

Overview

Theories offer general approaches to understanding society. Theories advance propositions about the nature of human action: are individuals selfish or idealistic, rational or moved by unconscious desires? Theories address large scale considerations: is society shaped by family structures, economic imperatives, or religious devotion? Theories also explore the minutiae of human interactions: how do interactions change when two people are joined by a third? In this course we will examine the background assumptions, conceptual adequacy, logical consistency, and empirical testability of major theoretical perspectives in sociology. We will gain an overview of these perspectives by reading a text that explains how social theory has developed over time, encounter the theories more directly in short selections from the original works, and explore a variety of applications of these theories in essays by contemporary sociologists.

This semester we will focus mainly on contemporary theories and theorists, though we will also study many of the classical theorists in order to provide background on current theories. Our study of both classic and contemporary theory will familiarize us with the kinds of questions sociologists have asked, as well as what questions get left out or silenced. By beginning with classic theoretical pieces and moving through contemporary theory, we will be able to consider how social conditions inform the key questions of the day, and develop an appreciation for how theory develops as a conversation between competing and complementary notions of theorists. Our concern throughout the course will be to apply specific theories to real-world issues. In papers, discussions, and class presentations, we will grapple with the challenging theoretical problems that have emerged as sociologists have sought to articulate their theories and use them to explain the complexities of social structures and social interaction.

Objectives for Individual Learning

1. To appreciate the importance of theory for making sense of the social world around us.
2. To gain familiarity with a broad range of sociological theories and with the work of a variety of currently active theorists.
3. To develop your "tastes" in sociological theory. By the end of the course, you will be able to explain and defend the reasons for your preferences.
4. To develop your ability to move intellectually between theories and theorists to compare, contrast and critically analyze them.
5. To develop your theoretical creativity by exploring applications of theories to everyday life, and by suggesting modifications and extensions of the theories studied.
6. To practice and strengthen your ability to write about social theory in clear and concise prose.
7. To practice and improve your ability to discuss challenging and abstract sociological concepts.

Responsibilities to Classmates

1. To come to every class meeting having read and reflected on the assigned material, prepared questions and comments in advance, and ready to discuss.
2. Plan and lead classroom presentations on two assigned readings, as well as making a presentation on your final essay.
3. To spend time preparing the presentations you make, and on the days you do not present, thinking about class materials in order to most effectively contribute to shared learning and productive class discussions.

Course Design:

Welcome to Contemporary Social Theory! Familiarity with key classic and contemporary theories, as well as a practiced ability to work critically with social theory is central to a sophisticated sociological imagination. This semester, we will work as a team to explore enduring and recent theories of social life. Many of the readings in this course will be difficult. You will need to make considerable time in your weekly schedule to be prepared for class discussions. This semester we will read some of the most difficult selections that sociology majors are asked to tackle. To help you master this challenging material, the course design encourages active participation in class discussions, gives students substantial responsibility for leading class discussions, and demands a considerable amount of reflective writing about the texts. By reading the selections carefully, discussing difficult concepts with classmates, explaining complex theoretical ideas in class presentations, and putting your reflections about theory on paper, you can come to know these powerful intellectual perspectives well enough to enhance your own understandings of social life.

Careful reading will be our first priority. Approximately 100 to 200 pages of readings are assigned per week. The assignments bunch considerably, so please plan your reading accordingly. A helpful technique in preparing for class discussions is to take notes on the readings, focusing on the author's central argument and noting anything that seems unclear. During selected class periods, I will administer a brief reading quiz. The quiz will ask you to demonstrate that you have read the assignment for the day, and will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of basic theoretical concepts. The lowest grade out of all of the quizzes will be dropped.

