

# Sociology 667

## Contemporary Sociological Theory

Fall 2003

### Course Syllabus

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#### I. *General Information*

**Professor:** Dr. Stephen Sanderson

**Office & Hours:** 112D McElhaney Hall, Office Phone 724-357-4769

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-12:00; Wednesdays, 11:00-12:30

#### II. *Required Reading Materials*

1. John A. Hughes, Peter J. Martin, and W.W. Sharrock, *Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim*. London: Sage, 1995.
2. Ruth A. Wallace and Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Expanding the Classical Tradition*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.
3. Stephen K. Sanderson, *The Evolution of Human Sociality: A Darwinian Conflict Perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
4. 47 articles available on both regular and electronic reserve in the library

#### III-A. *Course Content*

This is a graduate-level theory course that presumes a basic familiarity with sociological theory. Some students will already have taken an undergraduate course in sociological theory. If you have not had such a course, you might want to consider dropping this course now and enrolling in the undergraduate theory course (SO 320), which you may take for graduate credit under a suitable graduate course number. You may then take SO 667 next fall. Another option would be to take the two courses simultaneously. But be forewarned: If you stay in this course now without any undergraduate theory, you will have to be prepared to work very hard to keep up. No concessions will be made. This will be a genuine graduate-level theory course.

This semester we will examine all of the leading perspectives in contemporary sociological theory as well as some of the more modest ones. These are listed in the last section of the syllabus under "Course Outline and Schedule of Presentations." The course focuses on theoretical strategies as modes of explanation. What this means will become clear in due time.

### III-B. *Course Structure*

This course will proceed in seminar fashion from beginning to end. You will be reading a lot (the reading assignments are detailed below). The first hour and fifteen minutes of each class period will be devoted to discussing the assigned readings from Hughes-Martin-Sharrock, Wallace-Wolf, and my book manuscript. To facilitate discussion, each student will bring 2 prepared questions to class each week. Then, after a short break, we will reconvene and a student will present a 30-minute analysis of the essays that were assigned for that week.

### IV. *Course Requirements*

- (1) A minor paper of at least 5,000 words on a major theoretical work to be chosen from a list. This will be due by the 7<sup>th</sup> week of the semester.
- (2) A major paper on a contemporary social theorist. This paper must be a minimum of 7,500 words and a maximum of 9,000 words. The bibliography must contain no fewer than 10 references, at least 4 of which must be books written by the theorist being discussed. All of the works listed in the bibliography must be cited and discussed in the paper. This paper will be due by the 14<sup>th</sup> (final) week of the semester. The theorists that you may choose from are Anthony Giddens, Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Randall Collins, Immanuel Wallerstein, Herbert Blumer, Harold Garfinkel, George Homans, Theda Skocpol, Gerhard Lenski, Pierre van den Berghe, Marvin Harris, Howard Becker, and Frank Parkin. You may suggest one of your own, but he or she must be a major theorist and I must give my approval.

The basic idea here is for you to choose a representative sampling of a theorist's works and to summarize and critically evaluate them. A very important aspect of the paper is to show the extent to which the theorist's works hang together as a coherent whole in terms of the perspective adopted by that thinker. Use not only original works by the theorist, but also recent secondary works that critically assess the theorist.

- (3) A 30-minute presentation on the essays assigned for a particular week.
- (4) A final essay exam covering the entire semester's work.

*Attendance Policy:* Students are required to attend all classes and to be on time for each class. Absence from class because of illness or other extenuating circumstances is, of course, understandable, but needs to be explained to the professor.

## V. *Grading*

The final grade is determined as follows:

The minor paper counts 20% of your final grade.

The major paper counts 40% of your final grade.

The final exam counts 30% of your final grade.

The 30-minute class presentation counts 10% of your final grade.

I will grade on a point system and use the following scale: 85% and above = A; 75-84% = B; 65-74% = C; below 65% = F.

## VI. *Course Outline and Reading Assignments*

### *Week      Material Presented*

#### 1            **Course Introduction**

#### 2            **The Nature of Theories and Theorizing**

##### **Current Debates and Controversies**

Wallace & Wolf, ch. 1

Sanderson, *EHS*, Introduction

Stephen K. Sanderson, "The Logic of Social Theorizing"

#### 3            **Functionalist Explanations**

Hughes-Martin-Sharrock, chapter on Durkheim

Wallace & Wolf, ch. 2 and pp. 128-135

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 1

Robert K. Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions." From his *Social Theory and Social*

*Structure* (Free Press, 1957), pp. 25-37 and 50-72.

Lewis Coser, "Conflict and Group Boundaries." From his *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Free Press, 1956), pp. 33-48 and 87-95.

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10:242-49, 1945.

Herbert Gans, "The Positive Functions of Poverty." *American Journal of Sociology* 78:275-89, 1972.

#### 4 **Social Constructionist Explanations**

Wallace & Wolf, chs. 5-6

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 2

Herbert Blumer, "The Nature of Symbolic Interactionism." From his *Symbolic Interactionism* (Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 2-21.

Howard Becker, from his *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963), pp. 1-18.

Jeffrey Weeks, from his *Sexuality* (Routledge, 1986), pp. 12-18, 23-27, and 54-58.

Karin Knorr-Cetina, "The Ethnographic Study of Scientific Work: Towards a Constructivist Interpretation of Science." From Karin Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay (eds.), *Science Observed* (Sage, 1983), pp. 115-40.

#### 5 **Structuralist, Poststructuralist, and Postmodernist Explanations**

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 401-411

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 3

Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle." *Partisan Review* 33:586-95, 1966.

Louis Dumont, "From System to Structure: The Pure and the Impure." From his *Homo Hierarchicus* (University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 33-53.

