**Introduction to Social Theory**

**Course code:** SOC 200

**Semester and year:** Fall 2025

**Day and time:** Wednesdays 15:00 – 17:45

**Instructor:** Ted Turnau, PhD

**Instructor contact:** ted.turnau@aauni.edu

**Consultation hours:** Wednesdays 14:00 – 14:45 in room 4.02 (the door off on the stairway to the 4th floor), or by appointment. Please email me; I might be at reception making copies, but I do check my email often.

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|  **Credits US/ECTS** |  3/6 |  **Level** |  Bachelor |
|  **Length** |  15 weeks |  **Pre-requisite** |  TOEFL iBT 71  |
|  **Contact hours** |  42 hours |  **Grading** |  Letter |

# Course Description

The goal of this course is to introduce social theory as the study of thinking about how we live together, to develop a way of perceiving that goes beyond the obvious to see the structures that shape our lives and selves in the modern and postmodern world.

Even a moment’s reflection will reveal the dazzling variety of issues and topics social theory addresses: individuality, community, economy, consumerism, politics, family, race, gender, technology, just to name a few. We cannot possibly cover them all in the space of a semester; we will have to be selective. First, we will focus on a few key thinkers who helped uncover the tensions and quandaries inherent in modern social existence. Next, we will briefly explore two contentious issues that impact how we understand personhood in the contemporary world: race and gender/feminist theory. We will spend the rest of the semester exploring contemporary social phenomena that impact us collectively: consumerism, globalization, how we produce technology, and the internet/social media. Consider this course a selection of appetizers, a jumping off point for you to explore further.

# Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

* + - perceive human behavior from social theoretical perspective and apply it to a range of social issues and phenomena in their lives,
		- accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
		- demonstrate verbal and written analytical skills through engagement with social theoretical texts,
		- present and apply social theoretical concepts to contemporary contexts through clear and vivid prose and a impactful and persuasive visual and verbal presentation.

# Required Reading Material (available on NEO)

***Selected chapters/parts of four key readers:***

**Craib, Ian.** *Classical social theory: An introduction to the thought of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

**Elliott, Anthony.** *Contemporary social theory: An introduction.* London: Routledge, 2009.

**Lemert, Charles (ed).** *Social theory. 5th Edition.* Boulder: Westview Press, 2012.

**McLennan, Gregor.** *Story of sociology: A first companion to social theory.* London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

***Articles/book chapters* (also available on NEO)*:***

**Banks, Taunya Lovell.** “Two Life Stories: Reflections of One Black Woman Law Professor.” *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice,* vol. 6, issue 1 (Dec. 1990): 46-56.

**Bauman Zygmunt, and May Tim**. *Thinking sociologically*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 (Intro).

**Berman, Marshall.** *All that is solid melts into air.* New York: Verso, 1982 (Introductory chapter).

**Bourdieu, Pierre.** “The Aristocracy of Culture,” from *Distinction.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

**Chan, Jenny.** A suicide survivor: the life of a Chinese worker. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 28(2): 84-99, 2013.

**Chan Jenny, Pun Ngai, Selden Mark.** The politics *of* global production: Apple, Foxconn and China’s new working class.’ *New Technology, Work and Employment* 28(2): 100-115, 2013.

**Corey, Elizabeth C.** “The First Church of Intersectionality.” *First Things,* Aug. 2017.

**Crenshaw, Kemberlé.** “The Urgency of Intersectionality.” TED Talk, 7th Dec., 2016. Available on Youtube.com.

**Deleuze, Gilles.** Postscript on the societies of control. *October* 59: 3-7, 1992.

**Dubois, W. E. B.** “Double-Consciousness and the Veil.” From *The Souls of Black Folk.* Chicago: A. C. McLurg & Co., 1907.

**Foucault, Michel.** *Discipline and punish.* London: Penguin, 2004 (Chapter 1).

**Giddens, Anthony**. What do sociologists do? In *Social theory and modern sociology*. Cambridge: Polity, 1987.

**Grimm, Kristen.** “A Better World Means Shaping Emerging Narratives Now.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* June 19, 2020.

**Kemp, Steven.** “COVID-19, Protection Motivation Theory and Social Distancing: The Inefficiency of Coronavirus Warnings in the UK and Spain.” *REJIC* blog, March 22, 2020, <https://rejicblog.wordpress.com/2020/03/22/covid-19-protection-motivation-theory-and-social-distancing-the-inefficiency-of-corona-virus-warnings-in-the-uk-and-spain/>.

