SOCI 712: Contemporary Social Theory
Syllabus

This course is devoted to understanding some of the most important social theorists and theoretical themes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through close readings of the texts, we will study each theorist systematically looking at the larger theoretical project and the text’s inner structure. During these discussions, we will also consider what sort of empirical projects or methods might follow from these theories.

Course Objectives
By the end of this course, students should be able to
- Discuss major terms, themes, and debates in contemporary social theory.
- Analyze theory texts.
- Explain the historical background and larger theoretical projects of major social theories.
- Discuss possible empirical projects and methods that might follow from social theories.
- Collect, analyze, and interpret sources to construct a research paper on social theory using the appropriate sociological conventions.

Course schedule and readings

Jan. 24    Introduction

Part I: Bodies, Knowledge, and Power

Part II: Forms of Capital and Civil Society


Mar. 14 Spring Break (no class)


**Library of Congress visit**


Part III: Capitalism and Socialism


Apr. 29 Exchange drafts of final paper by email.
Return comments on drafts (in hardcopy during class).

May 16   Final Paper due at 7:15pm (by email: jbockman@gmu.edu).

* all material marked with an asterisk is available on Blackboard.

**Course Requirements**

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short weekly papers</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library of Congress project</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Facilitation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments on Research Paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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*To receive a passing grade, all six components must be completed.*

Grading scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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*Class Participation:* Participation includes attendance, being on time, bringing the reading, asking questions, and participating in discussion. The weekly papers will help you during the discussion.

*Short weekly papers*
This is a 1-2 page paper on the readings each week. What is the argument of the reading? How does it relate to previous readings and discussions we have had? Do you have any criticisms or questions about the reading? The paper must be turned in by email (jbockman@gmu.edu) noon on Mondays. You can drop one weekly paper from your grade: 11 out of 13 papers will go towards your grade.

*Library of Congress project*
The Library of Congress is an essential resource for thesis and dissertation research. As a class, we will visit the Library of Congress. Whether or not students can make the visit, students will have to visit the Library of Congress, obtain an LC library card, check out a book or other item, and provide proof of doing so. Students will also have to write a one-
Discussion Facilitation
Each student in this course will lead the class discussion at least once during the semester. You will not be required to teach the class (that’s my job). For 10 to 15 minutes, please cover the following:

1) Identify the main argument(s) of the reading.
2) Choose a passage that illuminates at least one of these arguments.
3) Present what you find most interesting or surprising about the reading.
4) Present what you find most confusing about the reading.
5) Prepare two questions for class discussion.

These should be formal, polished presentations. Think of your presentation as practice for future lectures and conference papers. You should make a careful, clear outline from which to speak. You should practice your presentation a couple of times before delivering to the class. You should not go over the time limit by more than two minutes or be significantly under the time limit. It does not matter if you are nervous, but it does matter if you are poorly prepared.

Comments on Final Paper
Each student will give a draft of their final paper to two other members of class. These “commentators” will write at least one page of comments about the draft to the author to help the author improve the final paper. These comments will be submitted with the final paper and graded.

Final research paper
Each student will prepare a 20-page paper on, or using, contemporary social theory. With your research paper, please include the commentators’ comments and memo explaining how you incorporated their comments. Your papers should advance your own intellectual project, whether you are preparing to write your MA thesis or thinking about dissertation work. I will meet with each of you individually during the semester to discuss your work and to generate a topic. I am glad to read drafts of the research paper.

Late Policy
For each day that any written work is late that grade will be reduced by a step (e.g., an A paper will become an A- paper one day after the due date, a B+ paper two days after the due date, etc).

Required Texts
The following books are required for the course and will be available from the bookstore:


Blackboard
The syllabus and *articles/book chapters will be available on Blackboard.

Reading Recommendations
- Always print up online readings.
- Make many underlines and margin notes in all readings (thus pens are better than highlighters).
- Always bring all the readings for the day assigned.
- Do not get bogged down in the details of the reading. We are reading for argument, methods, and big themes. In class, we will look at specific details that are relevant to the discussion.

Additional Items:
- **Academic Integrity**
  I will not tolerate plagiarism. Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

- **Mason Email Accounts**
  Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See [http://masonlive.gmu.edu](http://masonlive.gmu.edu) for more information.

- **Office of Disability Services**
  If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)

- **Writing Center:** A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200
  [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)

- **University Libraries** “Ask a Librarian”
http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380
  http://caps.gmu.edu

- University Policies

The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.