



SYA 5126
Contemporary Sociological Theory
Fall 2008

519 Bellamy Building
Thursday 2:30-5:25

Sociology 5126, Section 07088
Florida State University

<i>Professor:</i>	Dr. Janice McCabe
<i>Office:</i>	431 Bellamy Building
<i>Office Hours:</i>	Tuesday 11:00-12:00, Thursday 1:00-2:00, and by appointment
<i>Office Phone:</i>	644-4757
<i>Mailbox:</i>	526 Bellamy Building
<i>E-Mail:</i>	jmccabe@fsu.edu

Course Description, Goals, and Learning Objectives:

This seminar offers an introduction to contemporary sociological theories including functionalism, rational choice theory, exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, culture, institutional analysis, critical theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, post-structuralism, queer theory and postmodern theory. In this course, we will concentrate on tensions that exist in contemporary sociological thought, such as those between structure and agency, micro- and macro- approaches to the social world, modernity and postmodernity, and claims of Truth and epistemological relativism. The “contemporary” period refers to the period from WWII to today. The body of work that falls under this definition of contemporary social theory is characterized by fragmentation of social thought and lack of consensus about the nature and goals of social theory. This has led to the development of a wide variety of social thought. We, unfortunately, do not have the time to cover all aspects and approaches. One aim of this course is to whet your appetite for further reading, rather than to complete your theoretical education. The goals of this course include exposure to a wide range of texts, developing an ability to read closely, cultivating the competence to identify and understand the important concepts used, and to practice discussing it coherently. At the end of the course, you should be able to identify and defend different theoretical approaches and different methods for evaluating and constructing social theory.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to actively participate in the class within the framework set by the instructor. Students are expected to complete five memos on the assigned readings, write and post reading questions for ten weeks, prepare a group presentation and facilitate discussion, write a paper and provide feedback to your classmates, come to class prepared, and participate in class. Students also have the option of doing an individual presentation. The benefits of this class come from talking as well as listening and reading.

MEMOS: You will write five memos on the required readings throughout the semester (your choice of the five weeks). Each memo should critically analyze at least two issues, points, or concepts that you found to be the most useful or interesting from at least two readings assigned

that week. Memos should not simply be used to summarize the readings; however, you will need to briefly summarize some points in the readings in order to critically analyze them. In each memo, provide your own critical analysis of the argument and/or claims – for example, consider the assumptions the arguments lie on, what evidence is used in support of the argument, or what the implications of the arguments are. Rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with a reading, you must offer a well-reasoned explanation of your perspective on the author's arguments. Each memo should discuss at least two readings for that week (unless there is only one reading assigned) and discuss ties between the readings (e.g., how ideas, evidence, or styles of argumentation in these readings converge or diverge). Memos should be 1 single-spaced page in length; Memos should be no longer than 1.5 pages and no shorter than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page. A hardcopy of the memo is due at the beginning of class. Late memos will not be accepted. You may turn in more than five memos and your five highest grades will be recorded. You may NOT turn in a memo on the day you do a group presentation. These memos comprise 20% of your course grade.

READING QUESTIONS: To encourage engaged reading and to foster lively, productive discussions, you must prepare 2-3 questions about the session's readings and post them to our Blackboard discussion board by Wednesday night at 11:59pm. Questions can be of a variety of types including: they can explore connections between readings (from one class session or multiple sessions); they can ask for clarification about points in the readings (for example, I wasn't sure if the author meant X or Y by the term A); they can critique an argument, method of sociological research, or framing of an argument from the reading; they also can ask about the meaning or implications of a particular claim or conclusion made by an author. You should write and post reading questions at least 10 times throughout the semester. You may NOT post readings on Blackboard for the week you do a group presentation. This means that you may skip posting questions (but not reading!) two weeks throughout the semester with no penalty to your grade. These questions comprise 10% of your course grade.

GROUP PRESENTATION: For the discussion, leaders should prepare a short (approximately 15-20 minute) presentation and should prepare to facilitate a discussion centered around five questions. The presentation has three parts and should be approximately 60 minutes. This is worth 20% of your course grade. Your group should:

- a) provide an intellectual biography on a theorist on the day she or he is assigned
- b) discuss one journal article written since the assigned theory was published that uses the theory in some way, applies the theory to an empirical issue, critiques the theory, compares the theory with another theory and/or further elaborates the theory, and
- c) prepare five questions for class discussion and lead discussion over these questions.

