SOCI 3123 CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY
Section 4330
TR 8:00-9:15 Nance Boyer 3008

Su Lee, Ph.D.
Office: 2081 Nance Boyer, 581-2945, suholee@cameron.edu
Office Hours: T 1100-1200 & T 100-400, or by appointment

Required Texts
Ian McIntosh, 1997, Classical Sociological Theory: A Reader.
Jürgen Habermas, 1970, Toward A Rational Society.

Course Description/Objectives
This course explores classical-modern theories in sociology, focusing on major explications of conflict, change, interaction, communication, and modernity. In addition to exploring mid-range social theories, this course stresses interrelated assumptions and concepts underlying classical Marxism, functionalism, symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, critical theory, and world-system theory. Due to time constraint, we will often survey social theories of varying levels of analyses. However, we will examine selectively Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Mead, and Habermas. The thoughts of these modern theorists have vast contemporary relevance and are counterpoints to the potpourri of contemporary theories known as postmodernism. Examining their thoughts would enable us to address central questions of social criticism, social evolution, and social modernity. We will examine critical theory, focusing largely on the critical relationship between democracy and technology on one hand and, on the other, between the public sphere and the role of social theory. The class will be introduced to the historical backdrops of world-system theory in relation to colonialism, capitalism, and underdevelopment. Contingent on class time, we will explore contemporary debates on such contested issues as postmodernism, multiculturalism, identity and difference, social fragmentation, global democratization, and electronic mass media. We will conclude this course by evaluating modern social theories, appraising localizing tendencies in postmodern thoughts, questioning the impact of information media on social relationship, and reflecting on the lifeworld of individuals in mass society. You are expected to grasp comparatively the overall traits of social theories and theoretical perspectives, to identify the questions they raise and attempt to answer, and to discuss critically their thematic relevance to social life.

General Information
1. Class attendance and participation are important in this course. You are expected to be present and on time for class. Attendance will be taken frequently on a random basis. If you are absent once or twice, I will assume that you had a good reason for missing. On the other hand, a pattern of absence and tardiness will adversely affect your course grade. If you anticipate periodic or prolonged absence in the course of the semester, you are advised not to take this course.
2. You are always welcome to elicit comments, critique, and opinions in class. I appreciate your reaction to the issues raised in texts and lectures. If you are befuddled, the class will welcome your efforts at clarification. Bring the text under discussion to class meeting. I often make textual references in class.
3. If you have a disability that will make it difficult for you to participate in class, to abide by the course policies or perform successfully, please advise me immediately. I will work with you and the Office of Multicultural and Disabled Services to provide you with reasonable accommodations. Similarly, please let me know if a problem arises during the course of the semester, so we can resolve it at the
earliest possible time. Feel free to contact me by telephone or e-mail.

4. I distribute handouts in class, especially in the event we fall behind the scheduled progress. You are to make sure that you have all handouts, including study questions given in class. If you do not have them, you are responsible for securing your own. Pleased do not ask me for the handouts distributed in the past week(s).

5. Incompletes are given only in accordance with University guidelines and only under extraordinary and documented circumstances in which a student is unable to complete the latter portion of course work. There is no extra-credit work in this course; you are to focus on class requirements.

Class Requirements

Discussion Essays

1. You will submit five discussion essays, each discussing in your words themes/issues of the readings and lectures for the previous weeks. These essays are meant to foster class discussion, review course materials, and for you to articulate via writing your comprehension of the learned materials. You may base your essays on the study questions distributed in class. However, I expect you to show succinctly that you have grasped the covered portion of course materials at the level and breadth appropriate to upper-division course. Edit your essays before submitting them; essays are to be thoughtful and well written (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. do count).

2. Your discussion essay should: (a) incorporate or refer to the assigned portions of texts, especially the primary text or reader discussed in class; (b) be 1½ to 2 pages long, single-spaced, stapled, and 11 or 12 font-size typewritten with proper margins (margins no wider than 1.2 inch); (c) show your name and essay number on the back of the last page (i.e., I do not want to see your name when I read your essay); (d) begin immediately from the top margin (i.e., do not write essay title, course name, etc., on the front of the first or second page); (e) begin with purpose statements, stating clearly in two or three sentences what your essay is going to show, apply, analyze, contest, or contrast; and (f) be written in paragraphs without line break (i.e., begin a new paragraph with a short indent instead). You will lose 6 points (-10%) at the outset if you do not adhere to these specifications; there is no exception.

