

Applications of Theory SYA 7933

Professor: Christine Overdevest

Time: Tuesday 3:00-6:00 pm

Place: Matherly 0051

Office Hours: Tuesday 12 -2 pm or by appointment.

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Are you struggling to find a relevant theoretical perspective in the existing scholarship? Do you have trouble articulating your findings in academic terms? Are you not sure about the right way to integrate a theoretical background or theoretical statement in the text? Whatever your theory challenge is, this course will help you address it.

We start with lessons on why we need theoretical foundations for research. We take a brief tour of techniques of persuasive argumentation and commonly used argument heuristics in the social sciences. Assigned readings guide you in the “how to” of grounding your research conceptually and developing a solid relationship with the reader. The second part of the class presents exemplary works in which we see how skilled sociologists use such heuristics to highlight their contributions and establish strong connections with readers. Finally, students will apply knowledge learned by workshopping a manuscript during the course, ideally a paper for future publication or a dissertation chapter. ‘Workshopping’ refers to sharing a draft paper with peers to discuss it and get feedback. Students can share their projects-in-progress with the class. During class meetings, we will analyze together the theoretical aspects of your work and suggest potential ways to develop them. The shared project could be at any stage – from initial thoughts to an entirely written article. You should engage the class not only with your arguments but also with your hesitations and doubts. The goal is to help you develop your theoretical argument in a non-judgmental context.

Course Objectives: By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Understand the importance of conceptual foundations and the role of theory in social science research
- Develop skills in persuasive argumentation
- Learn to apply common heuristics for structuring, writing and revising scholarly papers that contribute to theory.
- Offer constructive, professional feedback on their peers’ manuscripts

Required Textbooks

Assigned readings will be on Canvas or are on reserve at the UF library.

Course Schedule:

<p>Week 1. August 27</p>	<p>Introduction to Course</p> <p>Organizational meeting. Introductions. Class content and setup.</p>	<p>Introductions and class overview</p>
<p>Week 2. Sept 3</p>	<p>Philosophy of Science: Evolution of Scientific Theories from Popper to Lakatos</p> <p>Popperian Falsification</p> <p>Popper, Karl. (1959) A Survey of Some Fundamental Problems. Chapter 1 in The Logic of Scientific Discovery. Pp. 3-27.</p> <p>Kuhn's Scientific Revolutions</p> <p>Kuhn's Philosophy of Science, part II https://antimatter.ie/2011/02/09/kuhns-philosophy-of-science-part-ii/</p> <p>Lakatos's Progressive and Degenerating Research Programmes</p> <p>Imre Lakatos. 1970. Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs. In Schick: Readings in the Philosophy of Science. 6 pp. pdf</p> <p>Kuhn vs Popper; the philosophy of Lakatos. https://antimatter.ie/2011/02/11/kuhn-vs-popper-the-philosophy-of-lakatos/</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	<p>Memo 1 Due</p>
<p>Week 3 Sept 10</p>	<p>Why are Strong Conceptual Foundations Important in Research?</p> <p>Pp 23-30 (skim 31-43). Chapter 2 Conceptual Foundations of Research. In Research Methods in the Social Sciences by Frankfurt-Nachmias et al. 2015. Macmillan</p> <p>Why is creating a relationship with your reader essential?</p>	<p>Memo 2</p>

	<p>Craft Of Research: Creating a relationship with your reader: your role, pp.17-19. In Craft of Research, Second Edition 2003</p> <p>Managing Uncertainties Pp 30-31</p> <p>A Checklist for Understanding Readers. Pp 32-33</p> <p>How do I make an effective, persuasive theoretical argument?</p> <p>On the (General) Toulmin Model of Persuasive Argumentation</p> <p>The Toulmin Model of Argumentation. Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-YPPQztuOY</p> <p>Karback, Joan. 1987. Using Toulmin’s Model of Argumentation. The Journal of Teaching Writing.6(1): 81-91</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	
<p>Week 4. Sept 17</p>	<p>What are “argument heuristics” in the social sciences, and why do they matter?</p> <p>What is the additive heuristic?</p> <p>Abbott, Andrew 2004 Introduction to Heuristics Chapter 3 (pp. 85-92) in <i>Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences</i>.</p> <p>What are some of the common intellectual moves in making arguments, e.g., Problematizing the Obvious? Making (or Denying) an Assumption? Making a Reversal? Reconceptualizing?</p> <p>Abbott, Andrew 2004 General Heuristics: Search and Argument. Chapter 4 (pp. 110-111 and 120-136) in <i>Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences</i>.</p> <p>These readings serve as the basis for the next several weeks of class, where we will next read exemplary works of social science and interrogate their use of common argument heuristics. We will ask how these techniques work in the exemplars and how they can help you make theoretical contributions.</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	<p>Memo 3</p>

