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## Sociology Final Project/Presentation

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## Assignment Name: Sociology Final Project/Presentation

### Due date(s):

**Purpose:** This assignment is designed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning of core terms, concepts, theoretical perspectives, and methods of inquiry within the field of sociology. Sociology is not only a field of study, but important to the study of social phenomena, past and present while looking to the future. It is important to understand interrelationships between individuals, groups, structures, and institutions and their impacts so productive action can occur across any social space where necessary. This assignment asks you to describe and apply what you have learned this semester, while challenging you to discuss how the course content is reflected in your own life (e.g., thoughts, experiences, expansion of your existing knowledge and ideas about sociology and society).

In our world, technology is growing exponentially, and students must be familiar with tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Students must learn how to interact with and use AI in a manner that balances integrity with efficiency. This will continue to be an essential skill for employers.

This assignment framework can be used for an introductory or intermediate level sociology course. Institutional and departmental goals should be included to remind students about how this assignment relates.

**Essential Studies Goals:** <Insert institutions essential studies goals here>

**Department Goals:** <insert department goals here>

**Course Learning Goals:** <Insert course goals here>

**Audience:** Students should design their projects to target an incoming group of new students who may not be familiar with sociological concepts and practices. The goal for students is to demonstrate their learning of course material through presentation/teaching of it to others, while also making an argument about why society should care about their topic while suggesting some type of action for change.

**Skills:** Students will CREATE a hypothetical research project they think could address some social phenomena or the impacts of some type of social change. Students will identify a topic of interest, and then explore ideas about that topic area throughout the semester. At various points throughout the semester, students will submit pieces of this assignment to ensure progress toward the final project.

Students will use artificial intelligence (AI) in two major ways for this project.

A common practice in academic (and general) environments is to search for information and ideas about writing, research, general knowledge, etc. in a web browser or search engine of some type. When people do this, they typically filter out what content is determined relevant and appropriate for a given goal. To maintain integrity in academic work, sources are cited and referenced, and a unique interpretation, analysis, and connection to the our original ideas is provided. Even academic writers engage in this process when determining when and how to incorporate existing scientific articles into their own work. The student process of development is no different.

Therefore, this assignment will do the above but using AI as a mechanism to help guide students toward their ideas if they need help brainstorming and/or to help them narrow their focus if they want to study something but are undecided about how to proceed.

This project will help students to:

- 1) Become familiar with AI behavior.
  - a. Students will use AI to generate an outline of six ideas they may choose to include in their final project. Each idea may represent approximately one slide in their slide deck. Students may not include more than 10 content slides in their presentations.
  - b. Students will also use AI to generate the content for each individual slide.
- 2) Learn how to appropriately use AI to support their projects.
  - a. Students will add, remove, or change wording of the AI-generated ideas (i.e., the bullet points from the outline which will ultimately become the titles for each slide).
  - b. Students will use AI to generate content for each slide based on the title, then incorporate class content in an appropriate and accurate manner, including in-text citations. Students will add, remove, and/or change the content to their preference and as it aligns with their project topic.
- 3) Learn how to critique AI-generated material
  - a. Students must critically ANALYZE and EVALUATE the quality of the AI-generated product, discussing positives and negatives about what was produced.
    - i. This exercise will take place in-class with peers as an additional form of examining the AI-generated material before submitting the project.

Upon successful completion of this assignment, students will have not only a comprehensive UNDERSTANDING about the study of society, but they will be able to APPLY sociological thinking to help them ANALYZE their own worlds, the worlds of others, and EVALUATE where they stand as individuals in both respects. Through the process of developing their ideas for this assignment, students will also gain the skills necessary to engage in the diverse world in which we live, including the increasingly more diverse workforce. Students will gain the ability to thoughtfully process the impacts of their own actions and perspectives, and the actions and perspectives of others, as a mechanism for creating meaningful interactions.

Students must become not only aware but proficient in UNDERSTANDING AI and utilizing it with integrity. This assignment will help students become competent in the function and use of AI, which will soon be skills desired by employers. As AI becomes more prevalent, students will need to know how to thoughtfully ANALYZE and EVALUATE the information generated by it, not only for their future job prospects, but to be productive citizens of the world.

## Tasks:

- Identify a topic (it can be a specific or general as you would like at this point)
  - Students are welcome to use AI to help them come up with ideas.
- DEFINE AND UNDERSTAND the key terms and concepts used to discuss that topic (e.g., discussion of welfare more than likely should be discussed using terms associated with inequality and/pr social stratification)
- APPLY concepts of the sociological imagination, and the three major theoretical perspectives (symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict) to your topic. Do not simply define the theories, but provide a specific example related to your topic that demonstrates your understanding of the theories. For example, if your topic is welfare... **(below examples are not all-inclusive examples – there are many other ways students can choose to apply sociological concepts to their project topics).**
  - Sociological Imagination: Someone who is on welfare may be unemployed due to personal decisions or behaviors that led to their unemployment, but they could also be unemployed due to an economic recession or downsizing of a company. However, also consider mental health issues left untreated as potentially related to unemployment among some, but not all. (Note: Be careful not to stereotype).
  - Symbolic interaction: describe what visually lets us know someone is using or not using welfare, while recognizing we could be wrong and that these visuals (how a person appears or what behaviors we assume they engage in, such as living on the street or having dirty and stained clothing, etc.) are only based on social constructions of what it means to be on “welfare”. Also discuss interactions you might see between people who are perceived to be on welfare and those who are not (e.g. is there a power dynamic? Is there specific language used? Is there interaction at

all? What social spaces are designated for people of certain social classes, such as the mall, the convenience store, the golf club, etc. – meaning and assumptions are made about people based on where they spend time and what they look like. Discuss that.

