Description:

This seminar is designed to provide the student with social science knowledge to understand social issues that are addressed in advanced studies in social welfare and related disciplines, and to frame questions for theory-based/theory-informed research. Students will read original works of social theorists from historical and contemporary perspectives. Readings address both micro- and macro-level concepts, largely from the disciplinary lenses of sociology and philosophy. Critical reading of original works will help students identify recurring themes, fundamental assumptions, orientations, worldviews, and epistemological, methodological and practical dilemmas in today’s world. Students will expand their ability to read complex texts, conduct nuanced analyses, craft thoughtful arguments, and develop well-constructed critiques of theories that do and/or could inform their substantive field of study and empirical research. Students will have the opportunity to exchange views, perspectives and critical analyses in seminar discussions and related activities.

Objectives: By the end of this semester students are expected to attain the following:

1. An understanding of the epistemological perspectives and social contexts that inform selected social theories.

2. Expanded ability to critically evaluate theories and frameworks and to identify the assumptions that underlie the concepts therein. In particular, expanded ability to reflect upon the theories in your own words.

3. Expanded ability to use theory to guide the formulation of research questions and design.

4. Expanded ability to analyze and examine a research question or issue using multiple theoretical perspectives at different levels of analysis.

5. Deeper understanding of individual, social, and cultural factors that are related to issues in society.

6. Knowledge of specific theories that will serve as a base for further scholarly exploration.
Course Expectations

1. Students are expected to demonstrate that they understand readings and are thinking analytically, critically, theoretically, and reflectively. Accordingly, students are to do assigned readings prior to class, bring the week’s texts and/or Canvas readings to EVERY class (either in hard copy or electronically), and actively participate in class discussion. Class discussions should reflect critical thinking about the ideas presented in the theoretical works and their applicability to fields concerned with social issues. In class discussion try to identify the theorist by name as you talk about the ideas; e.g. “As Lamont argued...” versus “as she argued”...

2. Satisfactory completion of all assignments.

Student Conduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and comply with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. The Code can be found at https://provost.upenn.edu/policies/faculty-handbook/students/iv-b.

OK to eat quiet food (& wrapping) in class.

Attendance

Because classroom learning is a fundamental component of your education, attendance is expected and will be considered in the determination of your grade. In the event that you cannot attend class, please notify the instructor—preferably before the missed class.

Texts These books should be available from the Internet (used is fine) or the library. PLEASE GET THESE EXACT EDITIONS.


Check periodically for announcements.

Re course material: I will use the Modules section of our Canvas site for the Syllabus and for all required weekly reading other than texts. I will also post my class notes and any powerpoints after class each week in that week's module folder. Please treat my notes and ppts confidentially. I have also posted optional readings that may be of interest and/or useful for your research in the Module folder for the relevant week and may post additional optional readings during the semester.

**Designations on the Syllabus**

Author name in Bold = Text  
(CM) before author name = Reading is on Canvas - in Modules section (by weeks)

### Weeks 1 - 3: Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

#### Week 1 (Jan. 22): Introduction to Course

- Introduction to Social Theory
- Overview of Syllabus and Course
- Introduction to Ancient Greece


#### Week 2 (Jan. 29): Intellectual Ancestry of Western Social Theory: Ideas and Methods of Plato


- Book I – entire
- Book II – entire
- Book III – read intro for themes, p.60
- Book IV – entire
- Book V – read intro for themes, p. 122
- Book VI – entire
- Book VII – entire

#### Week 3 (Feb. 5): Aristotle and Kuhn: On Scientific Theory


*Topics*, Book I (p.188-198 bottom) -- read for the main points -- basis of scientific method

(CM) Then read Hacking's Introductory Essay to *Structure* (pp. vii-xxxvii). Read this *after* you read Kuhn’s original chapters.


