


VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Humanities & Social Science · Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice
Course Syllabus · Summer 2026

Sociological Theory — Independent Study

SOCI 430 / SOCI 318 · Independent Study (IS)

Course	SOCI 430 / SOCI 318 — Sociological Theory (Independent Study)
Format	100% Online, Asynchronous + Weekly Microsoft Teams check-in (1 hr/week)
Dates	May 26 – July 30, 2026 (8 weeks)
Credit Hours	3
Instructor	Dr. James Fraser, Associate Professor & Sociology Program Coordinator
Office	Alfred Harris Academic Commons 1217 · Teams by appointment
Contact	Email (first): jfraser@vsu.edu · Text: 804-304-7105 · Teams: email/text to schedule
Prerequisite	SOCI 101 or instructor permission

 **Who this is for:** This section is for **Ty'Nasia**. Email or text me anytime this summer — don't wait until you're stuck.

Course Description

An independent study survey of sociological theory from classical foundations to 21st-century frameworks. You work as a *Theory Detective*: each module is a real social problem, and your job is to crack it using theory. Every Case File answers three questions — What is the problem? Which theory explains it best? What does theory reveal that common sense misses?



How every module works — the same 4 steps






You never have to guess what to do. Every case follows the identical path:


1 Start Here overview + videos	2 Reading Guide meet the theorists	3 Briefing Room AI exercises	4 Submit + Badge upload & earn
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Do them top to bottom. Finish all four and you earn that case's badge. Finish all eight and you earn the **Platinum** credential.

Your AI Toolkit

This course runs on an **exploratory AI policy** — you are *required* to use AI as a thinking partner. A full setup guide lives on the Canvas home page. Your five tools:

Tool	Where	What it's for
 Claude	claude.ai	Your main thinking partner — explains, quizzes, role-plays, critiques.
 Gemini	gemini.google.com	A second opinion and quick cross-checks.
 NotebookLM	notebooklm.google.com	Your research library — answers only from sources you add.
 Scite	scite.ai	Find real research and see if it's supported or disputed.
 Google Scholar	scholar.google.com	Search peer-reviewed articles; grab clean citations.

 Your course notebook: <https://notebooklm.google.com/notebook/e5493ac2-b95a-42cb-8c79-75316f54e271>

The one rule: use AI openly, then make the work yours. Every assignment includes a 2–3 sentence **AI disclosure** (which tools, what for, how you checked/changed the output). Using AI is not cheating; turning in its words as your own thinking, with no disclosure, is.

The AI Skill Ladder

Each module adds one new AI skill, so it gets richer without ever getting overwhelming:

Module	New skill	What it means
1	Prime & Ask	Give the AI context (your reading, your project), then ask. The habit everything builds on.

2	Compare & Map	Put two ideas side by side and map the connections.
3	Roleplay & Be Challenged	Have the AI play a role (a theorist, an ethics board) and put you under pressure.
4	Critique My Work	Paste your own draft and demand tough, specific feedback.
5	Research with Scite & Scholar	Find and verify real studies and measures.
6	Co-Build with the AI	Design something together, step by step.
7	Stress-Test	Make the AI attack your work to find the weak spots.
8	Synthesize in NotebookLM	Pull all your materials into one coherent whole.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain major classical and contemporary sociological theories and their contexts
- Apply theoretical concepts as tools to real-world social problems
- Compare and critically evaluate competing frameworks
- Deploy intersectionality, conflict theory, and postmodern theory on contemporary issues
- Use AI tools (Claude, Gemini, NotebookLM, Scite) responsibly as intellectual partners
- Write Case File Reports that integrate theory with evidence

Schedule & Badges

Recommended pace below. You may work ahead. The **only hard deadline is July 30, 2026**.

#	Case	Dates	Reading	Badge	Pts
1	Enter the Theory Lab	May 26 – Jun 1	Ritzer Ch. 1 & 6	 Theory Detective (Bronze)	20
2	The Marx Files	Jun 2 – 8	Ritzer Ch. 2	 Class Conflict Investigator (Bronze)	25
3	The Durkheim Investigation	Jun 9 – 15	Ritzer Ch. 3	 Social Facts Analyst (Bronze)	25
4		Jun 16 – 22	Ritzer Ch. 4–5		25

	Weber, Simmel & the Iron Cage			 Iron Cage Breaker (Bronze)	
5	Structure, Function & Conflict	Jun 23 – 29	Ritzer Ch. 7–8	 Macro Theorist (Silver)	30
6	Interaction, Identity & Everyday Life	Jun 30 – Jul 6	Ritzer Ch. 9–10	 Micro Theorist (Silver)	30
7	Feminist Theory & Theories of Race	Jul 7 – 13	Ritzer Ch. 12 & 15	 Critical Theory Investigator (Gold)	40
8	Postmodernity, Globalization & 21st C	Jul 14 – 30	Ritzer Ch. 14, 16–18	 Grand Theorist (Platinum)	50
TOTAL					245

Grading Scale

Grade	Score
A	90% and above
B	80.0–89.9%
C	70.0–79.9%
D	60.0–69.9%
F	Below 60%

Course Policies

Pace & Late Work. No weekly hard deadlines — only the July 30, 2026 final deadline. Contact me before then if you need an accommodation. Missing two or more cases without prior communication is grounds for course failure.

Academic Integrity. Cite the source and the author. The line is clear: your argument, your voice, your badge. AI use without disclosure is a violation.

ADA Accommodations. Contact me at the start of the course; accommodations will be made.

Wellness. University Counseling Services (804) 524-5939 · Student Health (804) 524-5711 · 24-hour crisis line 988.

