Theory and Methods in the Social Sciences
CORE-GG 2025

Description: This seminar, designed for incoming M.A. students, provides a broad introduction to theories and methods that have shaped the interdisciplinary terrain of the social sciences. The course emphasizes the reading of classic and more contemporary works of social theory and methodology, with a focus on key concepts and thinkers. How does one define a society? What is culture? How have social and cultural processes been understood? What is the relationship between a society or culture and a social group, an institution, or an individual? What is the nature of power, difference and identity? How do such foundational questions generate theories of modernity, capitalism, nationalism and globalization? How do such foundational questions orient the variety of disciplines within the social sciences? The course also surveys qualitative and quantitative methodologies, exploring the relationship between theory, methods, and the broader goals of research within the social sciences. Empirically grounded writings will explore the links between research frameworks, methodologies, data collection and theoretical claims.

Class Structure: The first half of every class will be devoted to exploring the theoretical and methodological texts assigned, teasing out the key ideas and perspectives of the authors and discussing how these might influence how we understand the study of society. During the second half of class we will put these theories and methods to work: collectively and collaboratively applying these frameworks to concrete social phenomenon, asking ourselves what observations, evidence, categories, descriptions and analysis are proposed by the approaches we have studied, and using these to draft appropriate plans for research.

Requirements:
1) Attendance, diligent reading, and active participation in all class discussions: 25%
2) Three 10 page essays over the course of the semester (only necessary to meet 3 out of 4 due dates): 60%
3) Weekly reading response posts on NYU Classes: 15%

Learning Goals:
• Introduce students to core theoretical texts in the social sciences
• Introduce students to multiple methodologies in use in the social sciences
• Introduce students to the basic questions that drive the social sciences
• Demonstrate how enquiry, theory and methodology work together
• Create a foundation for interdisciplinary study from a social sciences perspective.
**Books:**
- Gianpaolo Baiocchi, et al. *The Civic Imagination*
- Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*
- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol 1*
- Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*
- Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, *The German Ideology*
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*
- Sigmund Freud, *Dora*

**Essays and Selections:**
- Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”
- Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, selections from *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*
- Theodor Bestor, “How Sushi Went Global”
- Julie Bettie, selections from *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*
- Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method.”
- Ngina Chiterji and Darrick Hamilton, “Family Matters: Kin Networks and Asset Accumulation”
- Ngina Chiterji and Darrick Hamilton, “Estimating the Effect of Race and Ethnicity on Wealth Accumulation and Asset-Accumulation Patterns”
- Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, “Worthy and Unworthy Victims” from *Manufacturing Consent*
- Emile Durkheim, “The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations” from *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
- Emile Durkheim, selections from *Suicide*
- James Ferguson, selections from *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*
- Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance”
- Jay MacLeod, selections from *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*
- Kristin Luker, selections from *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*
- Karl Marx, “Thesis on Fuerbach”
- Karl Marx, “Commodity Fetishism,” from *Capital, vol. 1*
- C. Wright Mills, “The Promise” from *The Sociological Imagination*
- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
- Stanley Payne, selections from *The Art of Asking Questions*
- Saskia Sassen, selections from *Deciphering the Global: Its Spaces, Scales and Subjects*
- Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”
- William Foot Whyte, “Interviewing in Field Research”

Books can be ordered online through Amazon, Alibris, Powells and other stores (many can bought used, some may be found free online, and sharing is encouraged) and are on reserve at Bobst. All of Essays and selections can be accessed, for reference purposes only (do not copy or download) via NYU Classes “Resources.”

_Semester Schedule:_

**Sept 2**

**What is a Social Question?**

READ: C. Wright Mills, “The Promise”; Max Weber, “Objectivity in the Social Sciences”; and Emile Durkheim, “What is a Social Fact?” (in Rules… but also available on NYU Classes site under “resources”)

**Sept 9**

**Marx**

READ: Karl Marx, “Thesis on Fuerbach,” “Commodity Fetishism,” and The German Ideology; and Jay MacLeod, selections from Ain’t No Makin’ It

**Sept 16**

**Weber**


**Sept 23**

**Durkheim**

READ: Emile Durkheim, “The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations” and selections from Suicide; and Kristin Luker, selections from Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood

**Sept 30**

**Freud**

READ: Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents and Dora; and Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

**DUE: Essay #1**

**Oct 7**

**Foucault**

READ: Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol 1; and James Ferguson, selections from The Anti-Politics Machine

**Oct 13**

**No Class**

**Oct 21**

**Race**

READ: W.E.B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk; and Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance”

**Oct 28**

**Gender**

READ: Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, Chapter 1 (also in NYU Classes); Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex”; Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”; Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment and the Docile Agent”; Julie Bettie, selections
from *Women Without Class*.
*DUE: Essay #2*

**Nov 4**  
**Globalization**  
READ: Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”; Theodor Bestor, “How Sushi Went Global”; Saskia Sassen, selections from *Deciphering the Global*

**Nov 11**  
**The Case Study**  
GUEST: Gianpaolo Baiocchi

**Nov 18**  
**Ethnography**  
READ: Howard Becker, continue on with *Tricks of the Trade*; Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, selections from *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*  
GUEST: Ritty Lukose  
*DUE: Essay #3*

**Nov 25**  
**Interviews and Surveys**  
Guest: Kimberly Dacosta

**Dec 2**  
**Documents, Content Analysis and Coding**  
GUEST: TBA

**Dec 9**  
**Quantitative Analysis**  
READ: Ngina Chiterji and Darrick Hamilton, “Estimating the Effect of Race and Ethnicity on Wealth Accumulation and Asset-Accumulation Patterns” and “Family Matters: Kin Networks and Asset Accumulation”  
GUEST: Ngina Chiterji  
*DUE: Essay #4*

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**Appendix**

Assignments:
1) Weekly, posted on NYU Classes: Brief summation, less than a page, of what the week’s reading made you think about in terms your research interests. In other words: how were the readings useful?

2) Three, ten page, essays:

2 of A
1 of B

A) Generating ideas, questions and categories that help you think about things in the world.

Pick a text. What ideas, questions, categories (as well as perhaps: observations, description, evidence and analysis) does the author use? How does the author do this?

Pick a social phenomenon. Informed by this author’s method, how would you approach your topic?

B) Devising a methodology that helps you analyze things in the world.

Pick a text in which a research methodology was used. What was the method, or methods? How were they used done? How was the data contextualized? How were the findings presented? What is gained and what is missed from using this method?

Pick a social phenomenon. Informed by this author’s method(s), how would you apply them to your topic?