Morris B. Holbrook and Elizabeth C. Hirschman, "Semiotics and Popular Culture." From their *The Semiotics of Consumption* (Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 61-85.

Steven Seidman, "Postmodern Social Theory as Narrative with a Moral Intent." From Steven

Seidman and David Wagner (eds.), *Postmodernism and Social Theory* (Blackwell, 1992), pp. 47-81.

Richard A. Watson, "Ozymandias, King of Kings: Postprocessual Radical Archaeology as Critique." *American Antiquity* 55:673-89, 1990.

### **Eclectic Explanations**

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 411-420

Jerry Caldwell and Kathleen Kalab, "Searching for the Theoretical Godot." *Sociological Focus* 19:207-14, 1986.

Stephen K. Sanderson, "Eclecticism and its Alternatives." From John Wilson (ed.), *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, vol. 8 (JAI Press, 1987), pp. 313-45.

### **6 Marxian Explanations**

Hughes-Martin-Sharrock, chapter on Marx

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 68-105, 158-163

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 4

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Education and Personal Development: The Long Shadow of Work." From their *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Basic Books, 1976), pp. 125-48.

Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property." From Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 207-22.

Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16:387-415, 1974.

Albert Szymanski, from his *The Capitalist State and the Politics of Class* (Winthrop, 1978), pp. 143-61.

Michael Reich, "The Economics of Racism." From David M. Gordon (ed.), *Problems in Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (Heath, 1977), pp. 183-88.

## 7 **Weberian Explanations**

Hughes-Martin-Sharrock, chapter on Weber

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 105-110, 118-128, 135-151

Randall Collins, "Reassessments of Sociological History: The Empirical Validity of the Conflict Tradition" *Theory and Society* 1:147-78.

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 5

Theda Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Revolutions and the World-Historical Development of Capitalism." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 22:100-13, 1977-78.

Frank Parkin, "Social Closure as Exclusion." From his *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 44-60.

Randall Collins, "The Politics of Professions." From his *The Credential Society* (Academic Press, 1979), pp. 131-59.

Michael Mann, "Societies as Organized Power Networks." From his *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-3, 6-11, and 18-33.

## 8 **Exchange and Rational Choice Explanations**

Wallace & Wolf, ch. 7

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 6

George C. Homans, "Human Exchange: Propositions." From his *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), pp. 51-82.

Debra Friedman and Michael Hechter, "The Contributions of Rational Choice Theory to Macrosociological Research." *Sociological Theory* 6:201-18.

Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market." *American Sociological Review* 37:547-59, 1972.

Richard Posner, "Sex and Rationality." From his *Sex and Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 111-13, 115-26, 136-41, 146-51, and 173-80.

Jack A. Goldstone, "Is Revolution Individually Rational?" *Rationality and Society* 6:139-66, 1994.

## 9 Cultural Materialist Explanations

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 7

Marvin Harris, "The Riddle of the Sacred Cow." From his *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (Simon and Schuster, 1985), pp. 47-66.

William Tulio Divale and Marvin Harris, "Population, Warfare, and the Male Supremacist Complex." *American Anthropologist* 78:521-38, 1976.

Eric B. Ross, "Patterns of Diet and Forces of Production: An Economic and Ecological History of the Ascendancy of Beef in the United States Diet." From Eric B. Ross (ed.), *Beyond the Myths of Culture* (Academic Press, 1980), pp. 181-83, 190-204 and 215-17.

Marvin Harris, "Why Women Left Home." From his *America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture* (Simon and Schuster, 1981), pp. 76-97.

Stephen K. Sanderson, "The Japanese Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism." Article prepared especially for this class (shorter version of an article originally published in *Review* 17:15-55, 1994).

## 10 Sociobiological Explanations

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 382-399

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 8

Pierre L. van den Berghe and David P. Barash, "Inclusive Fitness and Human Family Structure." *American Anthropologist* 79:809-23, 1977.

Donald Symons, "The Desire for Sexual Variety." From his *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 206-23.

Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, "Killing Kinfolks." From their *Homicide* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 17-30 and 42-52.

Pierre van den Berghe, "Ethnicity as Kin Selection: The Biology of Nepotism." From his *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (Elsevier, 1981), pp. 15-29 and 35-36.

11            **Evolutionary Explanations**

Stephen K. Sanderson, "Social Evolutionism"

Wallace & Wolf, pp. 163-169

Talcott Parsons, from his *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 2-3, 21-27, and 109-11.

Gerhard Lenski, "History and Social Change." *American Journal of Sociology* 82:548-64, 1976.

Marvin Harris, from his *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (Random House, 1977), pp. ix-xiv and 3-7.

W.G. Runciman, from his *A Treatise on Sociological Theory*, vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 37-48 and 285-310.

Stephen K. Sanderson, "Evolutionary Materialism: A Theoretical Strategy for the Study of Social Evolution." *Sociological Perspectives* 37:47-73, 1994.

12            **Darwinian Conflict Theory: A Unified Evolutionary Theory of Human Society**

Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 9

13            **Darwinian Conflict Theory Illustrated: Gender and Family**

Sanderson, *EHS*, chs. 12 & 13

14            **Darwinian Conflict Theory Illustrated: Stratification and Economics**

Sanderson, *EHS*, chs. 14 & 15

(cont'd)

**Additional Readings:**



Wallace & Wolf, pp. 110-117, 169-187 (on Bourdieu, Habermas, and Giddens)

Stephen K. Sanderson and Lee Ellis, "Theoretical and Political Perspectives of American Sociologists in the 1990s." *American Sociologist* 23:26-42, 1992.

Jane T. Lord and Stephen K. Sanderson, "Current Theoretical and Political Perspectives of Western Sociological Theorists." *American Sociologist* 30:42-66, 1999.