

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
Department of Sociology  
Sociology 631.01  
Seminar in Sociological Theory  
Fall 2011

Instructor: Dr. A.W. Frank

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Office hours: Thursday, 9:30-12:20, or by appointment

Course hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 2-3:15

Sociology Department web page: <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca>

### Course Objectives

The seminar will read major theorists from 19th and 20th centuries--Marx to Bourdieu. Our interests will be threefold:

- how each theorist encounters *modernity*, which will be the crucial issue of the seminar; how does modernity produce social theory, and how does social theory respond to modernity;
- continuities and discontinuities in the ongoing conversation that is social theory; which issues persist and which drop away; who speaks to whom and who gets ignored;
- the question of *theory* itself, especially after Lyotard's famous declaration that "grand narratives" (for example, Parsons' AGIL scheme, and even grander, his "telic system") are no longer compelling, which seems to be an empirically accurate assessment of contemporary writing in social science. In social science today, what kind of argument do we characterize as *theoretical*, and what makes such arguments compelling?

### Required Texts:

Craig Calhoun et al., eds. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Wiley-Blackwell. (CST)

Bryan Turner, ed., *The Talcott Parsons Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Stephen Mennell and Johan Goudsblom, eds., *The Norbert Elias Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

### Course Requirements:

Final grades will be based on three components, weighed equally.

- A *reading/seminar journal*, in which students write up to two pages on each of the questions given in the seminar schedule, below (but, N=7, see below). These writings are *not* finished essays; they may be in outline form, in whole or part. Each should demonstrate the student's knowledge of the assigned reading and ability to engage with the theorists discussed.
- For *two* of the seminar questions below, develop a well-edited short essay, no longer than five pages. Cite only the assigned readings; after a quotation, provide page numbers in parentheses (no bibliography).

On the two edited essays, students have the option of *rewriting*, if their grade is B or less, with a possible revised grade of B+ maximum. Journal writing will have two feedback submissions.

Due dates: one week after the seminar and reading that the essay discusses.

Final essay, due December 19.

Format: Spelling, syntax, and the organization of ideas will count in the grade. Careful editing is crucial.

- All written work should be typed or printed, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with pages numbered and stapled together.
- The student's name and ID# should appear in the upper corner of the first page.
- Please do not put papers in covers.

Schedule:

September 15 -- course introduction

September 22 -- Marx readings in CST; also critical theory readings, chapters 27-30

- Do the Frankfurt theorists make Marx relevant to the 20th C., or do they hijack his agenda?
- Note: this question and those below are provisional; the point of having a seminar is to test whether the question we begin with is the right one. Thus, students should treat the questions on this outline as points of departure, not as final. Journal writing should report on progress refining the question, in seminar and afterwards.

September 29 -- Durkheim and Merton in CST; chapters 11-14, 34-36

- How does Merton, both in his agenda for sociological research & theory and in his adaptation of *anomie*? What does Durkheim take seriously that Merton (at least in these readings) does not?

October 6 -- Simmel, Weber, and Mannheim; chapters 22-23, 15-20, 26

- Journal check: turn in reports of the Sept 22 and 29 seminars for feedback; sample grades will be given to indicate student standing, but the journal assignment will be graded as a whole at the end of term.
- Discuss the relationship between Simmel's concept of forms, Weber's forms of rationality, and Mannheim's *ideology*.

October 13 -- Mead, Freud, and DuBois; chapters 21, 24, 25

- What is an *individual* for each of these three theorists? What different conception of *society* emerges from Mead's and Freud's apparent emphasis on the individual?

October 20 -- *Parsons Reader*, first half, and Parsons readings in CST

- From the readings, distill a statement of what counts as *modernity* for Parsons. In particular, what requires defending in Parsons's particular understanding of modernity? What is *at stake* for Parsons?

October 27 -- finish Parsons

- Journal check: Oct 6, Oct 13, & Oct 20.
- Discuss one of Parsons's arguments that you disagree with. What does Parsons force you to account for, in order to build an argument with his essay?

November 3 -- *Elias Reader*, first half

- Elias studied with Max Weber's brother, Alfred, and with Mannheim; his work was also significantly influenced by Freud. Discuss how Elias adapted each theorist to create his own project.

November 17 -- finish Elias

- Turner's introduction defends Parsons against several criticisms made by Goudsblom. Engage this debate; specifically, in what ways are Parsons and Elias complementary as theorists, and in what ways are their theories incompatible?

