Sociology 376-001: Modern Sociological Theory
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Location: LUB: S195
Dates & Time: 9/6 - 12/14, T & Th. 9:30 – 10:45
Instructor: Matthew McCarthy
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Office Hours: T & Th. 11 – 12 in BOL: 778

Course Description and Objectives

This course presents an introduction to contemporary social thought specifically for the sociological mind. Throughout the semester we will cover a range of theorists who have pushed the intellectual boundaries of some of the classical thinkers like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, among others. The goals/objectives of this course are:

- Read and understand theory/theoretical writing
- Understand how theorists and theories relate to, and speak to one another
- Be able to apply theories to understand and explain contemporary events

Given these goals, we will spend a significant amount of time closely engaged with a number of different interpretations of some of the major branches of social theory and some of the leading theorists within. We will not only learn about those theories/theorists but we will learn how they extend and speak to one another. We will also spend a good deal of time grappling with current events and applying what we are learning with the aim at a richer and more critical understanding of those events.

Since theory is generally dense and complex reading, familiarity with assigned readings and constant participation in class is essential for not only your learning but your classmates’ learning as well. Often the best way to understand abstract theory is in conversation with other people’s interpretations.

Required Texts

In addition to the texts below, specially curated selections from some theorists and interpreters will be uploaded to the course D2L site. It is essential that you purchase the correct editions of the texts. The UWM bookstore will have copies in stock (though you may find it much cheaper to buy the book used online). In addition to the text described, there will sometimes be supplementary media on a given topic. These aspects of the course are required and will have direct bearing on the course’s assignments.


Organization of the Class

There is no attendance policy for this class. We are all adults and we all need to do what we need to do. That said, you are expected to be in class and there will be no make-ups for missed sessions. As a buffer I will allow you to drop two quizzes in the event that you are not there.

Each class session will consist of a series of tasks to be completed prior to a certain date and time specific to the assignment. In the past I have found that a continuous stream of small tasks is better for learning and mental health than a few very large tasks. As such, there is a pretty wide range of things that we will do in this class. The tasks are described below.

Course content subject to instructor revision
Reading, Supplementary Media, and Study Questions

At the beginning of each week we will have an assigned segment of reading and/or supplementary media that may take the form of video lectures from experts on a given topic or podcasts relevant to the material at hand. The first task in each segment is to read/watch/listen to all of this material and to take detailed notes. It is important to note that the readings and other media, while similar, will not simply repeat one another. That is, you will be assessed on content from all sources, some of which may be unique to that source. To help you in your readings and to direct your focus, I will supply you with a series of study questions. You do not need to turn in the questions, but I do suggest you answer them since they are a very good indication of how well you understand the material and what you might need to focus on. Your ability to answer these questions will be a good gauge of your performance in the course.

Generally, the first segment of readings will be oriented towards a general understanding of theory and a contextual placement within the larger set of theories we will cover. The second segment will usually include an additional (sometimes more difficult) work aimed at both solidifying your understanding and refining your thinking on a theory. This second segment will also include background material – article(s), video(s), etc. – for class discussion and application.

Quizzes

At the beginning of some classes, we will have a short multiple choice and short answer quiz on the readings assigned for that class. These quizzes will not be particularly difficult, but will assess whether or not you have read and basically understood the material. These quizzes will be unannounced and cannot be made up, but you will be able to drop your two lowest quiz grades. You should expect a quiz for every chapter. Quizzes will be graded on a 10pt scale. As a motivation for deeper reading, students who turn in a completed and correct copy (not the original) of the week’s study questions with their quiz will earn an additional point (10%) for their quiz grade.

Long Answers

In addition to the readings and quizzes you will have to choose two long answer questions from a list of questions on each chapter. These questions will be in an appropriately marked discussion forum on D2L. Before the last day of class (not the final exam date), you must answer one question each from the two categories listed below. Each question must be answered in no less than 400 words. There will be two types of questions that align with the goals of this class, the two types are:

- Understanding Key Concepts
- Relations between theories/Contextual Understanding

As always, plagiarism of any sort is unacceptable. Due to the brief nature of these assignments, no direct quotations are allowed. All work must be original and all thoughts expressed in your own words. Paraphrasing must not be too similar to the original text and must be cited with the appropriate page number (or time stamp on audio/video).

