

Course Description ~

Social theory is an interdepartmental offering that investigates the everyday assumptions that shape our lives and reflects in a systematic and critical manner on the ways in which social life is organized and, sometimes, transformed. The course will introduce you to the major nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers who shaped the development of social science theory, with special attention to three whose influence has been so profound that they are commonly referred to as "founding fathers": Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. From such theorists, sociology and anthropology developed in response to the rapid social changes that accompanied colonial expansion, and the democratic and industrial revolutions which have shaped modern life. While both concern themselves with the scientific study of the origins and social relationships of human beings, anthropology has generally looked outside the parameters of Euro-American culture, sociology inside. However, recent globalizing influences have muddied the waters of these distinctions, and created increasingly hybridized societies. Likewise, issues have arisen to confront the social sciences, including corporate colonization and planetary ecological destruction that challenge conventional theories. We will therefore cover a wide range of perspectives on how the "logic" of these rapid and varied changes have worked themselves out in modern society, and what prescriptive methods are (and can be) offered.

Course Objectives:

1. To introduce students to the major players and the significant debates in the social sciences.
2. To foster the ability to read and interpret social theory texts.
3. To recognize and apply sociological and anthropological concepts and theories in understanding and analyzing human interactions, institutions, and daily life situations.
4. To recognize the work that sociologists and anthropologists do, how they do it, and why they do it.
5. To question the basic structures and beliefs of our own culture and society, and foster a non-ethnocentric view of the world.

Format

Class will include lectures on material related to the day's assignment, and student presentations on sections of the chapter(s) to be discussed that day to the class.

Each student will be responsible for:

1. A number - depending on class size - of presentations on sections of the readings.
2. A research report on any topic relevant to this course. It will be from 6-8 pages in length (text), and the subject must be approved. A short summary of your paper will be presented the last day of class.
3. Three (3) reaction papers based on situations or questions posed during the semester. You must write a 2-4 page paper on your reactions/analysis to the questions. Remember a reaction paper is your opinion on a topic, not a research paper.
4. The completion of a mid-term and final exam. These will be sequential rather than cumulative.

Grading

The following evaluation criteria is suggested: exams (50%), research report (25%), reaction papers (15%); class attendance and participation (10%)

90-100 @ A; 80-90 @ B; 70-79 @ C; 60-69 @ D; 59-0 @ F

The following requirements will be considered in the grading:

- mandatory attendance
- be courteous and professional in class discussions; i.e. take turns in speaking, allowing others to express their ideas without interruption, communicate with positive, constructive verbal and nonverbal language.
- show respect and an open mind to different ideas and opinions of class members.
- complete assignments on time.

Learning Outcome Assessment

All the student's work will be evaluated for:

- knowledge of the reading material, class lectures, discussion, videos, and resources from research.
- ability to provide relevant examples to support viewpoints.
- ability to apply the knowledge to understand current issues in society.
- clarity and logical presentation.
- demonstration of having an understanding of the subject matter objectively and from opposing viewpoints.
- demonstration of achieving the objectives of this class.
- ability to analyze, critically review, and compare the issues cross-culturally.

Required Text

Ritzer, George

1996 *Sociological Theory*. 4th ed., San Francisco, CA: McGraw Hill.

Schedule

January 8

Theories and paradigms; pre-modern thought

January 22

Social evolutionism; Marx

Reading: Chapter 1, 2

January 29

Durkheim

Reading: Chapter 3

February 5

Weber

Reading: Chapter 4

February 12

The symbolic world: Simmel, Goffman, and Turner

Reading: Chapter 5; pg. 351-361

February 26

Gender, race, and ethnicity

Reading: Chapter 12;

Exam I

March 5

The society of nature: ecological perspectives

Reading: handout

March 12

Modernism, Foucault, and post-modernism

Reading: Chapter 15; pg. 598-619

March 18

Globalization and development theory

Reading: handout

class presentations

March 21

The role of culture broker/activist: bridging theory and practice in the social sciences

Research papers due / class presentations

Exam II