Many students have anxiety about theory. The best technique to resolve these anxieties is to read and discuss theory. Sociology 285 is conducted as a seminar: I will participate in discussion but will not lecture, except to offer mini-lectures on occasion to get us started. Therefore, you must come to each class prepared to discuss the topics covered in the assigned readings. Since the success of this course depends on active participation, class participation figures heavily in your grade. Being in class is key to understanding the theories individually and as they connect to one another. Everyone gets one "oops" – a day off from the course that requires no explanation. More than one unexcused absence will affect your participation grade, while more than three unexcused absences will affect your **final** grade for the course.

To help the class cope with some of the most challenging articles, you will sign up to make a class presentation on one of the required readings on two different days. Articles suitable for presentations are indicated by "P" on the syllabus. This role will involve offering introductory comments along with a written synopsis of the article and of your reactions to it and then helping to lead discussion. You should provide a handout to accompany your presentation. **The handout should be emailed to me by midnight on the day before your presentation, and you should make copies for your classmates.** Your overall course participation, which includes contributing to class discussion and making three presentations —two on theories of your choosing and one on your final paper — will count for 30 percent of your grade.

Expressing your reactions in writing, like reading carefully and participating actively in class discussions, can greatly facilitate your understanding of difficult material. You will write three short memos – two reading memos and one criteria memo (described on the last page of this syllabus). Prior to the first formal assignment, you will write three practice memos, which you will workshop with your classmates. After those practice memos, you will then write two formal reading memos. In each of these short papers, you will analyze some interesting or problematic aspect of a theorist's work. The third memo will constitute the first step in your final paper project, described below.

Your final written assignment will be a longer paper that compares two theoretical perspectives in detail. During the last weeks of the semester, each of you will act as presenter of your own final paper and as peer editors for your groupmates' papers. In this longer paper (from fifteen to twenty pages), you will present information from your reading of original and secondary sources to argue for the superiority of one of the two perspectives. The final reading memo, due right before spring break, constitutes a draft of the first part of this paper, in which you defend your choice of criteria for evaluating the two perspectives. A first draft of the paper will be due in the last four weeks of classes, as will a class presentation and discussion of it. A mandatory rewrite of this final paper will be due on Thursday, May 14 by 4pm. I will provide written comments on the draft version and will grade only the final version. This longer paper and presentation will count for 30 percent of your grade.

A Note on Assignments

Assignments must be handed in during class on the date due. I rarely grant extensions, and only when you contact me in advance of the due date. All assignments must be printed out and stapled, I do not accept emailed assignments. Please print double-sided when possible.

Summary of Assignments and Grading

- Class participation (includes making presentations on articles, and participating actively in class discussions) — 30%
- Quizzes—10%
- Three practice memos —5%
- Reading Memo 1 — 10%
- Reading Memo 2—10%
- Criteria Memo—5%
- Final paper and presentation — 30%

Required Texts:

Kivisto, Peter, ed. 2008. *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Fourth edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. [LIFE]

Kivisto, Peter, ed. 2008. *Social Theory: Roots and Branches*. Third Edition. Los Angeles: Roxbury. [ROOTS]

Wallace, Ruth A., and Alison Wolf. 2006. *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Expanding the Classical Tradition*. Sixth edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. [TRADITION]

Ereserves are available on the “ereserve” section of our PioneerWeb site. EReserve readings can also be accessed through the library webpage. You will need to enter your name and ID number to enter the reserve site, then you can search by my name or the course number, and there will be links to each of the ereserve readings. [ERESERVE]

NOTE: Articles suitable for selection for one of your presentations are marked accordingly in the schedule below. [“P”]

Course Schedule

Date	Day	Book	Topics and Assignments	Presentations
1/21	W		First Day – Introduction to the Course Guest lecture: Karla Erickson	
1/23	F	TRADITION ROOTS LIFE	Introduction to Theory: What is “theory” and what is it good for? 1:2-14 The Understanding of Society 1-9 What is Social Theory? Peter Kivisto 1-4 Classical Sociological Theory: Introduction; 127-132 Contemporary Theories and Their Connections to the Classics: Introduction Theory as Liberatory Practice, bell hooks 36-41 (handout)	
1/26	M	TRADITION ROOTS LIFE	Functionalism I: Émile Durkheim 2:15-24 Functionalism: Introduction II (Durkheim): 46-63, 68-75 6. On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity 7. What is a Social Fact? 8. Anomic Suicide 10. The Human Meaning of Religion 3:61-100 Surfing the Net for Community: A Durkheimian Analysis of Electronic Gatherings, Anne Hornsby	P P
1/28	W		Functionalism II: Parson and Merton, Neofunctionalism	

