

SOCI 302: Topics in Contemporary Theory
St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology
Winter 2018

Instructor: Dr. Peter Mallory
Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-1:00;
Wed. 12:00-3:00; Thurs. 11:00-1:00
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Lecture Schedule

T1 and T2, Tuesday and Thursday 3:45-5:00

Course Description

This course introduces you to the major developments in sociological theory from the end of the Second World War to the present. Topics include phenomenology, structuralism, hermeneutics and interpretive sociology, micro-sociology, critical theory, cultural sociology, and feminist theory. As we examine the major developments in sociological theory over the last 60 years, you will have an opportunity to read the original works of theorists whose ideas are still generating much lively debate and controversy within the discipline today. By the end of the course, you will have a good understanding of the history of contemporary social theory as well as the more general questions of what theory is and what it means to engage in the practice of theorizing. The purpose of this course is not only to introduce you to the history and diversity of contemporary social theories, but also to help you develop your own ability to practice social theory.

Course Evaluation

25% Short Analytical Papers (5 at 5% each)
15% Midterm Exam
20% Essay
10% Participation
30% Final Exam

Short Analytical Papers:

You will be expected to write papers on five of the twelve weeks of readings. Each paper will consist of a concise and careful examination of the readings assigned for the week and will be due in class on the day the readings are discussed. Papers will not be accepted outside of class. The papers should be between 500 to 750 words. In each paper you will be expected to, a) present a concise summary of the arguments of the readings; b) offer a detailed analysis of at least one central issue or main idea in the readings which you believe deserves attention; c) discuss the significance of the readings for developing our course themes; and d) raise questions which you would like to see discussed during class. You will be expected to discuss your papers in class.

Mid-term Test:

There will be an in-class test on Tuesday, February 6. The purpose of the test is to give you feedback on your progress in the course.

Essay:

There will be one essay assignment. A handout will be distributed during class with possible topics. Completed papers will be around 8 pages in length (250 words per page, 12 point standard font, double spaced). It will be due no later than Tuesday, March 27.

Exam:

A closed-book exam will be scheduled during the regular examination period. The exam schedule will be available on Friday, February 2.

Class Participation:

Active participation is an important part of this course. Participation comprises attendance, active listening, giving other students an opportunity to speak, raising and answering questions, and providing relevant comments on the material discussed in lecture. Please bring the readings to class and be prepared to offer your questions and insights.

IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Late Policy

Late papers submitted without prior permission will incur a late penalty of 5% of the total assignment per day, including weekends.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Since this course requires you to complete a written assignment, you should familiarize yourself with standards for proper referencing of all materials cited (i.e. books, journals, newspaper articles, internet resources etc.). Students who attempt to pass off someone else's work as their own (plagiarism) will be dealt with through the university policy on academic honesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this policy (see section 3.8 in the calendar).

Special Accommodations

If you develop a prolonged illness or encounter a personal crisis that will impact your progress in the course, please contact me as soon as the problem becomes apparent. If you contact me early, we will have a better chance of developing a plan to help you complete the course in a way that is satisfactory to you.

Other Accommodations

If you are a student with physical, learning, or psychiatric disabilities that require reasonable accommodation in teaching style or evaluation, you should speak with me early in the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Jan 4 **Introductions— What is theory? Why study it?**

Jan 9 & 11 **Phenomenology: The Natural and the Theoretical Attitude**

Tuesday:

Schutz, Alfred. 1944. "The Stranger." *American Journal of Sociology* 49(6): 499-507.

Thursday:

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. "The Foundation of Knowledge in Everyday Life." Pp. 19-46 in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Jan 16 & 18 **Goffman and Collins on Interaction Rituals**

Tuesday:

Goffman, Erving. 1967 "On Facework: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction" Pp. 5-46 in *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Thursday:

Collins, Randall. 2013. "Interaction Ritual Chains." Pp. 75-90 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 3rd Edition, edited by C. Calhoun, J. Gerteis, J. Moody, S. Pfaff, and I. Virk. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Jan 23 & 25 **Feminist Theory: Dorothy Smith on Standpoint and Institutional Ethnography**

Smith, Dorothy. 1990. "Women's Experience as a Radical Critique of Sociology." Pp. 11-29 in *The Conceptual Practices of Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1807. "Lordship and Bondage." in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Available Online at:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phba.htm>

**Jan 30
& Feb 1** **Critical Theory: Mass Society and the Bourgeois Public Sphere**

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article." Pp. 136-142 in *Critical Theory and Society*, edited by S. E. Bronner and D. M. Kellner. New York: Routledge.

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. "The Mass Society." Pp. 298-323 in *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press. Read the online excerpt at:

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Book_Excerpts/MassSociety_PE.html

Feb 6 & 8 Critical Theory: Foucault on Discipline and Normalization

Tuesday
Midterm Test

Thursday
Foucault, Michel. 1984 [original 1975]. "The Body of the Condemned", "Docile Bodies" and "The Means of Correct Training." Pp. 170-205 in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by P. Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books.

Feb 13 & 15 Critical Theory: Foucault and the History of Sexuality

Readings TBA

Feb 20 & 22 Winter study break – No classes

Enjoy!

**Feb 27
& Mar 1 Critical Theory: Recognition and Redistribution**

Tuesday:
Taylor, Charles. 1994. "The Politics of Recognition." Pp. 25-37 in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by C. Taylor, A. Gutman, et al. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Thursday
Fraser, Nancy. 1997. "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age." Pp 11-41 in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition*. New York: Routledge.

Mar 6 & 8 Levi-Strauss and Structuralism

Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology" Pp. 29-53 in *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1978. Chapter 1: "The Meeting of Myth and Science" Pp. 5-14 in *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mar 13 & 15 Hermeneutics and the Meanings of Culture

Weber, Max. 1978 [original 1920]. "Social Action" and "Types of Social Action." Pp. 22-6 in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Volume One*. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 22-26.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pp. 3-30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Mar 20 & 22 Jeffrey Alexander and Cultural Sociology

Tuesday:

Alexander, Jeffrey and Philip Smith. 2003. "The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics." Pp. 11-27 in *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Thursday:

Reading TBA

**Mar 27, 29,
& April 3 Pierre Bourdieu on Class and Culture**

Appelrouth, S. And L. Edles. 2012. "Contemporary Theoretical Synthesis: Pierre Bourdieu." Pp. 652-76 in *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory: Texts and Readings*, 2nd edition. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. [This chapter includes a discussion of Bourdieu's key ideas and two excerpts from his works].

*Essay due in class, Tuesday, March 27

April 5 Conclusion to the Course

Review class