

**CRITICAL THEORY FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS:
A WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE**

RS-1830

3.0 units

Starr King School for the Ministry – Graduate Theological Union
Fall 2017

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Office Hours: Students may request a 15-minute appointment to discuss course concepts and assignments on Mondays, Thursdays, or Fridays, using a scheduling link provided by the instructor.

This is a thinking and writing intensive course, designed especially for students who have entered theological school without recent academic writing experience or who wish to improve their critical thinking and writing practice in a focused setting.

"Thinking begins in provocation" (Gilles Deleuze). Rich theoretical traditions call forth questions for religious leaders about how we make meaning, interpret history, form opinions, understand ourselves in relation to the world around us, and decide how to act. In this introduction to critical theory, students engage key thinkers on culture, religion, and social change, as well as each other, to develop a theoretical toolbox and skills needed to read, think, and write effectively as a religious leader and agent of social change. After closely reading major texts in social thought, including feminism, postcolonial, queer, and antiracist theories, the seminar session takes up the task of interpretation and analysis, practicing critical thinking for graduate level work in theology, ethics, and religious studies. A peer writing group will support writing *every day*, incorporating new tools into an expanding set of gifts for ministerial and religious leadership. Assignments build upon each other, so that the final product is a polished academic, analytical paper. Students are expected to dedicate the required amount of time and energy, and access electronic and library resources from home. Comfort and proficiency in academic reading, thinking, and writing will aid religious leaders in applying theoretical frameworks and knowledge into their own practice and art of ministry for their lifetime.

This is a hybrid course, which meets weekly in a live video session. It is open to both high- and low-residence students who have consistent access to technology that meets the requirements. **Highly recommended to SKSM students in their first term.**

Meets on Zoom with two student assistants, Wednesdays at 2:10pm. Moodle is used for course documents, assignments and discussion. *This is a low-residence hybrid course.*

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 the nature of the request. Please do not hesitate to contact fellow students for assistance as well.

I. Learning Objectives

This introductory course engages both theoretical scholarship and practical skills. During this course, students will:

- Explore the work of important thinkers in social theory
- Engage each other in thoughtful discussion of social theory and the writing process.
- Dedicate significant time to reading, thinking, and writing as a scholar
- Read, interpret and compare complex written material
- Develop self-awareness of personal academic gifts and challenges through focused writing assignments
- Access, search and use library research tools and resources for academic papers
- Practice the application of theory to ministry and religious leadership contexts

II. Student Learning Outcomes

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

- Critically read and understand difficult text;
- Communicate the meaning of an academic article or text in writing;
- Understand the major ideas of several important social theorists;
- Apply theory to important social, political, religious, and cultural issues;
- Engage skillfully in the research and writing process;
- Incorporate social theory into their vocational and academic paths

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 the theory/theorist understand themselves and the world around them?
- How does this theory/theorist understand society "functions" and changes through history?
- How does this theory/theorist envision the "common good" or social change?
- How does this theory/theorist resist oppression or advance our understanding of oppression?
- How can I apply this theory in countering oppressions today?

IV. Course Policies

- a. **Participation:** Work in this course is cumulative as each week builds upon the previous. Consistent attendance as well as participation is necessary for an individual's success in the course, and the success of the learning community in meeting its goals. Each student is expected to attend each weekly seminar and meet with their peer writing group. Participation in each aspect of the course is tracked on Moodle.
- b. **Absences:** Students are expected to contact the professor before class if they should have to miss class. If a student misses 2 Wednesday sessions of the course, they will be invited to consider dropping the course. If they miss 3 sessions, the instructor will consult with the student as well as their advisor. Students will only be able to make up one previous week of assignments, if they have an excused absence. If a student is ill or otherwise miss material, it is their responsibility to review what has been missed and stay up-to-date. *Meaningful* student involvement in course discussions is essential to success in this course. *Students should come to class, if they have read, taken notes, and completed the required thinking and writing. Just "showing up" without demonstrated effort to complete work, or failing to contribute will be considered an absence.*
- c. **Reading and Note-taking:** Readings will be a blend of primary social theory texts, exemplar applications of social theory, and skill-building resources. Each student is expected to read all required reading in full, take comprehensive, detailed notes, and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts and other resources. Good notes will be essential to good thinking, discussion, and analysis from week to week. Occasionally, you will be asked to share your notes with your instructor, writing assistants or peers. *Recommended software: It is recommended that you obtain appropriate software for taking notes. Adobe Acrobat Reader, Preview and other PDF viewers may allow you to view electronic copies of readings and take marginal notes using the computer. Some may prefer to use Word or Google documents to take notes. Those who use paper/pen may be asked to scan/send their notes in order to share in class.*
- d. **Writing:** Writing is a practice and becomes easier if we write every day. Students in this course are expected to write independently every day of the semester, taking a day per week of rest. An activity log will be required for the first half of the semester. Not all writing will be turned in, but should be well-organized. *Written assignments should be done only on the computer and backed up often to an external drive or Cloud.*
- e. **Students with Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make arrangements. Planning and communication is essential to providing reasonable adjustments to the academic environment and coursework.

V. Course Requirements

- a. **Wednesday Seminars:** These seminars are designed to develop shared understanding of the major concepts, arguments and tools from readings. Students will be expected to learn from one another, as well as the instructor and writing assistants. Be prepared to be *called upon* to respond to questions related to the material and enhance the dialogue with peers and instructor.

