

SO245-15 Modern Social Theory

24/25

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Nicholas Gane

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The purpose of this core module is to show how social theory can be applied to the study of real-life social and political problems that exist in the present. The module opens by considering what theory is and why it is important, and then uses a range of theoretical resources to address contemporary developments, questions, and topics that include: the economisation of the social; financialisation; indebtedness; stigma and power; race; and class. The module builds on first year modules such as History of Sociological Thought, Class and Capitalism in the Neoliberal World, and The Sociology of Race by introducing students to work by key figures in social theory from the late-20th Century through to the present. These figures include C.W. Mills, Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown, Erving Goffman, Imogen Tyler, Anthony Giddens, Stuart Hall, and Bev Skeggs. The module involves close textual study of key texts by these and other thinkers, and students are encouraged a). to consider the underlying politics of these texts; and b). to reflect on their value for understanding the world in which we live today.

students will also develop advanced skills in critical thinking and close textual reading. Student led reading groups will also foster skills in team work and discussion.

Module aims

To develop advanced skills in critical thinking, sociological imagination and awareness.

To provide students with an overview of key perspectives in twentieth century social theory,

situating theoretical traditions in relation to each other and providing a firm foundation for further study in social and political theory.

To equip students with advanced skills to identify and analyse contemporary power relations.

To develop students' skills and confidence in reading and discussing social theory.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1 – What is Social Theory and Why Do We Need It?

Week 2 – Stigma and the ‘Spoiling’ of Identity: Erving Goffman

Week 3 – The Politics of Stigma: Race and Racism

Week 4 – Social Class I: Anthony Giddens, The Third Way, and Stuart Hall

Week 5 - Social Class II: The Politics of Classification

Week 6 - Reading Week – NO LECTURES OR CLASSES

Week 7 - Neoliberalism I: Ordoliberalism

Week 8 – Neoliberalism II: Human Capital

Week 9 - Bringing Neoliberalism into the Present: Wendy Brown

Week 10 - Debt and Subjectivity

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand what social theory and how it can inform a sociological imagination
- Understand, engage with and apply key sociological concepts such as class, inequality, race, and stigma
- Use social theory to think critically about power relations in modern societies
- Write with confidence about a range of theoretical issues and concepts
- Address the aims and objectives of the module demonstrating close engagement with module materials

Indicative reading list

Adkins, L. (2019). ‘Debt, Complexity and the Sociological Imagination’ in M. Featherstone (ed.) *The Sociology of Debt*.

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the Demos*.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

Giddens, A. (1998). *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

Hall, S. (1998). ‘The Great Moving Nowhere Show’. *Marxism Today*, November/December, pp.9-14.

Hall, S. (2011) ‘The Neo-Liberal Revolution’, *Cultural Studies*, 25, 6, pp.705-28.

Mills, C. Wright. (2000). *The Sociological Imagination*.

Skeggs, B. (2019). ‘The Forces that Shape Us: The Entangled Vine of Gender, Race and Class’. *Sociological Review*, 67, 1, pp.28-35.

Tyler, I. (2015). ‘Classificatory Struggles: Class, Culture and Inequality in Neoliberal Times’.

International

The module introduces the tradition of social theory which is an international movement of thought. Care is taken in the design of the module to make the module relevant to international student body . This is the case in terms of selecting examples - where an effort is made to match with students' internationally diverse interests, and also in terms of the traditions of thought.

Subject specific skills

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of social theory, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in sociology and social theory and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in sociology and social research
- use a range of established social theory techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences and deploy key techniques of social theory analysis effectively

Transferable skills

- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles of sociological-relational thinking, and critical social analysis outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context .

-critical thinking.

-textual interpretation and analysis.

-teamwork, co-operation and discussion.

- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.
 - have an enhanced capacity to undertake independent research, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.
 - attain the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making, in particular being better able to think critically about power relations at play in all social processes including knowledge production.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Other activity	7 hours (5%)
Private study	125 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

125 hours private study will be spent reading and writing for the seminars and assessment.

Other activity description

Formative written assessment of 1,000 words

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A4

	Weighting	Study time
Assessed Essay	100%	
Assessed essay. Questions set by the module convenor.		

Feedback on assessment

Written comments and verbal feedback on formative written exercise. Verbal feedback on students' ideas, arguments and developing analyses during seminars. Written feedback on summative assessments.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of USOA-L300 Undergraduate Sociology
- Year 2 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 2 of UIPA-L3L8 Undergraduate Sociology and Global Sustainable Development
- LL23 BA Politics and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- Available as an outside option