<p>Week 5. Sept 24</p>	<p>Conceptual or Category Innovation: Creating your own Concepts</p> <p>Example from the Cultural Sociology/Families Literature</p> <p>Exemplary Work</p> <p>In <i>Unequal Childhoods</i>, Annette Lareau exemplifies how to create and develop theoretical constructs to structure and convey an argument effectively. She introduces the concepts of the accomplishment of natural growth and concerted cultivation, embedding them within larger theoretical debates on the cultural logics of child-rearing and the social reproduction of inequality. These concepts help frame her analysis and make her arguments more compelling.</p> <p>Lareau's use of other theoretical constructs, such as the transmission of differential advantages, sense of entitlement, and sense of constraint, further demonstrates her ability to contribute to theory development. She emphasizes these concepts by putting them in italics, drawing attention to their significance as general theoretical claims or constructs. This technique highlights their importance and aids in their recognition as contributions to the broader understanding of cultural reproduction and cultural repertoires.</p> <p>Through her innovative use of these concepts, Lareau not only advances our understanding of accepted social science notions but also demonstrates how participant observation can generate grounded theory in cultural sociology. Her work showcases the power of creative conceptual category innovation in developing robust theoretical frameworks.</p> <p>Read Chapters 1-12. Notice how Chapter 12 offers qualifications, cf: Booth et al. and Toumlin on the importance of qualifications to build trust with the reader. Readers trust you more when you do not overstate your claims. Delimiting your theory contribution is essential to the quality of your overall argument. What other things does she do that build trust with the reader and strengthen her general argument (see chapter 15, for one)? Read Appendix B.</p> <p>The book is available as an e-copy through UF Library or many used copies available for purchase for your library.</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	<p>Memo 4.</p>
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<p>Week 6. Oct. 1</p>	<p>Problematizing the Obvious</p> <p>Example from the Demography Literature</p> <p>Glenn Firebaugh – The New Geography of Global Income Inequality Chapter 71 in David Grusky and Szonja Szelenyi (eds), Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender. pp. 681-694 Routledge.</p> <p>What does it mean to problematize the obvious and how does Firebaugh problematize the obvious?</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Discussion Leader_____</p>	<p>Memo 5.</p>
<p>Week 7 Oct 8</p>	<p>Making (or denying) a Simplifying Assumption:</p> <p>Example from Economic Sociology Literature</p> <p>Because there is a deep background to this literature, please review this intellectual history:</p> <p>Economists have traditionally assumed that people act rationally to maximize their utility (happiness). This simplifying assumption has allowed them to build mathematical models of human behavior. Simplifying assumptions often open the door to entire fields of study (what Lakatos would call a “progressive research programme”). However, much <i>economic sociology</i> challenges economists’ assumptions by proposing that rational action is hard to achieve because rationality is bounded and/or “embedded” in social relations. This shift highlights the importance of understanding the limitations of the rationality assumption in explaining human action, and also opens a productive counter-progressive research programme.</p> <p>Key Features of this Heuristic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves either introducing a basic assumption to simplify a complex issue or explicitly denying a commonly held assumption to reveal alternative perspectives. • These assumptions, whether made or denied, must be clearly stated and justified within the context of the research. 	<p>Memo 6</p>

- Simplifying an issue makes it more manageable for analysis, while denying an assumption opens up new avenues for inquiry.

Further exposition:

1. **Traditional Economic Rationality:**

- **Simplifying Assumption:** People act rationally to maximize their utility.
- **Significance:** This assumption underpins many mathematical models in economics, facilitating the prediction and analysis of human behavior in economic contexts.

2. **Bounded Rationality:**

- **Refinement of Simplifying Assumption:** Rational action is limited by cognitive constraints and the social context (boundedness) in which decisions are made.
- **Key Figure:** Herbert Simon introduced the concept of bounded rationality, arguing that individuals' decision-making processes are constrained by the information they have, their cognitive limitations, and the time available to make decisions.
- **Read:** [Herbert Simon's Bounded Rationality](#).