Peer group meetings: During the third hour of the seminar, students will be separated into peer groups to share drafts, as well as offer and receive feedback. These groups will help hold one another accountable to the reading, thinking and writing process in the course. They will also serve as spaces to share reflections on the content of the course. Writing assistants serve as facilitators.

- b. **Activity Log:** Students will keep a reading and writing log of their participation in the course, which details the time of day, frequency and intensity of one's time reading and writing. will be used as a means of tracking the process of growth over the semester.
- c. **Thought paper:** How does [THEORIST] understand the relation of the self to the world? Students will write a thought paper (1-2 pages, approx. five good paragraphs), responding to this question. They will select an author read in the course from a provided list (tentatively: Althusser, DuBois, Goffman, Aflatun). In five paragraphs, make an argument and use evidence from the primary text that answers the research question. They may include biographical references or references to class discussion, but not do other research. Essays should have an introduction in which the student states their argument in one thesis statement, approximately three paragraphs of evidence from the primary text, and a conclusion.

This is not a reflection, reaction, or personal essay. Students will be expected to integrate the skills and knowledge developed in the course. Thought papers are shared in the peer writing group as well as with the instructor.

- d. **Research and Writing exercises:** Students will use the resources available online from the GTU library and Moodle to learn research and writing skills. These exercises will be completed each week and shared in the peer writing group and with the instructor.
- e. **Final Academic Paper:** Compare/contrast the perspectives of 2 theorists (choose from provided list) about what holds society together and what makes social change possible. Then, briefly apply their views of social change to religious leadership or ministry. Use at least 3 outside peer-reviewed academic sources, including one journal publication. Optional, but recommended: use additional scholarship by the theorist to bolster your argument.

Papers must include an introduction with thesis statement, “road map” paragraph, relevant background information and literature review, 2-3 themes, and a concise application of the theory and themes to religious leadership or ministry. Grammar, spelling, structure, organization, and citations are important aspects for this assignment. Full guidelines will be offered as well as the opportunity to submit a detailed paper proposal. Drafts and outlines will be shared with peer writing group as well as instructor. *In lieu of the final academic paper, students who would like to eventually produce a MA thesis or specialize in social theory are invited to submit a final term paper on a topic and theorist(s) of their choice (15-20 pages). Students who would like to take this option should contact the instructor in the first month of the semester.*

VI. Grading and Evaluation

- a. **Grading Option:** At registration, students are prompted to select a grading option. Please select the traditional SKSM option of full credit/no credit (Pass/Fail) system or a letter grade. Please be sure to confirm grading options when registering on WebAdvisor.
- b. **Narrative Evaluation:** SKSM students will receive a narrative evaluation. Students from other schools may request a narrative evaluation in addition to the grade during the first week.
- c. **Assignment Evaluation:** Each major writing assignment will include a rubric and assigned point values. This should be used a tool for planning and editing before submission to ensure meeting all the requirements of the assignment.
- d. **Grading Scale:** Point values are assigned to each assignment and course requirement. A passing evaluation in this course is considered to be 70 points out of a possible 100 points, or higher. Letter grades are assigned as follows:

0-69 = F	
70-73 = C-	84-86 = B
74-76 = C	87-89 = B+
77-79 = C+	90-93 = A-
80-83 = B-	94-100 = A

- e. The course is designed as a writing intensive seminar for religious leaders, focused on critical reading, interpreting, and writing skills through the engagement of critical social theory. Each student is evaluated holistically and using a credit/no credit (Pass/Fail) system, as well as narrative evaluations. Point values to help students assess their own progress throughout the semester. If a student would prefer a letter grade, this must be requested, following relevant SKSM/GTU deadlines.

VII. Sources for Learning

Sources for learning include primary texts by key social theorists of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, writing *about* writing, exercises, and examples of academic writing.

a. Required Texts:

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

A book *on writing*. A list of options will be provided. Students should not have to purchase these texts but can obtain them locally.

b. 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. Writing *on writing* as well as exercises, examples, and tools will also be required reading material. 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

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*.

VI. Course Schedule

Week 1: “Why Theory?” and Academic Honesty

“Confessions of a Slow Reader,” *Duke University Podcast*
C. Wright Mills “The Sociological Imagination”
Selections from *The Theory Toolbox*

Week 2: Ideology I and Asking Good Questions

“Camera Oscura” Karl Marx PDF
Recommended: Karl Marx biography PDF
[Turabian Style guide](#).

Week 3: Ideology II and Taking Good Notes

“Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser

Week 4: Library Electronic Research (meet in Library or Library ZOOM room)

Selections from *The Theory Toolbox*
Research Scavenger Hunt

Week 5: Worldviews and Incorporating a Source

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, “Double-Consciousness and the Veil”

Week 6: Identity, Arguments and Evidence

Selections from *Stigma* by Erving Goffman
Selection from *The Theory Toolbox*

Week 7: Difference and Reconstructing an Argument

Inji Aflatun, “We Egyptian Women”

Week 8: *Reading Week – No Session*

Thought Paper DUE end of Reading Week

Week 9: Power and Responding to Feedback

Selections from *The Theory Toolbox*

Week 10: Post-Colonial Ideas and Constructing a Paper

Frantz Fanon, “Decolonizing, National Culture, and the Negro Intellectual”

Week 11: Politics, Surveillance and Risk

Michel Foucault, TBA

Week 12: Standpoints, Intersections and Good Outlines

Patricia Hill Collins, TBA

Week 13: Gender, Affect and Revising Papers

Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation”
Ahmed, “Affective Economies”

Week 14: Technologies of Self and Society

Mbembe, “Necropower”
Haraway, TBA