

Sociological Theory
Soc 335
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:20 – 3:30; PPHAC 116

Professor Daniel Jasper

PPHAC 316

Office Hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays 8:30-9:30 & 1:00-2:00; Fridays 8:30-9:30; Other times by appointment

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Course Overview: This course is designed to introduce students to the dynamic field of social theory. To this end, we will trace the historical development of social theoretic thought and identify some of the current issues and debates that shape the field. Through this course, students will

- Develop a familiarity with theoretical logic and argumentation in sociology
- Read and become familiar with key social thinkers from both the classical and contemporary periods.
- Understand and be able to analyze key issues in the field.
- Cultivate their sociological imaginations as they learn to apply the theories.
- Develop their own theoretical contributions.

A common set of issues will guide our inquiry into the work of pivotal social theorists and schools of social thought. What is the relationship between social action and social structure? How is social power produced, exercised, and challenged? How are social identities forged, articulated, and recognized in the modern world?

Course Requirements and Expectations: In addition to written work, for students to do well in this course, they will need to read and think systematically about social theory over the course of the semester. Towards this end, **it is expected that students regularly consult supplementary texts**—such as those on reserve. I will be happy to suggest additional texts on particular topics of interest to any student. It is expected that all students will have thoroughly and thoughtfully completed the weekly readings, and be prepared to discuss these, by our first meeting of each week. Since many of the arguments presented are complex and multi-faceted, it is expected that students read and re-read the assigned texts closely and conscientiously.

This course is a collective exercise in textual explication and theoretical argumentation. All participants, therefore, have an equal responsibility for the success of this course. Everyone is expected to regularly contribute to in-class discussions with reactions and responses that deal directly with the issues and texts being considered. This participation will count for 10 % of the final grade. **Periodic and unannounced quizzes** will be counted towards participation. Students will also have the opportunity to share their insights in writing through weekly reading notes (these will be discussed the first week of class). Reading notes will be collected only on the first course meeting of each week, graded on a gpa scale (0 – 4), with the ten highest scoring counting for 10 % of the final

grade. Each student will also have the opportunity to lead, with a colleague, a seminar presentation and discussion. Presentations will account for 20% of the final grade.

Other requirements:

Midterm Exam	— 20 % of final grade
Final Exam	— 20 % of final grade
Comparative Theory Essay	— 20 % of final grade

Students who wish to submit their writing assignments through electronic mail may send it to my email address **only as an attached Word document**. Assignments submitted in this way must be received by 10:00pm the evening **before** the due date. No late reading notes will be accepted, other late assignments will be penalized 10 % per day.

Repressive Policies and other mechanisms of social control: As a professional and collective endeavor, there should be no need for repressive policies. That is, we all share the responsibility for the success of this course. Therefore, we should plan on attending all class sessions. We shall arrive on time, having completed the shared readings, and be prepared to collectively explicate, interrogate, and expand the arguments. We should arrive with the texts, our notes on the texts, and the necessary tools of scholarship. We should leave unnecessary distractions, such as cell phones, in our private ‘backstage’ regions.

The most important part of conducting oneself as a professional scholar involves following the conventions of scholarly citation. All members of this course should read, re-read, and familiarize themselves with the college policy on Academic Honesty included in the student handbook. All written work must include full and proper citations. There are **no exceptions**, including ignorance. Cheating and plagiarism will result in failing this course.

Anyone unable to consent to these shared principles should not participate in this course.

Required Texts: The following text is available in the bookstore.

Farganis, James. (2004). *Readings in Social Theory*, 4E. McGraw Hill.
(Referred to in schedule as Far)

Supporting Texts: The following are on reserve in the library. These resources will prove useful by providing different analyses and perspectives on the theorists we cover. All students are highly encouraged to consult these resources regularly.

Craig Calhoun, et. al. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*.
Lewis Coser. *Masters of Sociological Thought*.
Anthony Giddens. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*.
Charles Lemert. *Social Theory: the Multicultural and Classic Readings*.
Wolfgang Mommsen. *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*.
George Ritzer. *Frontiers of Social Theory*.

Steven Seidman. *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*.

Course Schedule

Please note, the outline below is merely a guide. Changes are possible as the semester progresses.

Week 1 (January 16 & 18) **Course Introduction**

Far: Introduction

Week 2 (January 23 & 25) **Karl Marx**

Far: Ch. 1

Seminar Leaders for Jan. 23: _____

Week 3 (January 30 & February 1) **Emile Durkheim**

Far: Ch. 2

Seminar Leaders for Jan. 30: _____

Week 4 (February 6 & 8) **Max Weber**

Far: Ch. 3

Seminar Leaders for Feb. 6: _____

Week 5 (February 13 & 15) **Georg Simmel and George Herbert Mead**

Far: Chs. 4 & 5

Seminar Leaders for Feb. 13: _____

Week 6 (February 20 & 22) **Functionalism**

Far: Ch. 7 – Reading and Reading Notes due on Thursday Feb. 22

Midterm Exam on February 20

Seminar Leaders for Feb. 22: _____

Week 7 (February 27 & March 1) **Symbolic Interactionism**

Far: Ch. 11

Seminars Leaders for Feb. 27: _____

Spring Break (March 6 & 8) No Classes

Week 8 (March 13 & 15) **Exchange and Rational Choice Theory**

Far: Ch. 9

March 15: ESS Meetings in Philadelphia

Seminar Leaders for Mar. 13: _____

Week 9 (March 20 & 22) **Conflict Theory**

Far: Ch. 8

Seminar Leaders for Mar. 20: _____

Week 10 (March 27 & 29) **Critical Theory**

Far: Ch. 13

Seminar Leaders for Mar. 20: _____

Week 11 (April 3 & 5) **Feminist Theory**

Far: Ch. 12

Patricia Hill Collins “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination”

