

Soc202 Contemporary Sociological Theory

Term 2: 2010

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Course Title	:	Contemporary Sociological Theory
Course Code	:	SOC202
Recommended Study Year	:	2 and 3
No. of Credits/ Term	:	3
Mode of Tuition	:	Lecture-Tutorial
Class Contact Hours	:	Three hours per week
Category in Major Prog	:	Discipline Concentration-required
Discipline	:	Sociology
Prerequisite(s)	:	(a) SOC101 Introduction to Sociology, or Sociology, or (c) CUS106 The Making of Modern Culture
Co-requisite(s)	:	None
Exclusion(s)	:	None
Exemption Requirements(s)	:	None

Aims

This course aims to acquaint students with the main schools of modern sociological theory. Students will scrutinize salient concepts and key thinkers. They will learn how sociological theory is relevant to understanding modern life. They will become adept at recognizing, and evaluating, the conflict tradition, the Durkheimian tradition, and the micro-interactionist tradition. Students will also be exposed to the connections between classical and contemporary theory and to debates around the following questions: What is “scientific” knowledge in the social sciences? How much impact can individuals have in shaping social structure? What is the nature of social action, social conflict and social ritual?

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students

1. Will be able to recognize the origins and structure of modern sociological theory
2. Will be able speak and write clearly on the major concepts and theorists covered in this course
3. Will be able to explain the similarities and differences between social and natural science approaches
4. Will be able to evaluate contemporary sociological theories and apply them to social research questions

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The above learning outcomes will be assessed, respectively, by

1. Requiring students to write a term paper (30%) on at least one key issue in modern sociological theory, and writing an examination (40%) that encompasses all three sociological paradigms
2. Tutorial group presentations (20%), preceded by an advisory pre-tutorial meeting with the instructor to ensure that the salient issues are understood. Class participation, measured by the instructors' notes on attendees, will earn up to a further 10%
3. Regular instructor feed-back sessions throughout the term to gauge student comprehension.
4. Class simulations in which sociological theories are applied to Hong Kong issues (e.g. mass response to emergency [SARS], social conflict, rituals of patriotism, crime and delinquency).

Hence: Continuous Assessment (tutorial presentation, class participation, term paper) = 60%

Examination = 40%

Good Practices

1. The instructor will be regularly available to see students, talk to them by phone and communicate with them through email
2. The instructor will return all student work within two weeks of its submission
3. Students will attend all classes of this course and do so on time
4. Students will produce the work that is required of them on the day that it is required
5. Students and the instructor will create a respectful atmosphere in which plural and contrasting views can be expressed

Indicative Content

1. Introduction: The nature of social theorizing.
2. Science, values, explanation and prediction.

3. Action and social action.
4. Varieties of conflict theory I: Power
5. Varieties of conflict theory II: Revolutions and Ethnic Cleansing
6. The Durkheimian legacy I: the nature of religion
7. The Durkheimian legacy II: Interaction ritual theory.
8. Ethnomethodology.
9. Symbolic interactionism.
10. Social Exchange and Rational Choice theory.
12. Critical Theory.
13. Postmodernism and poststructuralism.
14. Hermeneutics and the “canon”.

Required Reading

Jeffrey Alexander, *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Recommended/ Supplementary Readings

Peter Berger, *A Far Glory. The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*, New York: Free Press, 1992.

Donald Black, *The Social Structure of Right and Wrong*, San Diego: Academic Press, 1993.

Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Len Doyal and Roger Harris, *Empiricism, Explanation and Rationality*, London: Routledge, 1987.

Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption*, London: Profile Books, 1999.

Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.

Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Erving Goffman, *Stigma, Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd and expanded ed., London: Palgrave, 2005.

Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Thomas J. Scheff, *Microsociology. Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978. (For our purposes, the two most important chapters are Part 1, chapter I “Basic Sociological Categories”; and Part 1, chapter III: “The Types of Legitimate Domination”.)

DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines selectively a range of sociological theories. It is often assumed that these theories (for instance, conflict theory, exchange theory, Durkheimian theory) are alternatives from which one must choose. My approach is to suggest that many theoretical perspectives in sociology can be combined to produce a rich understanding of modern life. Over the last century, sociology has made great strides. But the greatest advances have been made by people who knew well, and who adapted, sociology’s classical tradition. This course will do the same. It will build on the classics (Marx,

Durkheim , Weber, Mead etc.) To that extent, it will also help reinforce the other course which most of you did last term: Classical Sociological Theory.

The key background text of this course is Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*. Also useful, is Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings*, to which I will also refer.

Three other texts that cover a lot of the ground this course deals with are:

- a) Jeffrey Alexander, *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*
- b) Randall Collins, *Theoretical Sociology*
- c) George Ritzer, *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (available in a number of editions; any one will do)

This is a demanding and challenging course. You are advised to prepare carefully for it.

