SOCI 131

# Midterm Project Guidelines

For your midterm project, you will spend at least one hour observing a public workplace of your choosing. You will apply theory from the course to explain the social phenomena you observed in an informal presentation to your work group and in a written memo submitted on Canvas.

The purpose of this project is:

- To apply theory you learned in the first few weeks of the course to real-world workplace interactions
- To demonstrate mastery of the theory you use to explain these interactions.

This project is graded out of 30 points. It is worth 30% of your grade, and includes the following components:

| **Assignment part** | **Due date** | **Points** |
|---|---|---|
| Workplace location description (p.2) | Friday, January 30 by 5pm | 2 |
| Observation notes (p.3) | Sunday, February 15 by 5pm | 2 |
| Memo (p.5) | Sunday, February 22 by 5pm | 2 |
| Informal presentation (p.7) | in class Monday, February 23 | 2 |
| Midterm project reflection (in class) | in class Monday, February 23 | 2 |
| Revised memo (see Memo p.5) | Friday, February 27 | 20 |

## Workplace location description

Before completing your observations, you'll submit a brief description of the public workplace you will be observing, the interactions you expect to observe, and the theory or theories you think might shed light on these interactions.

The purpose of this assignment is:

- For you to plan where you will be doing your project observations
- For me to give you feedback on the feasibility of your plans.

### *Requirements*

- Write **3-6 sentences describing where you will conduct your observations** for the project. The location description must answer the following questions:
    1. **Where will you be doing the observation?**
    2. **How will you be able to gain access to this location?**
        i. This project intends for you to observe a public workplace (ex. a park or library).
        ii. You must receive the instructor's permission if you choose to observe private workplace interactions (ex. at your job). If you receive permission, you will need to bring a project information sheet with you when you conduct your observations, ask everyone present for explicit verbal consent to participate in the observations, and protect the confidentiality of the workplace and participants in your notes and memo (ie. use pseudonyms).
    3. **What are the primary interactions you expect to observe?**
        **i.** Ex. Do you think you will see interactions among coworkers? Between workers and managers? Between workers and clients?
    4. **Which theory (or theories) from the course do you think might shed light on the observations you will observe?**
        **i.** Ex. If you are observing interactions in the library, you might expect library staff members' agency to be limited by bureaucratic rules (Weber 1921). This doesn't need to be fully thought out, but having a theory or theories in mind will help you focus your observations – of course after you've done your observations you may find that a different theory best explains your observations!
- Paste your location description in the textbox for the assignment on Canvas.

### *Evaluation*

Location descriptions will receive full credit if they **answer all four required questions** above (bolded). Points will be deducted for partial responses.

## Observation notes

Observe a public workplace for at least one hour and take notes on the social phenomena you observe.

### *Guidelines*

- Include **the location and the time** of the observation at the top of your notes (ex. Student Store, Friday Sept. 28, 10am-11am)
- You can use any medium that's most useful to record your notes (pen and paper, tablet, phone note, typed on a laptop)
- Focus on jotting down **details that are most relevant** to themes from the course. You won't have time (or energy) to write down everything.
    - Ex. If you're observing a park you don't need to write down every time a dog chases a squirrel, but if the dog impacts the tasks and interactions of people working in the park, like grounds staff, nannies, or coaches, that would be useful to record.
- At the same time, write down **as many details as possible**. This is the only material you will have to analyze for your memo. Think "show not tell."
    - Ex. If you're watching a manager criticize a worker's performance, write down the details of what you see and hear (ie. jot their tone and words, instead of generally writing that the manager is angry). When recording dialogue, also be sure to indicate what is an exact quote and what is paraphrased.
- In addition to the interactions themselves, information about the **people** you are writing about (ex. perceived demographics, roles, clothing) and the **place** (use your 5 sense) is helpful in understanding the social context of the interactions you observe
- It can be helpful to **structure your notes chronologically**, with rough time stamps.
- **Tip: type up detailed descriptions of important scenes as soon as possible** after witnessing them. The longer you wait, the fewer details you will remember. A rule of thumb is to never wait until the next day to write up your field notes. You only need to do this for the scene you think you will analyze for your memo.
    - It is also helpful to type out handwritten jottings or flesh out typed notes to help you remember the entire observation as you refer back to it during your analysis (ex. you might need to put a scene in context to apply the theory).
- Observe the workplace for **a minimum of one hour**. You can observe the workplace for longer if it is particularly uneventful and you won't have enough material to analyze in your memo.

### *Resources*

- You can find orienting questions to help you identify useful details as you observe here.
- You can find an information sheet that you can use to help explain your observations to people in the workplace here. Note that this information sheet guarantees workplace and participant confidentiality.

### *Evaluation*

You will receive full credit if your notes show **evidence that you attentively observed a workplace for at least one hour**. Partial credit will be given, for example, if the notes are sparse and lacking detail, are only a few lines long, or describe something that would have only taken a few minutes to occur. You will receive a zero if you use generative AI to create your notes or write an imagined scene. This will also hurt your ability to complete the next part of the assignment.

