This course has two central goals. First, to expose seminar participants to some of the most influential theoretical ideas in sociology. We will focus on understanding the differences between these traditions, their strengths and weaknesses, and the implications of each when applied to contemporary research and problems. Second, the course gives seminar participants the opportunity to construct and evaluate their own social theories. We will use the different theoretical ideas that already exist in sociology as building blocks for creating new theories based on the individual interests of students in the class.

Course Requirements

Attendance and participation: The course is based around our weekly seminars. I do not give formal lectures during class time. Preparation and attendance are thus critical not only to your individual grade, but also to the success of the course as a whole. Seminar participants are expected to do all assigned reading and come to class prepared to actively and thoughtfully discuss the major themes and important issues raised by what they’ve read.

Papers: Each seminar participant will be expected to write two papers over the course of the semester--

(1) The first requires that you use sociological theory from the seminar to explain a current social phenomenon (which we discuss in class). Papers should be no longer than seven pages, double-spaced, in 11- or 12-point type with one inch margins all around. The paper must be turned in no later than 5pm on Monday, November 1st.

(2) The second paper requires you to use at least two different sociological theories to derive testable hypotheses about a social issue or problem of interest to you. We will talk more about the requirements for this paper in class, including the possibility that it be linked to your final assignment in SSP411. Students will present their final papers on the last day of class, December 2nd. They are due at that time.

Team projects: Everyone in the seminar will also be expected to participate in writing two “theory memos” as part of a group. These memos will be distributed to everyone in the seminar, and serve as a basis for our seminar discussions. Memos should highlight the key concepts of a theory, an example of how the theory might be applied to a contemporary social issue, weaknesses of the theory, and questions for further discussion. Memos should be no longer than eight pages, double-spaced, in 11- or 12-point type with one inch margins all around.
Course grades will be determined as follows:
  20% seminar participation
  20% individual midterm paper
  30% team theory memos (15% each)
  30% individual final paper

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify me and/or Cheryl Ashcroft, Director of the Office of Academic Support Services (610-758-4152). Accommodations will be individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

An important note about academic honesty: Plagiarism and cheating are both forbidden by University policy. Ideas as well as every word in your writing must be your own unless contained in quotation marks and properly cited. This includes text taken from the Web. Plagiarism or cheating will, at minimum, result in an F for the entire course along with other sanctions by the university. If you have questions or concerns about acceptable ways to use and cite outside material in your writing, please see me; I’m happy to help. So too is Susan Lantz in the Academic Support Services office (610-758-4159). Lehigh also has a special website devoted to academic integrity: http://www.lehigh.edu/~indost/integrity.html.

Class Schedule

08/26  Introduction to class: the role of theory in applied sociology

09/02  What is theory?
       Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3 (pp.3-130)

09/09  Marx, power, and conflict

09/16  The role of conflict in contemporary sociological research

09/23  Weber: Protestants, capitalists, and history

09/30 Weber: organizations, authority, and status

10/07 NO CLASS: PACING BREAK

10/14 Weberian theory in contemporary sociological research

10/21 Durkheim, rituals, and the collective consciousness

10/28 A Durkheimian tradition?

11/01 FIRST PAPER DUE BY 5PM!

11/04 Microinteractionism, dramaturgy, and the self

11/11 The microinteractionist tradition today

11/18 Taking stock of applied social theory
11/25  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

12/02  Seminar presentations