Course Description

This course provides an insight into contemporary social theory from post WWII to the present. For centuries academics have explored this thing we call society, its structure, function, purpose, interactions, development and so on. Typically, we understand theoretical development in sociology as one from the macro and determined theoretical structures based in Marxism, functionalism and social interaction through a variety of particular social standpoints, to the fluid dynamics of discursive sociality and scientific systems theories applied to society. The theorists covered in this course represent all three phases of sociological thought and are grounded in work by each of the current regular faculty in the Department. We shall explore how varied, contemporary approaches to understanding and explaining society work in the world today through three theoretical approaches: role theories, critical theories, and systems theories. Key original readings will be provided as well as recent articles by our faculty and others that are chosen to ground and illustrate the particular theoretical approach. It is assumed that you have covered and are familiar with the theoretical bases of social thought (functionalism, political economy, critical theory, feminism and so on).

Learning Outcomes

- To appreciate the development of sociological theory especially since the mid 20th century.
- To become familiar with, and critical of theoretical trends in this period, through concepts such as agency, structuralism, interactionism, identity, social change, and social systems.
- To be able to handle a variety of theoretical approaches to a specified contemporary social question or problem.
Assignments

30% seminar presentation (Sept 18th – Nov 4th inclusive)
30% theoretical literature review (October 30th)
40% theoretical position paper (December 18th)

**seminar presentation**

Each student is required to present in class, starting September 18th. There will be two presentations in each of the weeks of the course including this date. Students are asked to use the assigned readings as a jump-off point and to find two additional readings to present to the class: one theoretical and one applied. In the presentation, the student should critically engage especially with the content of the first two required readings for their presentation week. The class is not expected to read the extra two readings, so their content needs to be summarized. The grade for the assignment will be an average between the presenter’s grade of self, presenter’s colleagues’ grades of the presentation, and the instructor’s grade. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade.

**literature review**

Each student is required to prepare a 1200 word review of a theory’s literature covered in class, or any theory related to the ones covered. There is a minimum of three references required in the review that are additional to the Course Readings. You may use the readings from your own presentation, or from that of others as the additional readings. In your review you need to demonstrate that you understand the origin, the extent, and common applications of the chosen theoretical perspective. High grades are awarded to those who can demonstrate the ability to critically engage with the ideas in the readings. The instructor shall grade this assignment, and it is worth 30% of the final grade.

**position paper**

In this 4800 word paper you will take a theoretical position (you can build off of that in your literature review), summarize the main literature pertinent to the theoretical perspective (providing a brief history of the development of this perspective), indicate the main debate(s) with this perspective. Then, and this is **important to your work here in the Department**, indicate how you would use this theoretical positioning. Whether you plan to write a thesis or an essay, and whether your method is qualitative or quantitative, you need to theoretically position the work, and your sociological question in that work. You may use this opportunity to draft the literature sections of a thesis or essay proposal, or a grant proposal. The instructor shall grade this assignment, and it is worth 40% of your final grade.
Course Outline and Texts/Readings

Sept 11 – introduction to theory

Gabriel Abend: *The meaning of theory.*

I ROLES

Sept 18 - Strain Theory [PRESENTATIONS START]

Stephen Baron: *It’s more than the code.*
Robert Agnew: *Building on the foundation of general strain theory.*
Susan Snyder et al: *Homeless youth, strain, & justice system involvement.*

Sept 25 – Crime and Prevention

Nicole Myers: *Eroding the presumption of innocence.*
Ashworth & Zender: *Prevention and criminalization.*
Watson & Erikson: *Cannabis legalization in Canada.*

Oct 2 – Environmental Criminology

Piza & Sytsma: *Exploring the defensive actions of drug sellers in open-air markets.*
Brantingham & Brantingham: *Criminality of place.*

Oct 9 – Life Course Theory and Social Capital

Fiona Kay et al: *Undermining gender equality.*
Pierre Bourdieu: *Social capital.*
Powell & Sang: *Everyday experiences of sexism in male-dominated professions.*

II CRITICAL THEORIES

Oct 16 – Phenomenology

Rob Beamish: *Engaging with the social world* (pp.21-57).
Alfred Schuetz: *Common sense & scientific interpretation of human action.*
Hockey & Allen-Collinson: *Digging in.*

Oct 23 – Capitalism and Globalization

Annette Burfoot: *Manufacture in place.*
Michael Piore: *Varieties of capitalism theory.*
Saskia Sassen: *The global city.*
Oct 30 – Intersectionality [THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW DUE]
  Cynthia Levine-Rasky: *Intersectionality theory applied to whiteness & middle-classness."
  Sumi Cho et al: *Toward a field of intersectionality studies.*
  Bakan & Abu-Laban: *Intersectionality & the UN world conference against racism.*

Nov 6 – Feminism and Racialization
  Sarita Srivastava: “You’re calling me a racist?” & “I wanna be white!”
  bell hooks: *Sisterhood.*
  Sara Ahmed: *Mixed orientations.*

III SYSTEMS

Nov 13 – Surveillance
  David Lyon et al: *After Snowden.*
  David Murakami Wood: *Before and after Snowden.*
  Zygmunt Bauman: *Liquid modernity.*

Nov 20 – Posthumanism
  Thomas Abrams: *Braidotti, Spinoza & disability studies after the human.*
  Rosi Braidotti: *Critical posthuman knowledges.*
  Dan Goodley et al: *The dishuman child*

Nov 27 – Practice Theory
  Martin Hand: *Persistent traces, potential memories.*
  Pierre Bourdieu: *Social space and symbolic power.*
  Andreas Reckwitz: *Toward a theory of social practices.*

Dec 4 – Actor Network Theory
  Norma Möllers: *Algorithmic IF…THEN rules & the consequences of power.*
  Jim Johnson (Bruno Latour): *Mixing humans and nonhumans together.*
  Edwin Sayes: *Actor-network theory and methodology.*