Sociology 4/864: Contemporary Sociological Theory  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Spring 2018  

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Office Hours: Mondays 10-11am, Fridays 3-4pm  
Office Location: 725 Oldfather Hall  

Course Meeting Time and Location: Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-10:45am, 707 Oldfather Hall  

Course Description and Objectives  

The primary objective of this class is to introduce you to some of the major perspectives and key debates in contemporary sociological theory. We start by considering phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, which provide conceptualizations of the individual and the relationship between “macro” and “micro” levels of the social world. We then cover contemporary theorists who offer new approaches to the question of structure and agency. Additionally, we consider theories that reflect the “cultural turn” and “postmodern turn” in social theory and discuss how sociologists have responded to these “turns.” Finally, we will consider contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of inequalities and differences. We cover theories that address class, gender, sexuality, and race as well as ones that advocate for an intersectional approach.  

Along with covering major perspectives and debates, the course is also designed to allow you to engage in questions about the relationship between theory and research and about the politics of doing sociological research and theorizing. Sociologists have differing perspectives about the role of theory in research and about how to justify knowledge claims. We begin the class considering some of these perspectives. Throughout the rest of the class, we will read empirical examples that relate to the theories covered and also provide more illustrations of sociological research and its relation to theory and epistemology. We end the course by returning to these larger questions and consider the politics of disciplinary research and theory and the link between contemporary and classical theories.  

Course Materials  

All required readings are available online on our Canvas site. You are required to bring a hard copy of the readings to class.  

Course Format  

This course will be a seminar format and will be discussion based. Our class time is your opportunity to engage with and clarify the readings, many of which are not easy. You are expected to come to class having done all the required readings and being prepared to discuss them. Please note that this class requires a lot of reading each week and plan accordingly.
Course Assignments

Your grade in this class will be determined by your performance on the following:

Weekly response papers (15%)

Since this is a discussion-based class, coming to class prepared to participate will play a large part in how well you do in this class. Your preparation will be assessed through weekly response papers. Each week you will be responsible for writing a response paper (beginning the week of January 16). The paper will be a combination of reflections on the reading and at least 2 discussion questions. The response papers should be 2 pages (of reflection), double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font. (the discussion questions should be on page 3). The paper is due in-class. Your weekly responses are worth 15% of your overall grade. Undergraduate students are required to write six response papers throughout the semester.

Participation (15%)

You are expected to participate fully in each class by discussing the readings, asking questions and engaging with your peers. Missing two or more classes with negatively affect your participation grade. The participation component is worth 15% of your overall grade.

Midterm paper (30%)

The midterm paper is due March 1st. It will be submitted in my departmental mailbox. The midterm paper should be 10 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font. It is worth 30% of your overall grade. The page requirement for the midterm paper for undergraduate students is 5 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font.

Final paper (40%)

The final paper is due April 24th. It will be submitted in class. The final paper should be 10 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font. It is worth 40% of your overall grade. The page requirement for the final paper for undergraduate students is 5 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font.

Grading Scale

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READING SCHEDULE

*Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to make a change to the schedule to better meet the needs of the class. Additional or alternative readings may be announced in class.

**Week 1: Introductions**

*January 9 & 11: Introductions and Syllabus*


One empirical article of student’s choosing that has a clear theoretical framework

**Week 2: What is theory? What is the relationship between theory and research?**

*January 16 & 18*


**Week 3: What is theory? What is the relationship between theory and research?**

*January 23 & 25*


Davis and Moore. 1945. “Some Principles of Stratification” (excerpt)

One empirical article of student’s choosing that has a clear theoretical framework

**Week 4: Phenomenology, Symbolic Interactionism, and Goffman**

*January 31 & February 1*


Blumer, Herbert. 1969. “Symbolic Interactionism” (excerpt)


**Week 5: Structure & Agency**

*February 6 & 8*


**Week 6: Postmodernism**

*February 13 & 15*


Foucault, Michel. 1975. “Discipline and Punish” (excerpt)


Week 7: Culture

February 20 & 22


Week 8: Midterm

February 27 & March 1

MIDTERM PAPER DUE MARCH 1st

Week 9: Theorizing Class

March 6 & 8


Week 10: Theorizing Race

March 13 & 15


Hill Collins, Patricia. 2004. Black Sexual Politics (excerpt)


Week 11: No Class

March 20 & 22 Spring Break

Week 12: Theorizing Gender

March 27 & 29


Butler, Judith. “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”


Week 13: Theorizing Sexuality

April 3 & 5


Foucault, Michel. 1978. The History of Sexuality (excerpt)


Week 14: Theorizing Difference and Inequalities

April 10 & 12


**Week 15: The Politics of Theory and Research**

*April 17 & 19*


**Week 16: Course Reflections**

*April 24 & 26*

**FINAL PAPER DUE: April 24th**