

Sociological Theory
Soc 335, Spring 2008
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:20 – 3:30; PPHAC 235

Professor Daniel Jasper

PPHAC 316

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:00-11:30; Fridays 8:30-9:30; Or by appointment

djasper@moravian.edu

610.625.7882

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 15 % of the final grade. For this portion of their grade, students will be evaluated on the quality as well as the quantity of their interventions. **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 (see attached guidelines). Reading notes will be collected only on the first course meeting of each week (unless otherwise stated) and account 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 15% of the final grade (see attached guidelines). Students will complete a Midterm Exam (10 % of final grade) and a Final Exam (20 % of final grade). Students will also prepare a comparative theory essay, staged throughout the semester. The combined stages of this will account for 30 % of the final grade(see attached guidelines). A detailed grading sheet is appended to this syllabus.

Students should expect to spend approximately 10 hours per week on this course.

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. All submitted work related to the Comparative Theory Essay must be turned in as a hard copy. No late reading notes will be accepted, other late assignments will be penalized 10 % per day (unless noted otherwise below).

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. (2007). *Readings in Social Theory*, 5E. 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 15 & 17) Course Introduction

Far: Introduction

Week 2 (January 22 & 24) Karl Marx

Far: Ch. 1

Seminar Leaders for January 22: _____

Week 3 (January 29 & 31) Emile Durkheim

Far: Ch. 2

Seminar Leaders for January 29: _____

Week 4 (February 5 & 7) Max Weber

Far: Ch. 3

Seminar Leaders for February 5: _____

Week 5 (February 12 & 14) Georg Simmel

Far: Ch. 4 – Reading notes due on Thursday February 14

Midterm Exam on February 12

Week 6 (February 19 & 21) George Herbert Mead

Far: Ch. 5

Seminar Leaders for February 19: _____

Comparative Theory Essay – Statement of Interest – Due on February 19

Week 7 (February 26 & 28) Functionalism

Far: Ch. 7

Seminar Leaders for February 26: _____

March 3 – 7: Spring Break, No Classes

Week 8 (March 11 & 13) Symbolic Interactionism

Far: Ch. 11

Seminar Leaders for March 11: _____

Week 9 (March 18 & 20) Conflict Theory

Far: Ch. 8

Seminar Leaders for March 18: _____

Week 10 (March 25 & 27) Critical Theory

Far: Ch. 13
Comparative Theory Essay – First Draft – Due on March 25; No Late Drafts Accepted. Bring Two (2) copies to class.
Peer Review Day – March 27. Bring two (2) copies of reviewer comments to class.

Week 11 (April 1 & 3) **Exchange and Rational Choice Theory**

Far: Ch. 9
Seminar Leaders for April 1: _____

Week 12 (April 8 & 10) **Feminist Theory**

Far: Ch. 12
Patricia Hill Collins “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination”
available at <http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/courses/BLKFEM.HTML> or
<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/252.html>

Seminar Leaders for April 8: _____

Comparative Theory Essay – Revised Draft – Due on April 10

Week 13 (April 15 & 17) **Michel Foucault**

Far: Ch. 14
Michel Foucault “Body/Power” <http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/bodypower.htm>
Seminar Leaders for April 15: _____

Week 14 (April 22 & 24) **Course Conclusion**

Final Exam during the scheduled exam period (April 28 – May 3)

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.

Please Note: you should not quote or paraphrase the introductory comments by Farganis or any other source. Your response should be directed to the primary source material that we will be discussing.

Reading notes should be typed, include a proper citation for the text, and have your name on them. Notes will be graded on a scale (0 – 1) for a possible total of ten points. 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 **required** that each student consult supplementary texts—both primary and secondary—in preparing their presentation. Each student should submit an annotated bibliography of the works consulted 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 analysis 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 should meet with me at least one week prior to their scheduled seminar leadership.

Guidelines for Comparative Theory Essay

Theoretic arguments are developed by building upon the work of previous theorists. The purpose of this essay is for students to develop theoretical arguments through a close and thorough reading of different theoretical perspectives. In other words, you will develop your own theoretical perspective addressing a contemporary social issue by synthesizing existing social theoretic knowledge and logic. Your theoretical 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.

Students will work on their essays throughout the semester, turning in the following:

Statement of Interest and Preliminary list of texts Consulted (5 points)

This should be a concise, but clear, statement of the ‘problem’ to be addressed. It should also include brief statements of how different theorists or theoretical perspectives will be brought to bear on the issue. A preliminary bibliography should be included listing texts consulted.

Due: February 19

First Draft (10 points)

This should be a fully developed essay with all arguments clearly presented and developed. It should include an abstract of approximately 200 words that succinctly presents the arguments of the essay.

Due: March 25. Two Copies Due; No Late Papers Accepted.

Peer Review (5 points)

Each student will prepare written comments for a peer whose paper they will be reviewing. While these comments may include copy editing suggestions, they should be primarily substantive. That is, they should address the theoretic arguments that are developed and how they are developed. These comments should identify strengths and weaknesses in the arguments with the goal of improving the essay.

Due: March 27. Two Copies Due; No Late Papers Accepted.

Revised Draft (10 points)

This is the final draft submitted and should incorporate substantive revisions to the first draft. Revisions should be based upon further thinking, further refinement of the argument, and incorporating comments from reviews of earlier drafts.

Due: April 10. When submitting revised drafts, please include a copy of the statement of interest, the first draft, reviewers comments, and the final submitted version.

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Grading Sheet

Weekly Reading Notes: $\frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} = \frac{\quad}{10}$

Seminar Leadership: 15

Seminar Participation
Points at Midterm: 5

Points at End-term: 5

Points for Engaging Colleague-Led Discussions: 5

Midterm Exam 10

Final Exam 20

Comparative Theory Essay
Preliminary Statement & Bibliography 5

First Draft 10

Review Comments for Peer 5

Revised Draft 10

Total: 100 **Possible points = 100**

Final Grades

	87.1-90 = B+	77.1-80 = C+	67.1-70 = D+
>94.1 = A	83.1-87 = B	73.1-77 = C	63.1-67 = D
90.1-94 = A-	80.1-83 = B-	70.1-73 = C-	60.1-63 = D-
60 points or below = F			