

SOCI 126-601: Contemporary Theory

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Spring 2014

Introduction

This course reviews contemporary sociological theories, with an emphasis on using these theories to understand and think about the social world. The material is roughly organized so that we start with theories focusing mostly on individual, local contexts (the micro-level), building to larger phenomena (the macro-level).

Required books

These are on reserve at Van Pelt and for sale at the Penn Book Center.

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994
- PIERSON, P. *Politics in time: History, institutions, and social analysis*. Volume 24, Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ, 2004
- KATZ, JACK *How emotions work*. University of Chicago Press, 1999

Course requirements and grading

There are several required and graded assignments for this course. They are listed here, and we'll discuss them more in class.

- Come up with a research question to apply the theories to as the class progresses. Due January 27, before class. Pass/non-pass: no final grade without it. Does not have to be your final question.
- Theory descriptions. For each week, describe the assigned readings in a couple of sentences, and how it could be used to answer your research question. Due each week before class. 20% of final grade.
- Participation in class discussions. I will pose questions to the entire class, such as "What is, in your view, the key difference between theory X and theory Y?", then give everyone a couple of minutes to reflect and then ask each person to give their answer. If you do the email reactions you should be well prepared for these. 10% of final grade.
- Paper 1, trying to answer your research question using at least two theories covered so far. Due October 18 before midnight. 30% of final grade.
- Paper 2, trying to answer your research question using one micro and one macro theory. Due December 10 before midnight. 30% of final grade.
- Class presentation of 2 (one micro and one macro) readings. Prepare a short presentation of the key argument in one reading, explaining and or critiquing it to your fellow class mates. 10% of final grade.

Instructor

- Alexander Jerneck, 121 McNeil
- office hours: Mondays, 3pm - 5pm, or by appointment.
- email: ajerneck@sas.upenn.edu (checked once every 24 hours).

Requirement details

Email your research question and theory descriptions to the class email list at SOCI126-601-14A@lists.upenn.edu. Use your UPenn email address to avoid being spam-filtered.

Research Question

A question you are interested in, one that you can apply the theories to, and one that could be the topic of your papers. (this question can, and should evolve as you learn more).

Papers

The papers are short, so you have to spend time and effort revising them to convey your most important (your best!) points. Papers will be graded on both content and writing.

Theory description

This means synthesizing the material for each week into a short description. The intended audience of these descriptions are other students. Try to connect it to the other theories. At the end of each class we'll try to formulate the key points of each theory; you can then compare with your own summary to see how to improve.

Course outline and readings

Extracting the key points from a large mass of sometimes inaccessible text is an important skill. This course will help you develop this skill (be sure to look at the resources posted on the blackboard site for how to read academic texts). Readings marked [BB] are available on the canvas site.

January 15 Rational Choice

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994, pp. 121 - 180

January 20 No class: Martin Luther King Day

January 27 Cognitive Limits on Rational Choice

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994, pp. 153 - 159
- TVERSKY, A. and KAHNEMAN, D. Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *science*, 185 1974, Nr. 4157 [BB]
- MARCH, JAMES and SIMON, HERBERT *Organizations*. John Wiley And Sons, 1958, pp. 136 - 142 [BB]

February 3 Microinteractions

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994, pp. 242 - 276 (focus 254 - 276)
- GARFINKEL, HAROLD *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1967, pp. 35 - 75 [BB]
- BECKER, H.S. Becoming a marihuana user. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1953 [BB]

February 10 Emotions

- KATZ, JACK *How emotions work*. University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 1 - 142, 175 - 222

February 17 Rituals

- Goffman readings on Blackboard (3 pdfs) [BB]

February 24 Interaction Ritual Chains

- COLLINS, RANDALL *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 47-182 (ch 2,3,4) [BB]

March 3 Conflict

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994, pp. 47 - 112

March 10 No class: Spring break

March 17 Power

- MANN, MICHAEL *The Sources of Social Power - A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*. Volume I, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 1 - 32 [BB]
- EMERSON, RICHARD M. Power-Dependence Relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27 1962, Nr. 1 [BB]

March 24 Social movements

- MCCARTHY, J.D. and ZALD, M.N. Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American journal of sociology*, 82 1977, Nr. 6, ISSN 0002-9602 [BB]
- AMENTA, EDWIN et al. The Political Consequences of Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36 2010, Nr. 1 [BB]

March 31 Time, persistence, and change

- PIERSON, P. *Politics in time: History, institutions, and social analysis*. Volume 24, Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ, 2004

April 7 18 Class

- COLLINS, RANDALL. *Four sociological traditions*. Oxford University Press New York, 1994, pp 62 - 76
- WRIGHT, ERIK OLIN *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 1 - 35 [<http://realutopias.org/class-counts>]
- BOURDIEU, P., SAPIRO, G. and MCHALE, B. First lecture. Social space and symbolic space: Introduction to a Japanese reading of Distinction. *Poetics Today*, 12 1991, Nr. 4 [BB]

April 14 Race, ethnicity and gender

- DU BOIS, W.E.B. *The world and Africa: An inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history*. International Publishers Co, 1965, pp. 16 - 43 [BB]
- CHAFETZ, J.S. Feminist theory and sociology: Underutilized contributions for mainstream theory. *Annual review of sociology*, 1997 [BB]
- ANDERSON, E. The cosmopolitan canopy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 595 2004, Nr. 1 [BB]

April 21 Networks

- Easley and Kleinberg "Networks, Crowds and Markets", Ch 2. [BB]
- GRANOVETTER, MARK Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 91 nov 1985, Nr. 3, ISSN 0002–9602 [BB]

April 28 Organizations

- SCOTT, RICHARD Reflections on a Half-Century of Organizational Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30 2004, Nr. 1, ISSN 0360–0572 [BB]