Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30-11:45
Devlin 026
Professor: • betsy@classmatters.org • 781-648-0630
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday noon to 1 pm, in McGuinn 426D
Teaching assistant: Lauren Diamond-Brown • brownyj@bc.edu

Required textbook:

If the cost of buying the book poses a hardship for you, please notify the professor.

Why study social theory?

Many students find theory more difficult to learn than applied sociology. And theory texts, especially primary texts from the 19th and early 20th century, can make dry reading compared with topical and ethnographic sociological writing. Are there reasons (besides prerequisite requirements) to make the effort to understand classical and modern sociological theory? Yes!

Here are four ways that studying theory will benefit you:

- You already make decisions based on generalizations about how social reality works, as all human beings do – but most likely you’re drawing some of your operating principles from a small dataset of anecdotal examples and from received folk wisdom. By spending one or more semesters thinking big about systematic interpretations of human situations, you are learning to look at your own choices through the lenses of sensitizing concepts, which will suggest different strategies for your words and actions.

- By learning theory, you become more able to join important conversations in progress. Sociologists and other social scientists, journalists, artists, policy planners, advocates for social change and others routinely refer to and build on the famous theories covered in this course. If you are familiar with the references, you will be better able to understand and participate in these discussions.

- Theory is an art form. Just like music or painting, it can only be appreciated and created with knowledge of past masterpieces. When you practice understanding, applying and building theory, you develop your theoretical mind.

- Finally, the purpose of sociology is to break with “common sense”—the way socially constructed phenomena imbued with existing power relations are seen as natural or inevitable—and to develop liberating alternative understandings. Theoretical concepts are tools you can use to break with common sense and build new views with potential for positive social change.
SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

Tuesday January 14 – Why theory?
Key concept: The sociological imagination

Thursday January 16 – The sociological approach
Key concept: Thomas theorem: Situations defined as real are real in their consequences

Tuesday January 21 – Overview of major categories of social theory
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, Chapter 1, pp. 1-18
Key concepts: Structure & agency; conflict, functionalist & symbolic interactionist theory

Thursday January 23 – Details of course and assignments; Durkheim
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 77-84, 92-100 (parts of Chapter 3)
Key concept: Mechanical vs. Organic solidarity

Tuesday January 28 – Durkheim
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 100-102, 114-124 (parts of Chapter 3)
Key concepts: Anomie; Collective conscience

Thursday January 30 – Marx
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 20-25, 26-29 and 32-41 (parts of Ch 2)
Key concepts: Conflict theory; class struggle; materialism

Tuesday February 4 – Marx
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 41-47, 50-66 (part of Ch 2)
Key concepts: Alienated labor; Labor theory of value

Thursday February 6 – Weber
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 125-150 (part of Chapter 4)
Key concepts: Ideal types; the Protestant ethic

Tuesday February 11 - Weber
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 168-183 (part of Chapter 4)
Key concepts: Rationalization; Charismatic, traditional and rational-legal authority

Thursday February 13 – Contrasting Marx, Durkheim, and Weber
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 159-168 (part of Chapter 4)
Key concepts: Materialism vs. idealism; Status vs. class

Tuesday February 18 –Neo-Marxist and critical theory: Gramsci and Marcuse
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 30-31 (parts of Chapter 2)
and pp. 375-386, 404-412 (parts of Chapter 10 )
Key concepts: Hegemony/counter-hegemony; one-dimensional; false consciousness

Thursday February 20 - Bourdieu
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 652-676 (part of Chapter 16)
Key concepts: Social reproduction; habitus; social capital

Tuesday February 25 - Bourdieu
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 676-684 (part of Chapter 16)
Key concept: Cultural capital

Thursday February 27 – Feminist & Gender Theories: Gilman; Butler
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 186-197, pp. 598-605 (parts of Chapters 5 and 14)
Key concepts: Socialization; nature vs nurture; gender vs. sex; queer theory

** No class on March 4 or 6 – Happy Spring Break! **

Tuesday March 11 – Feminist Theories: Smith; Collins
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 556-570, 573-586 (parts of Chapter 14)
Key concepts: Standpoint; Intersectionality/matrix of domination

Thursday March 13 - DuBois
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, Chapter 7, pp 256-288
Key concept: Double consciousness

Tuesday March 18 – Globalization theories: Wallerstein, Fanon, Spivak, Said
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 747-774, 790-811 (parts of Chapter 17)
Key concepts: Core/periphery; the colonized 'other'; Orientalism

Thursday March 20 – Post-modern theory: Foucault
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 607-636 (part of Chapter 15)
Key concepts: Disciplinary society

Tuesday March 25 - Post-modern theory: Baudrillard
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 636-650 (part of Chapter 15)
Key concepts: Similacra; Hyperreality

Thursday March 27 - Symbolic interactionist theory: Goffman
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 463-502-516 (parts of Chapter 12)
Key concepts: Symbolic interactionism; Impression management; Front & back stage

Tuesday April 1 - Symbolic interactionist theory: Goffman; Hochschild
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 492-517 (part of Chapter 12)
Key concepts: Total institution; Emotion work

** Please watch the movie Avatar after the 4/1 class and no later than 4/5.

Thursday April 3 – Phenomenology: Berger and Luckmann
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 533-554 (part of Chapter 13)
Key concepts: Social construction; Reification

Tuesday April 8 – Phenomenology: Garfinkel
No reading
Key concept: Breaching experiments

Thursday April 10 - Mead
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 289-298 307-321 (parts of Chapter 8)
Key concept: Generalized other

Tuesday April 15 - Structural Functionalism: Parsons
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 324-355
Key concepts: Functionalism; role sets and role expectations

** No class on April 17 – Happy Easter break! **

Tuesday April 22 - Structural Functionalism: Merton
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 355-366 (part of Chapter 9)
Key concepts: Deviance; Function & dysfunction; Manifest and latent functions

Thursday April 24 - Habermas
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 685-706
Key concept: The lifeworld

Tuesday April 29- Habermas
Reading: Appelrouth and Edles, pp. 707-716
Key concept: Communicative action

Thursday May 1 – Wrap-up and synthesis of course concepts
No reading

Course Expectations and Grading:

1) The textbook is a very important part of the course. Readings are due on the date they are listed. Please come to class ready to discuss them.