Each response will be graded on a 10pt scale. The use of direct quotations will result in a 1pt (10%) penalty per offense. Failure to meet the word count will be penalized based on the following scale: 1-25: 1pt., 26-50: 2 pts., 51-100: 3pts., >100 4 pts. You will be graded on accuracy, clarity of argument (this means that you must write convincingly and well, so proofread before you post), spelling, and word count.
Class Blog

In addition to the readings and quizzes we will all contribute to the maintenance of a class blog. I will set up this blog and provide the class with the appropriate information on how and when to contribute. Each student is required to contribute an entry to the blog over the course of the semester at times assigned by me. Additionally, all students must read each blog entry prior to class. Consider the blog a part of your normal reading assignment. While you are not required to respond to any blog posts on the actual blog itself, you are encouraged to. We will actively discuss the blog in class and it will be the subject of short response papers and potentially quizzes. Each blog post must be at least 400 words and draw closely on the work of the relevant class period to analyze a current event or cultural phenomenon that I will specify ahead of time.

All blog entries must be posted by 11:59 PM two days before the class period in which it will be discussed. So, if an entry is for a Thursday discussion (the most common scenario) you must post you blog entry by 11:59 PM on Tuesday.

You will also be required to briefly present your post to the class and assist me in leading discussion of the event/phenomenon in question and how the theories we are discussing help us question and understand the event/phenomenon. Prepare at least five (typed) open-ended discussion questions to assist you here. You will need to turn them in as part of your grade. Don't worry! The discussion will not rest entirely on your shoulders, as there will often be another classmate with the same assignment, you will have me on your side, and your classmates will have prepared response questions for discussion.

The grade breakdown will be as follows: 50% post, 40% presentation/discussion, 10% discussion questions. The post will be graded in the same way that the short answers are.

Responses

Every student is responsible for reading every blog post. For each post presentation day, everyone will need to come to class with a typed copy of the following:

- The title of the post you are responding to (does not count towards grade calculation)
- One thing about the analysis that you agreed with and why
- One thing about the analysis that you disagreed with and why
- Two open-ended discussion questions about the post

These will both help your peers facilitate and motivate class discussion. You will hand these in for a grade. They will be graded as 100% if they hit on all points, 90% for three, 80% for two, 70% for one, and 60% if they miss on all counts. These cannot be made up, but like the quizzes, I will drop your lowest two grades.

Final Exam

We will have a final exam in this class. It will have a multiple-choice section, short answer section, and an essay section with questions that you will select from a list of possible topics. I will provide you the essay section of the exam one week before the scheduled final date. The multiple choice and short answer sections will take place during our scheduled final. The essay section can be completed at your leisure, but must be submitted to the D2L dropbox by the due date. The exam will be cumulative. The grade breakdown will be 30/40/30 (MC/SA/Essay).
Grade Breakdown

Quizzes – 30%

Short Answers – 20% (10% + 10%)

Blog Post – 20%

Responses – 10%

Final Exam - 20%

*Please note that there will be no extra credit given in this course.

Grading Scale

100% - 94% = A; 93% - 90% = A-; 89% - 87% = B+; 86% - 84% = B; 83% - 80% = B-; 79% - 77% = C+; 76% - 74% = C; 73% - 70% = C-; 69% - 67% = D+; 66% - 64% = D; 63% - 60% = D-; ≤ 59% = F

Class Etiquette

Since the primary purpose in this class is to use theory to help understand our world, at times we may discuss fairly controversial subjects. It is crucial that we all respect one another and the right to hold different opinions. Along those lines, sexist, racist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive language will not be tolerated in any form. There is simply no legitimate reason for its use in class sessions, assignments, or life in general.

