Seminar: Contemporary Social Theory
Sociology 7050 001
Spring 2011
W: 2:00 PM-5:00 PM
BEH S 315

Description
This seminar offers graduate students an introduction to a variety of theoretical approaches, methodological considerations and conceptual innovations associated with contemporary sociological theory. In this seminar, we will consider such questions as: What is social theory? Whose knowledge counts? What is the relationship between deductive and inductive reasoning and the construction of social theory? Do new contexts demand new theories and new concepts, or did the classical theorists provide us with the necessary tools to grasp our current world? Is the age of meta-narratives forever behind us or is a new grand narrative just around the corner?

The course begins with a brief inquiry into the nature and purpose of social theory, highlighting some thoughts on the qualities and concerns that distinguish contemporary from classical social theory. Discussion then turns to four major approaches contained within contemporary social theory: symbolic interactionism, critical theory, post-modernism and feminist theory. The final section of the seminar delves into three important concepts that are hotly contested in sociology today: culture, social capital and globalization.

This seminar has two main goals. First, this seminar aims to expose graduate students to a body of research that will contribute to their general literacy in sociology. My second goal is to provide students with a set of tools – concepts, methodologies and theories – that will enrich and improve their research as they begin careers as sociologists.

Course Requirements
Reflection Papers: Students are required to submit six memos, due on alternating weeks during the course of the semester. The memos should focus on a substantive theme or question raised in the readings and provide a critical evaluation. They should be approximately three typed and double-spaced pages. Memos are due at the beginning of class the day the readings are discussed. Memos will constitute thirty percent of your final grade.

Student Presentations: Each student will present on one or two sessions during the semester, depending on the size of the seminar. These presentations should provide a general orientation to that week’s reading and should touch on theoretical, conceptual
and/or methodological issues covered in the reading assignment. Students may also choose to orient their comments around what they find most compelling about the reading or most problematic. Student presentations will constitute ten percent of your final grade.

**Final Paper:** This third major seminar requirement is a final paper, due at the end of the semester. Students may choose to write an original research paper based on one of the theorists or themes covered in the seminar, or they may write a paper comparing the work of two contemporary theorists in greater depth. Papers should be approximately twenty to twenty-five pages, typed and double-spaced. All students will meet with me prior to beginning the paper to discuss your topic (individual meetings are scheduled for April 7, during regular class). The final paper will constitute forty percent of your final grade.

**Class Participation:** Finally, I would like to highlight that in addition to the above requirements, I expect you to complete all of the readings prior to that day’s seminar. You should prepare for each seminar by thoroughly reading and taking notes on the assigned reading. Prior to each session, you should post two discussion questions to the discussion board I will set up for the course. They are due each week by 8pm on Tuesday (the day before the weekly seminar). Then come prepared to discuss and respond to the questions posed, in addition to questions I will pose during class. While I will provide background information and clarification, we will spend most of the class time in discussion. If you are not adequately prepared, it will show. A seminar is only as good as the students that comprise it, and your efforts will pay off. Twenty percent of your final grade will reflect your weekly participation in class discussions and your weekly postings.

The readings for the seminar are a mix of books and articles. All of the books for this course have been ordered from the campus bookstore. You may also find these books at more competitive prices if you search for them from Barnes & Noble and Amazon.Com – both used and new versions. I have also placed copies of these books on reserve at the Marriott Library. Students can access and print materials on e-reserve course reserves by selecting the course reserves tab in the Marriott Library catalog, [http://search.library.utah.edu](http://search.library.utah.edu). Additional information on using course reserves can be found in the Course Reserve “How to Guide.” It provides a walkthrough that will explain searching courses, filtering courses and finally how to access copyrighted material from off campus. [http://campusguides.lib.utah.edu/course_reserves_guide](http://campusguides.lib.utah.edu/course_reserves_guide)

**ADA Statement**
The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.
Schedule of Discussions & Readings

January 11  Introductions & Overview of Seminar and Syllabus

January 18  What is Social Theory?


January 25  Symbolic Interactionism

February 1  Symbolic Interactionism (cont.)

February 8  Critical Theory

**Focus on Part One (One-Dimensional Society) and Part Three (The Chance of the Alternatives); Skim Part Two (One-Dimensional Thought)**

February 15  Critical Theory (cont.)

February 22  Post-modernism

February 29  Post-modernism (cont.)
March 7 Feminist Theory


March 14 Spring Break – no class

March 21 Feminist Theory (cont.)

March 28 Culture


April 4 Student-Faculty Consultations for Research Papers

April 11 Social Capital


**April 18 Globalization**


**April 25 Student Presentations of Research Papers**

** Tentative due date for final paper: Monday, May 7th **