

SOCIAL THEORY

Instructor:	Masa J. Higo, MA
Class Room:	Campion 303
Class Hours:	Monday 3:00 pm to 5:30pm
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Office Hours:	Mon & Wed 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm and/or by appointment

❖ COURSE DISCRIPTION

This *Social Theory* course is an elective course designed for level two. Generally assuming that you have little, if not at all, experience in taking a social theory (including sociological, philosophical and political) course previously in any formal or systematic manner, this course is designed, first and foremost, to introduce you to the major literatures, basic concepts, foundational knowledge and indispensable discourses in social theory.

What is Social Theory?

Social theory can be generally defined as a broad body of knowledge constituted by logic, concepts and discourse concerning the structure, systems and dynamics of human society. It can be therefore sociological, psychological, philosophical and anthropological and/or a combination of them all. As conceptual tools, social theory is instrumental for us to insightfully discern the process of social interaction and critically examine the structure and relations underlying social phenomena you observe. Social theory is also embedded to larger social, cultural and historical conditions – a theory on society can be perceived as a product of historically specific context of a society. In this sense, social theory helps us systematically analyze not only the structure determining your position in society, but also your own personal positionality and reflexivity as an active and powerful agent constituting and reshaping society to which you belong.



The Classic and Contemporary

The content of this course are divided mainly into two parts: 1) classic and 2) contemporary theories. 1) Classic social theories will be covered from September 19th through October 17th. Theories, epistemologies and the historical contexts of four major founders of social theorists, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Simmel will be studied. Works of these “Big Four,” as it were, are crucially important not only to better understand the depth and significance of succeeding contemporary social theories, but also to conceptually illustrate the dynamics and structure of contemporary social issues and social life of your own. 2) Various strands of contemporary social theories will be introduced and critically examined from October 24th through the end of the semester. Works and contributions by major contemporary social theorists, e.g., Bulmer, Goffman, Giddens, Baudrillard and Bauman, etc., are important for us not only to critically examine the very contemporary social issues, but also to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of classic theories out of which those contemporary theories have been developed.

The Structure of the Course

The following explain the basic flow and structure of each class of this course:

- 1) The first hour or hour and half (depending on the topic) in each class will be spent for delivering a lecture mainly on the summary, key agenda and additional issue of the theme of the week. Assigned parts of the week in Seidman's (2004) *Contested Knowledge*, or Bauman's (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, will mainly frame the lecture.
- 2) Following a short brake, approximately thirty minutes will be spent for students to discuss their readings of Kivisto's (2005) *Illuminating Social Life*. Each student will be assigned at least once throughout the semester to take turn to present in class a review of the chapter assigned for the week. The lecture will first provide a very brief summary of the assigned chapter, then the student(s) assigned for the week will present in class at least the following three points: a) an in-detail summary of the chapter, b) relevance of the theories to the specific social issue(s) discussed in the chapter and c) critiques of the way(s) in which specific theories used in the chapter to illustrate or explain the specific social issue(s).
- 3) Last twenty to thirty minutes will be spared for in-class group discussions. While specific agenda for the group discussion will be announced each week, each group discussion will be revolving around the following three basic questions: a) a critical review of theories studied for the week, b) critical assessments of the way(s) in which the theories frame and/or explain the particular social issue(s) discussed in Kivisto's (2005) *Illuminating Social Life* and c) extended applications of the theories to the students' own past and present personal experience and social life.



❖ PURPOSES & GOALS

The followings are the main purposes this course plans to achieve with students. This *Social Theory* course aims to help students:

- 1) Get familiar with important authors, works and literatures of major social theories that will be indispensable for students' future studies in the fields of humanities and social sciences.
- 2) Get familiar with basic logics, concepts and terminologies constituting major social theories.
- 3) Get familiar with discourses and specific socio-historical contexts from which each social theory has been developed.
- 4) Acquire conceptual frames important to critically assess strengths and weaknesses of each theory.
- 5) Develop skills to analytically and critically apply a social theory to on-going actual social issue(s).



