Sociology 864: Contemporary Sociological Theory
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Fall 2021

Professor: Dr. Emily Kazyak
Email: ekazyak2@unl.edu
Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30pm; Th 11:30-12:30pm
Office Location: 725 Oldfather Hall

Course Meeting Time and Location: Mondays 2:30-5pm, 707 Oldfather Hall

Course Description and Objectives
The primary objective of this class is to introduce you to key perspectives in contemporary sociological theory, with an emphasis on the “cultural turn” and “postmodern turn.” We consider a variety of microsociological theories, including phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, which provide conceptualizations of 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. Finally, we 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. I also want students to understand how sociologists engage with theory in research. To that end, throughout the class, we will read empirical examples that relate to the theories covered.

Along with covering major contemporary theoretical perspectives (and related research), we will also 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 questions. 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 Canvas 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.

Required Use of Face Coverings
An individual in this course has a documented need for face coverings to be required in this course. Without divulging personal or identifying information, such a documented need might be that a member of their household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes
vaccines less effective for them. As a result, the College of Arts & Sciences has determined that face coverings will be required in this course. If you are unwilling to comply with this requirement, please visit with your advisor about different sections or possible alternative courses that you might take in lieu of this one.

**Course Assignments**

Your grade in this class will be determined by your performance on the following:
1) Weekly discussion questions 2) Presentations on empirical research 3) Final paper

**Weekly discussion questions (30%)**

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 discussion questions. Each week you will be responsible for writing at least one discussion question that engages with the theoretical readings of the week. The discussion questions are due Mondays by 1:30pm and are submitted in Canvas. Your discussion questions are worth 30% of your overall grade.

**Presentations on empirical research (30%)**

Over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for presenting on three pieces of empirical research (either a journal article or a chapter from a book). The presentations are worth 30% of your overall grade.

**Final paper (40%)**

For the final paper, you will be provided with question prompts and you will pick two to answer. The final paper will be 20 pages total (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, 1 in margins): the answer to each question should be 10 pages. The final paper is worth 40% of your overall grade.

**Grading Scale**

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<tr>
<td>A +</td>
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**Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is essential to the existence and integrity of an academic institution. The responsibility for maintaining that integrity is shared by all members of the academic community. The University's Student Code of Conduct addresses academic dishonesty. Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision.
Accommodations
The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options privately. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). If you are eligible for services and register with their office, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so they can be implemented in a timely manner. SSD contact information: 117 Louise Pound Hall; 402-472-3787. If you need an accommodation that falls outside of the purview of SSD, please do not hesitate to contact me directly; I'm happy to work with you to help you develop a plan to best meet your learning needs.

Counseling & Psychological Services
UNL offers a variety of options to students to aid them in dealing with stress and adversity. Counseling and Psychological & Services (CAPS) is a multidisciplinary team of psychologists and counselors that works collaboratively with Nebraska students to help them explore their feelings and thoughts and learn helpful ways to improve their mental, psychological and emotional well-being when issues arise. CAPS can be reached by calling 402-472-7450. Big Red Resilience & Well-Being (BRRWB) provides one-on-one well-being coaching to any student who wants to enhance their well-being. Trained well-being coaches help students create and be grateful for positive experiences, practice resilience and self-compassion, and find support as they need it. BRRWB can be reached by calling 402-472-8770.

Diversity & Inclusion
The University of Nebraska-Lincoln does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation.

READING SCHEDULE
*Please note this schedule is tentative. I may 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

August 23: Introductions and Syllabus

Week 2: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?

August 30

“The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory”


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

**Week 3: No Class Meeting**

*September 6*: Labor Day; No Class Meeting

**Week 4: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?**

*September 13*


**Week 5: Micro Sociological Theories**

*September 20*


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

**Empirical examples:**


Shapira, Harel and Samantha J. Simon. 2018. “Learning to Need a Gun.” *Qualitative Sociology*
Week 6: Structure & Agency

September 27


Empirical examples:


Week 7: Postmodernism

October 4


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


Empirical examples:


**Week 8: Culture**

*October 11*


**Empirical examples:**


**Week 9: FALL BREAK**

*October 18:* Fall Break: No Class Meeting

**Week 10: Theorizing Class**

*October 25*


Empirical examples:


**Week 11: Theorizing Race**

November 1


Empirical examples:


**Week 12: Theorizing Gender**

November 8


Empirical examples:


Polletta, Francesca and Pang Ching Bobby Chen. 2014. “Gender and Public Talk: Accounting for Women’s Variable Participation in the Public Sphere.” Sociological Theory

Week 13: Theorizing Sexuality

November 15


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


Empirical examples:


**Week 14: Theorizing Difference and Inequalities**

*November 22*


**Empirical examples:**


**Week 15: The Politics of Theory and Research: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?**

*November 29*


**Week 16: Course Reflections and Conclusions**