Sociology 401

Classical Social Theory

Instructor: Tom Semm Summer 2009

Office: NH 203

Course Meets: MTWTh 2PM-3:40PM

Office Hours: MTWTH 1:30PM-2PM psemm@mail.sdsu.edu

MTWTH 3:40-4PM 594-5906

**Required Text**:

Ritzer, George. Classical Sociological Theory. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. Fifth Edition.

Handouts

**Course Description**:

This course will examine classical social theories and theorists. The Classical period is usually considered to be between the mid-1700s and the 1920s. The reason for this is that Western society under went a revolutionary transformation during this time period. Some aspects of this transformation were secularization, industrialization, and urbanization. The classical social theorists were trying to understand and explain this transformation. This course will follow a threefold approach to the study of classical social theory. First, the course will situate classical theory and the theorists in the context of this transformation. It will examine the social forces that caused the transformation and the influence those social forces had on classical theory, especially the influence of the Enlightenment. Second, the course will examine the major classical social theorists Marx, Weber and Durkheim, but will also examine other social theories and theorists who had significant influence during the Classical period. And third the course will examine the influence that classical theory has had on contemporary social theory.

**Course Goals**:

1. The student should understand what a theory is in general, and what social theory is.

2. The student should have gained a general knowledge of classical social theories and theorists.

3. The student should understand how social and historical factors shape theory construction.

4. The student should have gained a better understanding of Western society.

5. The student should have gained a better knowledge of how historical context and social forces shape individual lives.

**Evaluation Process**:

There will be a total of approximately 300 points.

Exams. There will be three exams each worth approximately\* seventy-five (75) points for a total of approximately two hundred and twenty-five (225) points. The exams will be based on the lectures, the readings, and in-class videos. The exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in, short answer questions, and perhaps an essay question. See Course Schedule for day and date.

Papers. There will be one short paper that will involve applying a theory to an historical event or social organization. This paper will be worth seventy-five (75) points. The paper will be three to four pages in length. See Course Schedule for date.

I will treat you as adults and with respect, and I expect to be treated likewise. From my point of view, disrespect includes students engaging in private conversations and non class related e-activity during class. I expect cell phones to be turned off and put away unless you are in the middle of an ermergency or crisis of some sort. And in that case you need to inform me when you come to class. In the beginning, students will be allowed to use computers for note taking, however if it is obvious the computer is being used for other activity, I reserve the right to ban the use of computers in the class. I will give one polite warning to students who engage in disrespctful behavior, but if the activity continues I will deduct enough points that the student will fail the course.

Class Schedule:

Meeting Topics and Reading Assignments\*\*

Week 1 Course Introduction

May 28 “What is Theory?”

Reading Assignment: Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2 The Great Transformation and the early Classical Theorists

June 1-4 Reading Assignment: Chapter 4 and 5

Week 3 Adam Smith and Karl Marx

June 8-11 Reading Assignment: Chapter 6

Week 4 Marx and Weber

June 15-18 Reading Assignment: Chapter 8

**Exam 1: Monday June 15**

Week 5 Weber and Durkheim

June 22-25 Reading Assignment: Chapter 7

Week 6 American Sociological Theory: Guilded Age and Social Darwinism

June 29-July 2 Reading: Chapter 11 and 12

**Exam 2: Monday June 29**

Week 7 Collective Behavior and Fascist Social Theory

July 6-9 **Paper Due and Final Exam on Thursday July 9**

\*Approximately means just that; the total number of points on each exam may be more or less than seventy-five and the total number of points for the course may be more or less than two hundred and seventy-five.

\*\*I may lecture on topics, theories, and theorists that are not on the course schedule.