

The Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Fall 2015
(First Version of Fall 2015 Syllabus)

COURSE: SOCI-355-001: Theory and Intensive Writing

TIME: Tues. & Thurs. 3:30 p.m.- 4:45 p.m.

LOCATION: Burnett, Room 120

PROFESSOR: L. J. Dance, 723 Oldfather Hall, Office phone: 472-2962
Email: ldance2@unl.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Dance: Most Tues and Thurs, 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What is a theory or theoretical perspective or theoretical tradition? Ask professors in various departments at UNL or any university, and you are likely to get a variety of answers. Even if you limit your inquiry to sociology professors, you will get a variety of answers. Here are just a few definitions of “theory” or “theoretical tradition” from three different Introduction to Sociology text books:

“A statement that organizes a set of concepts in a meaningful way by explaining the relationship among them” (Robertson 1987).

“A set of interrelated ideas that have a wide range of application, deal with centrally important issues, and have stood the test of time” (Ritzer 2013).

“A conceptual framework or paradigm that sociologists use to imagine and make sense of the world” (My Soc Lab, NYU Dept. of Sociology 2013).

The main textbook for this course, *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*, defines sociological theory as “*the body of concepts and conceptual frameworks used to make sense of the multilayered, empirical patterns and underlying processes in society*” (Dillon 2014:537). The expression “framework” is good to keep in mind. In “SOCI 355-001, Theory and Intensive writing”, we will explore origins and destinations as well as usages and limitations of theories commonly associated with the discipline of Sociology. However, this course will sample several theories/theorists. Therefore you will likely acquire a skeletal knowledge or basic outline of several theoretical frameworks instead of an in-depth understanding of particular theories/theorists.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

As elaborated below, this course has five overarching goals/objectives. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- *Write (and discuss) theoretical assessments of cultural artifacts (and/or social phenomena).*
- *Understand, deliberate, and apply key terms and concepts related to sociological theories.*
- *Outline a brief and basic historical backdrop to contemporary theoretical discourses.*

- *Understand, deliberate, and apply, at an introductory level, several theoretical frames common to the discipline of Sociology.*
- *Write a literature review of relevant theoretical perspectives that apply to a particular sociological research topic. This review of theoretical perspectives will include an annotated bibliography of empirical studies.*

Intensive Writing about Cultural Artifacts The course is designed to improve analytical abilities through written theoretical assessments of cultural artifacts. “Cultural artifacts”, a term often used by anthropologists, are past and present human creations. Hence, cultural artifacts include things like tools, machines, instruments, books, videos, movies, poems, articles, music, songs, and so on. Though we will focus more upon cultural artifacts from the present, students will be encouraged to examine and assess these artifacts as if they were researchers living in the 2060s, looking back at objects from the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

“Play” with Key Conceptual Building Blocks The course facilitates assessments, constructions, and deconstructions of key terms/concepts revolving around theories. These terms/concepts will include expressions like “theory”, “episteme”, “paradigm”, “ideology”, “epistemology”, “ontology”, “historiography”, “discourse”, “sociological imagination”, and so on. “Play” refers to creative approaches to studying key terms and concepts. In addition to straightforward discussions, play will include the use of poetry, music/songs, drawings/diagrams, brief video clips, and so on, to add dimensions and vitality to concepts.

Stroll Through Key Historical Moments/Events/Persons Though the majority of the course will explore contemporary theories, students will examine moments, events, persons that provide the historical backdrop to contemporary theoretical discourses.

Try Out Theoretical Frames Most of the course will be devoted to sampling a variety of theoretical perspectives common to the field of Sociology. Ample time will be devoted to straightforward academic discussions designed to introduce students to perspectives like Marxism, Critical Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Social Reproduction, Feminist Theories, and so on. In addition to straightforward discussions, students will be encouraged to discuss aspects and dimensions of theories like implied narrative voice, texture, theme music, and so on.

Applying Theory to an Actual Cultural Artifact or Other Sociological Phenomenon

By the end of the semester, students will choose a research topic based upon a cultural artifact or other sociological phenomenon. Students will be provided guidelines for situating their research topic among the most relevant theoretical frames. The final product will be a literature review of relevant theoretical frames for the chosen topic. This review of theoretical perspectives will include an annotated bibliography of empirical studies.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There is one required text for this course. In addition to the text below, required articles will be placed on BlackBoard or provided in some other electronic format.