If you require special assistance, please see me immediately, so we can work together to ensure your success in this course.

University Workload Requirements

As the UW System assumes “that study leading to one semester credit represents an investment of time by the average student of not fewer than 48 hours” (UWS ACPS 4), a 3-credit course such as this one will require a minimum of 144 (3 x 48) hours of your time. You may find it necessary to spend additional time on a course; the numbers below only indicate that the course will not require any less of your time.

Since this is a traditional, or face-to-face course, you will spend a minimum of

- 37.5 hours in the classroom
- 75 hours preparing for class, which may include reading, note taking, completing minor exercises and assignments, and discussing course topics with classmates and the instructor in structured settings
- 31.5 hours preparing for and writing major papers and/or exams.

Since this course is predominantly reading and writing, the specific work requirements will differ from the university allocations. That is, you are not necessarily expected to spend more than the 106 hours outside of class over the course of the semester, but you are likely to have a different breakdown on coursework than 75 and 31.5 as indicated above. Realistically, you should expect to spend a little more than two hours outside of class each week for every hour spent in class on reading and reflection, while your remaining time will be spent on your major assignments.
Course schedule

*D2L dates will be marked where appropriate

Week 1 – Introductions & Review
9/6: Introductions/Syllabus
9/8: Review of the classics – Ch.1 in textbook & D2L

Week 2 – The Critical Theorists of The Frankfurt School
9/13: Part of Ch. 2 in textbook & D2L
9/15: D2L

Week 3 – Symbolic Interactionism
9/20: Ch. 3 in textbook & D2L
9/22: D2L

Week 4 – The Interaction Order
9/27: Ch. 4 & 5 in textbook
9/29: D2L

Week 5 – Phenomenology
10/4: D2L
10/6: D2L

Week 6 – Bourdieu
10/11: Ch. 8 in textbook
10/13: D2L

Week 7 – Foucault
10/18: Ch. 9 in textbook & D2L
10/20: D2L

Week 8 – Global/Networked Systems
10/25: D2L
10/27: Ch. 11 in textbook

Week 9 – Habermas
11/1: Ch. 12 in textbook
11/3: D2L

Week 10 – Giddens
11/8: Ch. 14 in textbook
11/10: D2L

Course content subject to instructor revision
Week 11 – Intersectionality & Race Theory
11/15: Ch. 15 in textbook
11/17: D2L

Week 12: 11/22 & 11/24 – Thanksgiving Break

Week 13 – Postmodernism
11/29: D2L
12/1: D2L

Week 14 – Feminism/Queer Theory
12/6: Ch. 16 in textbook
12/8: Ch. 17 in textbook & D2L

Week 15 – Postcolonialism
12/13: D2L
12/15: D2L

Final Exam
TBD
The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that page is: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf)

**Students with Disabilities.** Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate material and test accommodations can be found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/arc](http://www4.uwm.edu/arc)

**Religious Observances.** Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm)

**Students called to active Military Duty.** Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/academics/military.cfm](http://www4.uwm.edu/academics/military.cfm)

**Incompletes.** You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above. The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf)

**Discriminatory Conduct** (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf)

**Academic Misconduct.** Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following [http://www4.uwm.edu/dos/conduct/](http://www4.uwm.edu/dos/conduct/)

**Complaint Procedures.** Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf)

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the sociology department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College of Letters & Science. Procedures for undergraduate student grade appeal can be found at [http://www4.uwm.edu/letsci/upload/grievance_procedure.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/letsci/upload/grievance_procedure.pdf)

Procedures for graduate student grade appeal can be found at [http://uwm.edu/graduateschool/academic-appeals-procedure/](http://uwm.edu/graduateschool/academic-appeals-procedure/)

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S22.htm](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S22.htm)

**Book Royalties.** In accord with Department of Sociology policy, the royalties from the sale of faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation/Sociology Account to support future awards and activities for UWM students in Sociology.