**REQUIRED:** Chapter 2. "Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability" (pp. 33-57)

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(CM) **OPTIONAL:** Conant & Haugeland - Part 3 -- A Discussion with Thomas A. Kuhn (1995), about his life and his work (pp. 255-323).


((For those particularly interested in research methods. Students have liked this piece in the past))


((An interesting critique/commentary on Kuhn for the philosophy-minded))


**Weeks 4 – 9: Modernist Theories**

**Week 4 (Feb. 12): Conflict Theory: Marx, Engels, Post-Marx & Feminist Views**


"Wage, Labor and Capital” (pp. 203-217)

“Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” (pp. 683-717)

“The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State” (pp. 734-759)


"Introduction: The Problem with Work" (pp. 1-36)


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**Week 5 (Feb. 19): Conflict/Institutionalist Theory: Weber**


Chapter 1: “Basic Sociological Terms,” pp. 3-56.


Chapter IX, Section 6. “Class, Status, Party,” pp. 926-940


**Week 6 (Feb. 26): Simmel: Conflict Theory Extension**


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**Assignment #2. Mid-term Paper: Due SUNDAY March 3 (35%)**

***SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS - MARCH 4-8 ***

**Week 7 (Mar. 12): Durkheim**

- Social Structure/Social Order
- Group Boundaries


Book I: The Function of the Division of Labour
p.11-87 Chapter 1: “The Method of Determining this Function”
Chapter 2: “Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities”
Chapter 3: “Solidarity Arising from the Division of Labour, or Organic Solidarity”


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Optional


**Week 8 (Mar. 19) Rational Choice and Associated Theories**

- Social Exchange Theory
- Human & Social Capital Theories & Critiques
- Contemporary Extensions of Rational Choice

**Exchange Theory**

"Introduction" (pp. 1-11--the original introduction)
"Introduction to the Transaction Edition" (1986) (pp. vii-xvii)

**Human, Social, and Cultural Capital Theory**
**Associated with Rational Choice Theory**


**March/Simon & Olson readings are together in one file document**


((A view of social exchange theory from the psychology perspective))


((Particularly for those interested in life-course theory and gender))


((Extends and refers directly to the work of Granovetter that we read))


**Week 9 (March 26): Feminist Theories**

- Standpoint Theories: Feminism; Black Feminism; Womanism


(CM) OPTIONAL (or if you are particularly interested in de Beauvoir – pp. 721-751 – at end of the document).


Weeks 10-14: Turning to the Postmodern

Week 10 (Apr. 2): Microinteractionism and Symbolic Interactionism

- Theory and Concepts Pertaining to Stigma
- Self and Society


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**Week 11 (April 9): Bourdieu**

- Introduction to the Postmodern
- Bourdieu: Space, Power and the State


- Chapter 1 and Appendix: "Social space and symbolic space" (pp. 1-18) [[helps to get "habitus" concept; related to race]]
- Chapter 3 **APPENDIX ONLY**, pp. 64-74.


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(CM) OPTIONAL: Bohrman, C. (2013). Police officer assessments of mental illness, substance abuse, and co-occurring mental illness and substance use: It's common sense. Dissertation in Social Welfare, SP2, 2013. Suggest reading Abstract, p. v-vi, and Chapter 2, pp. 25-42. ((This is a great example of using Bourdieu in the conceptual framework of a dissertation. Dr. Bohrman kindly gave permission for me to post this for your referral -- and I'd add, enjoyment!))

**Week 12 (April 16): Foucault: The Birth of the Clinic**

- Background to Foucault
- Foucauldian Concepts

[[Read for his concepts and ways of theorizing—we'll review in class also]]

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(Particularly for those interested in mental illness, voice, EBP, and social networks)

**Week 13 (April 23): Social Construction**

- Sociology of Knowledge
- “Reality” versus “Construction”
- Multiple Perspectives


Part I - Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-46)


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Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 (Read before Gergen 2015 if you want more background on social construction theory)


A wonderful article on mental health diagnosis and social construction.