- Dillon, Michele (2014) *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*. Wiley Blackwell.

RECOMMENDED TEXT(S):

There is one recommended text for this course.

- Edwards, Mark (2015) *Writing in Sociology, Second Edition*. Sage.

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

All students are expected to **attend classes, participate in class discussions, do in-class presentations, read assigned texts, complete four writing assignments, participate in one group-led discussion, complete one literature review proposal, and complete one final literature review covering several theories.** The final grade for this course will be based upon class participation and in-class deliberations, four writing assignments, one group led discussion, one literature review proposal, and one final literature review covering several theories. Your final grade will be based upon the total number of points earned on the assignments identified above and listed below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	First Written Assignment	05 pts (05%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Second Written Assignment	05 pts (05%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Third Written Assignment	7.5 pts (7.5%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fourth Written Assignment	10 pts (10%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group Discussion Leaders	10 pts (10%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Literature Review Proposal	12.5 pts (12.5%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Final Literature Review	30 pts (30%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Class Participation ¹	20 pts (20%)
	TOTAL	100 pts (100%)

Grading Scheme ² :	A = 92-100% of total points
	B = 84-92% of total points
	C = 76-84% of total points
	D = 68-76% of total points
	E = 60-68% of total points
	F = 59% or less of total points

MAKE-UP POLICY:

Because each assignment builds upon the previous assignment, as a general rule there will be **NO** make-up assignments. In **extraordinary** circumstances, a late assignment may be accepted if: (1) you know in advance that you will be unable, for **extraordinary** reasons, to hand in the assignment, and you make arrangements with the professor at least one week before the scheduled due date; or (2) you are suddenly hospitalized, become seriously ill, or experience some other serious event and then consult with the professor about handing in the assignment as soon as possible. In any event, the professor reserves the right to refuse permission for make-up assignments if she feels it is not warranted. At the end of the semester, however, students with missing assignments will be given an opportunity to make-up missing work.

INTEGRATIVE STUDIES COURSE:

¹ 1.0 points will be deducted from your Class Participation (CP) grade for each class that you miss if you do not have an official excuse. For example, if you miss two classes, your CP grade could be no higher than 18 points, if you miss four classes, your CP grade could be no higher than 16 points, and so on. On top of this, your CP grade may also be affected by not participating in class discussions when you are in class. So, please do not miss classes. Of course, if you have an official excuse for missing class, then no points will be deducted from your CP.

² The grade point totals will be more specifically divided into A+/A/-, B+/B/B-, and so on.

This course is an Integrated Studies Course. Integrative Studies is a UNL experience requirement intended to engage students in actively developing their ability and desire to analyze, evaluate and communicate complex material and positions.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln provides individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that is impacting your academic progress, please call Students w/Disabilities Services (SSD) at 472-3787 and schedule an appointment with the Director, Veva Cheney, so that she can arranged a confidential discussion of your individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

If you do not have a documented disability but you are having difficulties with your coursework (such as receiving low grades even though you study more than your classmates or running out of time for test questions when the majority of your peers finish their exams in the allotted time), you may still schedule an appointment with Veva Cheney to discuss the challenges you are experiencing.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES:

The professor believes that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs. Students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the professor of any intended absences for religious observances in advance. Notice should be provided to the professor as soon as possible but no later than the end of the fourth week of classes.

USE OF CELL PHONES AND COMPUTERS DURING CLASS:

Please be courteous to your classmates and instructor and do **NOT** use your cell phone, I-phone, etc., during class. Computers and I-Pads are allowed in class but only with the approval of the professor and for course-related reasons (e.g., note taking, presentations).

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:

(This first version of meetings, readings, and assignments is subject to revisions)

PART I. INTRODUCTIONS AND THEORETICAL PLAY

Aug 25 Introduction to the Course and Review of Course Requirements

Aug 27 Everyday Theories: An In-Class Discussion

Required Reading:

(No Required Reading for this week).

A Note on “Play” Time

During Part I of the course and for the remainder of the semester, the professor will expect *all students* to engage in course discussions. Interested students will also have the opportunity to earn extra credit points by using poetry, music, brief video clips, or other creative tools to bring concepts and theories to life.

