

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Department of Sociology
Sociology 333 Lecture 02
Contemporary Sociological Theory
Winter 2010

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Office hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 11-12:30, or by appointment

Course hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 9:30-10:45

Classroom: ST 125

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

Course objectives:

The course has two interdependent objectives. First, to consider what counts as *theory* in sociology: What are the questions that theorists ask, and what distinguishes how a theorist addresses these problems? Second, what does contemporary theory tell us about the world we live in: its dangers, possibilities, and what makes it *social*? The first objective might be considered academic or disciplinary, and the second might be considered substantive.

We will consider four theorists: two near-contemporaries whose ideas shape the contemporary scene (Foucault and Bourdieu) and two contemporaries who illustrate the applied emphasis of current theorizing (Beck and Hochschild). Lectures will discuss a variety of other theorists, including mid-century theory (Parsons and those who revised and opposed his work).

Required Texts:

- Gary Gutting, *Foucault, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford)
- Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault* (Stanford)
- Michael Grenfell, editor, *Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Acumen)
- Arlie Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life* (California)
- Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (Polity)

Course Requirements:

Final grades will be based on four components, each weighed equally.

- For each theorist (Foucault, Bourdieu, Hochschild, and Beck), students will write an essay no longer than 600 words.
- Essays should focus on one *significant contribution* that each theorist makes, and how this contribution makes possible specific understanding of contemporary society.

- That contribution should be presented in the most specific terms possible; essays will be graded on how effectively they *utilize the assigned readings and lecture materials*, which should be quoted or cited.
- The essay should specify how this contribution *makes a difference*: how does it challenge generally accepted common-sense understandings of society? Who would benefit from this changed understanding and why? Why has this contribution not been noticed before; what line of thought made it possible? What entrenched interest would find this contribution threatening?
- To address these questions, you may *use an empirical example*; that is, some aspect of social life that the theory helps us either to notice for the first time or to understand in a new light.
- The *conclusion* should discuss how sociological practice (what is investigated and how) ought to be affected by this theorist.
- The contribution you write about will not necessarily be a main theme of that theorist's work. Again, what matters is how well you argue that the contribution *makes a difference* in understanding contemporary life and contemporary sociology, and how well you demonstrate knowledge of the assigned readings and lecture material.

Grades will be based on: (a) creativity and insight in reading that theorist, including the *significance* of what the essay says; (b) specificity defining the contribution you focus on and clarity explaining why it matters; (c) demonstration of care in doing the reading and attention to lectures; and (d) quality of writing and editing.

Quotation is crucial to a theory essay's success: selecting the specific passage that is necessary to make the point you are arguing; quoting enough to substantiate your argument, but not quoting so much that your essay turns into a jigsaw puzzle of quotations.

Writing advice:

- In past courses, when I allowed students 750 words, very few of them actually used more than 600 words effectively. Avoid empty, generic sentences such as: "Pierre Bourdieu was one of the great theorists of the 20th century." Go straight to specific statements about *why* this theorist matters.
- Writing gets serious only after you have finished a first draft. When *editing* your work, ask:
 - Does this sentence say something specific about this theorist, or could it refer to any number of theorists?
 - How does this sentence advance my argument? What is its specific contribution to the point I'm making?
 - Why does this sentence have to occur exactly *here*, at this point in my argument?
- *Sentences* are built from three components: a subject that does something, a verb that describes the doing, and a predicate that is the object or result of the doing, possibly saying something about what was done. Subjects, verbs, and predicates

should all be fairly close to each other, with subordinate clauses occurring at the end of the sentence.

- *Paragraphs* should have three to five sentences. The first sentence summarizes the idea presented in the paragraph. The next one to three sentences expand and specify this idea. The final sentence both summarizes and prepares the transition to the next paragraph. The lead sentence of each paragraph should blend expectation (the reader knew you had to talk about this issue next) with surprise (the reader didn't expect you to say exactly that, or say it that way).
- The *Internet* is a fine resource; use it only with the greatest discrimination. Use any web sources only as supplements to assigned reading, not in place of assigned texts. Be certain any web sources have credibility; verify the significance of any web source.

Format: All essays 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.

Due dates:

- February 2, Foucault
- March 2, Bourdieu
- March 23, Hochschild
- April 13, Beck
- Only medical excuses will be accepted as reason for late essays. These excuses must specify that the student was incapable of completing the required work, not simply that you saw a physician on a certain day (but the nature of your medical problem is private and need not be included in the physician's note).
- Requirements in other courses, job commitments, or personal engagements are not acceptable reasons for missing the exams.

Grades and Return of final essays: Papers will *not* be returned through the Sociology Department Office, nor will grades be posted by the instructor (due to FOIP rules). Students who want their final papers returned by mail should attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please do not telephone the departmental office asking for your grade.

Keep a copy: As in every course, my friendly advice is to keep a printed copy of all work you submit. At some point you should have printed at least one draft to edit on paper; keep that too. Students who might want a letter of recommendation should keep copies of their written term work (again, good advice in all courses).

Lecture schedule and readings:

January 12, 14 – Gutting, *Foucault*, chapters 1-5

January 19, 21 – Gutting, chapters 6-10; Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*

January 26, 28 – Nealon (complete the book)

February 2, 4 – Grenfell, *Bourdieu*, chapters 1-4

Note: Read chapters 1 & 2 for Bourdieu's biography without puzzling over intellectual influences that are too quickly passed over; concentrate on chapters 3 & 4.

February 9, 11 – Grenfell, chapters 5-8

February 16, 18 – Reading Week, no classes or office hours

February 23, 25 – Grenfell, chapters 9-12

March 2, 4 – Hochschild, Introduction, chapters 1-5

March 9, 11 – Hochschild, chapters 6-11

March 16, 18 – Hochschild, chapters 12-17

March 23, 25 – Beck, *World at Risk*, chapters 1-4

March 30, April 1 – Beck, chapters 5-9

April 6, 8 – Beck, chapters 10-12

April 13, 15 – review and concluding comments.

Mandatory University Addenda:

Exam Policies: You must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take an exam. All requests for deferral of an examination 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. Deferred exams may be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. If you have missed an exam for a legitimate reason, you will be able to write a "make up" exam as close to the original exam as possible. The date and location will be at the convenience of the Sociology Department. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferred exam. Deferred exams will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

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: cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. 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. Term 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, telephone 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 at class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant rather than at the Sociology Department main office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the Sociology Department main office. The Freedom of Information and Protection of 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 only be available for pick-up during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology department. They are only available online.