SOCIOMETRY 587  
CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY  
Spring 2013

Professor: Claire Decoteau  
Office: 4112 D  
Email: decoteau@uic.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-3pm and by appointment  
Phone: (312) 413-3755  
CRN: 30132  
Credits: 4

“Creating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting points and its rich environment. But the point from which we started out still exists and can be seen, although it appears smaller and forms a tiny part of our broad view gained by the mastery of the obstacles on our adventurous way up.” – Albert Einstein

Sociology 587 is the second semester of a year-long course surveying the theories and practices of sociology. Theory is abstract by definition, but it is meant to provide us with the tools we require to better understand our empirical worlds. We will analyze the context out of which these theories developed, the uses to which they have been put, the debates they have sparked, and the influences they have had on the development of later theories. In other words, we will analyze theory as it is grounded in the empirical, but also the ways it has inspired new trends and perspectives.

During this semester, we will trace the genealogies of major theoretical approaches in contemporary sociology. Rather than offering a strict linear history of theory from WWII to the present, the class follows a looser historical trajectory, focusing on the ways in which the theories build upon and debate with one another. The course is organized according to epistemological orientations and key debates. With the earlier readings, I will also provide you with some contemporary applications of the theoretical approaches. Although we will read but a sample of the field, this class will hopefully whet your theoretical appetites and provide you with the tools you require to pursue the theories most relevant to your own interests.

Because it is not organized linearly, I will supplement the readings with orienting lectures which will provide a landscape for your comprehension of the field. In addition, I will help to point out the key debates these theories touch on (including debates about identity, epistemology, power, ideology, structure vs. agency, etc), and discussion of these debates will be an important focus of our work together throughout the term. The course remains deliberately open-ended; it seeks to convey a sense of what “doing theory” is all about rather than envisioning a final theoretical or practical resolution of all of the questions that will inevitably be raised throughout the term.

Course Requirements
This is a reading-heavy course. We will read, on average, 200 pages of somewhat dense theory each week. Students are expected to complete all of the readings and come to the class prepared to actively discuss them. The success of this course will be dependent on quality discussions. In fact, the bulk of the work for this class will be spent reading and preparing for class each week. If you do not participate in some way during class discussion or if, for some reason, I think you have not completed the readings for the class, you will not receive participation credit. (Some of the readings are very demanding, and the amount of reading is quite substantial, so be sure to plan plenty of time to prepare for this class each week.)
**Presentations:** In addition to the required reading, each student is required to select a particular week to present supplemental material and relate it back to the required reading. The syllabus indicates the optional presentation material for each week. You will be given a **strict 15 minutes** of class time to provide: 1) a **brief** summary of the main argument of the monograph; 2) an analysis of how the book relates to, goes beyond, or challenges the required reading for the week; 3) a critique of the book or original intervention about the book. Because the other students will be unfamiliar with the material, handouts are encouraged. In addition, you will be required to submit a paper on the material the week of your presentation. The paper should be 7-10 pages in length. You will be graded on the accuracy of your summary, your ability to relate the supplemental material to the required course material in a clear and analytic fashion, and the originality of your critique or theoretical intervention. *Presentation papers will be due on the Friday of the week you have presented. If you have chosen a presentation week when there is also a substantive paper due, you will be given a one-week extension on your substantive paper.*

**Three Papers:** You will be required to write three short (5-7 page) papers for this course. You will be given a prompt (or a selection of prompts) which will ask you to synthesize the readings from a particular section. The papers will ask you to comment on the relationships between the theorists/approaches, the key debates sparked, and/or the major contributions of a particular field of study. The papers are meant to provide you with training on how to succinctly synthesize a theoretical field and provide a critical, analytic intervention of your own – training that will be helpful as you look toward your preliminary exams. *This semester, the papers will NOT be due at 5pm on the due date.*

**Discussion Questions:** Each week, you are asked to send me 1-2 discussion questions on the Tuesday before class (by noon). You can ask clarificatory questions, but they need to be specific. In other words, ‘I don’t understand habitus’ is not an adequate question. Rather, you need to tell me precisely what is confusing about the concept, and put it in the context of the rest of the reading. In other words, the questions are meant to help the class move forward in understanding the theories and/or to promote/instigate discussion of key concepts or debates. *These are a required component of your participation grade.*

**Grades:**
- Participation: 20%
- Presentation: 20%
- Paper 1: 20%
- Paper 2: 20%
- Paper 3: 20%

**Books to Purchase:**

**Course Materials:** All other readings are available on the course Blackboard site. I would like you to bring copies of the readings to class.
SYLLABUS

January 16th Introduction and Overview of the Course [96]


January 23rd Micro-Sociology: Phenomenology, Social Constructionism, Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology [234]


Possible Presentation Material:
January 30th  Structuralism [180]

Selections: Part I, Chapters 1-3, 65-98; Part Two, Chapter 4, 110-120.

Possible Presentation Materials:

February 6th  Critical Theory [196]


Possible Presentation Material:
February 13th  Culture and Cultural Analysis [226]


Possible Presentation Materials:


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February 20th  Postmodernity and Post-Structuralism [142]


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Possible Presentation Material:

**February 27th Pierre Bourdieu: Field, Capital and Habitus**

**Giddens and Sewell on Structure & Agency [191]**


**Possible Presentation Material:**

**March 6th  Michel Foucault, I**


**Possible Presentation Material:**

**March 13th  Michel Foucault, II [153] – Guest Instructor: Andy Clarno**

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**No Presentations This Week**

**March 20**

March 20** Debates in Post-Structuralism: Identity and Ideology [148]


**Possible Presentation Material:**


**SPRING BREAK**

April 3**

April 3rd Epistemologies: Positivism, Critical Realism, Standpoint Theory, and Interpretation [279] – Guest Lecturer: Isaac Reed


**No Presentations This Week**
April 10th  The Sociology of Knowledge [158]


**Possible Presentation Material:**

April 17th  Sovereignty and Exceptionalism [166]


**Possible Presentation Material:**
April 24th    Post-Colonialism [177]


Possible Presentation Material:


May 1st    Globalization and Empire [164]

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Possible Presentation Material:

**PAPER #3 DUE ON MONDAY, May 6th **