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Sep 01 Playing with Key Concepts: A Sociological Overview/Review

Required Reading

“What is Sociology (Chp. 1)” from *Introduction to Sociology* by Anthony Giddens et al. (WW Norton & Company, 2014) pages 3-27 (On Blackboard)

Sep 03 Everyday Theories versus Sociological Theories

Required Reading

“Chapter Three: Overview of Writing a Research Paper” from *Writing in Sociology, Second Edition* by Mark Edwards (Sage 2015) pages 19-24 (On Blackboard)

First Writing Assignment-Discussed

Introduction to A Paper on Theoretical Perspectives about “The Matrix” Pretend that you will eventually write a paper that answers the question: “What is the Matrix?” But first, you need to introduce this topic. To make a case that defining “The Matrix” is a topic worthy of scholarly consideration, write an Introduction using and elaborating the text below.

Everyday people may describe “The Matrix” in the following ways [Give 2 to 3 examples of Everyday Theories/Perspectives about The Matrix]. Sociologists would probably use concepts like [list concepts from the reading on “What is Sociology” assigned on September 1, 2015] to describe The Matrix. [Insert the name of a sociologist or two here] would offer the most useful theoretical perspective for understanding “The Matrix”. I have chosen [this/these] theorists because [insert reasons based upon info from the reading “What is Sociology”]. By comparing and contrasting everyday theoretical perspectives with sociological perspectives about “The Matrix”, this study will demonstrate [insert what your paper will demonstrate]. This Introduction should be 200 to 300 words, double-spaced, in a font no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10, with margins no smaller than 1-inch. *Due at Start of Class on September 8, 2015.*

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Sep 08 Playing with the Table of Contents of *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts,*

and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century

Required Reading

From the required text for this course, *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concept, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*, (hereafter summarized as *Intro to Soc. Theory*), read from page v to page 4.

First Writing Assignment-Due At Start of Class

Introduction to A Paper on Theoretical Perspectives about "The Matrix" (see info from September 3, 2015 for instructions)

Sep 10 Placing Cultural Artifacts under Theoretical Spotlights

Required Reading

Skim through *Intro to Soc. Theory* and choose a theorist (or two but no more than three) who captures your attention. Be sure to mostly "**skim**" through this book; the only sections I encourage you to read are the "Points to Remember" at the end of each chapter. In class we will discuss your answers to the following question, "*Having only skimmed the textbook, the following theory/theories/theorist(s) captured my attention because...*"

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**PART II. ORIGINS AND PARADIGMS: A THEORETICAL STROLL
THROUGH KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS**

(Group Led Discussions on Cultural Artifacts/Phenomena to be Added to Parts II to IV)

Sep 15 The "So What" of Sociology and of Theory (aka Why Sociology And Theory Matter)

Required Reading

"Introduction: Welcome to Sociological Theory," from *Intro to Soc. Theory* pages 4-29.

"Play" Time (Revisited)

All students are expected to engage in straightforward academic discussions of featured theories and theorists. Interested students will also have the opportunity to earn extra credit points by reading between the lines to uncover theoretical features like narrative voice, texture, theme music, etc. We will continue to "play" for the remainder of the semester.

Sep 17 Who were Thomas Kuhn and Anna Julia Cooper and (Why) Should we Care?

"Thomas Kuhn: the man who changed the way the world looked at science," by John Naughton (On BlackBoard)

"Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1858 to 1964) from BlackPast.org, (use the link below): <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/cooper-anna-julia-haywood-1858-1964>, accessed August 10, 2015.

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Sep 22 Spotlight on the Social Phenomenon of Bullying (*Bully*-The Documentary)

Required Reading

“Types of Bullying” by the National Centre Against Bullying (use the link below):
<http://www.ncab.org.au/parents/typesofbullying/>, accessed August 10, 2015.

“From Bullying to Genocides: From Micro to Macro” by Warren Blumenfeld
<http://www.warrenblumenfeld.com/2015/04/15/from-bullying-to-genocides-from-micro-to-macro-3/>, accessed August 10, 2015.

Sep 24 Notions of Bullying (and Anti-Bullying)?: A Play on Words of Power

Required Reading

“Government, Political Power, and Social Movements (Chp. 13)” from *Introduction to Sociology* by Anthony Giddens et al. (WW Norton & Company, 2014) pages 352-377 (On Blackboard)

“Michel Foucault: Theorizing Sexuality, The Body, and Power,” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 369-379.

Second Writing Assignment-Discussed

Introduction to A Paper on Theoretical Perspectives about “Bullying” or other Abuses of Power Eventually, you are going to write a paper that answers the question: “What is a Bully or what is the phenomenon of Bullying?” But first, you need to introduce this topic. To make a case that defining a Bully is a topic worthy of scholarly consideration, write an Introduction using and elaborating the text below.

Everyday people may describe “Bullying” in the following ways [*Give 2 to 3 examples of Everyday Theories/Perspectives about Bullying*]. Sociologists would probably use concepts like [*list 5 to 10 concepts from the reading on “Government, Political Power, and Social Movements (Chp. 13)” and/or from “Michel Foucault: Theorizing Sexuality, The Body, and Power” assigned on September 24, 2015*] to dimensionalize the concept “Bully”. Based upon what I have learned so far in SOCI-355, [*insert the name of a sociologist or two here*] might offer the most useful theoretical perspective for understanding Bullying. I have chosen [*this/these*] theorists because [*insert reasons based upon info from the reading “Government, Political Power, and Social Movements” and/or based upon skimming through Introduction to Sociological Theory*]. By comparing and contrasting everyday theoretical perspectives with sociological perspectives about Bullying, this study will demonstrate [*insert what your paper will demonstrate*].

This Introduction should be 200 to 300 words, double-spaced, in a font no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10, with margins no smaller than 1-inch. ***Due at Start of Class on September 29, 2015.***

Sep 29 Defining Social Phenomena: Bullying Revisited

Required Reading

“Defining and specifying social phenomena,” by Daniel Little, from the Blog Understanding Society” (use the link below):
<http://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2010/01/defining-and-specifying-social.html>

Second Writing Assignment-Due At Start of Class

Introduction to A Paper on Theoretical Perspectives about “Bullying” or other Abuses of Power

Oct 01 Phenomenology and The Social Construction of Reality: Bullying Re-revisited

Required Reading

“Phenomenology” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 302-307.

**PART III. TESTING AND CRITIQUING DIFFERENT
THEORETICAL FRAMES**

Oct 06 Marxism, The Basics

Required Reading

“Chapter One: Karl Marx (1818-1883),” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 32-52.

Oct 08 Marxism, The Basics (cont’d)

Required Reading

“Chapter One: Karl Marx (1818-1883),” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 52-75.

Oct 13 Functionalism, Social Facts, and Social Solidarity

Required Reading

“Chapter Two: Emile Durkheim (1858-1916),” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 77-98.

Oct 15 Structural Functionalism, Modernization, and Middle Range Theory

Required Reading

“Chapter Four: Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 155-179.

Oct 20 Fall Break (No Class)

Oct 22 Interpretive Understanding, Ideal Types, Social Action, and Authority

Required Reading

“Chapter Three: Max Weber (1864-1920)” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 115 to top of 125, pages 128-132, and pages 135-143.

Third Writing Assignment-Discussed

Drafting a Review of Theoretical Literature Choose a cultural artifact or social phenomenon that could be framed by different theoretical perspective(s). Begin drafting a review of theoretical literature that has the following sections:

- **Topic:** Choose a cultural artifact and/or social phenomenon and make a strong case for why studying

- this cultural artifact/phenomenon is important.
- **Theoretical Frames:** Choose three to four theoretical perspectives and briefly explain each perspective.
 - **Most Explanatory Power:** Explain which of the theoretical perspectives you have chosen would provide the most explanatory power for your cultural artifact or social phenomenon. Be sure to also explain why it would provide the best explanation.
 - **Least Explanatory Power** Explain which of the theoretical perspectives you have chosen would provide the least explanatory power for your cultural artifact or social phenomenon. Be sure to also explain why it would provide the worst explanation.

