DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
University of Utah

Seminar: Classical Social Theory  
Sociology 6050 001  
Fall 2009  
H: 2:00 PM-5:00 PM  
BEH S 315

Professor Julie Stewart  
405 BEH S  
Office Hours: M & F 12 – 1  
and by appointment

Description

This seminar introduces graduate students to some of the foundational texts and central traditions of the discipline of sociology. Given the very specialized division of labor that is a hallmark of the contemporary academy, the concepts and concerns of classical social theory provide us with a common frame of reference and a sense of disciplinary unity. Accordingly, in this seminar we will examine a series of questions that fascinated the founding theorists of our discipline and continue to resonate today:

- What generates social solidarity?
- How is culture developed, shared and transformed?
- What are the causes and consequences of capitalism?
- Are ideas or material conditions the fundamental agents in historical change?
- What are the defining characteristics of modernity?
- Can individuals shape their social world or are they inherently constrained by macro-structural forces contained within modern economic and political systems?

The course begins with a brief overview of the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution and the democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. Together, these interwoven social transformations produced modernity, arguably the issue nonpareil for classical social theory. It then devotes considerable attention to the writings and legacy of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, three pivotal social theorists for the discipline. The last portion of the course is concerned with “newer” classical theorists, typically the emerging American sociologists with a more pronounced interest in the individual and his/her experience with modernity and social change.

This seminar has three 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. Finally, part of my intellectual project is to demonstrate the continued relevance of classical social theory. Accordingly, where possible, I include in the syllabus contemporary readings that build on key classical concepts. As you read for this class – and for other classes – I encourage you to continually reflect on how/why the author builds upon the foundation provided by the classical social theorists.

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1 To create this syllabus, I drew heavily from two great social theorists: David Garland, of New York University and Michèle Lamont, of Harvard University.
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.

Exams: In this seminar, we will have a mid-term and final exam. The exams will be take-home and essay in format, and will require that the student show mastery of the readings assigned in the class. Each exam constitutes thirty percent of your final grade. The tentative due dates for the exams are as follows: mid-term, due: Oct. 19; final, due Dec. 17.

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 and then be ready to both respond to my questions and pose questions to the group. 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. Ten percent of your final grade will reflect your weekly participation in class discussions.

Course Materials
The readings for the seminar are a mix of books and book chapters. With the exception of Weber’s Protestant Ethic, 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. Note that Weber’s volume is available from both of these sites, as used versions. Please make sure that you order this specific copy, to ensure that the pagination corresponds to the assignments in the syllabus. I have also placed copies of these books on reserve at the Marriott Library. I strongly encourage you to purchase these books, as they should be a part of every sociologist’s library:


All of the supplemental book chapters for the seminar are available through the e-reserve service provided by the university library. To access these readings, go to Course Reserves on the Marriott Library home page @ www.lib.utah.edu or from the student portal @ My.Utah.edu. Login with your uNID and password. Then click on Academics. A list of your classes will appear, and there will be a course reserves link. The list of reserve readings appears in alphabetical order by title.

**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**

**August 27**
Introductions & overview of seminar and syllabus

**September 3**
Reflections on the parameters, content and future of social theory


**September 10**
Intellectual precursors to social theory
September 17  Marx: humanism and history; class struggle and revolution
“Theses on Feuerbach,” pp. 143-145.

September 24  Marx: foundations of political economy

October 1  Weber: ideal and material interests and their elective affinities

October 8  Weber: power and domination; rationality and bureaucracy

October 15  Fall Break – No Class

October 22  Durkheim: on the sociological method and suicide
Durkheim. *Suicide*.

October 29  Durkheim: society and social facts; solidarity and the collective conscience.
Conover, Ted. Selections from *New Jack: Guarding Sing Sing*. Pp. 95-151 (E-Reserve).

November 5  Introducing the individual: on civilization and repression
Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*.

November 12  Contemplating the place and role of self in society
Pattillo, Mary. Selection from *Black on the Block*. Pp. TK. (E-Reserve).

November 19  Critical theory and the sociology of knowledge
November 26  Thanksgiving Break – No Class

December 3  Structural-Functional analysis, part 1

December 10  Structural-Functional analysis, part 2
Calhoun et al. 2007. Readings on functions, the middle range and anomie. Pp. 441-470.