These questions may be over any materials for that day's class (i.e., assigned readings and supplemental information your group provides). As your group then goes through each question, provide appropriate context and remind your classmates to summarize any background information from the reading as they answer the questions. The intellectual biography should trace the history, development and directions of the theorist's work. You should prepare a handout (no more than 3 pages in length) with a summary of this information for your classmates. For option b, the article should be written by somebody other than the theorist. Two great sources for this article are the journals *Theory and Society* and *Sociological Theory*, older issues of which are available on JSTOR; other good sources include more specialized journals

such as *Social Psychology Quarterly*. The bibliographic information for this article should also be included on the handout, along with the intellectual biography and your discussion questions.

For these presentations, each group member should take responsibility for her/his part of the presentation. Feel free to be creative in these presentations. Role-plays, other games, and video clips are sometimes a powerful way of illustrating questions and important issues.

Your group should meet with me no later than the Tuesday before your presentation is scheduled. By the Friday before your presentation, you should have let me know which reading(s) your group will focus on and scheduled a time for your group to meet with me to discuss your presentation. Any materials that need copying, including the intellectual biography summary, should be given to me by 11am the day before the presentation (on Wednesday).

FINAL PAPER: Your final paper for this class will focus on a question you have posed and addressed using TWO of the theoretical perspectives we have covered in class. This is an exercise in using theory. You must explain and—most importantly—critique both theoretical perspectives. Demonstrate both the utility and limitations of the theories in answering this question. To do this effectively, you will need a clear question and to provide any necessary context. You may want to provide a rationale for why you have posed that particular question or to bring in empirical evidence if it helps you develop a particular argument. However, do not let this supplementary information dominate your paper as this is an exercise in using theory.

This assignment is left rather open because a large part of your grade will be based on your ability to develop a question and position based on your careful reading of texts and understandings of two sociological theories. This paper should not be considered an opportunity simply to state your personal opinion about the topic at large. Rather you should show your skill to engage the reading material, clarify or explain the authors' positions, discuss weaknesses and strengths, and develop your own point of view or counterpoint position(s). You may write this paper as broadly or as specifically as you wish. This means that you may write a paper that engages the entire theoretical framework, research or position of the chosen texts/theories or a particular idea of substructure from the readings/theories. For example, you may choose exchange theory as one way to address your question. You also may choose to contrast two theorists' versions of one theory, such as Homans' and Blau's contributions to exchange theory. In addition, if they are useful for your argument, you also may bring in ideas or concepts from other theories/theorists covered in the course in addition to the two general theoretical approaches you discuss.

Some specific points:

- On October 9th, you are required to bring class a potential question as well as an idea of at least one theorist you might use to address the question and how. You will exchange your question and idea with two classmates who will be responsible for giving you feedback by the next week (October 16). Failure to complete either part of this assignment will reduce your final paper grade by 10%. Failure to complete both parts will reduce it by 20%.
- On October 30th, you will turn in to me a one-page single-spaced summary of your question and a sketch/outline of how you intend to use two theorists to address it. This should be (at least) the second draft of your paper and should build upon your first draft and the comments

you received from your classmates. Failure to complete this assignment will reduce your final paper grade by 10%. I will return your assignment with comments the following week.

- Your paper will be graded on three criteria: 1) the quality and coherence of the argument you develop; 2) your integration of the theories and texts into your paper and the quality of your analysis of the texts and theories (i.e., how well you analyze the texts and theories to support your thesis); 3) the quality of your compositional and grammatical style. The grading sheet used to evaluate your final paper will be posted on Blackboard. Your final paper is worth 40% of your course grade.
- Final papers are due no later than December 9th by 5:30pm. Submit a printed version of your paper to my mailbox (BEL 526) or to me in my office (BEL 431) by this time. For each day the paper is late, your grade will be reduced by one step (i.e., from an A- to a B+).
- Please feel free to pass along earlier drafts of the paper for comments/feedback or to stop by my office hours to discuss your ideas, paper outline, etc. In fact, I encourage you to do this.
- You may incorporate empirical material if it helps you make your arguments, although this is not required. Regardless, your paper should focus on two theoretical perspectives.
- The paper should be typed, double-spaced and between 15-20 pages. Use ASA style for citations and references (see the ASA Style Guide on Blackboard, under “Handouts”).
- Always acknowledge the sources and materials that you use with proper citations.
- Be sure to proofread your paper and to run the spell-check.

OPTIONAL PAPER PRESENTATION: During the last week (or two, if we need additional time) of the course, you have the option of doing a short, individual presentation of your paper for the class. Choosing this option has a couple of beneficial consequences: it takes the place of 10% of your paper grade and it gives you an opportunity to practice presenting your work in a friendly and supportive context. These presentations should be about 10-15 minutes in length, summarizing your argument, particularly your research question and how you used theory to answer this question. You must let me know in writing by 10/30 if you choose this option.

