COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowing a lot of good theories does not automatically make you good at constructing one by yourself; however, thorough knowledge of historical development 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 development of good theories since 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 (“Contemporary Foundations,” “Institutions, Organizations, Networks,” and “Politics and Culture”), you will write an analytic paper.
Pick (at least) three readings in the section. Then, write a critique on each of the three readings 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 you will pick three different readings, you will have three 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.

TEXTBOOKS

Except for Niklas Luhmann’s *Ecological Communication*, all readings are uploaded on Laulima. A master copy of the Luhmann reading will be placed in my mailbox.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 8: Introduction


Contemporary Foundations

January 15: Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas. 1996. “Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere.” Pp. 329-387 in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*

January 22: Niklas Luhmann

Niklas Luhmann. Pp. 1-50 & 106-142 in *Ecological Communication* [A master copy is in my mailbox]

January 29: Michel Foucault


February 5: Pierre Bourdieu


February 12: Feminism


Iris Marion Young. 1996. “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy.” Pp. 120-135 in *Democracy and Difference*, edited by S. Benhabib

**The first analytic paper is due on February 19 (Tue)**

Institutions, Organizations, Networks
February 19: Institutional Sociology of Organizations


February 26: Institutional Dynamics and Transformations


March 5: Causes and Effects of Networks


March 12: Mobilization of Networks


** The second analytic paper is due on March 19 (Tue)**

**Intermission**

March 19: Critical Theory


March 26: Spring Recess

**Politics and Culture**

April 2: The State


April 9: Culture and State Formation


April 16: History of the Nation-State


April 23: Politics and Culture in the Age of Globalization


** The second analytic paper is due on April 30 (Tue)

Reflections on Sociology

April 30: The Nature of Sociology as an Academic Discipline + Ideas for Final Papers


** The final paper is due on May 9 (Thu)