

**SOC 612: CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MANOA - SPRING 2016**

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CLASS SCHEDULE: Thursdays: 12:00-2:30PM
Location: DEAN 104

Course Description:

Contemporary sociological theory is not only a continuation or expansion of prior forms of knowledge production but is also a profound challenge – even an unhinging – of some of the foundational assumptions of the discipline, particularly in regards to concepts of “society,” “culture” and “the human.” Contemporary developments in sociological theory re-examine ideas of *who* can hold knowledge, *what* comprises knowledge, *why* we come to know what we know, *where* the space of knowledge production is, and *how* knowledge production is integral to the creation of social differentiations and gross disparities. Many contemporary theorists pose challenges to the idea that there exist separate and discrete social, cultural, economic, and political spheres, reject essentialism, and reject the notion that there exists a "pure" or "scientific" methodology in social analysis. We will examine these developments through our reading of some the key texts informing contemporary sociological theory, particularly those associated with post-structuralism, post-modernism (including efforts at deconstruction), post-colonialism and cultural studies. In doing so, we will see how contemporary theorists have re-shaped our understanding of the relationship between the construction of social norms, an ever-expanding global capitalism, people's subjectivities and resistance to processes of expropriation, exploitation and subjugation.

Required Readings:

ES Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

PB Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

JB Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990.

SH Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Huan-Hsing Chen (eds.), New York and London: Routledge, 1996. (pdf provided).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Participation (preparation and level of engagement)	10%
Discussion Questions (each class)	20%
Short Papers on Readings (2 in term = 15% each)	30%
Final Research Paper (22-25 pp)	40%

CLASS ATTENDANCE: Your attendance is expected. Attendance is usually a good indicator of your participation in this course (i.e. interest, commitment and enthusiasm), which accounts for 10% of your grade. Moreover, you are responsible for everything that is covered during class time. Just as importantly, you are expected to come *fully prepared* for each class by having completed your assigned readings and having developed questions and comments that will allow you to be an *active* participant in class discussions.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS: All assignments must be submitted on the day they are due. A late paper will incur a penalty of 10% off the grade for each day past the due date.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

Students will develop their critical learning skills by: examining the historical origins of key ideas, concepts and categories shaping human experience today; examining the relations or ruling that organize dominant ideas, concepts and categories and; examining how people have variously contested these ideas, concepts and categories. Students will also develop their reading, writing and oral presentation skills in order to become clear thinkers and articulate communicators of theoretically informed empirical research.

Assignment: Discussion Questions:

Grade Total: 20% of final grade

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for students to *critically engage* with course material with other students and with instructor.

Description:

For each class, think of two questions you would like to discuss in class. You will post these questions to the class email list **by 8PM the night before class**. You should submit questions even if you plan on missing class. Bring your questions to class as well, as we will start each class with a round of students' questions. These questions will aid our class discussion that day. You do not need to submit discussion questions for the first class.

A good discussion question is thought provoking. Try to avoid questions that would simply require someone in the class to summarize something from the reading or to simply give a "yes" or "no" reply. "Why" or "how" questions are good. You might also try to make connections between the current reading and something we've discussed in an earlier class.

Assignment: Two Short Papers on Readings:

Grade Total: 30% of final grade (15% each paper)

Length: 2-3 pages for each paper

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for students to concisely discuss an interesting implication of the reading and to develop theory further.

Description:

You will choose two week's worth of pertinent readings on which to write short papers.

These papers should demonstrate clear engagement with the readings and should explore one idea (but possibly more) from the selected readings *in detail*. A good way to think about these assignments is to imagine your self as a book or article review writer, addressing both a broad intellectual audience as well as a sociological audience. If you disagree with an author's methods or conclusions, then explain why and provide an alternative argument (and source) that explains your point. Try to be as thorough, precise, and as specific as possible.

1) Begin by stating a theoretical proposition from the articles/chapters. A proposition is a statement about a causal relationship between two concepts. 2) Discuss how that proposition might be extended or applied to a different case, another context, or a different theoretical perspective. By choosing a new context, you are attempting to stretch the viability of the theory – see how far you can take it without breaking the theory

Assignment: Final Research Paper:

Grade Total: 40% of final grade

Length: 22-25 pages

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for students to use the knowledge gained from the course readings to analyze and discuss a significant text advancing the methods and theories associated with deconstruction.

Description:

You will state the main theoretical perspectives developed in **two** of the readings from this class. You will then critique a **selected element** from each of these perspectives by the method of comparison. For example, you may wish to **compare** how Edward Said and Pierre Bourdieu develop their **understanding** of the **concept** of culture and how they separately use it to **analyze** power. You will continue by **comparing** the two approaches and **evaluating** them in relationship to each other. You will then develop your own theoretical understanding of the concept you select (in this example, the concept of culture). Be sure to **accurately** depict the arguments of the two authors you select.

Evaluative Criteria (your grade will be based on whether or not you meet the following criteria):

- 1. Clarity of argument:** explain things in your own words; avoid obscurity; avoid jargon.
- 2. Documentation:** of paraphrases and direct quotations. You will need to know how to properly cite works that you have referenced. In writing an essay, consistently follow a standardized format of your choice (e.g. APA, MLA). All evidence and explanations used to support your argument must be referenced (or footnoted). When in doubt, reference! Failure to do so may constitute plagiarism. Your originality comes in how you work with or what you make of your findings.

Have a "References" or "Works Cited" section at the end of your paper. Identify the works by author and include all the relevant information needed for the reader to easily identify and locate the text.

3. Definitions: Be sure to define the central terms and concepts that you are using, especially if they are technical, controversial or subject to multiple interpretations.

4. Use of concrete examples: Illustrate your claims with observations about specific, concrete persons, settings and events (either your own or those discussed in your references).

5. Justifications of your view: Do not simply state your position or opinion on a given matter but try to support it. Provide evidence or reasoning in which you try to persuade your reader to agree with you on that matter at hand.

6. Overall coherence for the entire paper: Be sure to indicate to the reader what you are up to and how you plan to proceed. Include a brief introduction that spells out your overall plan of action.

Grading:

As a general rule, *A* papers *critically evaluate* research by examining its theoretical assumptions, checking the adequacy of its evidence, and looking at how conclusions were drawn. This is best done by using the theoretical arguments developed in the course (and elsewhere) as tools to evaluate your topic. Summation or quotes from books are drawn into the essay only where necessary to support a point. *B* papers usually combine summary with some evaluation.

