Social Theory
Honors Section

Sociology 475                        Professor Cameron Macdonald
T-Th 2:30-3:45                       8135 Social Science
Social Science 6112                 Office Hours, Tuesdays, noon – 2:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will study major thinkers and theoretical perspectives within sociology. In particular, we will explore how these thinkers address four of the central concerns of modernity: capitalism as a form of social order; the interplay between democracy and bureaucracy; and the role of religion in the face of the rise of scientific thought and the concept of the individual in complex societies. Students can expect to: (1) become familiar with the foundational concepts, analytic frameworks, and debates that inform sociological thought and practice; (2) understand these ideas, concepts, and debates in terms of the socio-historical contexts in which they developed; and (3) learn to identify and assess the assumptions and implications underlying these sociological theories. You will also be expected to apply these theoretical perspectives to contemporary problems.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

- Required course participation includes doing all of the assigned readings before class, and attending and participating in all class discussions. In addition, each of you will, with a partner, generate and distribute discussion questions at least two days in advance each class. The material we will be studying is sometimes difficult, but always fascinating – careful reading of the texts, diligent note-taking during lectures, and active participation in class will be essential to your success.
- Attendance is mandatory. You will also be expected to do close reading of the assigned texts. When we discuss the theorists presented, you will be expected to be able to refer to the page numbers and location of relevant arguments and citations. This means you should bring the book and your notes to class every week. I will give a set of study questions for you to follow with each week’s readings.
- Grades will be based on the following breakdown: Attendance/Participation – 100 points; Paper 1 – 50 points; Paper 2 – 50 points; Paper III – group research project and paper – 100 points.

REQUIRED READINGS

Anonymous. *Writing in Social Studies 10* (on learn@uw)
COURSE OUTLINE

Week One:  Modernity and the Invention of Social Theory

Tuesday, September 4:  What is Social Theory?
Overview and Introduction to the course

Readings:
Social Studies 10 – Writing Social Theory*
C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

Thursday, September 6:  What is Modernity?

Readings:
Robert A. Nisbet, “The Two Revolutions,” *The Sociological Tradition*

PART I: CAPITALISM, DEMOCRACY AND BUREAUCRACY

Week Two:  The Concept of Democracy

Tuesday, September 11:  *Introduction to de Tocqueville*
Readings:  “On de Tocqueville” from Ritzer, *Classical Social Theory*
Author’s Introduction, pps. 9-20, Volume I, chapters 2-5, (pps. 31-98).

**Fields Translation is out of print. Scans will be available online.**
Thursday, September 13:  
*Tyranny of the Majority*  
*Readings:*  
*Democracy in America,* -vol. II, Book II, chs. 4-8 (188-276)

**Week Three: The Critique of Democracy**

Tuesday, September 18:  
*The Taste for Material Well-Being*  
*Readings:*  

Thursday, September 20:  
*Democratic Despotism*  
*Readings:*  
*Democracy in America,* vol. II, Book IV, Entire.

**Week Four: Karl Marx: The Young Philosopher**

Tuesday, September 25:  
*On Alienation*  
Ritzer, “Introduction to Marx”*  
Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity*  
*Marx-Engels Reader,*  

Thursday, September 27:  
*Estranged Labor*  
*Readings:*  

**Week Five: The Critique of Capitalism**

Tuesday, October 2:  
*Historical Materialism*  
*Readings:*  

Thursday, October 4:  
*Revolutionary Program*  
*Readings:*  
Week Six: The Critique of Capital

Tuesday, October 9:
Readings: The Commodity and Its Value

Thursday, October 11:
Readings: The Laws of Capitalist Accumulation

Week Seven: Weber and Modern Western Capitalism

Tuesday, October 16:
Readings: Capitalism in the West and the “Calling”

Thursday, October 18:
Readings: The Problem of the “Iron Cage”
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, pps. 155-183.

PART TWO: MODERN SOCIETY, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND THE PROBLEM OF MEANING

Week Eight: Max Weber and the Problem of Rationalization

Tuesday, October 23:
Readings: Bureaucracy and the Types of Legitimate Authority
From Max Weber, pps. 196-199, 204-216, 220 (bottom)-235, 240-244. “The Types of Legitimate Authority,”* The Routinization of Charisma”*

Thursday, October 25:
Readings: Politics in a Rationalized World
Week Nine: The Problem of Meaning in Technocratic Society

Tuesday, October 30: Science and the Disenchantment of the World  

Thursday, November 1: What Can Science Do?  

****Paper I Due in Class****

Week Ten: Durkheim on Modernity

Tuesday, November 6: Mechanical and Organic Solidarity  

Thursday, November 8: Causes and Consequences of the Division of Labor  

Week Eleven: Alienation and Anomie

Tuesday, November 13: Durkheim, Suicide, Introduction, Book II: chapters 1, 2, 3 (1st paragraph, p. 171, pps. 208-216)

Thursday, November 15: Durkheim, Suicide, Book III: chapters 1, 2 (pps. 326-338); chapter 3 (pps 386-392)

Week Twelve: The Problem of Religion/Solidarity in Modernity

Tuesday, November 22: Religion and Social Solidarity  
Readings: Durkheim, Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Selections,*

Thursday, November 24: THANKSGIVING!
Section III
Case Study and Theoretical Application

Week Thirteen: Research Groups
Tuesday, November 27: Selecting Cases – Group Discussion
Thursday, November 29: Library Session (Location TBA)

***Paper II Due in class***

Week Fourteen: Group Presentations
Tuesday, December 4: de Tocqueville and Marx Groups
Thursday, December 6: Weber and Durkheim Groups

Week Fifteen: Wrap up and preparation for take-home exam
Tuesday, December 11: Work Groups – update bibliographic materials
Thursday, December 13: Final Class Wrap-up and paper preparation

***Paper III due via turnitin.com on 12/22/12***

Happy Holidays!