PARTICIPATION: Participation in class discussions is worth 10% of your course grade. Participation will help you better process and understand the material we cover while also increasing our collective understanding. One of the most stimulating and pleasurable things about graduate-level seminars is the opportunity to raise and grapple with wide-ranging questions about topics covered in a course. Monopolizing the discussion or failing to act in a professional manner during class will negatively influence your grade in the course.

Required Readings:

The following required books have been ordered through the FSU Bookstore and Bill’s Bookstore:

Calhoun, Craig, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk. 2002. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Press.
[The newer edition (2007) will work too]

Foucault, Michel. [1990]. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Press.

Goffman, Erving. [1990]. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2001. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: NYU Press.

Additional readings will be available on Blackboard. I expect all students to complete all readings assigned for the course *before* the class meeting for which they are listed.

Grading:

Percentage of Final Grade		Final Course Grade	
Memos	20%	A = 93.0-100	C = 73.0-76.9
Questions	10%	A- = 90.0-92.9	C- = 70.0-72.9
Group Presentation	20%	B+ = 87.0-89.9	D+ = 67.0-69.9
Participation	10%	B = 83.0-86.9	D = 63.0-66.9
Final Paper	40%	B- = 80.0-82.9	D- = 60.0-62.9
(Optional Paper Presentation will be 10% of the paper grade)		C+ = 77.0-79.9	F < 60.0

Course Guidelines and Policies:

CLASS DISCUSSIONS: This class is a seminar and will involve a sharing of ideas and viewpoints. I expect all students to treat each other and me in a courteous and considerate manner. All points of view are welcome in this class, but comments made must be respectful of others in the class, alternative viewpoints and diverse backgrounds.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY: Students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Policy of the Florida State University, including the statement on Values and Moral Standards published in The Florida State University General Bulletin. The Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of these expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty throughout the process. Please see the following website for a complete explanation of the Academic Honor Policy: <http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm>

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor's discretion. Any student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way may be reported to the university administration for further disciplinary action as specified in the Academic Honor Policy.

PLAGIARISM: Using someone else's words, ideas, or written work without acknowledgement is unlawful and may lead to criminal prosecution and/or your expulsion from the university. Always acknowledge the sources and materials that you use. If you use a string of three or more exact words from another source, place the words in quotes and cite the author, year and page

number in the text. If you use paraphrase (use the ideas but not the exact words) or use a concept or phrase, cite the author and year in the text.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center, 108 Student Services Bldg., Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, (850)644-9566 (voice), (850)644-8504 (TDD)
E-mail: SDRC@admin.fsu.edu, Website: <http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

ATTENDANCE: Class attendance is required. I expect all students to attend class, be on time, and not leave class early. **Three or more** unexcused absences will result in an F grade for the course. If you do not plan on attending regularly, you should not take this class. If you do miss a class, you still are responsible for the material covered and all announcements made in class.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Students will be allowed to miss class due to observance of religious holidays but they are still responsible for all materials assigned outside and covered in class on the day(s) missed. You must talk with your instructor in advance of missing a class for religious holiday observance reasons.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: The following and only the following absences are eligible to be excused: Religious holidays, as specified in FSU policy; absences due to representing FSU at official functions, including intercollegiate debating or varsity sports events; verified emergencies and/or medical illness. Medical illness refers to conditions that are serious in nature and require treatment by medical professionals and/or surgical or other treatments. Documentation is required for an absence to be excused.

INCOMPLETE GRADES: Missing work or uncompleted assignments are insufficient reasons for a grade of Incomplete. An Incomplete grade will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor's discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an "I" must be passing the course.

CLASSROOM COURTESY: Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions. This means **no** cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the professor or discussion leader), reading newspapers, using cell phones, ipods, text messaging, etc., are allowed during class. If you must have a cell phone to receive emergency calls about children or other family members, keep it on vibrate. Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions (such as cell phones ringing, talking out of turn, entering and leaving the room, etc.); repeated disruption of class may lead to penalties that reduce your final grade.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY: Students must take responsibility for their learning and for their grades. Students are to prepare for class, engage in class assignments and discussions, and initiate talks with the instructor about questions and problems regarding the class.

Class Schedule:

Note: This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change with advanced notice. How quickly we go through this material will depend on the class. As a result, the topics and dates might not perfectly correspond. However, you will be expected to have read the assignments **by the beginning of class** by the date listed (for example, you should read the Introduction to the Reader and selections from Parsons, Merton and Hechter (posted in the “Course Library” on our Blackboard site) before class on Thursday, September 4th). Readings from the Blackwell Reader in Contemporary Sociological Theory are designated by (R). Readings on Blackboard are designated by (B).