December 1 -- Bourdieu, *Outline*

December 8 -- Bourdieu, continued.

- Bourdieu seeks to resolve several of the crucial dichotomies in previous social theory, and to present a new theory of action. Evaluate his success; specifically, how does Bourdieu revise Elias and Parsons (with unequal attention)?

Writing advice, especially for final essay.

- Almost any idea is a potentially good paper; it all depends on how you write it. Many of sociology's greatest works have been on topics that most people would have regarded as marginal or uninteresting. The imagination in "sociological imagination" is the ability to demonstrate the importance of aspects of social life that had previously seemed uninteresting in their marginality.
- The opening paragraph should do two tasks: engage the reader (make him/her want to continue reading) and tell the reader what the essay will accomplish or contribute.
  - A friend told me that academic papers should be structured like detective stories. A murder mystery begins with the discovery of a corpse; the reader knows that what follows will progressively solve who did it.
  - Any essay should open by "discovering the body"; that is, discovering whatever is consequentially troublesome and requires some kind of solution.
- The most difficult part of writing may be learning to read what you have written as if you were someone else, remembering that this someone else does not know what you mean to express—and that you have to make this person care about what you're trying to say. Writing requires G.H. Mead's idea of taking the role of the other.
- Writing begins in revision. The first draft is an opening offer; then you get to work.
- As you edit, concentrate on continuity: does each sentence and each paragraph lead into the next, or does the reader have to ask why you are suddenly talking about this? Writing requires meeting a reader's expectations, but without becoming predictable and thus boring. Each paragraph should do what the reader expects, but do it in a way that is unexpected.

- The old rule of “one idea, one paragraph” remains a reliable guide. In general, the first sentence states the idea of the paragraph. The next one or two (or three if necessary) sentences expand and refine this idea. The final sentence is a transition to the next paragraph. It puts the idea back in the context of the whole argument by suggesting what needs to be said next (maybe not explicitly, but enough for the reader to think “Of course!” at the start of the next paragraph).
- Never write, “in my opinion.” If what you are saying needs this qualification (i.e., disclaimer), you should do more research until you can present it as more than your own opinion. The point of sociology is to present arguments that are compelling because they are more than the “opinion” of the writer—that’s science.
- A conclusion should be more than a summary. The conclusion should notch up the importance of the argument, giving the reader perhaps the best reason why the essay matters. In a truly fine conclusion, the reader will realize that s/he could not have understood this final reason without having read the essay. The reader will feel surprised, yet the conclusion will make perfect sense.
  - A film critic once wrote that audiences will forgive anything during the movie’s first 30 minutes, but nothing in the last 30 seconds.

### Mandatory Information

#### ***Emergency evacuations:***

In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom/lab, please proceed to the assembly point by [*check link to find assembly point for your building*] --  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/node/75>

#### ***Deferrals:***

If at all possible you must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take a test or pass in an assignment or essay on time. All requests for deferral of a course component due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferrals will be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferral. Deferrals will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

If you have missed a test for a legitimate reason, the instructor can require you to write a “make up” test as close in time to the original test as possible or can choose to transfer the percentage weight to another course component. If the instructor schedules a “make up” test for you, its date and location will be at the convenience of the Department of Sociology.

#### ***Deferred Final Exam Form:***

Please note that requests to defer a Registrar-scheduled final exam are dealt with through the Registrar's Office. Further information about deadlines, and where paperwork should be taken, is available on the form, which can be found at:

[http://ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/APP%20FOR%20DF%20EXAM\\_0.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/APP%20FOR%20DF%20EXAM_0.pdf)

*Deferred Term Work Form:*

Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It's available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf>

Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

***Ethics Research:*** Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

***Academic Misconduct:*** Plagiarism, cheating and other academic misconduct are regarded as serious academic offences. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

***The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation*** disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Written assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

***Safewalk:*** The University of Calgary provides a "safe walk" service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the "Help" phones located around Campus.

***Academic Accommodation:*** Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, phone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.

***Handing in papers outside of class, return of final papers, and release of final grades:***

1. When students are unable to submit papers in class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant. Papers will not be accepted in the main Sociology Department office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the main Sociology Department office. The Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place (i.e. outside an instructor's office, the department office etc.) Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will be available for pick-up only during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or at the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are available only online.