



IFE course syllabus

Course title

French Society: Problems and prospects

Course taught by

Jean Zoungrana

Holding a doctorate in Philosophy as well as a degree in Social Sciences from the University of Strasbourg, Jean Zoungrana is Associate Professor in Social Science Research at the University of Strasbourg in the program “Social Practices and Development”. His research focuses on the sociology of knowledge as well as on social work, where he is currently conducting research on social policies and social intervention. He is also interested in forms of citizen participation. At IFE Jean teaches a course on issues and perspectives in contemporary French society.

Purpose of the course

The key to understanding contemporary French society lies in grasping the paradox between the democratic and egalitarian ideal that is at the foundation of all the institutions of modern, post revolutionary France on one hand and, on the other, the current crisis of those institutions – and even of deep societal values – which is provoked by the pressures of global economic liberalism and the transformations taking place in Europe and in its Union. While the former has fostered an institutionalization of a citizen’s relationship with culture, work, education, social affairs etc, the latter have shaken the institutional foundations of French society and even to some extent the commonly held values of its citizens.

Through this course students become familiar with the effects these pressures are having on the specific institutionalized relations that exist between French citizens and culture, work, education, immigration, and other facets of life and society. Students learn to identify the various types of pressure behind societal difficulties, socio-economic conflicts and changing (eroding?) values. Students become familiar with the mainstays of French academic literature on contemporary French sociology.

Description of the course

This course takes a close look at contemporary French society and its social policies beginning with a brief, historico-critical look at the emergence of the welfare state and the safety-net state. Next, four fundamental areas of society are explored: social action and the critical role of the not-for-profit sector; the educational system and its effects on social standing; the problem of the ring of disadvantaged zones around French cities as emblematic of the French *malaise*; and the values held by French and European youth. Finally, a comparative look at the American model will provide an opportunity to analyze the prospects and issues facing French society.

This course meets approximately 32 hours, including mandatory site visits.

Outcomes

1. In addition to the fundamental outcomes relative to the course subject matter per se, as listed in the rubric “Purpose of the Course” above, this course is designed to enable students to develop the following “applied outcomes”:
 - generate a field guide to the components of French society providing reference points to students as they integrate that society via the workplace
 - understand the specificity of Alsatian society and in particular its German cultural heritage and its effects, but also specifically Alsatian responses to national issues such as urbanization or immigration
 - develop skills of inter-cultural analysis: identifying and contextualizing values and value differences for comparative purposes (home/host culture)
 - grasp more fully the American – and the French – social model through comparison
 - acquire an informed-citizen’s understanding of current social and societal issues and their roots (e.g. the “yellow vest” movement, anti-islamophobia activism and reaction, the eco-politics of civil society...)

- recognize the major actors of French society and culture (intellectuals, labor unions, cultural figures)
- acquire French vocabulary in social subjects
- become familiar with French news media
- develop oral skills of presentation, debate and exchange, in French
- master the use of French for the specific purpose of being able to engage professionally with the issues of the day and to produce useful texts in a French work setting
- learn the use of European methodology for structuring argumentation and marshaling relevant information.

2. Contribution to outcomes of an integrated program of study

The IFE semester is a fully integrated whole, academically. An important set of outcomes of this and every course comprising an IFE preparatory session is the repertory of skills and knowledge acquired in order to succeed in the next phase of the semester. Students as they enter the internship phase will know how – in French – to make oral presentations, write *dissertations*, organize material according to a standard methodology, comprehend oral material, take notes in a meeting, discuss the issues of the day, understand the work of their host organization in its societal context, and so forth. The result is a student-intern's readiness to take fuller advantage of the field experience opportunity including as a research terrain thus enhancing the final academic exercise, the 30-page guided independent field research paper (qv), the keystone of the IFE integrated semester.

3. Outcomes in the context of a program of experiential learning

Outcomes are essentially seized learning opportunities. Experiential learning outcomes result from the opportunity to study a subject both in situ as well as in words and in theory. At IFE, cultural and linguistic otherness enhances both factors of the experiential education equation, yielding the final, fundamental intended outcomes of comparative knowledge strengthening a student's grasp on a particular subject and discipline, along with robust language skills, and the knowledge of the world and of oneself that comes from having learned to operate effectively with and in otherness.

Pedagogical methods

1. Lecture-seminars whereby each two-hour class meeting is devoted to a specific theme, including lecture presentation of new material reinforced by in-class tools such as powerpoints, videos and readings (including some materials to be reviewed by students in preparation for class). Small class size allows for questions and some discussion.
2. Discussion or "workshop" sessions (*travaux pratiques*, a standard part of European university pedagogy), designed to assist students in assimilating the information and knowledge transmitted during the lecture-seminar sessions and applying it to current events and issues. Typical exercises include:
 - a review of national press on specific subjects linking course material with current events
 - short student oral presentations on selected subjects.
3. Site visits, encounters with civil society actors, and other activities; these may include, for example:
 - encounter and discussion with the staff and volunteers of AMSED (Association for Migration, Solidarity and Exchange for Development), a large Strasbourg not-for-profit engaged in cultural and social issues and the international youth movement
 - a cinema projection of a current documentary film linked to course themes.

