

RS-####
3.0 units
Intersession 2015

INTRODUCTION TO COUNTER-OPPRESSIVE SOCIOLOGIES (*draft syllabus*)

Rich sociological traditions offer tools and knowledge for dismantling systems of oppression, creating social change, and building just faith communities. This course offers an introduction to the critical analysis of social behavior, organization, and institutions for faith leaders and religion scholars. Students engage foundational texts and empirical research relevant to human experience as well as religious tradition, in order to develop theoretical and substantive bodies of knowledge as well as interpretive skills. Focus areas include feminist theory, affect, postcolonial thought, biopower, social movements, and critical race theories, among others. In each weekly unit, central questions address the nature of human action; the role of State power and ideology; notions of self, “other,” and agency; and systemic oppression and social change. The course requires weekly on-line discussion and frequent live video sessions. Students complete a final project by producing a photo essay as part of an online gallery and symposium.

Course Website: Moodle.gtu.edu

Meets online. Frequent voice-to-voice components required.

I. Faculty Details

Instructor: Megan Dowdell, mdowdell@sksm.edu

Phone: 978-305-0361

Office Hours: You may request a 15-minute appointment to discuss course concepts and assignments.

E-mail Communication: Questions and appointment requests by e-mail are welcomed. E-mails sent after 6pm Pacific or on the weekends may not receive an immediate response. The instructor does not accept text messages from students. Subject lines of e-mail messages should clearly indicate whether you have a question or request for appointment. Please do not hesitate to contact fellow students for assistance as well.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

At the close of the course and successful completion of all course requirements, students will be able to:

- Understand the origins and major ideas of sociological traditions and theorists from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries;
- Develop a theoretical toolbox to deepen knowledge of current social, political, religious, and cultural conditions;
- Identify counter-oppressive tools for conversation and conflict over the present and future contours of the social world;

- Integrate counter-oppressive social inquiry into their vocational development and professional identities.

III. Educating to Counter Oppressions

In addition to providing a valuable foundation in social theory for graduate students preparing for ministry and religious leadership, this seminar seeks to advance the values expressed in the statement on Educating to Counter Oppressions (ECO) that is central to Starr King School for the Ministry's educational design. Students should familiarize themselves with these priorities and reflect on the following questions:

- How does this theory/theorist understand the self in relation to the world and to the beloved community?
- How does this theory/theorist explain human suffering and imagine human freedom or wholeness?
- How does this theory/theorist understand cultural and institutional patterns as well as alternative paradigms that resist oppression and embrace systemic social change?
- How does this theory/theorist envision the "common good"?

IV. Sources for Learning

Sources for learning include primary texts by key social theorists of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, exemplar applications of theories, fieldwork exercises, video material that explores key topics, among others.

a. Required Books:

Available at Amazon.com and other retailers:

Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux. 2011. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*. ISBN: 978-0742570504

Charles Lemert (Ed.) 2013 *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 5th ed. 978-0813346687

b. Additional Required Resources:

The instructor will supplement the required course books by assigning copies of primary texts as well as methodological, substantive, and theoretical contributions that exemplify the application of a sociological tradition. Other electronic media relevant to each week will also be assigned or recommended.

c. Independent Research:

Students are expected to independently research topics relevant to the course, using the GTU electronic and print holdings and subscriptions as well as popular U.S. and global media available on the Internet. Students should come to the course with a working knowledge of the

GTU's resources and how to use them. Additionally, web searches for audio and visual material will be important for the successful completion of the final project.

e. Embodied Knowledge

The last (or in some ways, the first!) source of learning: the personal, lifelong experience of having/being a social being in relationship with others and the social world. Embodied experience is a form of expertise in itself and ought not to be discounted. As students are confronted with multiple forms of knowledge and a variety of views on important issues related to countering oppressions, personal histories (our own and through narratives and literature) can offer pause and help one to think critically in dialogue with scholarly, professional, and sacred sources. Students are expected to approach texts and resources with the goals of interpretation, analysis, and response, while engaging embodied experience as a valuable component of learning; *however*, personal sharing (anecdotes, stories, and raw opinions) is no substitute for serious study and engagement. Everyone will be reminded, gently and often, to *bring it back to the text*.