		TRADITION	2:25-66 Part 1, 2, and 3: Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, and Neofunctionalism	
		ROOTS	VII (Functionalism and Neofunctionalism): 186-213 30. The Unanticipated Consequences of Social Action, Robert K. Merton 31. The Functional Prerequisites of Social Systems, Talcott Parsons 32. Functional Differentiation, Niklas Luhmann 33. After Neofunctionalism, Jeffrey Alexander	P P
		LIFE	5: 133-167 Criminalizing Transgressing Youth: A Neofunctionalist Analysis of Institution Building by Colomy & Greiner	
2/2	M	TRADITION	Conflict Theory I: Karl Marx 3: 68-100 Introduction and Part 1: Conflict Theory	
		ROOTS	I (Marx):12-45 1. Alienated Labor 2. The German Ideology (with Friedrich Engels) 3. Manifesto of the Communist Party (with Friedrich Engels) 4. Commodities 5. The General Formula for Capital	P P P
		LIFE	1: 5-40 Working Longer, Living Less: Understanding Marx Through the Workplace Today by John and Anne Walsh	
2/4	W		No Readings, Continue discussion of Marx	Practice Memo 1 DUE
2/8	M		Conflict Theory II: Critical Theory, C. Wright Mills, & Pierre Bourdieu	

		TRADITION	3:101-120 Critical Theory	Practice Memo 2 DUE
		ROOTS	XIII (Critical Theory): 396-407, 218-223, 435-442 58. Philosophy and Critical Theory, Herbert Marcuse 59. Traditional and Critical Theory, Max Horheimer 35. Culture and Politics, C. Wright Mills 65. Structures and the Habitus, Pierre Bourdieu	P P
2/10	W	TRADITION	Conflict Theory III: Max Weber 3: 68-74 (review from last week – Weber/Marx and the 2 traditions)	Practice Memo 3 DUE
		ROOTS	III (Weber): 82-107 12. The Spirit of Capitalism 13. Bureaucracy 14. The Nature of Charismatic Domination 15. Class, Status, and Party	P
		LIFE	2: 41-60 The Weberian Theory of Rationalization and the McDonaldization of Contemporary Society by George Ritzer	P
2/16	M		Writing Workshop: DUE Polished Draft of Memo 1	
2/18	W	TRADITION	Conflict Theory IV: Georg Simmel 3:118-153 Part 2: Conflict Theory and Analytic Sociology	
		ROOTS	IV (Simmel): 114-125, 130-136 17. The Problem of Sociology 18. Conflict as the Basis of Group Formation 20. The Philosophy of Money	P P P
		LIFE	4: 101-126 Alcohol-Related Windows on Simmel's Social World by William J. Staudenmeier, Jr.	

