

SPRING 2007  
SOCIOLOGY 215-02

# Social Theory



## COURSE DESCRIPTION :

This *Social Theory* course is an elective course offered for students at level two. This course is designed on a general assumption that students have little experience in studying social theory in a formal or systematic manner. Generally, social theory refers to a broad body of knowledge constituted by logics, concepts and discourses with respect to the process, structure and dynamics of human society. A social theory can therefore be sociological, psychological, philosophical and anthropological and/or a combination of all of these. Focusing particularly on its sociological contributions, this course will introduce students to basic concepts, frameworks, and major arguments in both classic and contemporary social theories. This Social Theory course is characterized by a variety of learning activities; students will learn from video programs, group reading presentations, and in-class discussions as well as regular lectures.

### ***Why Studying Social Theory?***

As a conceptual tool, a social theory is instrumental for us to insightfully discern the process of social interaction and critically examine the structure and relations underlying social phenomena that you observe. A social theory is also embedded in larger social, cultural and historical conditions – a theory on society can be perceived as a product of the 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 experience and potency as an active and powerful agent constituting and reshaping the society to which you belong.

Instructor:	Masa Higo
Class Room:	Campion Hall 328
Class Hours:	M & W, 3-4:15 pm
Office Location:	McGuinn 410A
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### ***The Classic and Contemporary Social Theories***

The content of this course is divided mainly into two parts: *classic* and *contemporary* theories. 1) Classic social theories are scheduled to be covered from January 17<sup>th</sup> through February 27<sup>th</sup> (before Spring Break). During this period, we will overview and discuss classical foundations and contributions to social theory developed by four major founders of social theory: K. Marx, M. Weber, E. Durkheim, and G. Simmel. Works of these “Big Four,” as it were, are crucially important not only to understand the origins of succeeding contemporary social theories, but also to conceptually illustrate the dynamics and structure of contemporary social issues and your own social life. 2) Various strands of contemporary social theories will be discussed from March 12<sup>th</sup> through April 25<sup>th</sup> (after Spring Break). During this period, we will survey and critically examine four major social theoretical paradigms: structural functionalism, critical theory, symbolic interactionism, and feminist social theories. Contributions made by these theoretical paradigms are important for us not only to critically examine the contemporary social issues themselves, but also to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the classic theories out of which those contemporary theories have been developed.

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### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

In this course, students are responsible for completing the following five requirements:

#### 1. In-Class Video Review Essays

Throughout the semester, seven video programs are scheduled to be presented in class for the purpose of facilitating students' visual examination of the strengths and weaknesses of social theories. An *In-Class Video Review Essay* will follow each of the video program presentations. In this review essay, students will be asked to briefly discuss in what way(s) a set of social theories we cover for the week may or may not be applied to particular social issues described in the video program. Students will be given 10 to 15 minutes to work on each essay and may achieve 3 points per essay at maximum. These review essays will ask you to demonstrate and exercise basic knowledge that you are expected to gain out of lectures and assigned readings of the week. Please be prepared for each essay by regularly reviewing your lecture notes and reading materials.

#### 3. Mid-Term Examination

The mid-term exam is scheduled to be conducted **on March 14<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) at the regular class place and time (Campion 204 at 3:00am)**. The exam will include all the material (required readings, lectures, video presentations and in-class discussions) provided from January 22<sup>nd</sup> through February 28<sup>th</sup>. The specific format will be announced and a study guide for the exam will be provided on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Students may achieve 30 points at maximum on the mid-term exam.

#### 4. Final Examination

The final exam is scheduled to be conducted on **May 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am in the regular classroom (Campion 204)**. The specific format and a study guide will be announced on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The content of the final exam will be cumulative – it will include all the material (required readings, lectures, video presentations and class discussions) provided throughout the semester. As on the mid-term exam, students can achieve 30 points at maximum on the final exam.

#### 2. Group Reading Presentations

Throughout the semester, nine Group Reading Presentations are scheduled to be conducted in class. The group presentations are based on readings of Kivisto's (2005) *Illuminating Social Life* (one of the two required course textbooks). Each student will be required to select and sign up for one of the nine presentation opportunities and present his/her discussion of the chosen chapter in class within 20 minutes along with other students who choose the same chapter of the book. Each group may include two to three students. The lecturer 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: 1) a summary of the chapter, 2) relevance of the theories to the specific social issue(s) discussed in the chapter and 3) critiques of the way(s) in which specific theories are used in the chapter to illustrate or explain the specific social issue(s). For the "Group Reading Presentation" portion of your grade, you may achieve 10 points at maximum.

