Methods in Social Theory

Seminar Leader: Irit Dekel
Times: Monday 09:00 – 10:30
       Wednesday 13:30 – 15:00
Email: i.dekel@berlin.bard.edu

Course Description
In this course we will explore the many branches of the discipline called sociology. We will study classic theory as well as recent contributions in the field of sociology and examine the major questions that guide sociological analysis. We will also practice ‘doing’ sociology by exploring our everyday social world and the forces that shape it which are often invisible or taken for granted. By studying topics in human action, economy, gender, social interaction, inequality, organizations and religion, we will see why it is impossible to make the many faces of sociology into a single scientific discipline. Instead of constructing a science, we will see how these theories and practices help us in understanding the society in which we humans live. In the first half of the semester we will discuss classical readings in sociological theory which we will then draw on for discussion of contemporary issues of gender, class, politics, organizations, knowledge and art. By the end of this course you will:

1. be familiar with major sociological writings and concepts.
2. Ask sociological questions to open a critical discussion of social issues from a variety of methodological perspectives.
3. Critically review assigned texts, as an analytical lens for your everyday experiences.

Requirements
Class participation
You are to come to class having done the readings assigned for that session, and prepared to participate in class. Students will each give a short presentation at opening of class on assigned reading: summary and discussion questions will be submitted to class via email before class. Please view them as writing/ thinking exercise, not as a finished product, and use them to respond with your own questions, criticism and new ideas they suggest.

Attendance
Regular attendance is essential to the success of this course, and so is class preparation. More than just reading through the assigned pages, preparing for class means reading thoughtfully and trying to engage with the text. Please make sure to attend every class, and to be on time for each session. According to college regulations, over 15% unexcused absences will result in academic probation (See the Student Handbook section V for a description of college absence policies).
**Writing Assignments**

One short discussion paper which will answer questions based on readings that will be distributed. They will be addressed in no more than 4-5 pages essays that demonstrate explicit use of the readings. The paper is due **March 2, 2014, 23:59**.

Final Essay is due **May 21, 2014, 23:59**.

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

As the Student Handbook states, essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

**Grade Breakdown**

Discussion Paper 30%

Class Participation and Presentation 15%

Methods Presentation and Discussion 15% (**April 2 2014**)

Final Essay 40%

**Schedule**

**Week 1 INTRODUCTION: THINKING SOCIOLOGY**

January 27

Introduction I: Sociological imaginations

January 29

Peter L. Berger 1963 Invitation to Sociology: A humanistic Perspective New York: Anchor Books. Chapters 2 and 5 (pp. 25-53, 93-121)

**Week 2 DURKHEIM I: STUDYING SOCIOLOGY**

February 3


February 5

**Week 3 MAX WEBER, IDEALISM AND MATERIALISM**

February 10
Chapter 1: “Religious affiliation and social stratification” (pp. 35-46)

February 12
Chapter 2: “The spirit of Capitalism” (pp. 47-78)

**Week 4 MAX WEBER: THE IRON CAGE OF CAPITALISM, MARX INTRODUCTION**
February 17
Max Weber The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism Chapter 5: “Asceticism and the spirit of capitalism” (pp. 155-183)

February 19
The Marx Engels Reader Karl Marx “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844” (pp. 67-81)

**Week 5 KARL MARX: ON CLASS**
February 24
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels “The German Ideology” The Marx Engels Reader (pp. 147-163)

Feb 26
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels “The German Ideology” The Marx Engels Reader (pp. 163-175)

**DISCUSSION PAPER 1 DUE March 2 23:59**

**Week 6 QUALITATIVE METHODS**
March 3
Howard Becker, The Epistemology of Qualitative Research

March 5

**Week 7 ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND DATA**
March 10
Loic Wacquant, “Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography” (review essay) AJS vol 107, 6 (May 2002): 1468-1532
March 12

March 17-21 Spring break

Week 8 CASES AND ETHICS
March 24

March 26

Week 9 HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY
March 31

April 2
Presentation on methods and class discussion

Week 10 GEORG SIMMEL ON SOCIAL FORMS AND SOCIAL TYPES
April 7

April 9
Georg Simmel "The Stranger" in Levine (1971) (pp. 143-149)

Week 11 GEORG SIMMEL ON SOCIETY AND REALITY
April 14
Georg Simmel "Metropolis and mental life" in Levine (1971) (pp. 324-339)

April 16
Georg Simmel "The conflict in modern cultures" in Levine (1971) (pp. 375-393)

Week 12 THE KNOWLEDGE OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY
April 23
Michel Foucault Part one "We ‘Other Victorians?’" History of Sexuality Vol. 1 1990 New York Vintage Books (pp. 1-14)
Michel Foucault Part two "The Repressive Hypothesis" History of Sexuality Vol. 1. (pp. 15-49)

**Week 13 CRITICAL THOUGHT**
April 28 and 30

**Week 14 BETWEEN THEORY AND METHODS**  
May 5  
Mary Douglas 1996 Grid and Group in Natural Symbols (pp. 57-71)

**May 7 CONCLUSION**

**May 21, 23:59 - FINAL ESSAY DUE**