**Lorber, Judith.** “The Variety of Feminisms and their Contribution to Gender Equality.” Oldenburger Universitätsreden 97, 1997.

**Morse, Michelle, Amy Finnegan, Bram Wispelway, and Chandra Ford**. “Will COVID-19 Pave The Way For Progressive Social Policies? Insights From Critical Race Theory.” *Health Affairs* blog, July 2, 2020.

**Osborne, Peter.** Modernity is Qualitative, Not a Chronological Category*.* New Left Review I/192, March-April 1992, pp. 65-84.

**Ritzer, George.** *The McDonaldization of society. 8th edition.* London: Sage, 2015 (Chapter 1).

**Sage Publications (no author).** “7 Feminist and Gender Theories.” nd. Available at https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/38628\_7.pdf.

**Simmel, Georg.** *The metropolis and mental life* in David Frisby & Mike Featherstone (eds) *Simmel on culture* pp. 174-185.London: Sage, 1997 [first published 1903]*.*

**Tucker, J.** **B. W.** “The Ultimate White Privilege Statistics and Data Page.” From racism.org and jbwtucker.com.

**Wagner, Peter.** *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline.* London: Routledge, 1994 (Part I: Principles of Modernity).

**Wagner, Peter.** *Modernity: Understanding the Present.* Cambridge: Polity, 2012 (Part I: Re-theorizing Modernity).

# Teaching Methodology

The format of this session will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Each class will begin with presentation on a given problem/question and will be followed by in-class discussion. This will then be followed by a lecture throughout which students are invited to intervene and interrupt at any time – whether they have a comment and/or require clarification of the issue under scrutiny. Then we will discuss reading questions, which will allow for more free-form consideration of the issues involved. It is essential that you read all the assigned material, answer the reading questions, and be ready to discuss.

**Each session will thus proceed as follows (orientation times, may not always happen in this order):**

15:10 – 15:40: Student Presentation/Q&A

15:40 – 16:20: Lecture introducing topic

16:20 – 16:30/35: Break (depending on time left in class)

16:35 – 17:45: Reading discussion questions, set-up for next class.