<http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~Iridener/courses/BLDFEM.HTML>

Seminar Leaders for April 3: _____

Comparative Theory Essay Due on April 5

Week 12 (April 10 & 12) **Michel Foucault**

Far: Ch. 14

Michel Foucault “Body/Power” <http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/bodypower.htm>

Seminar Leaders for April 10: _____

Week 13 (April 17 & 19) **Globalization**

Riva Kastoryano, “The Reach of Transnationalism”

<http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/kastoryano.htm>

David Held “Violence, Law, and Justice in a Global Age”

<http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/held.htm>

Seminar Leaders for April 17: _____

Week 14 (24 & 26) **Course Conclusion**

Final Exam during the scheduled exam period

Guidelines for reading notes

For each primary author discussed, students should prepare a reading note. Unless otherwise noted in the course schedule, reading notes are due at the beginning of class on Tuesdays. They may also be emailed to me as a MS Word attachment no later than 10:00 pm. on Mondays. Late reading notes are not accepted.

Reading notes are brief preparations that should assist students in formulating reactions to and raising questions about, the shared primary texts. Reading notes should briefly articulate the main idea of the text(s). This should be a clear statement, in your own words, as to what the text(s)—as a whole—is about. You should also include a two or three other key sub-points of the text(s). Again, the point is to clearly and concisely state the main ideas of the text.

After presenting the main ideas, the reading note should include a two or three questions that are raised in the reader's mind by the text(s). These questions should be theoretical questions that address the key arguments of the text(s) and link these arguments to the wider body of social theoretic thought. Questions should not be factual or content specific.

Reading notes should be typed, include a proper citation for the text, and have your name on them. Notes will be graded on a gpa scale (0 – 4), the highest ten will account for the reading note portion of your final grade. Notes lacking a proper citation will receive no credit (0).

Guidelines for leading a seminar discussion

Each student, with a colleague, will be responsible for leading a seminar discussion on one theorist or school of theoretic thought. Students will be expected to prepare a presentation and discussion on the theorist of their choosing. In addition to the shared texts, it is expected that each student consult supplementary texts—both primary and secondary—in preparing their presentation. An annotated bibliography should be submitted on the day that you lead the seminar.

The presentation content should have three main components:

- 1.) A clear and concise explication of the main ideas and arguments presented in the shared texts. It is important to highlight any weaknesses in these arguments.
- 2.) Contextualizing the texts under discussion. There are a number of contexts that are relevant: the historic context of when the texts were written; the context of the author's larger project; the context of social theoretic debates; and the context of the course.
- 3.) Analyzing and extending the arguments and ideas. That is, to set and manage the stage for a collective exploration and of the texts.

Students will be graded individually on their presentations. Grades will be based upon the range and thoroughness of material consulted to prepare the presentation (evaluated through the annotated bibliography); the content of the presentation (the three components mentioned above); and the professionalism and clarity with which the seminar is led.

Nota Bene: Visual aids (e.g. powerpoint) are unnecessary. If you desire, you may provide a one page handout with an outline of your main points and/or questions to the seminar participants.

Students are encouraged to meet with me as they plan and prepare their presentations.

Guidelines for Comparative Theory Essay

The purpose of this essay is to bring together different theoretical perspectives and to apply them to a contemporary social issue. In other words, you will develop your own theoretical perspective by synthesizing existing social theoretic knowledge and logic. Your perspective can be applied to a wide array of issues: policy concerns, cultural analysis, intellectual gymnastics, etc.

For this essay, it is best to begin with the question or issue that will be theorized. Once this 'problem' is established, it will be possible to identify useful theoretical positions. Course texts may be utilized, but all essays must include outside theorists. Worthwhile places to look for theorists include the supplementary texts on reserve and the Sociological Journals available through Reeves Library, especially *Sociological Theory*. I will also be happy to suggest theorists to address particular problems.

In developing your theoretical stance, you should build it upon the extant theoretical work that you are drawing and building upon. In presenting the theorist's arguments, make sure that you do so accurately and fully. This means that you should recognize their larger project even if focusing only on a small part of their insights. In doing this, be sure to base your analysis and argumentation in primary texts. Therefore, you should quote or paraphrase their words as you see fit, but always include proper citations and a list of references. In synthesizing, show how the theorists differ, where they overlap, and how the theorists shed new light on other perspectives.

Practicalities:

As always, all written work should include proper citations for all works consulted. Citations and references can follow either MLA or APA format, but please be consistent throughout.

Essays should be typed, double spaced, and include page numbers. There are no formal length guidelines; rough length guidelines: 6-8 pages. I am available to discuss ideas, suggest theorists, and review outlines or drafts. It is highly recommended that writing center tutors be consulted. Emailed essays will be accepted only if they are sent as MSWord attachments and reach me before 10:00 pm on April 4.