3. You can be selective in your essay theme but be as complete as possible. I suggest you end your essay with one or two questions related to the readings and lectures that you would like for us to discuss in class. Avoid ending your essay by rephrasing what you already have written; you will lose points for unnecessary repetitions or rephrases at any part of your essay. You can cite authors but avoid using long or frequent quotes. Keep in mind that discussion essay requires you to incorporate or refer to the themes/issues in the assigned texts. If you are using external sources in addition to the class materials, insert author’s name and publication year in parenthesis where it is appropriate and provide a separate page with complete reference (author, title, publication year, publisher, page numbers). Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be subjected to the University disciplinary action. Internet web pages are not an acceptable source; your essay will not be accepted if it incorporates or is based on web page information.

4. Discussion essays are not for sharing your personal experiences. I expect you do that in class. Essays are to be integrating (show how concepts/statements interrelate to support the theoretical perspective under discussion), comparative (contrast thematic points in and across texts or theorists, and point out differences and similarities), applying (interpret any dimension or event in society from a theoretical perspective, or discuss how such a perspective might explain it), critical (take a position and argue against what you consider as critical deficiencies in a particular theoretical theme presented in texts or lectures), or inquisitive (discuss questions, answers, implications, inferences, assumptions, etc. that can be derived from a theoretical perspective). In other words, do not simply repeat or describe the points presented in texts/lectures in sequence but contrast, integrate, apply, explore, argue, question,
look for common themes, etc. You will receive minimal points if your essay is merely repetitive of texts and lectures. For example, do not define conceptual terms or describe statements unless you are making specific arguments and avoid narrating unrelated arguments unless you are making specific contrasts under a general theme. Good essays serve a definite purpose. Essays are to be organized, succinct, consistent, and as complete as possible.

5. You will have at least a week to work on a discussion essay following readings and lectures. Late essay policy: (a) essays should be turned in on time, which means during class meetings on the due dates, and must be brought to class (not e-mailed to me or brought to the department office); (b) all late essays are penalized without an exception (-6 points if submitted within a week, and -12 points thereafter and within two weeks past the due date); (c) under no circumstance I will accept an essay after two weeks past the due date; and (d) all missing essays thereafter will be converted to 0 point. To ensure class fairness and timely progress, I will strictly adhere to this late essay policy. Always keep a copy of the essay you have turned in. If you need out-of-class assistance, please see me during office hours or make an appointment after class. I am always willing to assist you.

Study Questions
1. On Thursdays, you will be given two or three take-home study questions, covering the readings and lectures. Study questions are meant to test your overall comprehension of the learned materials, to enhance your analytic thinking, and to prepare you for exams. You are encouraged to organize your answers on a separate notebook (not due). Keep this notebook updated and review it for the coming midterm exams. You may utilize study questions as an outline for your discussion essays.

2. On average 3-4 succinct paragraphs for each study question would suffice, but keep in mind that specific questions require specific answers. Avoid giving unnecessary definition to the terms you are using and get to the points immediately. You may discuss your answers in review sessions or during my office hours.

Midterm Exams
1. You will take three written exams, consisting of five questions of which you answer four. All exam questions are drawn directly from the study questions distributed in class for the midterm under examination. You will have 8-9 study questions before each scheduled exam. The third exam, which is not comprehensive, will be given at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 7th, the day designated by the University for our class final.

2. Exam policy: (a) there is no early exam; (b) if you miss an exam or anticipate missing one, you must provide a written statement verifying the necessity of your absence; (c) a makeup exam must be taken within two weeks following the scheduled exams; (d) all makeup exams are penalized (-10%) unless you provide a documented excuse; (e) under no circumstance a makeup exam will be given after two weeks past the designated exam date; (f) all missing exams thereafter will be converted to a “failure” (not an incomplete) for that portion of coursework; and (g) all makeup exams will be evaluated on an absolute, not comparative, basis. There is no exception to this exam policy. It is to your advantage not to miss an exam.

3. Please bring a blue book (exam book) and arrive 5 minutes early on the designated exam dates. I must sign on your blue book before the exam; a blue book without my signature on it is invalid and will not be considered. Do not attempt to cram up study questions. You will not be able to handle this, and I will not be able to help you.

4. Satisfying class requirements (i.e., submitting essays on time, taking all exams, etc.) does not by itself warrant a passing grade. In order to pass (for sociology majors C or higher), your overall course work must be of passing quality. In this course A is reserved for those who truly justify outstanding work.