2/23	M	ROOTS	Conflict Theory V: Ralf Dahrendorf and Randall Collins VIII (Conflict Theories): 214-217, 224-239 34. Functions of Conflict, Lewis Coser 36. Conflict Groups and Group Conflicts, Ralf Dahrendorf 37. The Basics of Conflict Theory, Randall Collins	Memo 1 DUE P P P
2/25	W	TRADITION ROOTS LIFE	Macrosociological Perspectives: Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens 4: 159-196 Evolution and Modernity: Macrosociological Perspectives XIII (Critical Theory): 408-413 and XIV (Contemporary Theories of Modernity): 423-427 60. On Systematically Distorted Communication, Jürgen Habermas 63. The Reflexivity of Modernity, Anthony Giddens 7: 197-225 Critical Theory, Legitimation Crisis, and the Deindustrialization of Flint, Michigan by Steven P. Dandaneau	P P
3/2	M	TRADITION ROOTS	Symbolic Interactionism I and II: Weber, Simmel, Mead & Blumer 5: 197-227 Intro and Part 1: George Herbert Mead and Part 2: Herbert Blumer VI (Outside the Discipline) and IX (Symbolic Interactionism): 180-185, 240-252 24. Fusion of the 'I' and the 'Me' in Social Activities, George Herbert Mead 38. Membership and History, Anselm Strauss 39. Society as Symbolic Interaction, Herbert Blumer	P P
3/4	W		Symbolic Interactionism III: Erving Goffman, and Arlie Russell Hochschild	

		TRADITION	5: 227-246 Part 3: Erving Goffman and Part 4: Arlie Russell Hochschild	Memo 2 DUE
		ROOTS	IX (Symbolic Interactionism): 253-265 40. Performances, Erving Goffman 41. The Drama in the Routine, Stanford Lyman	P P
		LIFE	10:271-291 Goffman's Dramaturgical Sociology: Personal Sales and Services in a Commodified World, Peter Kivisto and Dan Pittman	
3/9	M		Phenomenology I: Harold Garfinkel	Draft of Criteria Memo DUE
		TRADITION	6: 261-292 Phenomenology: Intro and Part 1 and Part 2: Peter Berger	
		ROOTS	X (Phenomenology): 272-293 43. Rules of Conversational Sequence, Harvey Sacks 44. Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities, Harold Garfinkel 45. Partnership, Aron Gurwitsch	P P
3/11	W		Phenomenology III: Social Construction of Gender, Dorothy E. Smith and Patricia Hill Collins	Criteria Memo DUE
		TRADITION	5: 255-260 Patricia Hill Collins	
		ROOTS	V (Neglected Voices): 148-163 and XII (Feminist Theory): 373-383, 363-372 23. The Dependence of Women, Charlotte P. Gilman 24. Utilization of Women in City Government, Jane Addams 25. Feminism and Conventionality, Elsie Clews Parsons 55. Sociology from Women's Experience: A Reaffirmation, Dorothy E. Smith 54. Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins	P P
3/14-3/29			SPRING BREAK!!	

3/30	M	ROOTS LIFE	<p>Feminist Revisions and Bringing the Body Back In</p> <p>XII (Feminist Theory): 347-362 and XVI (Globalization): 522-531 52. Doing Gender, Candace West and Don Zimmerman 53. Subversive Bodily Acts, Judith Butler 56. Rethinking Freud on Women, Nandy Chodorow 74. An Outline of a General Sociology of the Body, Bryan Turner</p> <p>8: 226-248 The Socially Constructed Body: Insights from Feminist Theory by Judith Lorber and Patricia Yancey Martin</p>	P P
4/1	W		NO Class – Conduct research at the library for your final paper.	
4/6	M	TRADITION ROOTS	<p>Rational Choice Theories I: George Homans, Richard Emerson, James Coleman and Peter Blau</p> <p>7: 303-382 Theories of Rational Choice</p> <p>XI (Rational Choice): 294-323, 340-346 46. Social Behavior as Exchange, George Homans 47. Power-Dependence Relations, Richard Emerson 48. Human Capital and Social Capital, James S. Coleman 51. Formulation of Exchange Theory, Peter Blau</p>	P P
4/8	W	ROOTS ERESERVE	<p>Critical Race Theory</p> <p>V (Neglected Voices): 143-147 22. The Conservation of Races, W.E.B. Du Bois</p> <p>Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne Davis. "Language and Silence: Making Systems of</p>	P