3. **Economic Sociology and Embeddedness:**

- **Alternative Assumption:** Rational action is embedded in social relations, making purely rational actions challenging to achieve in isolation from social contexts.
- **Class Lecture on:** Mark Granovetter's "Getting a Job."
 - **Key Insight:** Granovetter's research demonstrated that, contrary to the common assumption that "strong" ties (people you see every week) are most effective in finding good jobs (i.e., it is not what you know but who you know), weak ties (people you see only every once in a while) are often more important.
 - **Theoretical Contribution:** When confronted with this result, Granovetter argued that weak ties are more valuable because they connect individuals to new information and opportunities outside their immediate social circle, thus illustrating the role of social embeddedness in economic action.
 - **Impact:** This finding has become foundational in social network analysis and economic sociology, emphasizing the role of social structures in economic behaviors.

Read Getting a Job – Granovetter, Introduction (p.3-22)

	<p>Background Readings (Review):</p> <p>Granovetter, M. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties. American Journal of Sociology. 78(6): 1360-1380.</p> <p>Granovetter, M. 1985. Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. American Journal of Sociology</p> <p>Beckert, Jens. 2003. Economic Sociology and Embeddedness: How Shall We Conceptualize Economic Action? Journal of Economic Issues. 37(3):769-787.</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Discussion Leader_____</p>	
<p>Week 8. Oct 15</p>	<p>Making A Reversal</p> <p>Example from Deviance Literature</p> <p>Howard Becker 1953. Becoming a Marijuana User. American Journal of Sociology, 59(3): 235-242.</p> <p>Becker started from the standard view that people take up deviant behavior because of psychological motivation to be deviant. Becker reversed the idea. He writes: “Instead of deviant motives leading to deviant behavior, it is the other way around; the deviant behavior in time produces the deviant motivation” (1962:42). That move opens possibilities of interpretation that had been closed to others and makes his contribution to theory clear.</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop_____</p> <p>Discussion Leader_____</p>	<p>Memo 7</p>

<p>Week 9. Oct 22</p>	<p>Reconceptualizing</p> <p>Examples from Performativity Theory in Gender and Economic Sociology</p> <p>Performativity theory, as developed by Judith Butler, reconceptualizes gender by proposing that it is not a fixed identity but something that is performed through repeated acts. Butler further argues that performing alternative genders can be a significant form of cultural politics. She draws on linguistics and speech act theory, particularly the work of John Austin, to develop this idea. The Diverse Economies perspective extends this notion by suggesting that performing alternative economic practices is crucial for bringing these practices into existence and legitimizing them.</p> <p>Butler, Judith. 1988. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. <i>Theatre Journal</i>. 40(4): 519-531.</p> <p>J.K. Gibson-Graham. 2008. Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for ‘Other Worlds.’ <i>Progress in Human Geography</i>, 32(5):613-632.</p> <p>A Summary of Additive Work within this Paradigm</p> <p>Read: Dombroski, Kelly and Gradon Diprose. Diverse Economies. Pp. 142-148. In C. Overdeest, <i>The Encyclopedia of Environmental Sociology</i>. Elgar.</p>	<p>Memo 8.</p>
<p>Week 10. Oct. 29</p>	<p>Intersectionality In Race, Class and Gender Studies</p> <p>Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. 1989(1): 139-167.</p> <p>Examples of Progressive Work within this Paradigm</p> <p>Read: Pellow, David. 2024. Intersectionality theory and the Environment. Pp. 374-379. In C. Overdeest, <i>The Encyclopedia of Environmental Sociology</i>. Elgar. pp. 576</p>	<p>Memo 9.</p>

	<p>Read: Hanus, Stephanie. 2024. Environmental Reproductive Justice. Pp. 266-270. In C. Overdeest, The Encyclopedia of Environmental Sociology. Elgar. pp. 576</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	
<p>Week 11. Nov 5</p>	<p>Exemplar - Political Sociology/Stratification</p> <p>Esping-Andersen, Gosta. The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism</p> <p>Introduction and Chapters 1-5, and Conclusion</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	<p>Memo 10.</p>
<p>Week 12. Nov. 12</p>	<p>Exemplar - Political Sociology</p> <p>Scott, James. C. 1989. Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed. New Haven: Yale University Press</p> <p>Read Introduction, Chapters 1-4, Chapter 8</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	<p>Memo 11.</p>
<p>Week 13. Nov. 19</p>	<p>Final Paper Workshop (Week 1)</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop _____</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop _____</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	
<p>Week 14 Dec 3</p>	<p>Final Paper Workshop (Week 2) and Final Course Discussion</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop _____</p> <p>Student Paper Workshop _____</p> <p>Discussion Leader _____</p>	

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Evaluation of Grades

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Grade</i>
Memos	25%
Class Participation	25%
Session Leadership	20%
First Workshop Submission	15%
Second Workshop Submission	15%
Total	
	100%

Assignments Overview

Weekly Memo (25% of Grade):

- **Submit:** 10 of 11 memos via Canvas (discussion tool) before class.

