What this course is about

“Theory is not something set apart from our lives. Our assumptions about reality and change influence our actions constantly. The question is not whether we have a theory, but how aware we are of the assumptions behind our actions, and how conscious we are of the choices we make — daily — among different theories.”

Charlotte Bunch

“The most important thing to understand is that everything factual is already theory.”

Goethe

The goal of this course is to introduce graduate students to the theoretically informed practice of sociology. Theory courses are often avoided, I believe, because students think about the subject as something abstract and disconnected from other areas of study as well as unrelated to the mundane realities of policymaking, problem solving, and everyday living. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Theory affects both how we live our lives and how we understand these lives. It also affects how we understand the lives of others. Understanding theory, I would argue, is one of the most practical things we can do.

Throughout this course, the emphasis will be upon social theory and theorizing as a dynamic, living process which is highly relevant to the important issues of our day. In this sense the course has an applied focus, in which the goal is not merely to acquire knowledge of “famous dead theorists” or well-known theories of the past but to analyze and understand the contemporary situation based upon important insights transmitted to us by pioneering social thinkers. The goal is to facilitate each member of the class to develop competence in using social theory to critically analyze society and social life and to develop solutions to problems thereby identified. In other words, to help each student to develop an adequate and appropriate “theoretical toolbox.”

The learning objectives for this course correspond to those listed under SOC P540 on the department’s official list of Master’s Degree Learning Objectives. The numbers in brackets below reference those specific learning objectives. When you have successfully completed this course you will be able to do the following:

1. Explain and appropriately apply key classical and contemporary social theories to current social problems and issues. [1, 1a, 2, 17]

2. Outline the history and sociocultural context of sociological theory social practice. [1b, 10]
3. Explain and employ metatheoretical criteria for evaluating social theories and theorists and for applying theories to solve societal problems. [4, 2, 1c, 1d]

4. Develop a theoretically-informed sociological practice that translates the sociological perspective for clients and the public. [3, 5, 8a, 9]

5. Explain the ethical issues involved in professional sociological practice. [11]

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**Course materials and format**

Assigned readings will be drawn from the following sources:


Other articles may be placed on reserve in the Library during the course of the term.

You are expected, of course, to read all of the assigned material *before* the topic is covered in class and to come to class prepared to discuss it. What this means is that you will organize your notes on the readings, prepare a short summary and a list of questions or issues for discussion. This list may include questions about points you find difficult, confusing, or unclear as well as issues whose implications you wish to pursue.

This course relies almost exclusively on a seminar format. Your active participation is required. Participation includes asking questions as well as raising points of clarification or debate. It also includes actively attempting to apply the theories to your own life experience as well as to selected problems.

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**Course requirements**

The course requirements are designed to fulfil the learning objectives for the course. The number in parentheses after each requirement refers to the learning objective that requirement will help you to meet. According to department policy, some of the required assignments will be placed in your student portfolio. These assignments are noted at the end of this list.

1. **Prepare a summary of one or more of the readings, make a short presentation, and lead a class discussion.** (Objective 4)
   Each student will sign up for two or three different chapters. For each chapter, you will prepare a summary of the major points and some critical questions for discussion. You will be responsible for bringing enough photocopies to class for each individual student or getting the original to me enough in advance so that I can make copies.
2. **Keep a Practitioner’s Notebook.** (Objectives 1, 2, 4, 5)
Throughout the term, you are encouraged to record information that will help you to become a skilled practitioner of sociology. This may include notes on the readings or class discussion, short quotations, references, questions, issues to explore further, etc. How you keep and organize these notes is ultimately up to you, but I suggest you use a three-prong folder. Four times during the term, you will turn your notebook in for review and feedback by the instructor. All information in the notebook you turn in for review must be typed or computer printed. The notebooks are to be turned in on the following dates:

- February 4
- March 4
- April 8
- April 29

3. **Write two analytical papers.** (Objectives 1 and 3)
These papers, of 5-6 pages each, will involve reacting to particular topics in the class discussions and the readings and analyzing them theoretically. No additional outside research or reading will be required. Specific guidelines for each paper will be handed out separately. All papers must be typed or computer printed and stapled in the upper left corner only. The papers will be due on the following schedule:

- Paper #1: February 11
- Paper #2: May 7

4. **Prepare and deliver an in-class presentation.** (Objective 4)
The presentation is an exercise in sociological practice. You will be asked to develop and present a theoretical analysis of a selected social problem or social policy issue. You will choose the problem that is to be dealt with as well as determine what theories are appropriate to the explanation and action plan — a task very comparable to that faced most often by practicing sociologists. Specific guidelines for the presentation will be handed out separately. The presentation should be professionally done, using PowerPoint or comparable software or overhead transparencies. I will be available to you as a consultant in the design of these presentations. The presentations will be given in class on April 22 and April 29 (if necessary). You will be expected to turn in printed notes and summaries.