# Course Schedule

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| Sept. 3rd  | **Session 1: Social Theory in the Modern World, OR Teaching Fish How to See Water****Lecture/Discussion:** syllabus; discussion on expectations; introduction to our subject; what is theory and why does it matter? competence, imagination, thinking sociologically/as a social theorist vs common sense. Students will choose presentation topics. **Homework due:** None yet; it’s only the first class.**Suggested Pre-reading** (and presenter resources)**:** Elliot ch. 1, “The Textures of Society”; Lemert, ch. 1, “Social Theory—It’s Uses and Pleasures”; Giddens, ch. 1, “What Do Sociologists Do?”; Bauman and May, “Introduction”. |
| Sept. 10th  | **Session 2: Welcome to Modernity****Student presentation:** *Is social theorizing different from common sense? If so, in what ways? OR How does social theory see the world (sociological imagination)?***Lecture/Discussion:** What is “modern” and how is modernity shaping us?**Homework due:** Required: McLennan, pp. 17-38 (pp. 39-53 recommended but not required). Also recommended: Berman 15-36. Reading reflection questions. |
| Sept. 17th  | **Session 3: Early Modern Giants 1: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber** **Student presentation:** *Modernity – what is it and why is it important (for social theory)?* **Lecture/Discussion:** Durkheim & Weber; anomie, suicide, protestant ethic, iron-cage, bureaucracy.**Homework due:** Durkheim, *Anomie and the Modern Division of Labour* in Lemert, pp. 60-61; Durkheim, *Suicide and Modernity* in Lemert pp. 63-68; McLennan, pp. 63-69; Craib, pp. 30-33**;** Weber, *The Spirit of Capitalism and the Iron Cage* in Lemert, pp. 79-83; Weber, *The Bureaucratic Machine* in Lemert pp. 83-87; McLennan, pp. 69-76; Craib, pp. 248-256. And reading reflection questions. |
| Sept. 24th  | **Session 4: Early Modern Giants 2: Karl Marx and Georg Simmel****Student presentation:** *Durkheim’s analysis of suicide OR Weber’s concept of iron-cage (evaluation and applications).***Lecture/Discussion:** Marx & Simmel; commodity, alienation, Marx’s legacy, metropolis and mental life, fashion. **Homework due:** Marx, *Capital and the Fetishism of Commodities* in Lemert, pp. 47-49; McLennan, pp. 57-63; Craib, pp. 88-93; Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life;* McLennan, pp. 81-85; Craib, pp. 169-171. And reading reflection questions. |
| Oct. 1st  | **Session 5: Society and Capitalist Control: The Frankfurt School** **Student presentation:** *Is Marx still relevant?***Lecture/Discussion:** Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin; culture industry, one-dimensional man, art in the age of mechanical reproduction, the Frankfurt School and its legacy.**Homework due:** Horkheimer & Adorno, *The Culture Industry as Deception* in Lemert pp. 167-170; Marcuse, *Repressive Desublimation of One-Dimensional Man* in Lemert pp. 324-325; Benjamin, *Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction: War and Fascism* in Lemert pp. 198-200; Elliott, pp. 17-52. And reading reflection questions.**MIDTERM TEST 1 TODAY! Covers terms from Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Simmel.** |
| Oct. 8th  | **Session 6: Society and Its Prisons/Society *as* Prison: Michel Foucault****Student presentation**: *What does Marcuse mean by the concept of ‘one-dimensional man’? OR Adorno & Horkheimer’s concept of ‘culture industry’***Lecture/Discussion:** Foucault; discipline, punishment, surveillance, panopticon and contemporary examples.**Homework due:** Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Chapter 1)**;** Elliott, pp. 70-87; Deleuze. Reading reflection questions. |
| Oct. 15th  | **Session 7: Multiple Social Currencies: Pierre Bourdieu****Student presentation**: *Can society be understood as a ‘prison’ as Foucault seems to imply?***Lecture:** Bourdieu and the varieties of capital that circulate in society.**Homework due:** Bourdieu, “Aristocracy of Culture”; Wacquant, “Key Thinkers: Bourdieu”; Thornton, Excerpt from *Club Cultures.* Reading reflection questions. |
| Oct. 22nd  | **Session 8: The Female Perspective****Student presentation:** Summarize important concepts from Bourdieu and see if you can apply them to another social system besides the dance club.**Lecture/discussion:** varieties of feminist social theory, Dorothy Smith and Standpoint Theory.**Homework due:** Dorothy E. Smith, selections; Marie Campbell, “Dorothy Smith and Knowing the World We Live in.” Recommended: Sheelah Kolhatkar, “The Tech Industry’s Gender Discrimination Problem”; “Judith Lorber, “The Variety of Feminisms”; Maksim Kokushkin, “Standpoint Theory is Dead, Long Live Standpoint Theory!” Reading reflection questions. |
| Oct. 29th  | **Midterm break! Be safe and rest well!** |
| Nov. 5th  | **Session 9: Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality****Student presentation:** Critically assess Standpoint Theory. Is there another feminist social theory that you think accounts for the social position of women better? What adjustments would you make and why?**Lecture/discussion:** Critical Race Theory, Race, social order, and double (and triple, quadrupal, etc.) consciousness—intersectionality.**Homework due:** J. B. W. Tucker, “The Ultimate White Privilege Statistics and Data Page”; Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” Patricia Hill Collins, selection from *Black Feminist Thought*; watch Kemberlé Crenshaw’s Ted Talk, “The Urgency of Intersectionality.” Recommended: “A Short Guide to Critical Race Theory,” and “Is Intersectionality a Religion?” Reading reflection questions. |
| Nov. 12th  | **Session 10: Globalizations: risks, networks, liquids****Student presentation:** Apply critical double-consciousness/critical race theory to your own cultural context. What would it look like? OR Critically assess intersectionality, its strengths, weaknesses, necessity/gratuity, and future.**Lecture:** contemporary social theories of Beck, Castells and Bauman.**Homework due:** Beck, *World Risk Society* in Lemert pp. 475- 478; Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* in Lemert pp. 450- 452; Castells, *The Global Network* in Lemert pp. 464-467; Elliot, pp. 270-307. Reading reflection questions. **MIDTERM TEST 2 TODAY! Covers terms from Frankfurt School, Foucault, Bourdieu, Standpoint Theory, Critical Race/Intersectionality.** |
| Nov. 19th  | **Session 11: McDonaldization of society: irrationality of rationality****Student presentation:** *Critically assess Beck’s ‘risk society’ OR Bauman’s ‘liquid society’ OR Castells’ ‘network society’***Lecture:** Modern society as a McDonald restaurant, imperatives of efficiency, calculability, predictability/standardization and control, contemporary relevance of Weber.**Homework due:** Ritzer (Chapter 1), reading reflection questions. |
| Nov. 26th  | **Session 12: ‘Bitter Apple’: The dark side of the *i*Revolution****Student presentation:** *Do we live in a McDonaldized world?***Lecture:** economic globalization, socio-economic realities, neoliberalism, Harvey.**Homework due:** Harvey, *Neoliberalism on Trial* in Lemert pp. 453-454; Chan; Chan, Pun, Selden. Reading reflection questions. |
| Dec. 3rd  | **Session 13: The Influencer Economy****Student presentation:** *What is the dark side of the ubiquitous and excessive consumption?* **Lecture/Discussion:** What sort of social dynamics are at work in the money and prestige generated by social media influencers? Is this system good for the influencers...or for us?**Homework due:** Christian Fuchs, “Influencer Capitalism,” from *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* |
| Dec. 10th  | **Final Session: Review and Debrief****Presentation:** Finish discussion of the previous week.**Discussion:** Unrestrained Q&A, review of salient terms, etc.**Assignment: FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY ASSIGNMENT GIVEN, due by 5 PM on Saturday, December 13th (upload to NEO, must be in MS Word).** |

# Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **Workload (avg.)** | **Weight in Final Grade** | **Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes** | **Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes\*** |
| Attendance and Participation | 42 |  0% | Student should be able to:* + - perceive human behaviour from social theoretical perspective and apply it to a range of social issues and phenomena in their lives,
		- accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
 | 1, 2, 3 |
| Presentation [NOTE: Online students will be asked to assemble a PowerPoint presentation and present remotely.] | 15 | 25% | Student should be able to:* + - perceive human behaviour from social theoretical perspective and apply it to a range of social issues and phenomena in their lives,
		- accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
		- demonstrate verbal and written analytical skills through engagement with social theoretical texts, present and apply social theoretical concepts to contemporary contexts through clear and vivid prose and a impactful and persuasive visual and verbal presentation.
 | 1,2,3 |
| Homework: reading questionnaires  | 60 | 20% | Students should be able to:* + - perceive human behaviour from social theoretical perspective and apply it to a range of social issues and phenomena in their lives,
		- accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
		- demonstrate verbal and written analytical skills through engagement with social theoretical texts,
 | 1,2  |
| 2 vocabulary tests[NOTE: Online students will be asked to write a short essay in lieu of the vocab test.] | 10 (5 each) | 30% (15% each) | Students should be able to:* + - accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
		- demonstrate verbal and written analytical skills through engagement with social theoretical texts.
 | 1,2  |
| Final exam/essay | 23 | 25% | Student should be able to:* + - perceive human behaviour from social theoretical perspective and apply it to a range of social issues and phenomena in their lives,
		- accurately and clearly articulate concepts derived from classical social thought and from selected themes and thinkers of contemporary relevance,
		- demonstrate verbal and written analytical skills through engagement with social theoretical texts,
		- present and apply social theoretical concepts to contemporary contexts through clear and vivid prose.
 | 1,2 |
| **TOTAL** | **150** | **100%** |  |  |

\*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

# Detailed Description of the Assignments

**Attendance and Participation**

Though not graded, absences could affect your grade adversely. Engaged students tend to do better than passive and/or absent students, so please ask questions! Introverts may ask via NEO forums.

**Presentation:**

Each student is expected to deliver an in-class presentation**.** This presentation tests your presentation skills, your ability to explain the studied topic to peers, to identify key issues, the depth of your knowledge of the subject, how clearly you think and can express yourself, and whether you can put these concepts into practice to make a better world. The themes of presentations are indicated above and always reflect (without repeating) the lecture topic from the preceding week. Presentation should be based in independent research; use the lecture material as your launching pad for more in-depth exploration. Please do not bore me or the class by simply presenting a worked-over version of the lecture from last class. The duration of the presentation should be 20-25 minutes and each presentation will be followed by a discussion of 5-10 minutes in which students can ask follow-up questions of the presenters (*not* presenters asking “discussion questions”; I want to see how well you’ve researched, and how well you think on your feet). The use of MS PowerPoint or similar tools is recommended. Remember: Please email me your presentation before the start of class so that we can get you started straight away. If the number of students exceeds the number of topics/weeks, students will be expected to work in pairs or groups. If your partner drops the class and you are without a partner, please see me immediately. I reserve the right to grade each student in the group independently within the group if the quality differs significantly from student to student (so work closely together to have a unified presentation). You will be graded on research/writing content, style (visual and vocal), and how you handle the Q&A. For more detail on the assessment, please see the grading rubric in NEO folder Lesson 1. PLEASE NOTE: I reserve the right to grade each student in a group separately if there is a noticeable difference in quality between each student.