Memo Requirements:

- **Summarize Key Concepts:** Briefly outline core ideas and arguments from the readings, focusing on how these concepts are articulated and supported by the authors.
- **Select and Bring Passages:** Identify specific passages (with page numbers) relating to course content that you find insightful, challenging, or you would like to further discuss.
- **Submission in Canvas:** Due 24 hours before the beginning of each class.

Participation (25% of Grade):

- **Objective:** Engage actively and constructively in class discussions and offering feedback that strengthens the work of your peers. The more engaged you are, the better the collective learning experience.

Classroom Discussion Leader (20% of Grade):

- **Presentation:** Begin with a 15-minute summary, integrating insights from the memos.

- **Facilitate Discussion:** Guide the conversation with prepared questions, encouraging students to engage with points raised in their memos and contribute to a meaningful discussion.
- **Manage Time:** Ensure the discussion remains focused, redirecting as necessary to cover key themes.
- **Synthesize and Summarize:** Conclude by synthesizing the discussion, highlighting key takeaways, unresolved issues, and connections to broader course themes.

Example Seminar Structure/Schedule:

1. **Opening Presentation (15 minutes):**
 - The discussion leader presents a summary, incorporating insights from the memos.
2. **Discussion (1.5 hours):**
 - Guided by the leader's questions, participants engage with the readings, referencing their memos.
3. **Synthesis and Wrap-Up (15-20 minutes):**
 - The discussion leader synthesizes the discussion, highlighting key takeaways.
4. **Closing Reflections (10-15 minutes):**
 - Open the floor for final thoughts, connecting the discussion to broader course themes.

Workshopping Your Paper

Workshop your Paper

Workshopping an unpublished manuscript is a process where authors present their work-in-progress to a group of peers for feedback. The goal is to refine and improve the work through constructive critique and discussion. This process involves sharing drafts, outlines, or ideas, receiving feedback, and then revising the work based on the insights gained. Workshopping is not just about identifying weaknesses but also about recognizing strengths and exploring new directions for the research.

First Submission (15% of final grade):

- Submit either a complete draft of your manuscript or a detailed outline of the paper you intend to write by the Saturday night before discussion. *If submitting an outline*, ensure it includes:
 - **Research Question:** Clearly state the central question your paper seeks to answer.
 - **Definition of Relevant Fields:** Define the key fields of knowledge your paper engages with.
 - **Current Debates:** Discuss the ongoing debates within the field and where your paper will contribute.

- **Research Findings:** If you have already conducted research, mention your findings and their theoretical importance.
- **Statement of Obstacles:** Conclude with a brief statement on any challenges or obstacles you are facing in your writing process.

Second Submission (15% of final grade):

- **Revised Submission:** The last two weeks of the semester, submit a final version of your paper or outline (the Saturday night before the workshop).

Note: This syllabus is subject to further change or revision, as needed, to best realize the educational goals of the course.

Attendance Policy, Class Expectations, and Make-Up Policy

You are expected to attend every class (Zoom and face-to-face) unless you have a documented emergency or illness, consistent with the UF attendance policy (<http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=2020#attendance>). A substantial part of your grade will be based on activities and participation during these sessions. If you are unable to attend, please notify us via email before class. Absences will result in the loss of a half letter grade for each absence beginning with your second missed class.

State whether attendance is required and if so, how will it be monitored? What are the penalties for absence, tardiness, cell phone policy, laptop policy, etc. What are the arrangements for missed homework, missed quizzes, and missed exams? This statement is required: Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the Graduate Catalog (<http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=2020#attendance>) and require appropriate documentation. Additional information can be found here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and

can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluer.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see: <http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), [or http://www.police.ufl.edu/](http://www.police.ufl.edu/).

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-emailselect option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

Student Complaints Campus:

https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf.

On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.