- Functionalism: Discuss how the welfare system employs people or justifies social ideas about “homeless” people and meritocracy.
- Conflict: Discuss how certain people might find themselves in lower classes or accessing welfare more proportionately (not more in number) and how the social classes are maintained through structures of power and control. Specify something like the CJ system and practices of racial profiling or how family structures create a tax burden for lower income families but not higher income, contributing further to the existing income and class deficit. Feel free to also discuss intersections of class and race, gender and race, or race and gender. Are there specific patterns of welfare access or other class/income-based behaviors, and what systems maintain those patterns? Finally, when discussing power structures, mention who benefits. From the conflict perspective, some group has a disproportionate voice and ability to control the policies and practices in a society – who might that be in this case? Does that group have multiple characteristics? If so, what are they?

Students must also include at least one APA citation (from a scientific journal/scholarly source for this section, but any place where information did not come from your own direct experience or is not stated as your specific opinion MUST include a citation. It is likely you will have more than one citation. Citations not included where appropriate will result in a score of zero for this section of the project.

- ANALYZE your own social position (or a social position if you are not comfortable sharing your own) with respect to your topic. Include discussion of theoretical perspectives and the sociological imagination (e.g., What experiences have you had that could be personal troubles versus public issues? How do those experiences or your social position in that social space function? How are they unequal? What meanings are attached to individuals and situations that produced or contributed to your experience? etc.).
- EVALUATE how the social position you described above has been, is, or could be influenced by external forces as well as individual choices and discuss how this impacts society or has the ability to impact society in a significant way. What does it mean if a lot of people who are similar (or different) are making the same kinds of decisions, engaging in the same kinds of behaviors, experiencing the same kinds of outcomes? (e.g., health, education, class, etc.).
- CREATE a research question/hypothetical research project you think could make positive social change related to your topic, complete with an outline of ideas, which should essentially be your notes on the above items. Your outline should be similar to what you might use for slide headings or sub-headings.
- Using AI (Magic Slides or another similar tool):
  - Develop an outline of ideas as a starting point for your presentation. Review the outline items for appropriateness and relevance to your topic. Students are encouraged to add, remove, and change items.
  - Transfer your outline into the prompt text box or equivalent. Indicate the number of slides you want it to produce, which is no more than 10 for this assignment (each slide should be equivalent to about one paragraph of information) for this project, not including the title page, presentation overview, and reference slides.
  - The AI will likely generate slides with semi-specific information. At firsts glance, you will feel pleased with the result and be tempted to leave it as is while adding color and photos. However, this would be a fatal flaw. Remember, that generative AI is only a predictive model, and does not simply pull information from the internet – it is just as effective at generating slides as your cell phone is at generating predictive text. As you may be familiar, the predictive text function on your phone does not always provide the best or most logical next word, and AI used to generate slides is no different.
  - Edit the AI-generated information for accuracy and appropriateness and decide which content you would like to keep as part of your slide presentation. Take notes on which items you remove and why, as well as which items you kept and why. These notes do not have to be expansive, but simple notes stating why something was an error (e.g., is the opposite of what the textbook says,

or provide the correct textbook information and state that is what you are doing), or that it was not appropriate for this project (e.g., three slides on education when you only wanted to talk about education as one bullet point, or how the second half of the presentation is about the history of welfare policy when you only wanted to talk about sociological theory in a historical context).

- After you have edited your AI-generated slides and included your own modifications (including citations where appropriate), add photos and colors.
- Students will deliver their presentation either in-person for face-to-face courses or record their voice over their presentation and submit electronically for online courses. Presentations should be approximately 10-15 minutes in length.

Note: Students will engage with small groups during the process of developing and critiquing their outline as well as the content for each slide. Small group work may take place over one class period or several, depending on various factors about each class (e.g., size, changes in project requirements, progress students make on their projects outside of class, whether this assignment is transformed into a smaller version, whether this project is targeted at introductory or intermediate students, etc.).

**Criteria for Success:** Create a rubric and checklist for students and share it with them as early as the project is assigned. Awareness of how students will be graded will help students understand what they are required to do to successfully complete the assignment.

Rubric structures may vary depending on institutional, departmental, and course goals as well as the course (introductory or intermediate), group of students (varying levels of knowledge about sociology), and instructor preference (rubric for individual assignment parts or an overall rubric). Where possible, include institutional and departmental goals, as well as course goals, for assessment purposes.

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The author developed an earlier version of this template at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

<sup>1</sup> Winkelmes, Mary-Ann. "Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning." *Liberal Education* 99,2 (Spring 2013); Winkelmes et al, "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* 18,1/2 (Winter/Spring 2016).



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