

# Constructing Social Theory

## Prof. Goodman

**Course Description:** This course will cover contemporary sociological theory. Although both the social context and the sociological importance of the theories will be discussed, the major focus will be upon the way in which these theories can contribute to current controversies and research projects. We will look at the way in which the approaches provide necessary presuppositions for both empirical studies and critical interventions in society.

**Grades:** Your grade will depend on reading points, short research proposals and two exams, according to the following formula:

|                |                            |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Reading Points | 20%                        |
| Case Studies   | 30% (3 papers at 10% each) |
| Midterm        | 25%                        |
| Final          | 25%                        |

*Incompletes will only be given when the student is otherwise passing the course and cannot complete it due to circumstances that are unforeseen and beyond the student's control.*

**Reading Points:** I will provide reading points for most assignments. You will be graded on your ability to provide a summary of the author on those points when called on in class. Only students called on in class will be graded on that day. If you are absent the day that I call on you without a university defined excuse, you will receive an 'F'. Since each student is likely to be called on only 3 or 4 times, it is important that you be prepared for every class. I will give everyone one 'free pass' for the term. In other words, you can let me know that you will be unprepared to answer the reading points for that day. However, **you must do this before class starts**, either in person, phone message or email. You will not be given a free pass after I have called on you.

I may sometimes have you write a short paragraph to answer one of the reading points. That answer should be submitted on Blackboard by 9:00 a.m. the morning of class. It will count as one reading point. A free pass for that day will also apply to that.

**Case Studies:** A case study is where you take the theory that we have been learning and use it to analyze a case that I provide. These will be 4-5 page papers and should not require additional research.

There will be seven opportunities for case studies, but you only need to do six. That means that you can skip one of the assignments of your choosing. Although you must do six assignments, I will only grade three of them. I will grade the first assignment, but will randomly choose two of your other assignments to grade. When I have done this in the past, students have told me that I have an uncanny ability to pick their worst papers to grade, so you should make sure that you will be happy with your grade even if I pick your worst papers.

**Exams:** There will be a mid-term on 4/29 and a final exam whenever the university schedules our final exam. The final will not be cumulative. The exams will be short essays written in

class. Most of the questions will be a variant of the reading points. One question will come from a list of study questions that will be provided.

**Readings:** All readings will be provided as downloadable pdf's on Blackboard. Please let me know if you anticipate any problems with those formats and we will figure out an alternative.

**Help:** I will hold office hours Mon, Wed & Fri from 11:10 to 1:40. I can also be reached for help by phone or email. I check my email often and it is my preferred mode of communication. Messages can also be left for me in the Sociology office.

*Please let me know if you have any disabilities which will affect your participation in this class. I will make every effort to accommodate you.*

## **Schedule**

*This schedule is provisional. The most current schedule will be on Blackboard*

### **Intro: From Classic to Contemporary**

Wed. 3/27

Lemert, Charles. 1993. "Social Theory: Its Uses and Pleasures." From *Social Theory: the Multicultural and Classic Readings*.

### **Functionalism**

Fri. 3/29

"Structural Functionalism." From *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*. G. Ritzer (ed.)

Parsons, Talcott. 1954. "The Kinship System of the Contemporary United States." From *Essays in Sociological Theory*.

Mon. 4/1

Merton, Robert K. 1957. "Manifest and Latent Functions." From *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

Gans, Herbert. 1972. "The Positive Functions of Poverty." *American Journal of Sociology*.

Wed. 4/3

Case Study: *All Our Kin*

### **Conflict Theory**

Fri. 4/5

"Conflict Theory" adapted from various sources.

Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1968. "On the Origin of Inequality." From *Essays in the Theory of Society*.

Mon. 4/8

Coser, Lewis. 1957. "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change." *The British Journal of Sociology*.

Collins, Randall. 1993. "What Does Conflict Theory Predict about America's Future?" *Sociological Perspectives*

Wed. 4/10

Case Study: *Weapons of the Weak*

Critical Theory

Fri. 4/12

Goodman, Douglas. 2001. "Habermas Explained" From *Handbook of Social Theory*.

Mon. 4/15

Habermas, Jürgen. 1975. "A Social-Scientific Concept of Crisis." From *Legitimation Crisis*

Wed. 4/17

Empirical Research Article

Fri. 4/19

Case Study (S&A or CT): Educating Children

Symbolic Interactionism

Mon. 4/22

Sociology, Mead, Blumer

Wed. 4/24

Interactionism's Place

Identities & Social Structure

.Fri. 4/26

Case Study: Becoming a Doctor

Mon. 4/29

**Midterm**

Rational Choice & Exchange Theory

Wed. 5/1

Heckathorn, Douglas. 2001. "Sociological Rational Choice." From *Handbook of Social Theory*, edited by George Ritzer and Barry Smart.

Fri. 5/3

Cook, Karen, J. O'Brien, and P. Kollock. 1990. "Exchange Theory: A Blueprint For Structure and Process." In *Frontiers of Social Theory*, edited by G. Ritzer.

Lawler, Edward. 2001. "An Affect Theory of Social Exchange." *American Journal of Sociology*.

Mon. 5/6

Case Study: Passages

*Social Constructionism*

Wed. 5/8

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. "Society as Objective Reality" and "Society as Subjective Reality." From *The Social Construction of Reality*.

Fri. 5/10

Labeling Theory Handbook for Study of Mental Health

Mon. 5/13

Asylum Goffman

Wed. 5/15

Case Study : Released (Documentary)

*World Systems & Globalization*

Fri. 5/17

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. "The Modern World-System in Crisis: Bifurcation, Chaos, and Choices." From *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*.

Mon. 5/20

Giddens, Anthony. 2000. "The Globalization of Modernity." From *The Global Transformation Reader*, edited by David Held and Anthony McGrew.

Wed. 5/22

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. "Risk Society." From *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*.

*Feminist Theories*

Fri. 5/24

Feminine Mystique

Wed. 5/29

New Conservative Feminism

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." From *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.