Course Assessment:

A) Tutorial Presentations = 20%

Tutorials in this class are different from most other tutorials. The emphasis is on reading and discussing only a few texts – but reading them deeply and discussing them well. Each tutorial is focused on one or two texts that all students must read and should bring to class. The presenters will a) summarise the key points of the text; and b) raise questions – their questions – about it (for instance, what it means to them, what aspects of it they find difficult, contentious, significant, etc.) Presentations should be clear, invite discussion and be between 25 and 30 minutes long. They should end with at least two questions posed to the tutorial group for discussion.

Attendance in tutorials is **mandatory**; students who miss tutorials without good reason (explained to the instructors), will have marks deducted from the continuous assessment portion of their grade. (A deduction of 5% of the total mark for each tutorial gratuitously missed.) Tutorials will run on alternate weeks, so as to provide extra time for reading and preparation. The group responsible for the *In-class tutorial* presentation must come to see me **the previous week** during the scheduled tutorial period, with an **outline** of their presentation. I will offer feedback, more texts to look at, and suggestions.

B) Participation = 10%

All students are expected to contribute to the tutorials by asking questions, by contributing ideas, all underpinned by reading for the course.

Term Paper = 30%

You can choose a title from the tutorial topics below - students should ask me for extra reading but are expected to search for their own – or you can formulate your own question *provided it is first negotiated with me*. **Students are not allowed to choose, for the term paper, their tutorial topic.** Term papers should be around 3000 words, typed, and double-spaced. The deadline is Friday April 16th at 5.00 pm. Term papers **must** be fully referenced either using footnotes or endnotes. A list of references on the final page of the paper is insufficient. Typically, a term paper will utilize at least eight references, so you must read more than the texts listed below (do your own research in the library!). Cite your sources (references) in detail – give the page numbers - and be careful to avoid plagiarism. **This means that you must note the sources of quotations, data and general information in the essay. These sources/references should appear in alphabetical order in your list of references/bibliography.**

According to Langan University and Social Sciences Programme policy, plagiarism is **"presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgment of the source"**. **Plagiarism** (unattributed copying) will be heavily penalised and may attract a zero mark and disciplinary action.

End of Term Exam = 40% NOTE: THE EXAM IS SCHEDULED FOR THE LAST WEEK OF TERM ON APRIL 23

Week 1 (January 11-15) Introduction to the Course

Week 2 (January 18-22) The Nature of Scientific Theory: A contrast between Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn.

Week 3 (January 25-29) The Nature of Sociological Theory. The Sociological Vocation; three perspectives. What is “academic freedom”?

In-class tutorials this week on Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation;” Stanley Fish, “Do your job”.

Week 4 (February 1-5) Conflict Theory I: Weber and Schmitt on Politics and the State. Power. The idea and practice of *jihad* as a mode of friend-enemy distinction.

Week 5 (February 8-12). Conflict Theory II: Macro: War and its causes; state breakdown theories of revolution. Micro: tension, fear, “forward panic,” domestic violence.

In-class tutorials this week on Steven Lukes, *Steven Lukes, “Power, A Radical View”*

Week 6 (February 15-19). CHINESE NEW YEAR. NO CLASSES FOR THIS COURSE

Week 7 (February 22-26) Conflict Theory III: Diversity, Plurality, Heterogeneity.

In-class tutorials this week on Steven Lukes “Power, Reason, and Freedom;” Hannah Arendt, “Communicative power”.

Week 8 (March 1-5) Interaction Ritual Theory I: Durkheim’s contribution; Goffman on the Presentation of Self; Stigma.

Week 9 (March 8-12) Interaction Ritual Theory II: The sacred transgressed: Honor Killing; the Sociology of Apology and Failed Apology: German-Israel, Japan-China.

In-class tutorials this week on Jack Katz “Righteous Slaughter”. Randall Collins, “Attacking the weak: Domestic Abuse”.

Week 10 (March 15-March 19) Interaction Ritual Theory III: The Sociology of Mental Life and the causes of Schizophrenia.

Week 11 (March 22-March 26) The Microinteractionist Tradition: Ethnomethodology

In-class tutorial this week on Thomas Scheff, “Shame and Conformity: the Deference Emotion System.” Donald Black, “Crime as Social Control”.

Week 12 (March 29-April 2). NO LECTURE ON FRIDAY (EASTER HOLIDAYS)

Week 13 (April 5-9) Guest Lecture: Crystal So on “Turning Points”

Week 14 (April 12-16). Revision

No in-class tutorials this week; week for your own revision

Week 15 April 23 EXAM