#### 5. Class Participation

Each student's "class participation" will be evaluated on the following three grounds: class attendance, contributions to your in-class group discussions, and contributions to whole-class discussions. 1) Your class attendance is very important; your attendance will be checked in each class. Equally important is actively participating in actual learning practices in class. "Class participation" in this sense consists of two components: 2) actively participating in regularly assigned group discussions, and 3) actively participating in the learning process in the entire class by sharing with the rest of the class your questions, suggestions and feedback to given material (required readings, lectures, video presentations and in-class discussions). These forms of participation will be highly regarded since participation will effectively enhance other students' learning outcomes as well as yours. You may therefore achieve 10 points at maximum by performing excellently in these "class participation" criteria. For those students who don't feel comfortable with speaking up during class, feel free to express your thoughts, ideas and feedback via email and/or letters to the lecturer.

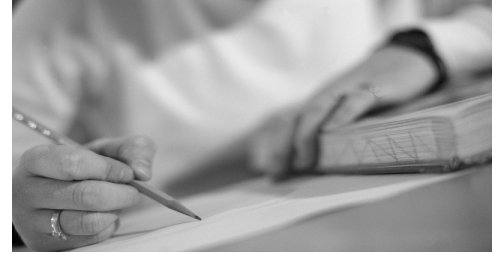
#### 6. Term Paper & Oral Presentation

Each student will be required to submit a term-paper and provide an oral presentation of the paper in class either on April 30<sup>th</sup> or on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Each student may achieve up to 10 points for his/her term paper, and up to 4 points for his/her in-class presentation. The specific format for writing the paper and guidance for presentation will be announced on February 26<sup>th</sup>. **The deadline for submitting the term-paper is April 30<sup>th</sup> regardless of the date of your oral presentation.**

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### **EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS:**

Each student is responsible for preparing herself (himself) for class by closely reading all the assigned materials specified beforehand 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. Personal chats and use of cellar phones during class are prohibited. Penalties for absence may only be compensated for by showing the lecturer a legitimate proof of absence (e.g., a doctor's appointment and an athletic commitment).



Your total sum of points will be translated into a letter grade as shown in the table below:

### **COURSE GRADES CRITERIA:**

Your overall course grade will be determined by the total sum of the points you achieve out of the following six components:

In-Class Video Reviews	(21 points at max., 3 points each)
Group Reading Presentation	(10 points at max.)
Class Participation	(10 points at max.)
Mid-term Exam	(30 points at max.)
Final Exam	(30 points at max.)
Term-Paper	(10 points at max.)
Term-Paper Presentation	( 4 points at max.)
Total	115 points at max.

Total Point	Letter Grade
95 and above	A
94 – 90	A-
89 – 85	B+
84 – 80	B
79 – 75	B-
74 – 70	C+
69 – 65	C
64 – 60	C-
59 – 55	D+
54 – 50	D
49 – 45	D-
44 and below	F

Note: If you achieve full points in each of the six components, then your total point sum for the entire course will be 115 points. The “extra 15 points” (out of 100 points) needs to be understood as a “built-in extra credit” component – therefore, no extra-credit work opportunity will be provided later in the semester. The first four components (in-class essay, mid-term exam, final exam and term paper) will ask you to demonstrate your learning results mainly in a written manner. Term paper presentation and class participation are integrated 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.

### **PURPOSES & GOALS:**

The following 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 actual ongoing social issue(s).

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### COURSE SCHEDULE & READING ASSIGNMENTS:

\*Reading materials with asterisk-marks (\*) will be provided in class.

#### The 1<sup>st</sup> Week:

January 17 (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Introduction to SC 215-02 Social Theory*  
Assigned Reading: None

#### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Week:

January 22 (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Preliminarily Lecture: What Is Social Theory and Why Do We Study It?*  
Assigned Reading: None

January 24 (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Development of Social Theory: The Early Years*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 3-13.  
Video Presentation #1: The Western Tradition (The Enlightenment and Society)

#### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Week:

January 29 (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #1: Karl Marx*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 39-54.  
Video Presentation #2: The Western Tradition (The Industrial Revolution)

January 31 (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #1: Karl Marx, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 55-71.  
Group Reading Presentation #1: *Chapter One: Working Longer, Living Less: Understanding Marx through the Workplace Today*. pp. 5-37. in Kivisto's *Illuminating Social Life*

#### The 4<sup>th</sup> Week:

February 5<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #2: Max Weber*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 107-131.