DATE TOPIC AND READINGS

8/28 Introduction to Course and to Sociological Theory

9/4 Functionalism and Rational Choice Theory

- (R) “Introduction” p.1-21.
- (B) Parsons, Talcott. “The Unit Act of Action Systems” from *The Structure of Social Action* and “Action Systems and Social Systems” from *The System of Modern Societies*
- (B) Merton, Robert. “On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range,” “Manifest and Latent Functions” and “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy” from *On Social Structure and Science*
- (B) Hechter, Michael. Chapters 3 & 4, “A Theory of Group Solidarity” and “The Necessity of Formal Controls” from *Principles of Group Solidarity*

9/11 Exchange Theory, Social Capital and Cultural Capital

- (R) Homans, George C. Chapter 5. “Social Behavior as Exchange” p.81-87.
- (R) Blau, Peter. Chapter 6. “Exchange and Power in Social Life” p.88-98.
- (R) Coleman, James S. Chapter 7. “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital” p.110-116.
- (B) Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. “The Forms of Capital.” Pp. 241-258 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*

9/18 Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology

- (R) Blumer, Herbert. Chapter 4. “Symbolic Interactionism” p.66-77.
- (B) Stryker, Sheldon and Peter J. Burke. 2000. “The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63: 284-297.
- (B) West, Candace and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. “Doing Difference.” *Gender & Society* 9:8-37.
- (B) Collins, Maldonado, Takagi, Thorne, Weber and Winant, “On West and Fenstermaker’s ‘Doing Difference’” in *Gender & Society*
- (B) Reply from West and Fenstermaker in *Gender & Society*

9/25 Theories of Social Interaction – Goffman

- Goffman, Erving. 1990 [1959]. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor/Doubleday.

10/2 Culture

- (B) Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51:273-286.
- (B) Sewell, William. 1999. "The Concepts of Culture" in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: History and Sociology in the Age of Paradigm Breakdown*, eds. V. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt: University of California Press.
- (B) Schudson, Michael. 1989. "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols." *Theory and Society* 18:153-180.
- (R) Bourdieu, Pierre. Chapter 19. "Social Space and Symbolic Space" p.267-275.

10/9 Structure and Agency

- (R) Giddens, Anthony. Chapter 17. "Agency, Structure." p.232-243.
 - (B) Sewell, William H. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98:1-29.
 - (B) Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103:962-1023.
 - (B) Fuchs, Stephan. 2001. "Beyond Agency." *Sociological Theory* 19(1):24-40.
- FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH QUESTION AND THEORIST DUE.**

10/16 Institutional Analysis, Modernity, and Critical Theory

- (R) DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell. Chapter 12. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields" p.167-182.
- (R) Giddens, Anthony. Chapter 18. "The Consequences of Modernity" p.244-256.
- (R) Habermas, Jurgen. Chapter 27. "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society" p.377-400.

FEEDBACK DUE TO TWO CLASSMATES ON RESEARCH QUESTION.

10/23 Race and Gender – Feminist Theories

- (B) Lorde, Audre. 1984. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" from *Sister Outsider*. The Crossing Press.
- (B) Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33: S14-S32
- (B) Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 20(4) 441-464.
- (R) Smith, Dorothy E. Chapter 22. "The Conceptual Practices of Power" p.315-323.

10/30 Feminist Standpoint Theory

- (B) Harding, Sandra. 1986. "From Feminist Empiricism to Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies" Chapter 6 in *The Science Question in Feminism*.
- (B) Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14:575-599.
- (B) Narayan, Uma. 1989. "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist" in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo. Rutgers University Press.
- (B) Bar On, Bat-Ami. 1993. "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege" in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda Alcoff & Elizabeth Potter.

**SECOND DRAFT OF RESEARCH QUESTION AND THEORISTS DUE.
DEADLINE TO CHOOSE TO DO PAPER PRESENTATION.**

11/6 Critical Race Theory

- (B) Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1994 [1986]. "Racial Formation" Chapter 4 in *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2001. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. NYU Press.

11/13 Post-Structuralism - Foucault

- Foucault, Michel. 1990 [1976]. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vintage Press.
- (R) Foucault, Michel. Chapter 15. "Discipline and Punish" p.211-218.

11/20 Queer Theory and Identity

- (B) Rubin, Gayle. 1993 [1984]. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David Halperin. Routledge.
- (B) Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5: 631-60.
- (B) Butler, Judith. 1991. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss. Routledge.

11/27 **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK**

12/4 Postmodernism

- (R) Bauman, Zygmunt. Chapter 30. "A Sociological Theory of Postmodernity" p.429-440.
- (B) Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra."
- (B) Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Postmodern Condition."
- (B) Seidman, Steven. 1991. "The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope" *Sociological Theory* 9(2). Symposium on Postmodernism

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PAPERS

12/9 **FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5:30PM ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9.**