

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY/WE

SOAN 360
Spring 2014
TR 10:30 – 11:50 pm, 2225 BT
Office Hours: MW 10 am-2 pm

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Program Information:

Sociological Theory is a required course for students on the sociology track through the Sociology/Anthropology major and a recommended course for Sociology minors. This course builds on factual knowledge, and cognitive and practical skills developed in the 100-level and 200-level survey courses. The course is intended to be taken: 1) after completion of at least two 200-level survey courses (for example, SOAN 267 Social Psychology and SOAN 265 Structured Inequalities); 2) in the same semester as Research Design (required for majors, not minors); and 3) one semester before Data Analysis and Reporting (required for majors, not minors).

Integration of Sociological Theory and Research Design is accomplished with early discussion of the link between theory and methods, and assignments focused on developing skills at thinking theoretically and using theories and concepts to explain social issues and problems.

Course Description:

In our daily lives, we face an onslaught of problems and issues, and it isn't only "experts" and politicians who can offer explanations and solutions. In some ways, we are all amateur social theorists, seeking to explain the world in which we live, and to gain a deeper understanding of how the world works. However, our ability to find useful answers and solutions to critical issues and problems depends on how well we ask our questions about society, and on the quality of the explanations we offer. This course encourages students to sharpen their skills at asking questions and proposing explanations of social issues through a study of how their predecessors in sociology critically examined society. By reading and analyzing the work of classical and more contemporary theorists, we can learn about what it means to study the social world through theoretical questions. And by observing how contemporary theorists have improved on the ideas and explanations of the classical theorists and applied them to contemporary problems, we can equip ourselves to modify and apply existing theoretical ideas to answer questions, and potentially effect positive change in our social world. We can accomplish these goals by sharpening our critical thinking and analytical skills through reading and collaborative discussion of social theories, and reflective and analytical writing. Sociological Theory is a Writing Enhanced course, and writing, along with deep, critical reading, is emphasized as a means of achieving a deeper understanding of the subject matter and its relevance to life experiences. Furthering students' ability to write critically and thoughtfully is therefore a major goal of the course. Writing Enhanced elements of the course include a series of analytical and reflective papers, which allow students to demonstrate improvement in their understanding of existing theories and their ability to develop their own theoretical explanations, as well as improvement in the quality of their writing in terms of both content and mechanics.

Specifically the course is designed to:

- 1) provide students with in-depth knowledge of how major classical and contemporary theorists have used theory to make sense of the social world;

- 2) enhance students' critical thinking skills and ability to theorize for themselves by asking them to identify the strategies of classical and contemporary theorists and to use these strategies to develop theory-based explanations/solutions for a specific social issue/problem;
- 3) use writing as a mode of learning as well as a method of communicating what was learned; students will exhibit the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, reflect and engage in other forms of critical reading, thinking, and writing.

Central design principles for all department courses are:

- 1) that being a successful participant in an academic discipline requires that students are taught the expectations of the discipline;
- 2) that it is necessary to have knowledge to think with;
- 3) that it is necessary to learn skills to read, evaluate, and craft arguments;
- 4) that it is necessary to learn skills to identify and collect appropriate data, perform analysis and report results; and
- 5) that it is important to encourage students to participate in activities that require them to apply and engage the knowledge and skills they learn in classes.

Required Books:

James Farganis, *Readings in Social Theory: the Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*. 6th edition. McGraw-Hill, 2011.

While most of the required readings are found in the text, supplemental readings may be added during the semester.

