Contemporary Social Theory

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Course Meets: Mon,Wed, and Sat (3)

Spectrum Center

Required Text:

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

Kivisto, Peter. Social Theory: Roots and Branches. Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2007. Ed.3.

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
* structuralism
* 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 four hundred (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 an oral report on one of the assigned readings. With this report, the student will hand in a two page written paper analyzing the reading on which they 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 Weber’s essay on bureaucracy relate to the topic, “the problems of modernity.” 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 points, 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 each day 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.

**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. .

**Points System**:

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%

Grading System:

Grade Percent

A 93%-100%

A- 90%-92%

B+ 87%-89%

B 83%-86%

B- 80%-82%

C+ 77%-79%

C 73%-76%

C- 70%-72%

D 60%-69%

F below 60%

Class Schedule

Day and Date Topics Readings

Class 1 Course Introduction Ritzer Ch 1

M Aug 31 Three Paradigms

Class 2 Structural Functionalism Ritzer: Chapter 4(158-165)

W Sep 2 **Paper # 1 Assigned** Kivisto\*: 28, 31

Class 3 Conflict Theory Ritzer: Chapter 2 (75-83)

W Sep 9 **Paper # 1 Due** Kivisto: 35, 37

Class 4 Neo-Marxist Theories Ritzer: Chapter 4

S Sep 12 **Exam #1**

Class 5 Post-Structural Theory Ritzer: Chapter 13 (490-501)

M Sep 14 Kivisto: 67, 65

Class 6 Collective Behavior and Ritzer: Chaper 6 (235-45)

W Sep 16 Social Movement Theories Kivisto: 40

Class 7 Globalization Theory Ritzer: Chapter 4(166-172)

S Sep 19 **Exam #2**

Class 8 Globalization Theory Ritzer: Chapter 12

M Sep 21 **Paper #2 Assigned** Kivisto: 70, 73

Class 9 Post-Modern and Feminist Social Theory Ritzer Chapter 9

W Sep 23 Kivisto: 66,54

Class 10 Social Theory and the Twenty-first Century

**Exam #3 and Paper #2 Due**

**\*Kivisto assignments refer to the number of the reading in the text, not to page numbers. For example Kivisto: 28 is “Civilization and Its Discontents” by Freud Section VI p. 173.**

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**Important University Policies**

**Course Workload:** This course has been designed for the adult learner taking course work at an accelerated pace. To facilitate your learning and cover all of the material in such a short time, it is imperative that in-class contact hours not be abbreviated. Each student is a valuable part of the learning environment, and your participation is needed in class discussion, presentations, peer evaluation, and being a supportive audience for anyone presenting or lecturing. Given the rapid pace of the course, it is necessary for students to keep on track and on task with the readings and assignments. In accordance with accreditation standards set by WASC, National University requires approximately two hours of outside work for every contact hour (NU Catalog). For a 4.5-quarter unit course, there are 45 contact hours, plus a minimum of 90 hours outside of classroom work. Of course, the time may be spent in all sorts of ways--many hours over the weekend, for example, with fewer during the week, or whatever schedule works best for the student given the deadlines in the course.

**Plagiarism**: Students are also reminded that all work must be generated independently and solely for this course. Any act of plagiarism or academic dishonesty (intentional or unintentional borrowing of another person's published or unpublished material without proper attribution, having someone fix writing or other errors, or any other attempt to defraud the academic process) will meet with reprimand and possible failure of the course (see the NU Catalog for other potential penalties). To avoid plagiarism, students should do their own work and submit work that is original to this course.

Students are required to cite the use of materials written by others in all written communications for courses. Remember, the use of ideas, words, or phrasing without proper attribution constitutes 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. Please use the APA or MLA guidelines/procedures for citing work. Use the standard you choose consistently.

**Grading Standard:** Papers grades are based on the goals of the assignments, which are to demonstrate close reading skills and familiarity with course concepts, *as well as on the standards for undergraduate written work described below.* Letter grades correspond to the definitions of those grades for undergraduate classes as defined in the National University Catalog.

**Grading Criteria for Writing Assignments:** Formal paper grades will be assigned in accordance with the University catalog and the following general criteria adopted by the School of Arts and Sciences. In this course, grades will be issued according to the +/- system.

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

**"C" range**

* Acceptable, solid achievement, meets standards for course.
* Retains over-all focus, generally solid command of subject matter.
* Subject matter well-explored but may show signs of under-development.
* 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.)**

**"B" range**

* Commendable achievement, exceeds standards for course.
* Specific, original focus, content well-handled.
* Significance of content is clearly conveyed; good use of examples; sufficient support exists in all 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.)**

**"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).**

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

* **Marginal achievement; only meets minimum standards.**
* Significance of content is unclear.
* Some ideas may lack support, elaboration.
* Lacks sufficient examples or relevance of examples may be unclear.
* Support material may not be clearly incorporated into argument.
* Expression is occasionally awkward (problematic sentence structure).
* Mechanical errors may at times impede clear understanding of material.
* **May have a few serious mechanical errors, but no recurring serious mechanical errors (fragments, run-ons, comma-splices, etc.)**

**"F" range**

* 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 college level.

**Grade Distribution:**

A /4.0

A-/3.7

B+/3.3

B /3.0

B-/2.7

C+/2.3

C /2.0

C-/1.7

D+/1.3

D /1.0

D-/0.7

F / 0.0

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**National University Writing Centers are available at various sites and by on-line appointment**