			<p>Privilege Visible” in <i>Readings for Diversity and Social Justice</i>. Ed. Marianne Adams, et al. New York: Routledge, 2000: 50-60. [ereserve]</p> <p>Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. “A Sociology of Wealth and Racial Inequality” in <i>Readings for Diversity and Social Justice</i>. Ed. Marianne Adams, et al. New York: Routledge, 2000: 402-406.[ereserve]</p>	P
4/13	M	<p>TRADITION</p> <p>ROOTS</p> <p>LIFE</p>	<p>Postmodernism</p> <p>6: 415-426 The Future of Sociological Theory: Modernism and Postmodernism</p> <p>XV (Postmodernism and Poststructuralism): 443-462</p> <p>59. Advertising, Jean Baudrillard 60. Panopticism, Michel Foucault 61. Postmodernity, or Living With Ambiguity, Zygmunt Bauman</p> <p>11: 292-311 Contrasts of Carnival: Mardi Gras between the Modern and the Postmodern, Kevin Fox Gotham</p>	P P
4/17			NO Class – Conduct research at the library for your final paper.	

4/20	M	ROOTS	Modernism and Postmodernism, Multiple Perspectives XIV (Modernity): 420-422, 428-434, and XVI (Globalization): 490-501 62. Spectacular Time, Guy Debord 64. Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity, Ulrich Beck 72. Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy, Arjun Appadurai	Group 1 Draft DUE P P
4/22	W	ROOTS	The Future and Critical Theory XVI: (Globalization): 502-521 and (New Directions): 533-543 73. Theorizing Globalization, Douglas Kellner 75. The Subject and Societal Movements, Alan Touraine Bobbie Harro. "The Cycle of Liberation," in <i>Readings for Diversity and Social Justice</i> . Ed. Marianne Adams, et al. New York: Routledge, 2000: 463-469. [reserve]	Group 2 Draft DUE
4/27	M		CLASS PRESENTATIONS	Group 1 Presents
4/29	W		CLASS PRESENTATIONS	Group 3 Draft DUE
5/4	T		CLASS PRESENTATIONS	Group 2 Presents
5/6	TH		CLASS PRESENTATIONS and Conclusions	Group 4 Draft DUE
				Group 3 Presents
				Group 4 Presents

FINAL PAPER DUE by 4pm On Thursday, May 14 in Carnegie 115

This syllabus and the design of the course were made possible through the help and generosity of Professors Karla Erickson, Chris Hunter and Kent McClelland. Thank you, Professors. -BE

READING MEMO INSTRUCTIONS:

Reading memos are short essays intended to help focus your reactions to the readings and understand them more thoroughly. These memos should address an audience of other sociology students at your level. You should assume, however, that members of your audience might not necessarily have read the particular selections that you are discussing.

Each memo should begin by saying just enough about the author and selection in question to allow readers unfamiliar with that selection to put it in context. The rest of the memo should provide a critical and creative response to the selection, not just a rehash or summary of its content. Thus, a variety of reading memo formats are possible. For instance, you might try one of the following:

1. Identify a claim in the selection that you dispute, and explain why you disagree with the logic or the facts of the claim.
2. Pose an interesting unanswered question and show how it follows from the reading.
3. Suggest a method for resolving an issue raised by the reading.
4. Write a poem, story or a dialogue that captures your reaction to the reading.

The series of reading memos gradually increase in complexity. The purpose of these assignments is to help you develop the skills you will need for your final paper, so they need to be done on time and need to be spread out some.

Here is a brief description of the memo assignments. Each successive memo must discuss at least one new reading selection that has not been the focus of any of your previous memos.

1. For the first reading memo (**February 23**), you may choose any of the assigned readings from the ROOTS reader. You will prepare three practice memos (1-2 pgs) in preparation for this first paper. Those memos will cover Marx, Mills, Bourdieu and Weber, so many of you will likely choose to revise and expand

those practice memos into your first formal reading memo. This memo is limited to three typed pages (double-spaced, with readable font and wide margins — roughly 900 words). Your task is to analyze one theoretical reading along the lines suggested to the left.