Readings
1. You are required to do assigned readings thoroughly prior to class; be prepared to discuss them and answer questions in class. Assigned readings demand meticulous attention. You are not expected to
grasp the details on your first reading. However, I will assume that you are already acquainted with conceptual terms in the texts, that you are prepared to raise generic issues and questions in class. In the event the class lags behind, I will randomly name a few of you to summarily describe the readings in the next class meeting.

2. Likewise, lectures are delivered on the assumption that you have completed your readings thoroughly. You will be introduced to competing standpoints and relevant issues in class, and lectured materials are on all exams. Each lecture will identify issues/themes that the text under discussion raises, and it often centers on extended clarification and discussion of the materials you have read. Notice the exam dates and essay deadlines below, and plan your schedules accordingly. Changes, if any, is announced in advance.

3. Readings for the following week(s) are assigned on every Thursday in class along with the expected completion dates and study questions. We will have to jump around reading WW text (WW=Wallace and Wolf; MR=McIntosh Reader; JH=Jürgen Habermas); but we will proceed in orderly and thematic fashion throughout, from Marx, Weber, Durkheim, functionalism, interactionism, phenomenology, critical theory, Habermas, world-system theory, etc., while simultaneously exploring relevant themes, issues, debates, and theories.

4. Reading assignments for the first and second weeks (Jan. 16th through 23rd) are WW pp. 2-13, MR pp. 1-7 (read before Thursday, Jan. 16), and MR pp. 13-38 (read before Tuesday, Jan 21).

   1. 1/14 course introduction; concept, theory, perspective, explanation.
   2. 1/21
   3. 1/28
   4. 2/04 1st discussion essay due on Thursday Feb 6.
   5. 2/11 review discussion on Thursday Feb. 13.
   6. 2/18 midterm exam 1: Tuesday Feb. 18, 1/13 to 2/11
   7. 2/25
   8. 3/04 2nd discussion essay due on Thursday March 6.
   9. 3/11
   11. 3/25 review discussion & 3rd discussion essay due on Thursday March 27.
   12. 4/01 midterm exam 2: Tuesday April 1, 2/20 to 3/27
   13. 4/08
   14. 4/15 4th discussion essay due on Thursday April 17
   15. 4/22
   16. 4/29 review discussion & 5th discussion essay due on Thursday. May 1.

Evaluation

Your course grade is based on:
   Five Discussion Essays (60 points each)....................300 points total.
   Three Midterm Exams (200 points each).....................600 points total.

The grading scale is:  792-900 (88%): A
                     702-791 (78%): B
                     612-701 (68%): C
                     522-611 (58%): D
8/20  Course introduction, concept, theory, and explanation.
8/24  MR pp.2-8. Understanding sociological theory II.


    9/07  WW pp.45-57. Merton: neofunctionalism. (1st essay on Durkheim due)


4. 9/17  WW pp.100-117. NeoMarxism: critical theory, class theory, and cultural capital.
    9/19  WW pp.89-93. An assessment of Marxism
    9/21  Review discussion (2nd essay on Marx due)

5. 9/24  1st midterm exam: from 8/22 to 9/21
    9/26  MR pp.113-114 & WW pp.71-74. Introduction to Weber


8. 10/08  WW pp.190-191. Introduction to symbolic interactionism, pragmatism.
    10/10  WW pp.196-205. Mead: communication, self and society.


     10/26  Review discussion (4th essay on symbolic interactionism and/or social phenomenology due)

     10/31  JH pp.50-61. Habermas: technical progress and the lifeworld.

12 11/05  JH pp.81-100. Habermas: technology and science as ideology I.
     11/07  JH pp.100-122. Habermas: technology and science as ideology II.
     11/09  Conclusion: communicative action and discursive democracy.

13 11/12  WW pp.180-188. Social evolution and modernity II: Giddens and Beck.
11/16 World-system theory: the origin and development of global capitalism I. (5th essay on Habermas due)

14 11/19 World-system theory: the origin and development of global capitalism II.

11/30 Evaluating sociological theory II: modernism and postmodernism. (6th essay on world-system theory due)

16 12/03 Postmodern conditions I: fragmentation and multiplicity.
12/05 Postmodern conditions II: individuals in contemporary society.
12/07 Review discussion.

12/13 3:00 p.m.: 3rd midterm exam: from 10/31-12/07

Student Evaluation

In this class “A” is reserved for those who justify outstanding work. Your grade will be based on:

Class attendance/participation: 10%.................................100 points
Six Discussion Essays: 30%...........................................50 points each; 300 points
Three Midterm Exams: 60%.............................................200 points each; 600 points

The grading scale is: 880-1000: A 780-879: B 680-779: C 580-679: D