((Draws together Berger & Luckmann, Foucault, and Habermas on hermeneutics, discourse, and sociology of knowledge))

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***ASSIGNMENT #3: FINAL PAPER DUE on or before SUNDAY APRIL 28***
Week 14 (April 30): Additional Postmodern Strands and Critiques

- Critical Race Theory
- Space
- Integrating Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Postmoderism


(CM) Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105-131. ((This is an important integrative piece!))

Assignments

GENERAL: All written work must be submitted electronically to me at (riversen@sp2.upenn.edu) in 12-point type, double-spaced in Word (doc or docx), and use flush left/ragged right margins. Put your name and page number in automatic header or footer. **DO NOT submit in pdf.** All work is to be original with referenced materials and quotations properly cited. Use the citation format of the American Psychological Association (APA) or the format that is customary in your field. Do not miss class or slight the week's readings to complete a paper. Submit papers by 6pm on the day due.

Assignment #1. Weekly discussion questions for class (25%)

Come to class each week prepared to discuss a question or thought(s) you have about some aspect of the reading that you found particularly stimulating; or some aspect you found relevant to a social issue or problem in your research area; or some aspect of the reading you would like to understand better.

***Submit your question or thoughts to me in writing (preferably a paragraph or less) at the beginning of class. Copy your commentary twice on one sheet of paper; make sure the version you give to me has your name and class date on it.

Grading for this "assignment" includes showing growing mastery of the content of the theorists' ideas in the readings and what their ideas mean to you and to contemporary social issues. Grading will also include the quality of your participation in overall class discussions.

Assignment #2. Mid-term Paper: Due SUNDAY March 3 (35%)
Rationale: This assignment is designed to help you review the course readings and the theorists' ideas to date (through Week 6, Feb. 26). Importantly, it asks you to think about and formulate your own analytic and critical reactions.

Assignment: The writers in the course to date have presented thoughts that are about or relevant to the form and structure of social organizations, such as political organizations; public bureaucracies; labor market organizations; social welfare organizations; and organizations in general.

Critically discuss your thoughts about how two course theorists' ideas contribute to your understanding of contemporary organizational structures and processes. Which of the theorists' ideas about these structures and processes do you find most important, and why? Feel free to draw upon your own experience(s) in organizations as a base for your analyses and reflections on the course theorists' ideas.

Length: Maximum of 10 pages (plus references for any outside reading). You may cite my notes as (Iversen, Week X, p. #). The point of the paper, however, is YOUR analysis of and thoughts about the theorists' ideas and their application - not what some other writer thinks.

Assignment #3. Final Paper: Due SUNDAY April 28 (40%)

Rationale: This assignment is designed to extend your knowledge about how theory is or is not used or evident in empirical research in your area of interest. The assignment also requires you to review course readings and encourages you to think about how course material might enrich your future research and writing.

Analysis: Examine and critically analyze the empirical/research-based literature about an issue in your substantive area to determine whether and how the issue has been approached theoretically by those in the field. This paper should not be a review of the theoretical literature per se.

First, describe a few studies from your area's research literature and discuss what the theory base is or seems to be, and whether the theory base is explicit or implicit. Evaluate and discuss the relevance and adequacy of these theoretical approaches based on your understanding of the theories, the issue you selected, the methodological implications of the use of theory (or its absence), and the "fit" between the theories and the issue. This section should be around one-third of the paper.

Then, provide and justify the use of two or more alternative theoretical approaches to your possible future research on the issue, using relevant theoretical works from this semester's class readings. Discuss in depth your ideas about how inquiry based on the ideas of these theorists might extend understanding of the issue, beyond how the empirical inquiry is currently theorized. Include discussion of the methodological implications of your proposed theoretical extension. This section should be around two-thirds of the paper. You may (but don't have to) use limited external resources, but the emphasis should be on your thinking.

Length: Maximum of 15-20 pages (plus references)
### General Grading Rubric:

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