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## Memo

In this brief memo, you will **describe one scene** from your observations and explain how **theory** from the course can help us understand the social phenomenon you observed.

### *Requirements*

- **Describe one scene** from your observations, in detail, paying closest attention to the social interactions most relevant to theory from the course. Someone who had never visited the workplace should be able to understand exactly what happened.

- The scene you analyze **must focus on how paid workers interact in the workplace.** These interactions might be with the environment, themselves, other workers, customers/clients, bosses, passersby, etc. *Students working on homework do not count as workers for this project.*

- **Apply at least one sociological theory of work** from the course to explain the social interaction in the scene you observed.
    - In other words, use the theory to connect the interaction you observed to broader social phenomena and social structures. What is going on here sociologically?
    - Theory you can use:
        - Weber 1905^ *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
        - Hughes 1951^ "Work and the Self"
          *^Applying Weber 1905 or Hughes 1951 is tricky because it's hard to know what people's internal motivations for working are. I don't recommend using these theories.*
        - Marx 1844 "Alienated Labor"
        - Du Bois 1935 "The White Worker" & famous quote
        - Weber 1921 "Bureaucracy"
        - Wingfield and Alston 2012 "The Understudied Case of Black Professional Men: Advocating an Intersectional Approach"
        - Ray 2019 "A Theory of Racialized Organizations"
        - Hochschild 1983 "The Managed Heart"
        - Wingfield 2021 "The (Un)Managed Heart"
        - Hodson 2001 "Deflecting Abuse & Mismanagement"
    - Use consistent **in-text citations** to cite the theory you use
    - Include a **bibliography with full citation(s)** for the theory you use at the end of your memo

- Before you analyze the scene, **briefly summarize the most relevant points of the theory** you will use to interpret the social interactions you observed

- In your analysis, **point to details from the scene** as you unpack how the theory explains the interaction

- **Document format:** Word document, 12-point font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, black ink

### *Tips*

- **Start early!** You might not witness a scene you'd like to analyze during your first hour of observations. Allow time to return to the site or, if needed, to choose a new site.
- This is a **brief memo**, not a paper, so you do not need an introduction, a conclusion, or artful transitions
- **Use a consistent citation style** for in-text citations and a full bibliography at the end of your memo to reference the theory you use from the course and any outside sources you might bring in. I recommend using ASA citation style. Using outside sources is not part of this assignment, but you can cite them if you need to.
- Length: **approximately 500-1,000 words** (2-4 pages double spaced)
- This is the bulk of your grade for the assignment

### *Suggested outline*

- Description of the scene (approx. 300 words)
- Summary of the theory you will use to explain the social interaction(s) in the scene (approx. 100 words)
    - Hint: You can adapt a summary you wrote in a reflection or review sheet
- Application of the theory to the scene to analyze the scene (approx. 300 words)

### *Evaluation*

**Memos are due by 5pm on Sunday, February 22.** Complete memos will receive full credit (2 points). Incomplete memos (including partial drafts) will receive partial credit (1 point). If you do not submit an initial memo before the in-class presentation, it will receive zero points (out of 2).

**You will submit a <u>revised</u> memo by 5pm on Friday, February 27.** I will use the following **rubric** to grade the revised memos (worth 20 points).

If you aren't happy with your revised memo grade, you can choose to write a second memo, describing and analyzing a different scene from your observations (you may have to go back and observe an additional hour if not enough happened during your first observation period). If you choose to analyze a second scene, use a different theory to explain the new scene. If you choose to write a second memo, your new grade will be the higher memo grade or the average of the two memo grades, whichever is highest. You can email me the second memo up to two weeks after receiving my feedback.

## Informal presentation

In class, you will informally present the findings from your memo to the colleagues in your group.

### *Guidelines*

- Each member of your group (assuming the group has 4 people) will have about **3 minutes to present** and about **3 minutes to receive feedback** from other group members (approx. 25 minutes).
- Presentations should include a **description of the scene and how you're applying the theory** you use to explain the social interactions you observed. The presentation can come directly from your memo.
- Give each other **feedback** on how well you think the theory explains the social interaction, if you think your colleague could have applied the theory in different ways, or if you think a different theory might also explain the phenomenon or even explain it better. Be nice! You can also comment on parts of the scenes you found particularly interesting, details you might want to hear more about, or parts of the analysis you enjoyed.
- You will then discuss all of your presentations as a group **to find commonalities and differences across your analyses** and observations to write about in your midterm project reflection (approx. 5 minutes).
- You will spend the **last 20 minutes of class individually reflecting on your observation, analysis, and discussion**. You will submit this reflection on Canvas (2 points). I will distribute the reflection prompts in class.

### *Evaluation*

You will receive full credit for the presentation by **attending class and actively participating** within your group. Class time should be spent presenting your memos and discussing each others' findings (not on solo work or non-class related work), until we transition to work on the midterm reflections. **Please let me know if you're sick or have an emergency** and I'll send an alternate assignment or assign you to a virtual or asynchronous group, depending on your circumstance.

You will receive full credit for the midterm project reflection if you fully and honestly answer each question.