February 7<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #2: Max Weber, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 131-142.  
Video Presentation #3: Groupthink

### ASSIGNED COURSE TEXTBOOKS

Ritzer, George and Douglas J. Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Kivisto, Peter (Ed.). (2005). *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Pine Forge Press.

\*These two books are available at BC bookstore and O'Neil Library as a course reserve.

#### The 5<sup>th</sup> Week:

February 12<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #3: Emile Durkheim*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 73-84.  
Group Reading Presentation #2: *Chapter Two: Working Longer, Living Less: Understanding Marx through the Workplace Today*. pp. 5-37.

February 14<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #3: Emile Durkheim, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 84-90.  
Video Presentation #4: INSIDE THE MIND OF THE SUICIDE

#### The 6<sup>th</sup> Week:

February 19<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #3: Emile Durkheim, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 90-93.  
Group Reading Presentation #3: *Chapter Three: Surfing the Net for Community: A Durkheimian Analysis of Electronic Gatherings*. pp. 59-91.

February 21<sup>st</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #4: Georg Simmel*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). *Sociological Theory*. pp. 152-179.

#### The 7<sup>th</sup> Week:

February 26<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #4: Georg Simmel, Continued.*  
\*Assigned Readings: "The Stranger" pp. 402-408. in *The Sociology of George Simmel*.  
Video Presentation #5: [Struggle and Success the African American Experience in Japan](#)

February 28<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Classic Big Four, #4: Georg Simmel, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: "The Stranger" pp. 402-408. in *The Sociology of George Simmel*.  
Group Reading Presentation #4: *Chapter Four: Alcohol-Related Windows on Simmel's Social World*. pp. 92-118.

\*\*\*\*\* Spring Break \*\*\*\*\*

The 8th Week:

March 12<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Overview – Contemporary Social Theory*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 197-218.

March 14<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) at 3:00pm

\*\*\*\*\* Mid-Term Examination \*\*\*\*\*

The 9th Week:

March 19<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Overview – Contemporary Social Theory*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 197-218. pp. 229-253.

March 21<sup>st</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Structural Functionalism and Neofunctionalism*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 229-250.

The 10th Week:

March 26<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Structural Functionalism and Neofunctionalism, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 250-258.

Group Reading Presentation #5: Criminalizing Traversing Youth: A Neofunctionalist Analysis of Institution Building. pp. 125-152.

March 28<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Critical Theory and Neo-Marxist Thoughts*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 271-284.

The 11th Week:

April 2<sup>nd</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Critical Theory and Neo-Marxist Thoughts, Continued*  
Assigned Readings:  
*Video Presentation #6: Stuart Hall: Representations and the Media.*

April 4<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Critical Theory and Neo-Marxist Thoughts, Continued*  
Assigned Readings: “The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas” pp. 121-133. in Steven Seidman (2004). *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today.*

Group Reading Presentation #6: Critical Theory, Legitimation Crisis, and the Deindustrialization of Flint, Michigan.” pp. 187-205.

\*\*\*\*\* Easter Weekend Break \*\*\*\*\*

The 12th Week:

April 11<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Symbolic Interactionism*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 337-361.

The 13th Week:

April 16<sup>th</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Symbolic Interactionism, Continued.*  
Group Reading Presentation #7: Wild Thoughts: An Interactionist Analysis of Ideology, Emotion, and Nature, pp. 237-254.  
*Video Presentation #7: The ‘In’ Crowd and Social Cruelty.*

April 18<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) *Symbolic Interactionism, Continued.*  
Topic/Theme: *Symbolic Interactionism, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 362-372.  
Group Reading Presentation #8: Goffman’s Dramaturgical Sociology: Personal Sales and Services in a Commodified World. pp. 259-276.

The 14th Week:

April 23<sup>rd</sup> (Monday)  
Topic/Theme: *Feminist Social Thoughts*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 443-474.

April 25<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Topic/Theme: *Feminist Social Thoughts, Continued.*  
Assigned Readings: Ritzer and Goodman (2004). Sociological Theory. pp. 443-474.  
Group Reading Presentation #9: The Socially Constructed Body: Insights from Feminist Thoughts. pp. 215-231.

The 15th Week:

April 30<sup>th</sup> (Monday)

\*\*\*\*\* Student Paper Presentations #1 \*\*\*\*\*

May 2<sup>nd</sup> (Wednesday)

\*\*\*\*\* Student Paper Presentations #2 \*\*\*\*\*

May 9<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) at 9:00am

\*\*\*\*\* Final Examination \*\*\*\*\*

