

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology

Sociology 302: Topics in Contemporary Theory

Dr. John Phyne
Annex 110A

Class Times: Tuesday: 2:15 to 3:30 PM; Thursday: 2:15 to 3:30 PM

Office Hours: Tuesday: 12:30 to 2:00 PM; Thursday: 12:30 to 2:00 PM; Friday: 10:30 AM to 12 Noon, or by appointment.

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E-mail Policy: Please restrict your e-mails to necessary communications. This includes: extended absences from class (more than one week) and family emergencies. I refuse to use the e-mail to cover lectures from missed classes. My office hours or the phone should be used to cover materials pertaining to the course. Also, **NO LAPTOPS** are to be used in the class. Refer to my information and communications technology policy guidelines on p. 4 of this syllabus.

Course Outline: Sociological theory deals with the assumptions that are made about what constitutes the ‘social’. Contemporary sociological theory begins after World War I. Between 1920 to the present sociologists have grappled with the challenges of examining a rapidly changing world. In this course, we will explore the major perspectives in contemporary social theory. Between 1920 to the early 1970s, the major branches of contemporary social theory emerged. These include: functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism and feminism. Added to these theories are approaches to ‘late modernity’. These approaches constitute Section One of the course (7 weeks). Section Two covers the post-modern and globalization perspectives that developed since the 1970s (6 weeks).

As you already know from your other courses, sociology is a multi-paradigm discipline that provides different approaches to the ‘social’. We begin the course with an examination of central factors that can be used to link the plethora of perspectives in the discipline. These consist of the attempts to connect micro (day-to-day interaction) and macro (social institutions, national societies and the global) *levels of analysis*. Second, we also will discuss the differences between interpretive (meaning and identity) and positivistic (search for scientific laws) *levels of explanation*. We will return to the macro-micro and interpretive-positivistic dimensions of sociological theory throughout the course to show the similarities and differences among the different approaches to sociology. Moreover, empirical examples will be provided to elucidate on the concepts provided in the various contemporary theories.

Textbooks

Peter Kivisto, ed. *Social Theory: Roots and Branches*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Fourth Edition, 2011.

George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society 6*. Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2011.

Evaluation

Test One: Thursday, January 26 (15%)

Test Two: Thursday, March 1 (25%)

Review of Ritzer (2011): Tuesday, March 13 (25%). An Outline will be handed out in class, on Thursday, January 12.

Final: (35%)

Required Readings (all from Kivisto [2011] except for Ritzer [2011])

Section One: Major Perspectives in Contemporary Theory

Functionalism

Merton (pp. 187-194); Alexander (pp. 207-215)

Conflict Theory

Mills (pp. 220-225); Collins (pp. 234-241)

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer (pp. 242-248); Goffman (pp. 249-254)

Feminism

West and Zimmerman (pp. 318-325); Butler (pp. 326-333); Collins (pp.334-343); Smith (pp. 344-354)

Theories of Late Modernity

Giddens (pp. 461-464); Beck (pp. 465-471)

Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Chapter 1 to 8). This is for your book review assignment that is due, in class, Tuesday, March 13.

Section Two: Contemporary Theory After Post-Modernism and Globalization

Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism

Bourdieu (pp. 483-490); Baudrillard (pp. 491-496); Foucault (pp. 497-502); Bauman (pp. 503-510)

Globalization: Economic, Cultural and Political Dimensions

Wallerstein (pp. 521-527); Roberston (pp. 528-537); Kellner (pp. 550-570).

Information and Communication Technologies Policy

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2. **Cell phones:** Please turn off all cell phones before the commencement of class. If you need to have your cell phone turned on, please let me know as soon as possible.
3. **No laptops in the classroom:** The surfing of the net while in class is a rude and disrespectful act. Despite my attempts over the past 5 years to get students to use their laptops in a responsible manner, far too many students are not complying. The surfing of the net has turned out to be a distraction that interferes with my ability to teach. It also interferes with the learning environment for the class as a whole.
4. **No audio or video taping of lectures:** Under no circumstances are my lectures to be audio taped or video taped. If you require assistance in the taking of notes, I suggest that you seek the assistance of the Counseling Centre (867-2281).

If you want to use your laptop, cell phone, black berry, etc., I suggest that you leave the class. If I catch someone using these devices, that person will be asked to leave the class.