Course Requirements:

- 1. Collaborative Learning:** Much of the learning in this course will be collaborative and based on the kind of dialogue which assumes that all participants have something to contribute to our understanding of the material we will be reading. Through dialogue we seek to grasp each other's positions and to be responsive to what they share with us. We accept differences of opinion as helpful and clarifying, and are open to new ways of thinking. In dialogue, we can be rigorous and critical, but within a positive context. The goal of our collaboration will be to gain an understanding of classical and contemporary theories, and to learn HOW to theorize and to put theories to work in solving problems and addressing social issues. Much of the work will be done in small groups (30 – 40 minutes), followed by class discussion (20 - 30 minutes), and teacher comments and student evaluation (10-15 minutes). 30% of your grade will be based on participation in the oral and written group work, while the other 70% will be based on individual written work (reading analyses and applied papers).
- 2. Writing Assignments:** See below.
- 3. Class Attendance:** Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions and assignments is essential for doing well in this course. I expect you to be in class every Tuesday and Thursday unless you have a valid reason for not being there (family emergencies, illnesses, or pre-arranged, university-sponsored activities). For an absence to be excused, you need to contact me (in advance, if possible) to let me know why your absence is necessary. Late reading analyses due to unexcused absences will only receive half credit.
- 4. Academic Honesty:** You should all be familiar with Truman State's policy on academic honesty (in the *General/Graduate Bulletin*). I expect you to do your own work, and to give proper credit

when you borrow from the work of others. This means that when you copy or closely paraphrase someone else's work you should use quotations and/or give them credit as a source.

5. **ADA Compliance:** The university is committed to making every possible effort to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Disability Services office (x4478) as soon as possible.
6. **Some advice:** The Writing Center in McClain 303B (x4484) is open from 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday, and is a very good resource for improving your writing. Also, please note that we will be making use of the Blackboard website for email messages, announcements, etc. You need to be sure that the email address listed for you on the Blackboard website is an address that you check regularly. If you use an email address other than your Truman email address, you need to find out how to change the address listed for you on Blackboard.

Your course grade will be calculated in the following way:

Class Participation		30%
Oral participation, group exercises		
Individual Written Assignments		70%
Reading analyses and applications		20%
Applied theory papers (5)		50%
A	=	90% or above
B	=	80%-89%
C	=	70%-79%
D	=	60%-69%
F	=	less than 60%

Office Hours and Assistance:

Please feel free to come by during office hours to discuss any questions you may have regarding the course or issues raised in class. My regular office hours are Monday and Wednesday from 10 am – 2 pm. If you cannot come in during office hours, I will try to arrange a time convenient for you.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

(Please note that the class schedule is tentative and may be modified over the course of the semester.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
PART I: THE CLASSIC TRADITION		
1/14	Introduction to Theorizing	
1/16	Discussion of components of theory, argument analysis, and	Handout (Lemert) Farganis 1-11

Erving Goffman 307-316
Arlie Hochschild 316-327

PART III: MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNISM

4/8, 4/10 Critical Theory
Herbert Marcuse Farganis, 15-19, 331-347
Jurgen Habermas 348-355

4/17 Post-Modernism
Michel Foucault Farganis, 357-368
Jean-Francois Lyotard 368-379

PART IV: AFTER POSTMODERNISM

4/22, 4/24 Sex, Gender, Queer Theory,
and Race Farganis, 19-24, 383-409
420-438

Paper #4 due on 5/1

4/29, 5/1 Global Society: Two Perspectives Farganis, 441-442, handout -
“Divided World, Divided Nations,”
451-455

Paper #5 due on Monday, May 5, 9:30 am

Writing Assignments:

- 1) Reading responses and class work:** For each theorist, you will be asked to construct a response (one to two pages) to the assigned reading in Farganis that identifies basic assumptions, key ideas and concepts, discusses/explains at least one major theoretical argument he/she uses to explain an aspect of the social world, and suggests a purpose for his/her writing. Responses should be organized in two columns: in the first column, you will briefly summarize (in note form) the material you are reading [must be typed and single spaced]; in the second column you will record your reactions, identify assumptions about social reality, key concepts, and theoretical arguments, and comment on what you understand to be the theorist’s methodology, purpose for writing, etc. [may be typed or hand-written]. Since we are all theorists (Lemert), each of us has our own theorizing practices and experiences that will help us understand different aspects of the theorizing of the professional theorists, and that can contribute to our overall collaborative understanding. Individual reading responses will therefore be shared in discussion groups (your written response will serve as your “ticket” to participation in the group work) and will be turned in for credit at the end of the discussion of that particular reading or theorist. Students who come to class without their reading response may participate in the group discussion, but will only receive half-credit for both individual and group work for that theorist. (The lowest grade for one individual and one group assignment will be dropped at the end of the semester.) Group