**Elements of evaluation that will become part of the student portfolio include:**
- Selected Chapter Summaries: each student will choose their best example(s).
- Papers 1 and 2
- Printed notes from the Presentation and instructor’s evaluation of it.

**How you will be evaluated**

The elements of evaluation in this course will be weighted in the following way:

- Class Participation (including chapter summaries) 15% of final course grade
- Practitioner’s Notebook 20% of final course grade
- Analytical Papers (2 @ 20% each) 40% of final course grade
- Presentation 25% of final course grade
Final grades for the course will be assigned according to the following scale:

A = 90% – 100%
B = 80% – 89%
C = 70% – 79%
D = 60% – 69%
F = 59% and below

There will be no curve and no extra credit work.

What I will do

• Take responsibility for organizing the syllabus and the general design of the course.
  I’ve had the time and training to think about this topic, so it’s appropriate that I take the lead. Your input, however, is valued and necessary.

• Be available as a consultant for any course-related issues.
  Schedule an appointment, stop by, e-mail or call me:
  Office: CM 235  Phone: 481-6669  Sociology Dept. Office: 481-6842
  Office Hours: TR 12 noon – 1:15 pm; T 8:45-9:15 pm; other times by appointment
  email: ashton@ipfw.edu
  At other times, call me at home between 8:30 am and 10:30 pm: 485-6314

• Accommodate any disability, if at all possible.
  If you have or acquire any sort of disability that may require accommodation, I urge you to discuss it with me (preferably after class or during office hours). I want to do everything that I can to help everyone who wants to succeed in this course. If you want to find out what special services and accommodations are available on campus, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities in Walb 118 (481-6657, voice/TDD) http://www.ipfw.edu/ssd/

Schedule of topics and assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment and Class Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 14</td>
<td>Overview and Organization of the Course / Introductions</td>
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<td>Individual and Mutual Expectations / Sociological Theory &amp; Practice</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 21</td>
<td>Reading: Garner, pp. xii-xv; 322-330</td>
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<td>Dentler, Chapter 1</td>
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<td>DuBois and Wright, “The Sociologist as Artist”</td>
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<td>Applied Theory and Sociological Practice</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 28</td>
<td>Reading: Garner, pp. 478-485</td>
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<td>Dentler, Chapter 2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Theory and Metatheory / Epistemological Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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| Feb 4     | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 3-13, 23-63  
             Dentler, Chapter 3  
             Early Sociological Theory / Marx          |
| Feb 11    | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 64-101, 124-134  
             Dentler, Chapter 4  
             Durkheim and Weber                           |
| Feb 18    | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 135-170, 312-321, 331-346  
             Dentler, Chapter 5  
             Simmel, Parsons, Symbolic Interactionists   |
| Feb 25    | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 173-246  
             Dentler, Chapter 6  
             Pragmatism and the Chicago School           |
             Cultural Analysis I                         |
| March 11  | NO CLASS – Spring Break                                           |
| March 18  | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 374-390, 407-471  
             Cultural Analysis II                        |
| March 25  | **Reading**: Garner, pp. 527-588  
             Global Analysis                             |
| April 1   | **Reading**: Newman, pp. 3-76  
             Self and Society  
             NO CLASS MEETING                           |
| April 8   | **Reading**: Newman, pp. 79-143  
             Social Construction of the Self              |
| April 15  | **Reading**: Newman, pp. 146-247  
             Social Institutions                          |
| April 22  | **Reading**: Newman, pp. 252-331  
             Student Presentations / Social Inequality   |
16 April 29  **Reading:** Newman, pp. 338-467  
Dentler, Chapter 7  
Student Presentations / Social Change / Developing a Theoretical Toolbox / Course evaluation  

Wednesday, May 7  Final paper due by 10 pm.