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content (demonstrates clear understanding of concepts and relevant literature). | 50 |
| Presentation skills (slides and vocal delivery). | 30 |
| Question and Answer (how insightful and clear your answers are to audience questions). | 20 |

**Homework Reading Questionnaires:**

Each week, students will be required to answer questions based on their reading. The questions will be used as a launch pad for in-class discussion and debate. I do not grade on correctness, but completion. I want to see evidence that you did the reading and made an effort to understand. In other words, when I ask to see your homework, I want to see a beefy paragraph rather than a hastily scribbled sentence or two. That work will pay off when we discuss the readings in class.

**Two Vocabulary Tests**

Students will have two short quizzes that will test how well they understand certain key terms used in class. Students must identify the thinker the term is associated with, define the term, show the significance of the term for the social theory, and illustrate what it would look like in practice (if applicable). In other words, do whatever you can to convince me you know what you’re talking about. Each outline should contain the terms for which you will be responsible. *Also,* if students take initiative and form a study group, they can ask me to visit their study group to ask questions.

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content (demonstrates clear and accurate understanding of concepts and the theorists associated with the term). | 80 |
| Writing style (uses clear and vivid language to communicate answers). | 20 |

**Final Essay/Take-home Exam:**

The main assessment in this course is a final essay, written outside of class. Students are to write a 2250-2750 word essay (excluding bibliography) on a topic that will test how well they have synthesized and can apply the subject matter. I will give you a question that will allow a degree of freedom. The deadline for the submission of essays is **Wednesday, December 13th, 17:00**. Cite your sources (a sources cited list at the end is NOT enough).

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Evidence of firm grasp of theories, even nuances | 40 |
| Convincing application to the real world  | 40 |
| Clarity and vividness of writing | 20 |

# General Requirements and School Policies

## General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules available in the Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1xoNETY9yqNMwNP-06wDzM2VmgMIOire-) regarding coursework.

***Course Specific Requirements***

* Attendance policy for Turnau’s courses: The lectures and class discussions will be the primary means of learning in this class. Therefore, it is very important that you actually come to as many classes as you can (coming to them all would be ideal). Here's my attendance policy: You may miss one class. If you miss a second, then I will require you to post on NEO three comments and/or questions that show you watched and engaged with the lecture recording (if available) or notes taken by a classmate. The same for the second or third. If you do it within 48 hours, I may even mark you present! Do NOT miss four classes—I reserve the right to fail any student who misses four classes. Note: Coming more than 15 minutes late to class will count as one-half of an absence. If you are more than 30 minutes late, I will mark you as absent. Missing classes may adversely affect your grade, so please come to class, and come on time.
* If for some life-or-health-threatening reason you know that you will miss a quiz or a presentation, you MUST inform me at least 24-hours in advance to arrange for an alternate time to take the quiz or give the presentation. If you do not give me advance notice, I may deduct points for lateness.
* Please also see “What Is Plagiarism?” on the class NEO website. If you are unsure whether you have committed plagiarism, please see me *before* you hand in the paper. I would love to give you guidance and advice. I’m all sorts of forgiving before the deadline. *After* you hand it in, I’m all sorts of *not* forgiving (read: fire and sulfur raining down from the sky on your immortal soul). Be smart and avoid plagiarism like the plague. Please.
* A word about citation in your final essay: First, a “resource list” or “works cited” list is absolutely insufficient. I need footnotes or in-text citations that tie a source (*including a page* number) to a particular sentence in addition to a sources cited list at the end. I personally prefer Chicago style. You may use author-date in-text citations allowed (see <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/citing-information/chicago-author-in-text>). You may also use MLA in-text citation (which also requires page numbers), but APA (which does not) is expressly forbidden. *Also,* in your essay, if you have to cite me or my lectures, fine. But if you have the option to cite the primary source (such as your readings), do that. I always prefer primary source citations.
* Students may NOT use AI text generating websites or apps for their papers or homework assignments. Letting an AI bot do your writing for you is a form of plagiarism. Using such aids will result in a failing grade for that assignment, and perhaps referral to the Dean.
* If unsure about technical aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>. You can also talk to me. I truly want to help you avoid plagiarism.
* Electronic devices are to be off and put away during class (except at break).
* Course accessibility and inclusion: If you have learning accommodations, please speak to me as soon as possible. I will do what I can to help (within reason).