NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

SOC 375: Contemporary Social Theory

Instructor: Paul Semm Phone: 619-286-5254

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Location: Spectrum Center

Time: Mon, Wed, and Sat (2)

Required Text:

Ritzer, George. Modern Sociological Theory. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007. Ed.7.

Kivisto, Peter. Social Theory: Roots and Branches. Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2011. Ed.4.

Directed Readings

**Course Description**:

This course examines the major social theories and social theorists from the 1930s to the present. The course also investigates the historical, social, intellectual, and biographical contexts within which contemporary social theories have developed and the extent to which these contexts inform current sociological research and thinking.

There will be four main emphases throughout the course. The first emphasis will be on two of the theoretical paradigms that have shaped sociological inquiry - structural functionalism and conflict theory. The second emphasis will be on globalization theories, theories that explain the transformation of the countries of the world into what is called a “global village.” The third emphasis will be on contemporary social movements and the theories that explain them. And the fourth emphasis will be on post-modern and post structural social theories.

**Course Goals:**

Students will read a broad selection of major works by contemporary social theorists. They will analyze the social issues, problems, and themes that gave rise to new theoretical frames for describing and understanding contemporary society, politics, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The focus will be on contemporary perspectives that modified classical social theorists such as Marx and Weber and on paradigm shifts that changed the modernist traditions of Western thought shaped by the classical theorists. The sociological, historical, intellectual, and biographical influences shaping contemporary social theory will also be examined.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the intellectual foundations of social theory as it is practiced today.
2. Distinguish the theories of major contemporary social theorists.
3. Analyze the social issues, social problems, and social themes that inform contemporary social theorists, as well as the historical, sociological, and biographical influences that shape their ideas.
4. Evaluate the various theoretical approaches to the study of society, the individual, class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.
5. Investigate and describe how class, race, gender, and sexual orientation biases and identities influence social thought, social theory, sociological research, and public policy.
6. Evaluate the relevance of the central and defining themes of social theory for understanding everyday social experience (e.g., technology, media, politics, terrorism, crime, punishment, war, the body, fashion, consumption, social inequality, experience of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, etc).
7. Research the relevant scholarship and integrate this research into original arguments that contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion of a topic within the period.
8. Articulate how social theory shapes public, political, and moral debates.

**Course Content**

This course covers the work of social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, C. Wright Mills, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Marcuse, Michele Foucault, Arundhati Roy, George Ritzer, Jean Baudrillard, Immanuel Wallerstein, Zygmunt Bauman, Andrew Feenberg, Neil Postman, Aldo Leopold. To foster scholarly discussion, the course will be organized around small and large group discussion, lecture, workshops, and media presentations.

This course includes an overview of contemporary social theories such as:

* critical theory
* neo-Marxism
* symbolic interactionism
* structural functionalism
* post-structuralism
* postmodernism
* theories of the mass media
* theories of consumerism
* theories of globalization
* social theory and the environment
* social theory and technology

**Evaluation Process**:

There will be a total of 400 points.

Exams. There will be three exams, each worth seventy-five (75) points for a total of two hundred and twenty-five (225) points. The exams will be based on the lectures, the readings, and in-class videos, and will consist of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in, and short answer questions.

Oral and Written Reports. Each student will give one oral report on an assigned reading (see Class Schedule). With this report, the student will hand in a two page written paper analyzing the reading on which he/she reported. This paper should include the thesis, or theme, and the main points of the reading, and also relate the reading to the topic of that particular class, e.g., how does Foucault’s essay on the Panopticon relate to the problem of security versus privacy in contemporary U.S. society. The paper must also be computer generated and in essay form and handed in on the day of the report. The report and the essay combined will be worth fifty (50) points.

Papers. There will be two papers assigned during the term. These papers will be three to four pages in length and focus on the application of theory to a social issue or social problem discussed in class. The papers will be worth fifty (50) points each for a total of one hundred (100) points.

Class Participation. The final twenty-five (25) points will be based on class participation. Attendance is mandatory at National University and the necessary starting point for class participation, but being present is not class participation, class participation consists of relevant comments and questions that reflect both that the student has read the material and made an attempt to engage the material analytically.

Late Work. Late work will be given a grade reduction for class period that it is late. Exceptions in grade reduction can be made for compelling family emergencies, documented medical emergencies, and unexpected demands at work; however, any of these need written documentation, e.g., letter from a physician or work supervisor. However, no late work will be accepted at all after the last scheduled hour/day of class except for the above reasons.