❖ COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In this course, you are responsible for completing the following three requirements:

1. Mid-Term Paper

A mid-term paper will be required as a substitution for a mid-term examination (same as the final exam). You will be requested to produce a paper that reflects your knowledge gained out of various materials (lectures,

reading materials and in-class discussions) that are provided from the 19th of September through the 17th of October. The specific format of the paper will be announced on the 26th of September. The mid-term paper will be required to hand in on the 24th of October before the regular class time (at Campion 303 at 3:00pm). You can achieve 30 points at maximum in the mid-term paper.

2. Final Paper

The specific format of the final paper will be announced on the 7th of November. Your final paper will be required to reflect your knowledge achieved from all the materials (lectures, required readings, and in-class discussions) provided throughout the semester. Your final paper has to be submitted on the 5th of December before the regular class time (at Campion 303 at 3:00pm). You can achieve 30 points at maximum in the final paper.

3. Class Participation



The “class participation” part is made up of 1) a student’s constant class attendance, 2) successful presentations of weekly readings, 3) contributions to discussions (both “in-class” and “group” discussions) and 4) successful in-class presentation of a final paper. Class attendance is very important for each student, let alone actively participating in group discussions that will be assigned on a regular basis.

“Contribution to in-class discussions,” in this regard, refers to your questions, suggestions and feedback to a given material (lectures, required readings, other students’ paper presentations, and in-class and group discussions) shared in class.

These participations will be highly regarded since participations as such will contribute to active and effective learning processes of other students. Therefore, each student may achieve 50 points at maximum in the “Class Participation” part altogether. For those students who don’t feels comfortable with speaking up during the class, alternative way(s) to participate in class will be welcomed - feel free to express your thoughts, ideas and feedback via email and/or letters to the lecturer.

❖ EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Students are responsible for being prepared for the class by reading all of the assigned materials beforehand specified in the syllabus. Please be aware of all dates, deadlines, and assignments and adhere to them at your own responsibility. Students are also responsible for being clearly aware of the BC Academic Integrity Policy that will not tolerate academic dishonesty including cheating, abetting, fabrication and plagiarism.

❖ COURSE GRADES CRITERIA

Each student’ overall course grade will be determined by the total sum of the points that are achieved out of the following three components:

1. Mid-term Paper	(30 points at maximum)
2. Final Paper	(30 points at maximum)
3. Class Participation	(50 points at maximum)*

Total 110 points at maximum

*The following four components consist of the “Class Participation” part:

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Class Attendances: | 20 points at maximum |
| 2) Weekly Readings Presentations: | 10 points at maximum |
| 3) Discussion Participations: | 10 points at maximum |
| 4) Paper Presentation: | 10 points at maximum |

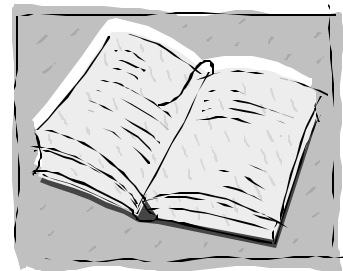
If you achieve full points in each of the five components, then your total sum point for the entire course will be 110 points. Your total sum of points will represent the following letter course grade:

A	= 95 or Above
A-	= 90 to 94
B+	= 85 to 89
B	= 80 to 84
B-	= 75 to 79
C+	= 70 to 74
C	= 65 to 69
C-	= 60 to 64
D+	= 55 to 59
D	= 50 to 54
D-	= 45 to 49
F	= 44 or Below

Why is the “Class Participation” part so important in this course? It is mainly in a written manner that the first two components (the mid-term and final papers) are the form of exams in which you are requested to demonstrate your learning results. Class participation is largely integrated in this course in case you are not able to fully exercise what you have learned in a written manner as such. Therefore, please be ready to make a high achievement in the “class participation” part as a safety net.

❖ **ASSIGNED COURSE TEXTS**

- 1) Seidman, Steven. (2004). *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today* (Third Edition). Blackwell Publishing.
- 2) Kivisto, Peter (Ed.). (2005). *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited* (Third Edition). Pine Forge Press.
- 3) Bauman, Zygmunt. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press.



➤ All three books are available at BC bookstore.

❖ **COURSE SCHEDULE**

The 12th of September

Introduction to SC 215-02 Social Theory.