2) Class attendance and participation are also important. Both speaking and focused listening will be valued; either too much silence or too much over-participation (dominating discussions) could negatively affect your grade. If you miss a class session, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate.

Looking at or listening to unrelated content on a screen (laptop, phone, iPod, etc) during class will lower your grade by 2 points per offense. Offline laptops may be used for taking notes only; all other devices must be turned off during class sessions.

3) ASSIGNMENTS

This course zooms in on 50 terms that sum up well-known sociological concepts. While the readings and class sessions will offer an abundance of additional theory ideas, you can earn a good grade in the course by learning to define and apply just these 50 key concepts.

A. Key Concepts Guide – On Blackboard each student has two lists with the 50 key concepts with blank columns for author(s), definition and example. Please use your own words to define the meaning of each concept to its sociological creator(s), and come up with an original example in a real-life human situation or in art or popular culture. Your completed Key Concepts Guides can serve as your study guides for the final exam.
To get full credit, by February 28 you should have completely filled in the first list with 27 of them (for up to 5 points), and by May 5 you should have filled in the second list with the remaining 23 (for up to 5 points). These two deadlines are pass/fail assignments, graded by completeness only; the quality of your definitions and examples will not be evaluated.

**B. Film interpretation paper – Due April 15** (5 to 8 pages, minimum words of text 1250, maximum 2000.) Submit via the Assignment Dropbox on the course Blackboard website. (Submissions until 8 am on April 16 will count as on-time. Late paper submissions will lose 3 points for each day late without an approved excuse.) 35% of grade.

Two screenings of the 162-minute 2009 movie *Avatar* will be offered on April 1 and 3; students may also obtain and view the movie privately. (You may fast-forward through the half-hour final battle scene, but please do watch the ending after the fighting stops.)

Please write a formal paper applying social theories covered in the course by March 31 to the film, in two sections: first, please identify all the course concepts you see reflected in the movie, naming the theorists and giving brief examples from the movie; second, pick one theory you believe is *most relevant* and make your case in two to six pages. You may claim that the plot, characters and/or one or both of the societies portrayed in the film *illustrate or contradict* a theory, or you may claim that a theorist would have a *critique* of the film. In any case, back up your claims with elaborations of the theory (explained in your own words, not over-relying on quotes) and with illustrative details from the film.

Include a little *self-reflection* on how knowing more theory gave you a new lens to view the film differently than you did or would have before this course, and/or more generally how you are finding theory useful in relation to art and popular culture.

**C. Creative presentations** - Small groups of students will be assigned a key concept and a date between February 25 and April 29. Each group will work together to create a 5- to 12-minute presentation that brings the concept alive for other students by demonstrating its relevance to familiar human situations and/or reveals how it has been used in popular culture or public affairs.

Examples of creative presentation forms: a skit, dramatic reading or mock debate; a video montage; an exercise or electronic game for the rest of the students to do; a song parody; a dance or kinetic sculpture; an animation; or an annotated photo slide show. What you present may be original, or it may juxtapose four or more pre-existing cultural artifacts to make a point; the material may be fictional or factual.

All group members are required to participate in developing the presentation. Credit will be based half on a group grade for the quality and creativity of the presentation and how well it exemplifies the concept (10% of final grade), and half on individual effort (10% of final grade). On Blackboard you will find a Small Group Effort Log; each student in the small group must write up who did what when. Since some people would rather have a sharp stick poked in their eye than perform in front of a group, well-documented behind-the-scenes research and development effort will be given as much credit as actually presenting.

**D. Final exam** – The multiple choice exam on May 12 at 9 am will ask you to identify the correct definition of 25 of the 50 key concepts on a Scantron form. 35% of grade.
GRADING

Grades will be calculated on a 100-point scale:

- Key concepts guide: 10%
- Film interpretation paper: 35%
- Creative presentation: 20%
- Final exam: 35%

**Grading Scale:**

- 94-100= A
- 70-73= C
- 90-93= A-
- 66-69= C-
- 86-89= B+
- 62-65= D+
- 82-85= B
- 58-61= D
- 78-81= B-
- 54-57= D-
- 74-77= C+
- 53-00= F

**Policy on students’ opinions:** The film interpretation paper, the creative presentation, and classroom discussions all require you to put forward critical opinions. Feel free to try out views new to you or ones you aren’t sure you actually agree with. If you disagree with the professor or the author of a reading, you will not be graded more strictly for that; if you agree, you will not be graded more leniently. All positions you take will be evaluated by whether you have used evidence-based reasoning.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity standards are of utmost importance in this course. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the BC website at:

http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity

Outright plagiarism on the paper assignment or cheating on the final exam will result in failing the course and notification of the dean. Lesser degrees of noncompliance with BC’s policies on academic integrity will result in a lower grade on the assignment in question. It is your responsibility to know the rules of citation. If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with the professor.

**Disability accommodation**

Students needing a change in the time, location and/or format of the final exam due to a disability, or needing any other disability accommodation, should inform the professor at the beginning of the semester. For more information, please call the Dean for Students with Disabilities at 617-552-3470 or see http://www.bc.edu/offices/odsd/disabilityservices.html.