Summary of Points

Assignment *#* Points Total % Grade

Exams 3 75 225 56%

Report 1 50 50 12.5%

Papers 2 50 100 25%

Participation 25 25 7%

400 100%

**Class Structure**:

The first part of each class will be a lecture given by the professor on the topic for that class (see Class Schedule). After the dinner break, the students will present their reports. The reports will have been assigned in the previous class. Every student is required to read all the assigned readings and participate in the class discussion of them even though not reporting on them. After the reports and discussions, the class will view a documentary (partial) on a relevant topic, or be given an on-site research assignment. After viewing the documentary, or doing the research, there will be a class discussion. The two most important ways to gain class participation points is during the discussions on the reports and during the discussions on the documentaries/research.

I treat students with respect and expect to be treated likewise. I consider it disrespectful to me when students engage in non-class related activity during class time. Once class starts and until it finishes all non-related activity should cease. Types of disrespectful activity include, but are not limited to, private conversations, reading outside material, and non-class related e-activity. If there is a family or work emergency that requires keeping a cell phone on, let me know before class. .

Class Schedule

Day and Date Topics Readings

Class 1 From Classical to Contemporary Theory Ritzer Ch 1

M Feb 28

Class 2 Structural Functionalism Ritzer: Chapter 3

W Mar 2 **Paper # 1 Assigned** Kivisto\*: 6, 33

Class 3 Conflict Theory Ritzer: Chapter 2

M Mar 7 **Paper # 1 Due** Kivisto: 37, 38

Class 4 Neo-Marxist Theories Ritzer: Chapter 4

W Mar 9 **Exam #1**  Kivisto: 61

Class 5 Post-Modern Social Theory Ritzer: Chapter 5, 13 (490-501)

M March 14 Kivisto: 72,74

Class 6 Collective Behavior and Ritzer: Chapter 6 (235-45), 7

W March 16 Social Movement Theories Kivisto: 79

Class 7 Globalization Theory Ritzer: Chapter 8, 10, 12 (422-427)

S March 19 **Exam #2**

Class 8 Globalization Theory Ritzer: Chapter 11, 12 (428-446)

M March 21 **Paper #2 Assigned** Kivisto: 75, 78

Class 9 Feminist Social Theory Ritzer Chapter 9

W March 23 Kivisto: 50, 54,

Class 10 Social Theory and the Twenty-first Century

S March 26 **Exam #3 and Paper #2 Due**

**\*Kivisto assignments refer to the number of the reading in the text, not to page numbers.**

**General Policies of National University**

**Grades and Grading System:**

Grade by Per Cent

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | 96-100 | B+ | 87-89 | B- | 80-83 | C- | 70-73 |
| A- | 90-95 | B | 84-86 | C+ | 77-79 | D+ | 67-69 |
|  |  |  |  | C | 74-76 | D | 64-66 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | D- | 60-63 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | F | 00-59 |

**Diversity:**

Learning to work with and value diversity is essential in every degree program. Students are required to act respectfully toward other students and instructors throughout the course. Students are also expected to exhibit an appreciation for multinational and gender diversity in the classroom and develop leadership skills and judgment appropriate to such diversity in the workplace.

**Disability:**

National University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you need accommodations due to a documented disability, please contact the Coordinator of Scholarships and Special Services at (858) 642-8185 or via e-mail at [scholarships@nu.edu](mailto:specialservices@nu.edu). Information received by this office is confidential and is only released on a 'need-to-know' basis or with your prior written consent. Accommodations can only be granted upon approval by the Committee for Students with Disabilities (CSD).

**Ethics:**

Ethical behavior in the classroom is required of every student. Students are also expected to identify ethical policies and practices relevant to course topics.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are required to cite the use of materials written by others in all written communications for courses. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else’s ideas or work as one’s own. This includes using ideas, words, or phrases without proper attribution. Students found plagiarizing are subject to the penalties outlined in the Policies and Procedures section of the University Catalog, which may include a failing grade for the work in question or for the entire course. Inadequately or improperly cited work receives no credit. In cases of plagiarism, the burden of proof rests on the student, not the instructor. In other words, the student will be required to prove that plagiarism has not occurred.

For more information on proper citation and writing research papers see the web sites listed below:

[Plagiarism](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html) (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>)

[Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotprsum.html) (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/01/>)

[MLA Citation Format](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html) (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>)

**Attendance:**

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. An absence is assessed each time a student is not in attendance during a regularly scheduled class period, whether or not it is an excused absence. An instructor may withdraw a student from class prior to the sixth session in graduate courses if there are more than two unexcused absences. Students who have more than three absences, excused or unexcused, cannot be given a satisfactory grade.