While elaborating the explanatory power—or lack thereof—of the theoretical perspectives you have chosen, recall the following definition of sociological theory from *Intro to Soc. Theory*: “the body of concepts and conceptual frameworks used to make sense of the multilayered, empirical patterns and underlying processes is society” (Dillon 2014:537). The theoretical frame(s) that help to explain the most layers/patterns/processes of your cultural artifact or social phenomenon would have the best explanatory power. This Draft Review of Theoretical Literature should be 500 to 750 words (but not more than 1000), double-spaced, in a font no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10, with margins no smaller than 1-inch. *Due at Start of Class on October 27, 2015.*

Oct 27 The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory

Required Reading

“Chapter Five: Critical Theory” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 187-201.

Third Writing Assignment-Due at Start of Class

Drafting a Review of Theoretical Literature

Oct 29 Jürgen Habermas, Societal Crises, and Communicative Action

Required Reading

“Chapter Five: Critical Theory” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 211-220.

“Habermas & Communicative Actions,” from Enotes (use the link below):

<http://www.enotes.com/research-starters/habermas-communicative-actions>

Nov 03 Group Conflict, Powerful Elites, Dependency Theory

Required Reading

“Chapter Six: Conflict, Power, and Dependency in Macro-Societal Processes” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 221-243.

Nov 05 Erving Goffman and Social Rituals

Required Reading

“Chapter Eight: Symbolic Interactionism” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 281-299.

Nov 10 Standpoints, Femininities, and Masculinities

Required Reading

“Chapter Ten: Feminist Theories” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 327-346.

Nov 12 Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, and Emotional Labor

Required Reading

“Chapter Ten: Feminist Theories” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 346-367.

“How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography: The Annotated Bibliography” from Cornell University Library (use the link below):

<http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography>

Fourth Writing Assignment-Discussed

Drafting a Review of Theoretical and Empirical Literature Choose a cultural artifact or social phenomenon that could be framed by a few theoretical perspective(s). Begin drafting a review of theoretical and empirical literature that has the following sections:

- **Topic:** Choose a cultural artifact and/or social phenomenon and make a strong case for why studying this cultural artifact/phenomenon is important.
- **Theoretical Frames:** Choose three to four theoretical perspectives and briefly explain each perspective.
- **Most Explanatory Power:** Explain which of the theoretical perspectives you have chosen would provide the most explanatory power for your cultural artifact or social phenomenon. Be sure to also explain why it would provide the best explanation.
- **Least Explanatory Power** Explain which of the theoretical frames you have chosen would provide the least explanatory power for your cultural artifact or social phenomenon. Be sure to also explain why it would provide the worst explanation.
- **Empirical Studies** Provide an annotated bibliography of three empirical studies about your topic. An empirical study is usually an academic journal article or academic book about your topic. At this point, you do not need to read the entire article or book; you just need to read an abstract or summary to determine that the article/book relates to your topic.

While elaborating the explanatory power—or lack thereof—of the theoretical frames you have chosen, recall the following definition of sociological theory from *Intro to Soc. Theory*: “the body of concepts and conceptual frameworks used to make sense of the multilayered, empirical patterns and underlying processes in society” (Dillon 2014:537). The theoretical frame(s) that help to explain the most layers/patterns/processes of your cultural artifact or social phenomenon would have the best explanatory power. This Draft Review of Theoretical and Empirical Literature should be 650 to 850 words (but not more than 1200), double-spaced, in a font no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10, with margins no smaller than 1-inch. *Due at Start of Class on November 19, 2015.*

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PART IV. APPLYING THEORY TO AN ACTUAL PHENOMENON

Nov 17 Theories about The Racialized Other

Required Reading

“Chapter Twelve: Race, Racism, and The Construction of Racial Otherness” from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 395-411.

Nov 19 The Racialized Other (cont'd)

Required Reading

“Chapter Twelve: Race, Racism, and The Construction of Racial Otherness” from *Intro to*

Soc. Theory, pages 411-426.

Fourth Writing Assignment-Due at Start of Class
Drafting a Review of Theoretical and Empirical Literature

Nov 24 Open Topic

Required Reading

No required reading

Nov 26 Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Dec 01 Bourdieu's Notions of Capital

Required Reading

"Chapter Thirteen: The Social Reproduction of Inequality" from *Intro to Soc. Theory*, pages 427-438.

Dec 03 Open Topic

Dec 08 Discussion of Final Literature Review

Dec 10 Discussion of Final Literature Review (cont'd)

Dec 14 FINAL EXAM, 8:30 to 10:30 **PM**