Constructing Social Theory
Prof. Goodman

Course Description: How are societies organized? This course examines how social scientists answer this question by exploring a variety of contemporary theoretical perspectives, including those that focus on how conflict, functional needs, individual self-interest, cognitive perceptions, culture or symbolic interpretations organize society. Students compare, contrast and evaluate these and other theories of social organization in light of empirical studies that have tried to explain the genesis and dynamics of groups, formal organizations, social classes, nation states and global systems.

Grades: Your grade will depend on reading points, short research proposals and two exams, according to the following formula:

- Reading Points 20%
- Research Proposals 30% (3 papers at 10% each)
- Midterm 25%
- Final 25%

Incompletes will only be given when the student is otherwise passing the course and cannot complete it due to circumstances that are unforeseen and beyond the student's control.

Reading Points: I will provide reading points for most assignments. You will be graded on your ability to provide a summary of the author on those points when called on in class. Only students called on in class will be graded on that day. If you are absent the day that I call on you without a university defined excuse, you will receive an 'F'. Since each student is likely to be called on only 4 or 5 times, it is important that you be prepared for every class. I will give everyone one 'free pass' for the quarter on reading points. In other words, you can let me know that you will be unprepared to answer the reading points for that day. However, you must do this before class starts, either in person, phone message or email. You will not be given a free pass after I have called on you.

I will sometimes have you write a short paragraph to answer one of the reading points. That answer should be submitted on Blackboard by 9:00 a.m. the morning of class. It will count as one reading point. A free pass for that day will also apply to that.

Research Proposals: There will be three short papers in which you apply the general theory from the reading and class lecture to a particular research project of your choice. You will not actually be doing the research, but you will be expected to propose a research project that could reasonably be done.

For one of the proposals, I will ask you to provide a transparency with a shortened presentation of your proposal for class discussion.

There is an assignment sheet for this at the end of this syllabus.

Exams: There will be a mid-term and a final exam. The final will not be cumulative. The exams will be short essays. In order to make up an exam, you must contact me before the test or as soon after as possible and provide a university defined excuse.
Help: I will hold office hours Mon., Wed. & Fri. from 11:00 to 12:00 and from 3:00 to 4:00. I can also be reached by phone or email. I check my email often every day and it is my preferred mode of communication. Messages can also be left for me in the Sociology office.

Please let me know if you have any disabilities which will affect your participation in this class. I will make every effort to accommodate you.

Readings

Intro: From Classic to Contemporary

Functionalism
"Structural Functionalism." From Encyclopedia of Social Theory. G. Ritzer (ed.)

Conflict Theory
"Conflict Theory" adapted from various sources.
Habermas, Jürgen. 1975. “A Social-Scientific Concept of Crisis.” From Legitimation Crisis

Individual Self Interest, Rational Choice & Exchange Theory

**Cognitive Perceptions & Social Constructionism**

**Symbolic Interpretations & Dramaturgy**

**Theories of Culture**


**World Systems & Globalization**


**Feminist Theories**
Friedan, Betty. 1963. *Feminine Mystique*


**Postmodern Theories**

**Organizing Groups**
Hechter, Michael. *Principles of Group Solidarity*
Organizing Nations
Gellner, Ernest. Nations and Nationalism

Organizing Classes
MacLeod, Jay. Ain't No Making It
Research Proposal Assignment

1. Statement of precise, testable hypothesis to be studied.

2. A summary in your own words of the theory from the reading that is relevant to the hypothesis. A discussion of the limits and criticisms of that theory in light of your hypothesis.

3. a) a description of the population/data to be studied. b) Explanation of why the population/data is relevant for testing the hypothesis.

4. Outline of the method you would use.

5. Explanation of what is at stake, either theoretically or socially in the study. In other words, what difference will it make if your hypothesis is right or wrong.

Grading:

- A precise, testable hypothesis: 5 points
- Summary of relevant theory from reading: 10 points
- Reasonable population for testing the hypothesis: 5 points
- Reasonable method for testing the hypothesis: 5 points
- Explanation for what is at stake: 10 points

Transparency:

You will also be assigned to provide a transparency of one (out of the three) of your research proposals for class discussion. That should include the following:

1. Statement of precise, testable hypothesis to be studied.

2. 1-3 sentence description of the population/data to be studied.

3. 3-4 sentence summary of the method you would use.