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, including Bourdieu, Giddens, Sewell, and Hays. 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 other required readings are available online on our Blackboard site.

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: 1) Weekly response papers 2) Participation 3) Midterm paper 4) Final paper.

Weekly response papers (25%)

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 that includes at least one discussion question. The response papers should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font.

A hard copy of the paper is due by in-class. Your discussion questions are due via email by 1pm on the day we meet (ekazyak2@unl.edu).

Your weekly responses and questions are worth 15% of your overall grade.

Note: 400 level students will submit a paper every other week with the first paper due on January 18th.

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 should be 10 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font. It is worth 30% of your overall grade. The midterm paper is due March 1st by 6:30pm and should be emailed to me at: ekazyak2@unl.edu. Late papers will be penalized by 10% per day late.

Final paper (30%)

The final paper should be 10 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font. It is worth 30% of your overall grade. The final paper is due May 3rd by 8:00pm and should be emailed to me at: ekazyak2@unl.edu. Late papers will be penalized by 10% per day late.

Grading Scale

A + = 97-100%  B + = 87 – 89%  C + = 77 – 79%  D + = 67 – 69%
A = 93 – 96%  B = 83 – 86%  C = 73 – 76%  D = 63 – 66%
A – = 90 – 92%  B – = 80 – 82%  C – = 70 – 72%  D – = 60 – 62%
F = 59 % or below

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.

* CST = Contemporary Sociological Theory

**Week 1: Introductions**

*January 11:* Introductions and Syllabus

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

*January 18*

CST Introduction


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

*January 25*


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

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

*February 1*


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


**Week 5: Structure & Agency**

*February 8*


**Week 6: Postmodernism**

*February 15*


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


Week 7: Culture

February 22


Week 8: Midterm

March 1

MIDTERM PAPER DUE by 6:30pm

Week 9: Theorizing Class

March 8


Week 10: Theorizing Race

March 15


**Week 11: No Class**

*March 22 Spring Break*

**Week 12: Theorizing Gender**

*March 29*


Butler, Judith. “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”


**Week 13: Theorizing Sexuality**

*April 5*


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


**Week 14: Theorizing Difference and Inequalities**

*April 12*

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. “Black Feminist Epistemology” (CST ch. 27)


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

*April 19*


**Week 16: The Politics of Theory and Research**

*April 26*


**FINAL PAPER DUE: May 3rd by 8:00pm**