2. For the second memo (**March 4**), you must discuss (in three to four pages) an empirical application of the theory presented in the selected reading. For instance, you might do one of the following:
 - Describe a current event or news item that is an excellent example of an idea in the selection. Show how the example embodies or illustrates the author's idea.
 - Show how something in the reading connects to "real" life, your own or somebody else's.
 - Give a real-life counterexample to one of the claims made in the reading. Explain why the theory is inadequate to deal with examples of this type.
3. The criteria memo (**Draft due March 9, final due March 11**) constitutes a draft of the first part of the final long essay: you will carefully describe three criteria for analyzing sociological theories and explain why those criteria provide a sensible, defensible, and reasonable basis for such an analysis.

FINAL ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS:**Due during final four weeks of classes**

The final paper (15 to 20 pages) represents your attempt to convince us that **one** of the theoretical perspectives we have studied this semester is better than one other. To do so, you must accomplish the following:

Select three criteria which will permit you to evaluate these perspectives and explain clearly what these criteria are and how these criteria provide more-or-less "objective" standards (that is, standards we all might be willing to accept) for judging the relative adequacy of the perspectives. [You will have already done this in the criteria memo, but you will need to rewrite/revise this material for the final essay.]

Select two perspectives to evaluate and explain why those two ought to be compared. You may select either a specific version of a perspective (e.g., Merton's version of functionalism or Goffman's reworking of symbolic interactionism or Hill Collins' Afrocentric feminist epistemology) or some reasonable amalgam that includes the basic features of the perspective. Be sure to choose two strong competitors.

By March 9, write the criteria memo in which you outline the criteria and the perspectives you have chosen and explain why they are reasonable choices.

Apply the criteria to those two perspectives and explain clearly and convincingly why one of the perspectives emerges as superior. [If you wish, you may also indicate explicitly how the two perspectives could be combined into a synthesis that would be

stronger than either one perspective alone.] The resulting essay will need to be 15-20 pages long to accomplish this task adequately.

Provide one hard copy of your polished draft to me, and a hard copy or electronic copy of the polished draft to your peer reviewers.

As you write this essay, remember that others in the course will read your paper and get a chance to critique it in class, and that I will write comments on the draft version. Note that I will not put a grade per se on the draft, but will write comments designed to help you improve the paper. The final, rewritten version of the essay should take advantage of all those comments.

The summary schedule for writing, presenting, and rewriting these essays is on the next page of the syllabus.

FINAL PAPER SCHEDULE:		
<p>DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER</p> <p>Apr 20 Monday Apr 22 Wednesday Apr 27 Monday Apr 29 Wednesday</p> <p>Author: Provide me with a paper copy of the polished draft of your paper. Exchange either paper or electronic copies of your paper with your peer reviewers. Distribute a one-page handout to each member of the class and to me on the day you present.</p> <p>Peer Editors: Read the paper carefully, making whatever stylistic or grammatical suggestions you feel comfortable making, but focusing your comments mostly on the substantive arguments offered. The goal of each paper is to be convincing, so indicate the points at which the paper is most and least convincing. Provide comments to your group members prior to or on the date you all present.</p>	<p>PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION</p> <p>Apr 27 Monday Apr 29 Wednesday May 4 Monday May 6 Wednesday</p> <p>Author: Distribute your handout to the class and present a brief, analytic, oral summary of your basic argument and conclusions. Be prepared to answer questions from members of class, from your peer editors, and from me.</p> <p>Peer Editors: Offer brief substantive comments on the paper in class and raise questions suitable for class discussion. After class, return your marked copy of the draft with your written critique to the author.</p> <p>Other class members: Be prepared to ask questions about issues that confuse you and to make suggestions that might improve the author's argument.</p>	<p>FINISHED PAPER</p> <p>Thursday, May 14 by 4pm in Carnegie 115.</p> <p>Author: Turn in to me the carefully revised and accurately proofread copy of your paper (along with the marked originals).</p>