Participation in these course-related visits and activities is mandatory. These activities are prepared in advance and debriefed and commented afterwards, in workshop sessions. Material presented during these activities is part of the body of material on which students may be tested.

Course outline

Introduction

I From Welfare State to Social Protection

- A. The welfare State and the protector State
 - Europe as the cradle of social security and the welfare State
 - Historically, two systems of social protection: the Bismark system and the Beveridge system
 - The French system as hybrid of the two
 - The American system: from Welfare to Workfare; elements of the Obama reform

(Why the French system?)

B. Problems of social solidarity in the 19th century

- Solidarity according to Auguste Comte, Pierre Leroux, Emile Durkheim - Mutualism et solidarism (Léon Bourgeois)

C. Solidarity in the 20th century - Solidarity in practice

- It's effects on social protection

D. Crisis in the welfare State

- Protection deficits

- What type of solidarity?

- The free-market solution?

II Social Action and the Not-for-profit Sector

A. The state of social action today

B. The not-for-profit sector as a major player

C. Commodification of social action

D. The French model of integration

III The Educational System in France

A. The weight of the past

B. The question of *laïcité*: public school versus confessional school

C. Description of the French model

D. Elements of comparison with the USA

IV The Question of the French *Banlieues*

Film: *Les Misérables* (2019), directed by Ladj Ly

A documentary-style approach to the French banlieue through the eyes of a police officer. Distancing itself from stereotypes and fantasies, the film demonstrates that no one is completely at fault nor completely free of blame.

V The Values Held by French and European Youth

A. The role of cultural protest and social criticism

B. Emergence of a new form of individualization: autonomy and proximity

C. Towards a return of religion

D. Elements of comparison with the USA

Overall conclusion

Suggested bibliography

Jean-Louis Auduc, *Le système éducatif français*, 6e édition, CNDP, 2008.

Robert Castel, *L'insécurité sociale. Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé ?*, Seuil, 2003.

Olivier Galland, *Culture et valeurs des jeunes*, La Découverte, 2007.

Olivier Galland & B. Roudet, *Les jeunes européens et leurs valeurs*, La Découverte, 2005.

Jean-Marc Stébé, *La crise des banlieues : sociologie des quartiers sensibles*, PUF, 2007.

Eurobaromètre : Cf. site Commission européenne, Opinion publique.

François Ewald, *L'Etat providence*, Grasset, 1986.

D. Lamiot, P.J. Lancry, *La protection sociale. Les enjeux de la solidarité*, Nathan, 19

Baromètre sur la Jeunesse

Grading

There are two in-class written examinations:

- a one-hour examination mid-way through the preparatory session comprising multiple-choice and short-answer questions (20% of the final grade)
- a two-hour final examination taking the form of a *dissertation*, or long essay in which the student – on the subject given for the examination – first constructs a specific question to be examined and then proceeds to do so in a formal, well-structured manner, drawing on and thereby demonstrating a certain master of course material (30% of final grade).

A sample examination subject for this course: *Europe: Birthplace of the social welfare state*

Class preparation and participation in the lecture-seminar sessions are taken into account in assessing the grade for this part of the course.

Grades for the various exercises of the workshop section, taking into account active participation in all class sessions and course-related visits and activities, are averaged to assess a grade for these aspects of the course (50% of final grade).

A note on grading – IFE teachers use a standard grading system based on a scale of 20. The final grade is also transposed into an American letter grade according to a scale of equivalence, and both grades are displayed.

The grade assessed for written work reflects the degree of acquisition of the information and knowledge presented during the course as well as how well the extent to which the methodology is followed. Since the language of instruction and examination is not the student's own language, the quality of the written expression only enters into account in cases of noteworthy progress or, on the contrary, repeated and avoidable errors and carelessness.

Those who grade IFE students' work are guided by the principle that this course – in its several parts – is not intended to train specialists in French sociology. Therefore, evaluation of student work pays particular attention to knowledge gained during the five weeks of the preparatory session, demonstrated curiosity and a student's motivation to apply this knowledge to their experience and to gaining new perspectives, including on their home culture and society.

Grading scale

A+	18 - 20/20	B+	14/20	C+	10/20
A	16 - 17/20	B	13/20	C	9/20
A-	15/20	B-	11 - 12/20	C-	8/20

Equivalent in American university course offerings

The Sociology of France, Modern French Society (French Studies)