Sociology 612 (Spring 2012)

**Contemporary Sociological Theory**

Seio Nakajima  
Tuesday 12:00-2:30 p.m., KELL 414

Office hours: Tue. 2:30-3:30 p.m. or by appointment  
208 Saunders Hall  
seio@hawaii.edu

**Course Description:**

This seminar has three major goals: (1) To familiarize students with the evolution and the current state of contemporary sociological theory by discussing texts written by key contemporary sociological thinkers (e.g., Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann) (mastering of theory). (2) To consider how theories we learn both inform and draw from actual empirical research by reading theoretically informed works by these sociologists (e.g., Bourdieu on the “field of cultural production,” Luhmann on “art as a social system”) (mastering of application of theory to empirical research). (3) To prepare a short research proposal as a final paper on a subject of the student’s choosing by explicitly engaging with one or more theorists we discuss in class (mastering of theoretically-informed methods and research design).

**Notes:**

- Although the formal title of the course is "contemporary sociological theory," we will also discuss some “non-sociology” contemporary theorists (e.g., Foucault).
- This course is a theory course, but we also try to highlight the importance of “putting contemporary sociological theories to work” in concrete, empirical research settings. Roughly 50% of time and effort will be spent for achieving goal (1) above, 30% for goal (2), and 20% for goal (3).
- Students should be aware that this is an extremely reading and discussion-intensive course. Seminar participants are expected to attend every session and be prepared for every class.
- In addition to the three major goals above, whenever appropriate, we will discuss miscellaneous technical “know-hows” of doing academic research. E.g., how to find relevant academic literature, use of citation software for organizing references, etc. What to discuss each semester largely depends on the needs and interests of the students taking the course.
- This is a required course for sociology graduate students, but I understand students may come from diverse disciplinary background, so I do not expect all participants to have graduate-level knowledge in sociological theory and methods. I will provide “mini-lectures” on sociology (and other topics) whenever necessary so every student has an equal opportunity to learn from and enjoy this seminar!
Required Texts:

- All the readings will be available at Laulima except those marked with @, which are available at UH Library Electronic Resources or publicly available on the Internet.

Course Requirements: [Total = 100%]

1) Active participation in seminar discussions. [20%]
   Remember the aphorism: “Even to have expressed a false thought boldly and clearly is already to have gained a great deal.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein). So, don't be shy and speak up!
2) Three short analytic papers. [60% = 20% x 3]
   Choose from contemporary theorists we read, and select some issues and write three papers (approx. 6-8 double-spaced pages). More detailed instructions TBA.
3) Final paper (a short research proposal). [20%]
   A short research proposal on a topic of student’s own choosing in consultation with the instructor, explicitly engaging with one or more theorists we discuss in class (approx. 6-8 double-spaced pages). I want you to come up with research questions that derive from the theories we learn, and briefly specify how you would go about collecting and analyzing empirical data. More detailed instructions TBA.

Class Schedule

Week 1: January 10: Introduction: What is Contemporary Sociological Theory?


[Approx. total reading pages: 52]

Week 2: January 17: Michel Foucault I (1926-1984): Introduction/Theoretical Contexts


[85 pages]

**Week 3: January 24: Michel Foucault II: The History of the Prison/The History of Sexuality**


[115 pages]


[80 pages]

**Week 5: February 7: Pierre Bourdieu II: Distinction/The Field of Cultural Production**


[159 pages]
**Week 6: February 14: Anthony Giddens I (b. 1938): Introduction/Structuration Theory**

**FIRST ANALYTIC PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.**


[103 pages]

**Week 7: February 21: Anthony Giddens II: Modernity/Critical Theory/The Third Way**


[85 pages]

**Week 8: February 28: Jürgen Habermas I (b. 1929): Introduction/The Public Sphere**


[105 pages]

**Week 9: March 6: Jürgen Habermas II: The Theory of Communicative Action**


[91 pages]


[95 pages]

**Week 11: March 20: Niklas Luhmann II: An Example of a Subsystem: Art as a Social System**


[117 pages]

**Week 12: March 27: Spring Break: NO CLASS**

**Week 13: April 3: Jeffrey Alexander (b. 1947): From Neo-Functionalism to the New American Cultural Sociology**


[104 pages]

Week 14: April 10: Rational Choice Theory: James S. Coleman (1926-1995) and After


[104 pages]

Week 15: April 17: Some Frontiers in Contemporary Social and Sociological Theory I: Actor Network Theory: John Law (b. 1946), Michel Callon (b. 1945), and Bruno Latour (b. 1947)

THIRD ANALYTIC PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.


[150 pages]


[84 pages]


[94 pages]

Exam Week: May 8

FINAL PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.
Academic Honesty: “Acts of dishonesty, including but not limited to the following:

a. Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty.
b. Furnishing false information to any UH official, faculty member, or office.
c. Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any UH document, record, or form of identification.

The term 'cheating' includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the UH faculty, staff or student (4) engaging in any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion.

The term 'plagiarism' includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.”

[K7.208 UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEMWIDE STUDENT CONDUCT CODE, July 2009]

Kokua Statement: “Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability is invited to contact me privately. I would be happy to work with you, and the KOKUA Program (Office for Students with Disabilities) to ensure reasonable accommodations in my course. KOKUA can be reached at (808) 956-7511 or (808) 956-7612 (voice/text) in room 013 of the Queen Lili'uokalani Center for Student Services.”

eCAFE: “The Department of Sociology is committed to a continual improvement of the quality of its course offerings. To allow for this to occur, your help, as the consumers of these courses is needed. You are there and only you can tell us about your educational experience in your classes. Towards the end of the semester, you will be informed that the eCAFE system is available to you to complete your course evaluation. We encourage you to login to http://www.hawaii.edu/ecafe/ to submit your evaluations.”