V. Course Expectations

The course is designed as an interdisciplinary seminar and laboratory.

1. **Participation**: Each student is expected to engage each week of the semester in the course environment on Moodle. If you are ill or otherwise miss material, it is your responsibility to review what has been missed and stay up-to-date. Student involvement and leadership in course discussions is essential to the study of counter-oppressive sociologies. Plan to post weekly and reply to peers often.
2. **Reading and Note-taking**: Each student is expected to read all required reading in full, and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts and other resources that are indicated in each week on Moodle. Please see the PDF handout available on Moodle about “good note-taking for ethics and social theory” for the instructor’s suggestions on how to be a successful note-taker. Good notes will help you analyze, evaluate, and connect readings from week to week.
3. **Leadership**: Beginning in Week 3, at least two students will be assigned as critical reviewers for class meetings (marked with an asterisk in course schedule). Student reviewers will create a brief 1-2 page review of the origins, ideas, and tools of each of the main readings in each week. A template will be provided. The student reviewers post their summary at the beginning of the week and solicit feedback from fellow students to further refine the review of important concepts and contributions from the relevant theoretical discipline.
4. **Written Assignments**: Each student is required to complete all assignments prior to the assigned deadline and according to the guidelines provided. Unless otherwise stated, all written assignments must be in 12-point font, double-spaced, include 1” margins, and adhere to assigned page limits. All references should use consistent citation formats and include a bibliography. Grammar, spelling, clarity, and organization are important.

- a. **Discussion Postings:** During the seminar week, students will comment on the major ideas and tools from the readings and respond to central discussion questions, comparing and contrasting across weeks and sociological traditions. Also, each student is expected to respond to at least one peer in a thoughtful reply each week, and provide constructive feedback and additional commentary on the critical reviews offered by the student leaders in that week.
- b. **One-Minute Essays:** Without notice, a “one-minute essay” will be assigned to help recap the week, name linkages between theory and action, and identify aspects of the material that remain unclear.
- c. **Fieldwork Memo:** Students will have the opportunity to engage in brief fieldwork through “participant observation” in a public setting accessible to them. After the experience, the student will write a detailed analytical memo reflecting on the experience with regards to major themes in the course.
- d. **Photo Essay:** Students will search the web to identify (and cite) photos that illustrate 8-10 concepts or ideas from counter-oppressive sociologies. An accompanying essay will help to understand what the concept is, how it is interpreted, and why the image was helpful in illustrating it. *In lieu of the photo essay, students who would like to produce a thesis or specialize in social theory are invited to submit a final term paper.*

VI. Course Schedule

Below is a *tentative* schedule of seminar weeks and topics.

Week 1: September 8 – September 11
Why Sociology?

Week 2: September 14 – September 18
The First Sociologists

Week 3: September 21 – September 25
Neo-Marxism and Counter-Hegemony

Week 4: September 28 – October 2
American Race Theories and Intersectionalities

Week 5: October 5 – October 9
Social Movements and Identity

Week 6: October 12 – October 16
Post-Capitalism and Globalization

Week 7: October 19 – October 23
Power and Resistance

Week 8: October 26 – October 30

Reading Week

Week 9: November 2 – November 6
Affect, Bodies, and Emotion

Week 10: November 9 – November 13
Marginalities

Week 11: November 16 – November 20
Multiracial and Black Feminisms

Week 12: November 23 – November 25
Postcolonial Thought

Week 13: November 30 – December 4
Poststructuralism and Postmodernism

Week 14: December 7 – December 11
Biopower, Risk, and Surveillance