SOC 302
Contemporary Sociological Theory
Winter 2020
Instructor: Julius McGee (cjulius@pdx.edu)
Office hours
Office Hours Cramer 217O (Tuesday/Thursday 4:00-5:00)
TA: Sarah Guldenbrein (gulden2@pdx.edu)
Office hours by appointment

**Course Description:** In this course, you will learn about contemporary sociological theories that have contributed to the development of sociology as a discipline. Sociological theories are simply mechanisms to understand culture, history, and day-to-day interactions. Some theories are intuitive and easy to understand while others are convoluted and well… annoying. The goal of this class is to help you better understand the world, and not better understand theory. Focus on what makes sense to you but attempt to understand what you do not know. You will be graded on how much you grow in this class more than you will be graded on how much you know.

**Course Expectations:**

**Workload:** As a general rule, in any 4-credit course, students are expected to spend 4 hours per week in the classroom and 8-12 additional hours per week doing coursework outside the classroom.

The time commitment may vary from week to week, depending on the amount of reading and other assigned work. Some weeks may require significantly fewer hours, some may require more. Course materials include many reminders regarding the work you must complete.

**Active Participation:** You must log on to the D2L course at least every three days to check for announcements and email.

- All coursework must be submitted in the D2L course.
- If you encounter problems with D2L, click on D2L Help at the top of the page. It’s a very good idea to print a copy of the contact info found there in case you are unable to access D2L at some point during the term.
- Problems with your computer are NOT an acceptable reason for deadline extensions. If you encounter computer problems that cannot be resolved in time, you should use another computer to complete the work prior to the deadlines. It’s a good idea to have an alternative computer identified BEFORE you run into problems.
Course policies:

*D2L:* The instructor will post the syllabus on D2L. Students will submit journal entries via D2L. The instructor will also post comments on response papers and grades for all assignments on D2L.

*Email:* The instructor regularly communicates with the class via PSU email so be sure that you are receiving my emails. It is your responsibility to check your email daily during the school week and respond in a timely manner. In emails to the instructor, please put the title of the course in the subject line and sign your emails using your first and last name. Use the email addresses on the first page of the syllabus. The instructor will generally respond to email within 24 hours. Emails sent after 5:00pm on Friday will generally be answered by 5:00pm on Monday.

*Academic honesty:* You are expected to demonstrate complete academic honesty. Please refer to the Student Conduct Code for more detailed information on PSU policies. Cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and will be reported.

*Plagiarism:* If you use a direct quote (i.e. someone else’s words), you must include it in quotation marks and cite the source, including author(s) name(s), the date of publication, and the page number. If you summarize or paraphrase an idea from another person, you must cite the source, including author(s) name(s) and the date of publication. Failure to cite your sources, whether intentional or not, is plagiarism. Instances of plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and will be reported.

*Access and inclusion for students with disabilities:* If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the DRC to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, http://www.pdx.edu/drc. If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and to discuss your accommodations.

*Title IX reporting:* As a member of the university community, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals at http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Kenneth Allan. *The Social Lens: An Invitation to Social and Sociological Theory*

**Graded Assignments:**

**Do a Google (30%):** Once a week you will be asked to pick out a quote, theme, or concept from the readings or lecture that interest or confuses you and Google it (you can use other internet search engines as well). You can Google a quote, a term, or a question you have about the
reading/lecture. For the assignment, you will be asked to write out the quote, theme, or concept you are exploring, explain why you chose it (i.e. were you still confused after reading the description in the textbook; did you find this particular concept interesting; is this something you are interested in writing your essay on), and then catalog your experience on the internet. **What did you find? Do you feel as though you have a better understanding of the theory? Are you more or less interested in the theory? Did I misrepresent a concept in the lecture** (it is okay to use Google during lecture for this assignment)? Here is an example of how can go about this assignment: Let’s say you choose to Google “Marx’s theory of alienation”. First, you write that you chose this concept because the textbook did not provide you with a definition that made sense to you. Thus, you find a Wikipedia page about Marx’s theory of alienation, which provides a much more robust definition of the concept. Next, you write about the specific parts of the Wikipedia page that helped you understand the concept, better. Maybe there is a really good example; or maybe Wikipedia provides you with a better historical framework behind the theory; or maybe Wikipedia just adds to your confusion (there is no shame in “not getting it”). Regardless of what you find, you should write out explicitly what you found interesting and/or confusing about your search results. A simple “I liked what I found on Wikipedia” is not going to cut it. Please be as detailed as possible when describing what you think. You will be graded on how hard you try and not what you find, so do not be afraid to go down a rabbit hole. Your two lowest grades for this assignment will be dropped at the end of the quarter. Thus, if you are unable to complete this assignment for any reason (it is valid to skip a Do a Google assignment because you do not find a particular theorist or theory interesting), your grade will not be hurt. Because of this policy, there is no way to make up missed Do a Google assignments.

**Essays (70%):** You are required to complete two essays (minimum 1500 words) (each worth 35% of your grade) during the term, an “Analysis” essay, and an “Application” essay. The details of each assignment are spelled out on separate sheets posted to D2L. It doesn’t matter which essay prompt you respond to first. The essays must deal with entirely different readings (or at the very least concepts) and topics. You are welcome to turn in each essay at any point during the term before the start of week ten. Essays must be submitted on D2L. If you receive a grade below an 85% on your essay, you will be given the opportunity to revise your essay and resubmit your essay for a higher grade. If you decide to do this, you will be required to include additional one page paper outlining how you addressed each comment and concern raised in regards to your essay. Resubmitted essays should be emailed to the TA and me with the subject line resubmitted analysis or application essay SOC 302. Note: resubmitting your essay will not automatically result in a higher grade. The maximum grade a resubmitted essay can receive is an 85%. The deadline to email resubmitted essays is Friday of week 10. You are required to turn in both essays in order to receive a letter grade for the class. You will receive an incomplete for the course if you do not hand in both essay, which will eventually turn into an F

**Course schedule:**

**Week 1: Gramsci and the concept of hegemony**

Required Readings: Smith “Gramsci at the margins: subjectivity and subalternity in a theory of hegemony” (D2L)
**Week 2: The Frankfurt School and critical theory**

Required Readings: Horkheimer and Adorno “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (D2L)

**Week 3: Pierre Bourdieu**

Required Readings: Allan pages 305-320; Calhoun “Pierre Bourdieu and social transformation” (D2L)

**Week 4: Foucault**

Required Readings: Allan pages 484-502; Exerts from *Discipline & Punish* (D2L)

**Week 5: Erving Goffman**

Required Readings: Allan pages 385-396; Excerpts from *Asylums* (D2L)

**Week 6: Gender as a Performance**

Required Readings: “Doing Gender” (D2L) Butler “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (D2L)

**Week 7: Neoliberalism**

Required Readings: Jacobin “Neoliberalism is a Political Project” D2L

**Week 8: Lazzarato; The Indebted Man**

Required Readings: “Understanding Debt as the basis of Social Life” D2L

**Week 9: Contemporary theories on race**

Required Readings: Bonilla-Silva, “White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights era” D2L

**Week 10: Patricia Hill Collins**

Required Readings: Allan pages 540-547; “Learning From the Outsider Within” (D2L)

***Disclaimer***
Syllabus is subject to change.