**WRITING STANDARDS OF COLS: (Undergraduate Level):**

Students are expected to demonstrate writing skills in describing, analyzing and evaluating ideas and experiences. Written material must follow specific standards regarding citations of authors’ work within the text and references at the end of the paper. Students are encouraged to use the services of the University’s Writing Center when preparing materials (see National University Services below). Grades will be assigned for written material in accordance with the University catalog and the following general criteria adopted by the College of Letters and Sciences.

NOTE: *Letter grades may be assigned for any or all of the following reasons:*

**“A” Range:** Outstanding achievement, significantly exceeds standards

* Unique topic or unique treatment of topic, takes risks with content; fresh approach.
* Sophisticated/exceptional use of examples.
* Original and “fluid” organization; all sentences and paragraphs contribute; sophisticated transitions between paragraphs.
* Integration of quotations and citations is sophisticated and highlights the author’s argument.
* Confidence in use of Standard English; language reflects a practiced and/or refined understanding of syntax and usage.
* Sentences vary in structure, very few, if any mechanical errors (no serious mechanical errors).

**“B” Range:** Commendable achievement, meets or exceeds standards for course.

* Specific, original focus, content well handled.
* Significance of content is clearly conveyed; good use of examples; sufficient support exists in key areas.
* Has effective shape (organization), effective pacing between sentences or paragraphs.
* Quotations and citations are integrated into argument to enhance the flow of ideas.
* Has competent transitions between all sentences and paragraphs.
* Conveys a strong understanding of standard English; the writer is clear in his/her attempt to articulate main points, but may demonstrate moments of “flat” or unrefined language.
* May have a few minor mechanical errors (misplaced commas, pronoun disagreement, etc.), but no serious mechanical errors (fragments, run-ons, comma splices, etc.)

**“C” Range:** Acceptable achievement, meets standards for course

* Retains overall focus, generally solid command of subject matter
* Subject matter well explored but may show signs of underachievement
* Significance is understood, competent use of examples
* Structure is solid, but an occasional sentence or paragraph may lack focus
* Quotations and citations are integrated into argument
* Transitions between paragraphs occur but may lack originality
* Competent use of language; sentences are solid but may lack development, refinement, style
* Occasional minor mechanical errors may occur, but do not impede clear understanding of material
* No serious mechanical errors (fragments, run-ons, comma-splices, etc.)

**“D” Range:** Unsatisfactory achievement; does not meet acceptable standards

**Note: *The “D” grade is a passing grade; work that is not of “passing quality” should receive grade “F”.***

* Significance of content is unclear
* Ideas lack support, elaboration
* Lacks sufficient examples or relevance of examples may be unclear
* Support materials is not clearly incorporated into argument
* Expression is frequently awkward (problematic sentence structure)
* Mechanical errors may often impede clear understanding of material
* May have recurring serious mechanical errors (fragments, run-ons, comma splices, etc.)

**“F” Range:** Fails to meet minimal standards

* Ignores assignment
* Lacks significance
* Lacks coherence
* Includes plagiarized material (intentional or unintentional)
* Lacks focus
* Difficult to follow due to awkward sentence or paragraph development
* Mechanical errors impede understanding
* Problems with writing at the graduate level

**Definition of Grades (Undergraduate Level):**

**A** Outstanding Achievement: *Significantly exceeds standards*

**B** Commendable Achievement: *Exceeds standards*

**C** Acceptable Achievement: *Meets standards*

**D** Unsatisfactory Achievement: *Below standards*

**F** Failing

**I** Incomplete: *A grade given when a student has completed at least 2/3 of the course class sessions and is unable to complete the course requirements due to uncontrollable and unforeseen circumstances. The student must convey (preferably in writing) these circumstances to the instructor prior to the final day of the course. If the instructor decides that an “Incomplete” is warranted, the instructor must convey the conditions for removal of the “Incomplete” to the student in writing. A copy must also be placed on file with the Office of the Registrar until the Incomplete is removed or the time limit for removal has passed.*

## National University Services

National University provides all students with facilities to assist them in the completion of their course work. In particular the Writing Centers and NU Library provide access to materials and services in the area of academic writing, research and information literacy.

**Writing Center**

Assistance in meeting the written requirements for the course is available from the on-line Writing Center. Students may submit drafts of papers and outlines to the writing assistants and meet with them to discuss strategies for improving their papers. More information is available from the NU Writing Center Web Page: <http://www.nu.edu/Academics/StudentServices/WritingCenter.html>

**Library**

NU Library: National University Library supports academic rigor and student academic success by providing access to scholarly books and journals both electronically and in hard copy. Print materials may be accessed at the Library in San Diego or through document delivery for online and regional students. Librarians are available to provide training, reference assistance, and mentoring at the San Diego Library and virtually for online or regional students. Please take advantage of Library resources: