



Department of Sociology, Davison Hall, 26 Nichol Avenue
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Contemporary Sociological Theory (920 314:04-05; Spring 2013)

Instructor: Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell

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Office hours: T: 1:00-2:00 in 048 Davison Hall, DC; W: 3:30-4:30 in Livingston Student Center

TA: Hsin-Yi Yeh

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Office hours: T: 1:00-2:00 in 048 Davison Hall, DC – *to be confirmed*

Lectures:

All students: T/Th4 (2:15-3:35) in RAB 206 with Liz Mitchell

Recitation classes:

Section 04 T5* (4:10-5:05pm) in RAB 110A with Hsin-Yi Yeh

Section 05 Th5* (4:10-5:05pm) in RAB 110A with Hsin-Yi Yeh

With student and TA agreement, the recitation classes may start and end earlier than formally scheduled.

INTRODUCTION

Each of us theorizes about social actions and social relations: We try to explain why things happen to us ... what's going on in our world today... why things are different now than they were before... . Sociological theorists think like the rest of us - though hopefully in a slightly more organized or sophisticated way.

We can think of social theory as abstract ideas that simplify and explain our experiences of social reality -- yet our ideas, including those we call social theories, are intricately interwoven with the familiar practical experiences of everyday social life. Contemporary sociological theories are ideas derived in part *from* the life experiences of the theorists who wrote them -- but contemporary social theory also has an *impact on* how we understand and act in the world.

Contemporary Sociological theorists are also influenced by the ideas of earlier classical theorists. Thus, since many students in this class have not studied classical theory, we face the challenge of learning not only contemporary theories, but also their origins in the classical Sociological works.

Observation of our social world, coupled with mental reflection about those experiences, is essential to organizing our minds so that we can interpret, criticize, and develop formal and informal theoretical explanations of social experience that can assist us in adapting to, and changing, our social world. This is as true for well-known social theorists as it is for each one of us. Welcome to Sociological theory!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, I hope you:

- (1) have a basic understanding of the major conceptual themes and intellectual issues of contemporary Sociological theory;
- (2) are able to use Sociological theory effectively in your own research and writing, both in this and in other courses; and
- (3) have improved your thinking and (oral and written) communication skills that are essential to everyday existence in postmodern society.
- (4) will use the knowledge, and the analytic and communication skills you gain here, to reflect on important issues in your own life - and to make more considered decisions about social interactions that affect yourself, other people, and the social institutions in which you live and work.

CLASS FORMAT

The course includes (interruptible) lectures on two days a week. This four-credit course has a required recitation class that follows the lecture on one day each week. Some students find social theory abstract and challenging, thus the recitation class allows more opportunity for interactive learning and discussion.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

I expect you, as a student in this class, to take responsibility for your own learning. Readings are essential to understanding the course content. Please make every effort before class to read, and reread, study, and assimilate the assigned material, to the best of your ability. To improve your class performance, try to draw on your own personal experiences and academic knowledge to respond in class and in written assignments and tests to the writings of the social theorists we encounter.

ASSIGNMENTS, TESTS, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE

Assignments include three short written assignments (30% of grade), and two essay-type tests (each 30% of grade). Recitation performance, including quiz grades, accounts for 10% of your grade. Class attendance, including arriving on time and staying until the end of lecture is essential to good performance – and may, along with strong class participation, positively affect a very marginal course grade. Important assignments and announcements are given at the beginning of each class period. You do not want to miss these! No late papers or make-up exams are permitted without a valid written excuse, such as a note from your doctor, the police department, or your dean. Please note that you must bring hard copies of all assignment to class - - AND submit an electronic version to Turnitin (via the Sakai website for our class). As you know, Turnitin checks your work for plagiarism. Failure to submit papers on time to Turnitin and in hard-copy format will result in late penalties.

GRADING

I recommend that you keep an eye on your grade *during the semester* and, if you're concerned about your performance, please come see me, and/or your TA, well before the end of the course! We may be able to suggest ways of improving your performance during the semester – but neither you, nor we, can do anything about your grade once the semester is over! Note that extra credit is not permitted in this class.

Grade Ranges

A	90-100%
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79
C	70-74
D	60-69
F	<60

ETHICS

It is acceptable to read, assimilate, and use other people's ideas, as long as you give credit to the original author. You act professionally and ethically when you do this – and protect yourself from charges of plagiarism! It is useful to discuss theories with other students and with your professors -- but dishonest to present, as yours, the ideas of peers, writers, or Internet sources. Such behavior constitutes plagiarism and incurs failure in the class - and potentially dismissal from Rutgers. (See Rutgers academic integrity policy at: <http://sociology.camden.rutgers.edu/curriculum/plagiarism.htm>.) So, please remember, in your written work, to use your own words to express your ideas, NOT those of a peer, textbook author, or some Internet source. To give credit to the original author and to protect yourself from charges of dishonesty, always cite - within your text - the sources you've used and, in addition, include references to these sources in a Works Cited list at the end of your written text. (If you need help with citations see our class Sakai website - under the resources tab - or ask one me.)

CLASSROOM NORMS

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Thus, behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without informing your instructor, discourteous remarks, and other disrespectful behavior. Courteous and lawful expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, encouraged. If a student engages in disruptive behavior, the instructor, following the University Code of Student Conduct, may direct the student to leave class for the remainder of the class period. Finally, please schedule personal appointments and other commitments at times other than when our class meets.

TEXTS AND OTHER REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

Textbooks have been ordered at the B&N campus bookstore - and are on reserve at Kilmer Library. Copies are also available at multiple online sources.

1. **Required:** Michele Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010 (ISBN 1405170026) (New from Amazon: \$33.98; used: \$18.98; rental \$17.98)

2. **Recommended:** Peter Kivisto (Editor), *Social Theory: Roots and Branches: Readings*, Oxford Press: 4th ed., 2011, or 5th ed. 2012; (Some – but not all – Kivisto readings are on the Sakai/resources page.)

3. A few additional required readings are available on Sakai or elsewhere on the Internet. You may want to download these to read in advance of their due date.

The Dillon book is best used to gain a brief summary of the theories, while the Kivisto readings give you access to the original works of the theorists listed in the syllabus. (*Note that Kivisto is not the author of these excerpts – and should be cited in your writing as an editor of theories written by other authors.*)

Reserve copies of both textbooks are available for 2-hour in-library loans at the Douglass Library.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note 1: Page numbers for Kivisto readings refer to the 2011 4th edition.

1.22 I. First day introductions

Read for next meeting: Dillon, 2-29

1.24-29 II. Analytic Concepts

Read for next week: Emile Durkheim in Kivisto, 38-42, 43-48, 49-55;
Dillon, 78-111

(Readings and lectures do not coincide this week.)

1.31-2.19 III. Functionalism

A. Classical functionalism: The contribution of Emile Durkheim

(See last week's readings.)

B. Analytic functionalism of Talcott Parsons: Dillon, 154-172; Parsons in Kivisto, 195-200

C. Robert Merton's functionalist "fix": Dillon, 172-178; Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Social Action", in Kivisto, 187-192

2.21-3.14 IV. Conflict Theory

A. Marx's conflict theory:

Dillon, 32-72;

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848; Part 1: Bourgeois and Proletarians", in Kivisto, 17-23, or see:

<http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html> or Google "communist manifesto";

Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor" in Kivisto, 3-10, or see

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm> or Google "estranged labor"

B. Max Weber's theory of power and domination: Dillon, 133-145; Strongly suggested: Weber, "Bureaucracy", in Kivisto, 82-87; and Weber, "Class, Status, Party", in Kivisto, 95-100

C. *Tentatively* Georg Simmel's classical conflict theory: Simmel, "Conflict as the Basis of Group Formation", in Kivisto, 114-118

D. Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory: Dillon, 216-220;

Dahrendorf: "Conflict Groups and Group Conflicts", in Kivisto, 226-232;

3.12 FIRST TEST (Tuesday)

3.19-21 Spring Break – Enjoy!

3.26-4.4 V. Critiques of contemporary society

A. The Frankfurt School: Dillon, 181-209

B. C.W. Mills: Dillon, 220-225; Mills, "Culture and Politics", in Kivisto, 220-225

C. Michael Foucault, Dillon 350-368; suggested: Foucault, "Panopticonism", in Kivisto, 497-502

D. Pierre Bourdieu, Dillon, 405-424

4.9-4.18 VI. Theories of Everyday Life

- A. Symbolic Interaction and Phenomenology: Dillon, 257-282; Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction", in Kivisto, 242-248
- B. Erving Goffman's dramaturgy: Goffman, "Performances", in Kivisto, 249-254;
- C. *Tentatively*: Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology: Dillon, 285-309;
- Harold Garfinkel, "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities" in Kivisto, 268-271;
- Lincoln Ryave and James Schenkein, "Notes on the Art of Walking" – on Sakai

4.23-4.30 VII. Feminist Theory

- A. Dillon, 311-346;
- B. Dorothy Smith, "Sociology from Women's Experience," in Kivisto, 344-353;
- C. Patricia Hill Collins, "Towards an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology", in Kivisto, 334-341

5.2 Last class for us

5.7-5.8 Reading days (Tuesday & Wednesday)

5.9-5.15 Exam week

5.7 or 5.13 Suggested: Final take-home test could be due on Tuesday, May 7 – first reading day - at 2:15pm??
Or: Rutgers has scheduled our final exam for May 13 at 8:00am??
To be decided...