STPEC 190A
Social Thought & Political Economy (STPEC)
Fall 2015

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Introduction to Radical Social Theory
In Historical Context
4 Credit Course

Course Overview and Structure

This is an introductory course to radical social theory. Our focus is the history of social thought in the West, and the postcolonial critiques of some of these ideas. In this course, students will learn that “radical” means “at the root,” and radical social theory is theory that explains the roots of social inequalities and proposes ways of transforming society to achieve justice. However, in the U.S. today, many people think that “radical” is a negative term meaning someone who is irrational or inappropriately “extreme” in their views. That is not the view of this course.

As a General Education course, our goal is for students to have the opportunity to discuss key societal issues through a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, history, economics, African-American, Native American and gender and sexuality studies. Through analysis of readings and films, we will explore the connection between cultural processes and power in the West and the implications for non-Western people on a global scale and on different times and places.

Most of the readings will be primary sources, that is, texts that were written by people who were living and writing at the time of the events we are addressing. The ideas expressed in these readings pushed people to think in new ways and pushed the world into unchartered territories. Many of the great thinkers we will engage with were considered perverts or godless, and several were banned or sent into exile. Others were committed to mental institutions. However, their theories sparked momentous changes across the globe, and we continue to see their effects in our own lives today.
This course fulfills the Historical Studies (HS) objectives because it encourages students to acquire knowledge of and fosters an appreciation for historical perspectives. At the same time, it presents theories in their historical contexts, as resulting from human activity, and with impacts on the lives of individuals, nations, and the world. The postcolonial perspective of the course emphasizes the need for critical thinking skills so that students can understand the past and connect it with their own futures.

This course also fulfills the Global Diversity Objectives (G) as it focuses on the history of radical social thought in different countries and continents. Moreover, the course also emphasizes cultural diversity within other countries. Thus, we will analyze the thinking of women, people of different ethnicities, and those with limited access to resources as we think of the historical power structures that have framed these times and places.

Through collaborative use of technology, group presentations, and other forms of teamwork, students will have the opportunity to enhance their research and oral communication skills. Individual writing of essays and analytical papers will help students link social theories presented in the course with their own interests and passions.

**Course Objectives**

- Become familiar with the history of social thought in the West and its critique by postcolonial subjects
- Become familiar with social sciences and social studies concepts that address major axes of oppression/resistance in society
- Develop critical thinking skills, especially concerning issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, racism, class and globalization
- Become familiar with major Western ideas and critique them to articulate the student’s own vision of the World
- Engage in team learning and technology-enhanced public presentations
- Develop the capacity to present in public and engage in academic discussion of complex topics
- Develop capacity to engage in critical reading and writing skills.

**Attendance Policy**

Make every possible effort to not skip classes as the theories we are analyzing build on each other. It will be hard to understand what comes next if you have not participated in the class discussions of the previous theories.

*Excused Absences:* If you will be forced to miss all or part of a class period due to a known conflict, please email the instructor in advance. If you are forced to miss a class due to an emergency (illness, family crisis, etc.), contact the instructor as soon as possible.
Unexcused Absences: You are allowed 2 unexcused absences. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in the loss of a letter grade in the participation portion of your final grade.

Lateness: Arriving to class late is disruptive to the instructor and to other students, and puts you at a disadvantage during the class. Unless you have cleared it with the instructor previously, when you are late for 2 classes it will count as an unexcused absence. Arriving to class more than 30 minutes late also counts as an absence.

Thanksgiving: The break is certainly a short one, but we cannot cancel the Tuesday class, so please plan to attend.

Different Abilities

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements:

Class Dynamics

The content and format of this course will lead to a number of discussions about “hot topics” such as class, gender, and racial constructions. Students are expected to engage in these conversations sensitively and with openness to critique. If you feel you cannot speak in class, please talk with the instructor privately after class to figure out strategies that might help.

Grading

Attendance and Participation 25%
Group Oral Presentations 30%
Midterm Exam 20%
Final Exam 25%

A 94-100  A- 93-90  B+ 87-89  B 84-86  B- 80-83
C+ 77-79  C 74-76  C- 68-73  D+64-67  D 60-63  F below 60

Attendance and Participation (25%): This includes thoughtful comments and questions during class time to support discussion, contribution to small groups, and attendance. See above for attendance policy.

Groups Presentations (30%): Groups of students will present their in-class research following clear, detailed guidelines by the instructor.

Take Home Midterm Exam (20%): The exam involves short (two paragraphs) and medium
length responses (half a page) to questions about the different theories analyzed during the first half of the semester. A study guide will be provided so that the students know which are the main concepts, ideas and events they need to work on.

**Take Home Final Exam (25):** Similar to the Midterm exam, the Final Exam involves short (two paragraphs) and medium length (half a page) responses. The topics, however, include ideas and events analyzed throughout the semester. While the focus will be on the authors studied after the Midterm, students need to continue to work with the main concepts learned throughout the course. A study guide will be provided.

**Technology Policy**

This course does not require buying a book. Instead, it relies heavily on texts posted in Moodle. If you can annotate and underline texts online, you can bring your laptop to class for reference, but you cannot use the computer for any other task, except that of taking notes. Checking email, FB, twitter, etc., will amount to being absent from the class and will be graded accordingly. Attendance and participation amount to 25% of your overall grade.

Please turn your cell phone off during class.

**Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University’s official policy on academic honesty. You can read it in full at: [http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm)

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**Course Calendar**

**Week 1**
**September 2**  - Syllabus hand-out
**Liberalism and Eurocentrism in Europe, 18th Century**

**Recommended Reading:** Rousseau, Jean Jacques, Social Contract. Book 1

**Recommended Reading:** Quijano, Anibal. Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America.
Week 2
September 9 – Early Liberal Feminism
Olympe de Gouge, Rights of Woman

Week 3
September 16 – Workers of the World Unite, 19th Century
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The Communist Manifesto. Chapters 1 and 2
Video clips: Marx-reloaded, 2013, 53 min

Week 4
September 23 – Expropriating the Means of Production
Kropotkin, Pyotr Alexeyevich. The Conquest of Bread, Chapter 4.

Week 5
September 30 - God is Dead, late 19th, early 20th Century
Nietzsche, Frederick. Thus-Spoke-Zarathustra. Prologue

Week 6
October 7 - Black Self-Determination and Self-Defense, 20th Century
X, Malcolm. Whatever is Necessary to Protect Ourselves. In The Final Speeches.”

Audio Clip: Message to the grassroots

Week 7
October 14 – Love and Executions, 20th Century
Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Che Guevara Reader
Movie Clips: Che, Part 1, 2008, 134 mins

Week 8
October 21 – Feminism is for Everybody
hooks, bell. Feminism is for Everybody, Introduction and Feminist Politics, Pp. VII-X and 1-6

October 22 ****************MIDTERM EXAM **********************

Week 9
October 28 - Queerness, Culture and Ethnicity, late 20th, early 21st Century
Gloria Anzaldúa, La Conciencia de la Mestiza
Week 10
November 4 – Black Feminist Marxism, late 20th early 21st Century
Clips: http://critical-theory.com/watch-2-angela-davis-prison-interviews/

Week 11
November 11 – Holiday Veteran’s Day

Week 12
November 18 – Postmodern, Postcolonial Revolution, late 20th and early 21st Century
Subcomandante Marcos –Ya Basta!: Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising

Week 13
November 25 – Preparation for Final Project

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14
December 2 – Student presentations, wrap up and conclusions

*************************FINAL EXAM DUE DATE: TBA*************************

Bibliography

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