COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowing a lot of good theories does not automatically make you good at constructing one by yourself; however, thorough knowledge of historical developments and conceptual mechanics of good theories is essential for becoming a good theorist. Such knowledge helps you not only avoid reinventing the wheel but also acquire good theoretical intuition—how to identify conceptual problems in the existing literature as well as construct new concepts and explore their implications.

Thus this first-year theory seminar has two objectives. The first is to help you understand historical developments of good theories between the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. The second—and this is the ultimate objective—is to train you as a theorist who can wield sociological concepts to construct cogent explanations of empirical phenomena that you are interested in.

CLASS FORMAT

At the beginning of each class, I give a short lecture (10-15 minutes) to provide you with historical and theoretical contexts of the assigned readings. In the remainder of the class, we discuss your questions and reactions to the readings (as well as mine).

GRADING

Analytic Papers (20% x 3) 60%
Final Paper 40%

** Submit all your papers electronically at Laulima by using the “Drop Box” feature. I will then comment on your papers at Laulima.

Analytic Paper (6 pages, doubled-spaced)

For each of the three sections of the course (“Classics,” “Interaction and Self,” and “System and Structure”), you will write an analytic paper. Pick (at least) one reading
from each theorist assigned in the section. Then write a critique on each of the three readings (i.e. three theorists) by including the following two elements:

1. **Problem**—You state what is problematic about the theorist’s argument; for example, a logical contradiction, conceptual inadequacy, or empirical implausibility can be defined as a problem. Articulate the problematic as precisely as possible by using direct quotes;
2. **Solution**—You propose and elaborate a solution to the stated problem. What would be the most effective way to solve the stated problem? How does your solution improve or extend the theorist’s argument? Be as specific as possible.

**Final Paper (9 pages, doubled-spaced)**

For your final paper, you will pick one empirical phenomenon that you are interested in researching while in graduate school. Then, pick one reading (that you did not use in your analytic paper) from each of the three sections and do the following:

1. **Question**—Based on the theorist’s argument, you formulate a research question about the phenomenon that you are interested in. Since we cover nine theorists, you will have nine different research questions in total;
2. **Rationale**—You elaborate how the research question you have formulated derives logically from the theorist’s argument. By using at least one direct quote, justify the connection between the research question and the theorist;
3. **Evidence**—You explain what kind of data you will need to answer the research question. Specify which method(s) you will choose to collect the data and justify your choice.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

All required readings are either uploaded on Laulima or electronically available from the UHM Library.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

08/23: What Does It Mean To Construct a Theory?


Classics
08/30: Karl Marx


09/06: Karl Marx and Max Weber


09/13: Max Weber


09/20: Emile Durkheim


09/27: Emile Durkheim + How to Construct a Cogent Argument


** The first analytic paper is due in class on 10/04 (Thu).

**Interaction and Self**

10/04: Georg Simmel

10/11: George Herbert Mead


10/18: Erving Goffman


** The second analytic paper is due in class on 10/25 (Thu).

10/25: How to Theorize Mechanisms


System and Structure

11/01: Talcott Parsons


11/08: Robert Merton


11/15: Harold Garfinkel

** The third analytic paper is due in class on 11/29 (Thu).

11/22: Thanksgiving

**Reflection**

11/29: Historicity of Sociological Theory


12/06: Tutorials & Preparing for a Final Paper

Andrew Abbott. “Explanation.” Pp. 3-40 in *Methods of Discovery*

** A final paper is due on 12/13 (Thu).