Preliminary Lecture: *Overview - What Is Social Theory and Why Do We Study It?*
No assigned reading.

The 19th of September

The Classic Big 4 #1: *EMILE DURKHEIM – Social Solidarity, Division of Labor & Social Change*

Assigned Readings:

1. "The Promise of Sociology: Emile Durkheim." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 36-48.
2. "Surfing the Net for Community: A Durkheimian Analysis of Electronic Gatherings." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 59-89.

The 26th of September

The Classic Big 4 #2: *KARL MARX – Dialectical Materialism, Industrialization & Class Conflict*

Assigned Readings:

1. "The Revolutionary Theory of Karl Marx." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 22-35.
2. "Working Longer, Living Less: Understanding Marx through the Workplace Today." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 5-32.

The 3rd of October

The Classic Big 4 #3: *MAX WEBER – Bureaucracy, Authority & Rationalization*

Assigned Readings:

1. "The Ironic Social Theory of Max Weber." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 49 – 61.
2. "Weberian Theory of Rationalization and the McDonaldization of Contemporary Society." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 38-55.

The 17th of October

The Classic Big 4 #4: *GEORG SIMMEL – Urbanization, Social Form & Modern Culture*

Assigned Readings:

1. "Chapter 9: Georg Simmel". In *Sociological Theory: Classical Statements* (Sixth Edition). Pp. 259-279. * Copies of this chapter will be provided in class on the 3rd of October.
2. "Alcohol-Related Windows on Simmel's Social World." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 92-113.

The 24th of October

Symbolic Interactionism: *G. H. Mead, Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman – The Self, Impression Management & Symbols*.

Assigned Readings:

1. "Chapter 6: Symbolic Interactionism." In *Modern Sociological Theory*. Sixth Edition. Pp. 200-232.* Copies of this chapter will be provided in class on the 24th of October.
2. "Wild Thoughts: An Interactionist Analysis of Ideology, Emotion, and Nature." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 237-254.
3. "Goffman's Dramaturgical Sociology: Personal Sales and Service in a Commodified World." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 259-276.

The 31st of October

Critical Theory 1: *Jürgen Habermas – The "Communication" Turn, Legitimation Crisis & Modernity as an Unfinished Project*

Assigned Readings:

1. "The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 121-133.
2. "Critical Theory, Legitimation Crisis, and the Deindustrialization of Flint, Michigan." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 187-205.

The 7th of November

Critical Theory 2: *Stuart Hall, Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu – Race Theory, Late Modernity & Consumption*.

Assigned Readings:

1. "Stuart Hall and British Cultural Studies." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 134-141.
2. "The Critical Sociology of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 142-155.
3. "Critical Race Theory." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 231-244.

The 14th of November

Feminist Theories – Gender, Sexuality & Epistemology

Assigned Readings:

1. "Feminist Theory." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 209-230.
2. "The Socially Constructed Body: Insights from Feminist Theory." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 215-231.

The 21st of November

Post-Modern Social Theory #1: *Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault - Poststructuralism, Postmodernism & Disciplinary Society*

Assigned Readings:

1. "The Postmodern World of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 161-177.
2. "Michel Foucault's Disciplinary Society." In *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. Pp. 178-191.
3. "The Cinematic Society, the Interview, and the Postmodern Self." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 299-318.

The 28th of November

Post-Modern Social Theory #2: *Social Theory of Zygmunt Bauman - Liquid Modernity, Consumerism and Globalization*.

Assigned Readings:

1. "Foreword: On Being Light and Liquid." In *Liquid Modernity*. Pp. 1-15.
2. "Individuality." In *Liquid Modernity*. Pp. 53 -90.
3. "Time / Space." In *Liquid Modernity*. Pp. 91-129.
4. "The 'New' Means of Consumption: A Postmodern Analysis." In *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*. Pp. 280-298.

Students' In-Class Paper Presentation 1:

Approximately 10 students will present final papers. Each student will be given five to seven minutes for the presentation.

The 5th of December

Students' In-Class Paper Presentation 2:

Approximately 15 students will present the final papers. Each student will be given five to seven minutes for the presentation.

Review of the course.