

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA
Spring 2017

Advanced Sociological Theory SOI 6305, Section 1

Tuesday, 5:30-8:00 PM, Pafford 306

Dr. Emily McKendry-Smith

Office: Pafford 319

Office hours: Mon. 1-2, 3:30-4:30, Tues. 1-5, and Weds. 11-2, 3:30-4:30, or by appointment

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Do NOT email me using CourseDen!

“Social theory is a basic survival skill. This may surprise those who believe it to be a special activity of experts of a certain kind. True, there are professional social theorists, usually academics. But this fact does not exclude my belief that social theory is something done necessarily, and often well, by people with no particular professional credential. When it is done well, by whomever, it can be a source of uncommon pleasure.” – Charles Lemert, 1993

Course Information and Goals:

This course provides a foundation in the key components of classical and contemporary social theory, as used by academic sociologists.

This course is a seminar, not a lecture series. Unlike undergraduate courses, the purpose of this course is not to memorize a set of “facts,” but to develop your critical thinking skills by using them to evaluate theory. Instead, this course will consist of discussions centered on key questions from the readings. This course format requires that you be active participants. If discussion does not emerge spontaneously, I will prompt it by asking questions and pushing for your point of view. (That said, some of these theories can be difficult to understand; I will help you with this and we will work together in class to uncover the readings’ main points).

This course is designed to give you a broad overview of many key topics within sociological theory. These include both topics that you may use in your own research and topics that are rarely used in research but are important for your professional socialization. In addition, each subfield of sociology (family, social psychology, religion, etc) has its own theories that we will not cover in this course.

Expectations:

- **Attendance is required for this course.** This is a discussion-based class and will only work if everyone is present in class, prepared, and engaged in the class session.

- **Reading is required for this course.** Your readings are your most important resource for learning sociological theory and succeeding in this class.
- **In-class participation is important for this course.** You will personally get more out of the class and it will be more interesting for everyone if everyone participates in our class discussions. In order to remain fully engaged, please do not use your cell phone during class. Also, I expect everyone to practice sensitivity and respect in course discussions, particularly in regards to, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion, etc.
- **Adherence to the Honor Code is required for this class and all class work.** While you are welcome to use this course as an opportunity to work on your master's thesis, the work that you turn in should be substantially different from papers written in other courses. "Recycling" papers from previous courses is a form of academic dishonesty and will be treated as such. If you have questions about this, it is much better to contact me **before** turning something in

You can review the Honor Code and other UWG policies online here:

http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf

Initial instances of academic dishonesty (ie plagiarizing on an assignment) will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment. Additional instances of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course.

Preparing for class:

The readings I have assigned for each class period are comparatively shorter than those that you may read in some of your other graduate sociology courses. However, theory is often somewhat "dense" to read and you will need to read closely (ie not skim). While reading, you should focus on the following four goals:

1. Identify and understand the important concepts of the reading.
2. Identify the relevant sections of the reading that contain the important concepts and/or the author's main argument.
3. Prepare to explain and defend why you think the author's main argument is the main argument.
4. Prepare to discuss the plausibility and coherence of the author's ideas.

Readings:

I have assigned the following five books for our course. They are available for purchase at the university bookstore and online.

- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1993. *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1971. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Morris, Aldon. 2015. *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. DuBois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gould, Roger V. 2003. *Collision of Wills: How Ambiguity about Social Rank Breeds Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Abbott, Andrew. 2016. *Processual Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

All other course readings will be available on CourseDen in the “Resources” section.

Course requirements and evaluation:

- 12 Reading Responses (25%)
- Classical Social Theory Assignment (25%)
- Mid-Century Theory Assignment (25%)
- Contemporary Theory Assignment (25%)

Course assignments must be turned in to me hard copy and to a CourseDen dropbox in some cases. I will not accept or grade assignments turned in via email.

I will not formally grade you on your class attendance or participation. That said, both are important to succeed in the class and expected of you as graduate students.

I do not give grades; you earn grades. You will receive point values, but not letter grades, for individual tests and assignments. I will award final grades using this scale.

A = 90-100 B = 80-89 C = 70-79 F = 0-69

Reading Responses:

You will need to write and turn in a “reading response” for 13 weeks of class. (There are 14 weeks of class where we have readings, so you get one freebie). Your reading response should be turned in on the day that we discuss that reading. For example, if you turn in a reading

response on January 10th, it should be on *The Fine Line*. Your reading responses should be typed, using double-spaced 12 point Times New Roman font and 1 inch margins, printed out and turn in to me in person. I will not accept reading responses over email.

You should begin by your reading response by giving the quote from that week's reading(s) that you think is most important or interesting. You should then write a paragraph explaining why you have chosen that quote and what is important or interesting about it. In explaining this, you should also connect your chosen quote with other theoretical concepts or readings we have examined in this course. Your reading response should be at least 1 page long, but no longer than 1.5 pages.

Based on your reading response, I should be able to tell that you have done the assigned readings for that week of class. If it is not clear to me that you have done the readings (ie, if you pick a quote at random or can't explain why you chose your quote) you will receive partial or no credit.

Course Schedule:

January 10th: Introduction to the Course

January 17th: Thinking Sociologically

- Zerubavel, *The Fine Line*

January 24th: Marx

- Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Part 1
- Wright, "Marxism After Communism" (CourseDen)

February 1st: Durkheim

- Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Part 2
- Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (CourseDen)

February 7th: Weber

- Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Part 3
- Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell. "The Iron Cage Revisited." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April, 1983, pages 147-160 (CourseDen)

February 14th: Other Early Theorists

- Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* excerpt (CourseDen)
- Simmel, Georg. 1957. "Fashion." *American Journal of Sociology* 62(6): 541-558. (CourseDen)
- Simmel, "The Stranger" (CourseDen)

February 21st: DuBois

- Morris, *The Scholar Denied*

February 28th: Mid-Century Social Constructionism

- Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* excerpt (CourseDen)
- Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* excerpt (CourseDen)
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273-286.

March 7th: Other Mid-Century Theorists

- Lewis Coser, "Sociological Theory from the Chicago Dominance to 1965." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2(1976): 145-160. (CourseDen)
- Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions" (CourseDen)
- Merton, "Theories of the Middle Range" (CourseDen)
- Mills, "The Power Elite" (CourseDen)

March 14th: Social Status and Conflict

- Gould, *Collision of Wills*

March 21st: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**March 28th: Theories of Modernity**

- Foucault excerpt (CourseDen)
- Giddens, "Modernity and Self Identity" (CourseDen)
- Bauman, "Liquid Modernity" (CourseDen)

April 4th: Bourdieu

- Bourdieu excerpts (CourseDen)
- Swidler, "The Power of Social Movements" (CourseDen)

April 11th: Structure and Agency

- William H. Sewell, Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992). (CourseDen)
- Colin Campbell, "Distinguishing the Power of Agency from Agentive Power." *Sociological Theory* 27 (2009). (CourseDen)
- Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (CourseDen)

April 18th: The Social World as a Series of Processes

- Abbott, *Processual Sociology*, Preface, Part 1, and Part 2

April 25th: The Social World as a Series of Processes

- Abbott, *Processual Sociology*, Part 3, Part 4, and Epilogue

May 9th, 5-7 PM: Final Exam Period