discussion will focus on theoretical analysis in response to focused questions on the reading, and application of theoretical ideas to group members' social issues/problems, with members alternately serving as group facilitator and recorder. A brief summary of group work will be turned in at the end of the discussion. *"You must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it."* – C. Wright Mills

Group work will be followed by oral reports of group discoveries and questions, and full class discussion. Additional comments/ideas/questions may be added by the professor at the end of the class discussion.

2) Applied Papers

a) Paper #1

Marx, Weber, Durkheim and the early symbolic interactionists are often considered classical sociological theorists; the women and people of color we will be studying are not. Much of the reason for this has to do with our definition of "theory" and of "classical theory." Based on reading and discussion, write a clear, thoughtful 2-3 page paper that addresses the following issues/questions:

1. Lemert critiques the idea that social theory is something that only experts can produce. What is his argument? That is, who can produce theory and why?
2. What is classical sociological theory? That is, what kinds of factors are involved in the labeling of a particular theorist/work as "classical"? Be sure to include a discussion of the "canon" in your answer.
3. What is the value (if any) in reading the work of women and people of color as part of a course on sociological theory? Is there a place for them in the "canon"?

b) Paper #2

Choose a social issue or problem of particular concern to you, and use the library databases in sociology to find at least three recent journal articles that address the issue. All of the articles should offer a theoretical analysis of the problem, and at least one article should come from the journal *Sociological Theory*. Use information provided in the articles to outline the nature and extent of the problem, theoretical explanations of the problem, and possible solutions being offered in these articles. How useful and helpful is each theoretical analysis for understanding the problem? (3-4 pages)

c) Paper #3

Which of the (classical) theories/theorists that we've studied so far do you think is most useful for explaining, analyzing and solving the social issue or problem you wrote about in Paper #2? Explain why you think this approach is the most useful: Outline parts of the theory that apply to your problem and explain how they relate. In other words, how does this theorist's approach to understanding the social world apply to your particular issue? What are the implications of this theory for a research program or policy option that addresses this issue? Be as specific as possible. In addition, you need to identify some of the limitations involved in using this perspective to explain your chosen social issue. What kinds of questions are you unable to address from this perspective and which other theories/theorists we have studied would help you address these questions? (3-5 pages)

d) Paper #4

We have examined the work of a number of different theorists in this course. Which of them (classical and/or contemporary) do you consider to be the most useful for explaining, analyzing and solving the social issue or problem you wrote about in Paper #2? What is it about the work of these theorists that makes them useful? This time, you need to discuss

at least two different theorists (preferably a classical theorist and a contemporary theorist who in some way improves on or develops the ideas of the classical theorist) and show how their theoretical work helps you understand and address your particular social problem. As in the previous paper, you should outline parts of each theory that apply to your problem and explain how they relate. What does each theorist suggest is the best way to do research and to learn more about your issue? And what social policy solutions for this issue would be implied by each theory? Be sure to discuss why the combination of these theorists' approach to theorizing is especially useful. You might also want to discuss whether their approaches call into question or complement the research program and/or policy options suggested by the work of the theorist you wrote about in Paper #3. (4-6 pages)

e) Paper #5

Reflect on what you think you have learned in this course. What have you learned about the value of sociological theory and theorizing? What did you learn from applying theoretical approaches to a social problem or issue? How would you characterize yourself as a social theorist? What is your view of the social world and how it works? of human nature, social order, and social change? (3-4 pages)