This course offers an introduction to contemporary sociological theory for graduate students aspiring to lead a life of research in the social sciences. The first and primary goal is to provide guidelines for a reflection on the role of theory in sociological research. We will examine questions such as: What is theory? How is it to be evaluated? How can we build on available theories in constructing new ones? Our second goal will be to understand how theories are shaped by the context in which they are produced. We will also discuss whether the impact of contexts should prevent us from aspiring to the production of generalizable theories. A third, broader, objective will be to provide students with bases needed for achieving a decent level of intellectual literacy within the field of sociology.

Students who have not had exposure to sociological theory at the undergraduate level are encouraged to read one of the following books prior to our first meeting:


These books will provide you with a general road-map of the field of sociological theory, as well as basic information on some of the approaches that we will not be cover due to time constrains (e.g., critical theory, exchange theory, neo-functionalistm).

The first part of the course defines and contrasts various approaches to sociological theory. The second part focuses on structural approaches that privilege the objective properties of social reality. In particular, we will discuss the ongoing crisis of
neo-Marxism. The third part privileges cultural approaches that emphasize the subjective aspects of social reality. We will contrast traditional approaches (e.g., symbolic interactionism) with more recent work that focuses on the structural aspects of cultural phenomena. Our goal here will be to go beyond the structure/culture dichotomy that often organizes the teaching of postwar sociological theory. The fourth part turns to the post-, new, and improved European and American contributions which have had a powerful impact in transforming the meaning of theory in sociology and other disciplines. We will conclude with a general reflection on the impact of the material we have covered on our practice as sociologists.

Requirements:

1) Four memos on a group of weekly readings of your choice. These memos, of a maximum length of three to four pages, should be emailed to all class participants at least 24 hours before our meetings. Their role is to help you and others prepare our discussion by pointing to a number of substantive and critical issues, and by identifying connections and contrasts between theoretical approaches (40 percent of the grade).

2) Several class presentation (30 percent of the grade).

3) Take-home exam or a paper on a topic to be discussed with me (30 percent of the grade; due Friday, May 12th).

Readings:

The following books are available at the U-Store. A reading packet is also available at Pequod, 6 Nassau St.


Part 1: Introduction

Week 1 (February 1): What is Theory?


**Week 2 (February 9): Overview and Approaches to Theory**


**Part 2: Toward Structure**

**Week 3 (February 15): Rational Choice and Network Theory**


**Week 4 (February 22): Neo-Marxism, Kindred, and Less-Kindred Spirits**


**Part 3: Toward Culture**

**Week 5 (February 29): Ethnomethodology and Symbolic Interactionism**


**Week 6 (March 7): Culture Theory: From Functionalism to Recent Developments**


**Week of March 14: Spring break**

**Part 4: Post-, New, and Improved**

**Week 7 (March 21): Structuralism and Post-Structuralism**


**Week 8 (March 28): Giddens, Bourdieu, and Beyond.**


**Week 9 (April 4): New French Theory and Pragmatism**


**Week 10 (April 11): Feminist Theory**


**Week 11 (April 18): Postmodernism and Postmodernity**


**Part 5: Conclusion**

**Week 12 (April 24): Metatheoretical and Practical Issues and Synthesis**
