ISS 6346: Theory and Inquiry

Prof. Guillermo J. Grenier

Office: SIPA 331 Office Hours: by appointment
Phone: 348-3217 Email: grenierg@fiu.edu

About the Seminar

What does it mean to be a social scientist? How does one practice social science? What is the “object” of study in social science? Why do we ask the questions we do in social research? How do we choose our theoretical approach? What is social theory, anyway? How do we choose our evidence gathering methods?

These are some of the questions that inform and guide this seminar. It is neither an introduction to a disciplinary canon nor an indoctrination into a school of thought, but rather an open-ended exploration of thinking about thinking about social life and its patterns, something altogether more daunting. We will explore the problem of theorizing and researching a social world of which we are at once products and producers, interested participants and objective observers, unconscious constituents and self-conscious transformers. It is a multitasking seminar, partly an introduction to the philosophy of social science, partly a fragmentary survey of social theorists you have encountered or will encounter in countless bibliographies, and partly a discussion of how to move between abstract theory and empirical enquiry. The position taken is overtly a reflexive one in that we are going to spend time examining the questions major contemporary social theorists are trying to answer, why they chose to ask them, how they answered them (methodologically speaking). We will also spend a great deal of time reflecting on your research ideas and questions as well as exploring possible methodologies for their exploration.

The general emphasis of this course will be on “theorizing” rather than just “theories;” how to evaluate the methods of inquiry or gathering evidence, rather than specific methods. I want you to think conceptually about the world around you and the relationship among concepts. Having said that, I also have the goal of exposing you to a wide range of texts, developing your ability to read closely, cultivating the competence to "discover" the theoretical concepts in texts and identify the evidence gathering procedures used to frame and support the concepts and learning to discuss the process coherently. At its most basic level, it is a course on how to read closely in order to gain useful ideas for your own work.
Seminar Requirements

While I have tried to keep the readings manageable, this is still a graduate reading seminar, which means: 1) that the reading requirements are extensive and often challenging; and 2) that learning will be a collective process as we share our individual insights and understandings. In other words, we are going to read a lot and learn from each other through written and oral exchanges. At present, this is how the course grade is portioned out. (This might change if reality smacks some sense into us.)

Seminar participation 25%
Weekly questions for discussion 5%
Theory maps 10%
Readings journal 10%
Research Statement 50%

Seminar Participation

Participation constitutes a significant part of the seminar grade. There will be limited formal lecturing on my part and most seminar time will be taken up by open discussion and the employment of a modified Socratic question and response method. Each week I will call on participants at random to answer questions about the readings. Participation and preparation will be evaluated on a simple plus/minus system. Each participant is allowed one “free” pass per seminar session. A second pass results in a “minus” for that session. A “plus” is awarded for a response that demonstrates preparation. Each participant is allowed one excused absence for the semester and all other absences are an automatic minus for participation.

Weekly Questions for Discussion

Each participant will prepare a minimum of two typed questions from the readings, to be turned in at the beginning of the session. These should be substantive, thoughtful questions. They should not be done as an afterthought, but rather incorporated into your note taking as you read. These questions should contribute significantly to our discussions.
Weekly Theory Maps

Each week you will develop a graphic rendition of the concepts encountered in the readings. The book on theory construction by Jaccard/Jacoby is the bible to develop this skill. Particularly useful is Chapter 7 on Causal Modeling. We will work on this throughout the semester and you will improve your skills accordingly. It is worth the effort.

In general this is what you should do while reading:

- Identify and understand the important concepts used;
- Graph the relationship between the key concepts.
- Identify and graph the variables used to operationalize the concepts (and measure them).

In this process, be sure to identify the passages that contain the central argument/s (learn to pick out what's important; distinguish relevant from irrelevant materials), and refer to/defend your choice of these passages when presenting the theory map.

Readings Journal/Reading Notes

The idea of the readings journal is to create a set of annotations and commentaries for all of the seminar readings. This is essentially an exercise in formal note taking from the readings, a practice that most of you already follow. These notes should include not only summaries for each week’s readings, but also thoughtful critiques, ruminations on theory or method, contrasts and comparisons of readings, general reactions and so forth. Think of these commentaries as materials that will be useful to you in the future for writing a thesis, dissertation, or research paper or studying for comprehensive exams.

Participants must e-mail an electronic version of the journal entries to me no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day before those readings are being discussed. At the end of the semester, everyone will submit for formal grading a final version of the entire journal.
**Final Paper:** Ideally each class meeting will be divided into two parts. We will start off with the assignments designed to explore the readings and work our way into exploring your own research plans. These discussions will keep the final project of the class fresh on your mind.

The final project for this course is developing a paper, following ASA or AAA styles, of no more than 20-25 pages of text. The paper will answer this prompt: *Construct a theory of your research question identifying the main concepts, definitions, statements and variables that organize your topic and its theoretical construction. Present a theoretical model of your work as well as a literature argument that supports your theoretical framework. Be clear on the methodology that will you use to gather evidence to answer your research questions.*

You will be asked to give a conference length presentation on that paper (12-15 minutes) during the last days of class presenting, graphically and in as few slides as possible, your theoretical model and the methodological approach you have chosen to gather data. The first draft of this paper is due *December 5, by 5:00 P.M.*

**Policy on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is theft, cheating, and pointless if our intention is to learn and make our own contribution to the advancement of social science. The disciplinary action that will be taken in the case of plagiarism is explained in the section on “Academic Misconduct” in the FIU Student Handbook. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, check out the websites: “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It (Indiana University)” at [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml) or “Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words” at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/). This last site also has many other links, including how do identify and avoid plagiarism.

You never need to cheat. Social science is a collaborative activity. Do not buy the bourgeois individualistic myth. You stand on the shoulders of other colleagues, contemporary or historical. Just give them their due and answer your research questions. That’s your contribution to the discipline.

**Required Readings**
The following required books are available at FIU’s bookstore. Most are also available as used copies through on-line booksellers and some are available on PDF online.


Harvey, D. *The condition of postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell. 9780631162940


WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: August 26
Orientation and introductions, no readings

PART I: THEORY, THEORY CONSTRUCTION AND METHODS

Week 2: September 2 (No Class)

Week 3: September 9


Assignment: 1) Write your research statement. Include research questions. 2) Theory map (on your research). 3) Questions on readings.

Week 4: September 16


Assignment: 1) Identify concepts in your research, and their relationships. Refine research questions. 2) Theory map (on your research). 3) Questions on readings.

Week 5: September 23


Assignment 3: Identify evidence gathering strategies (methods) necessary to answer your research questions. Identify variables.
Week 6: September 30


Assignment 4: 1) Graph your research. 2) Write summary of your research statement (~10 pages) 3) Theory map, 4) Questions

PART II: DECONSTRUCTING THEORIES AND METHODS

Week 7: October 7


Assignment: Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

Week 8: October 14


Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

Week 9: October 21


And


Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

Week 10: October 28

Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

**Week 11: November 4**


Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

**Week 12: November 11**


Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis, 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

**Week 13: November 18**


*Or*


Assignment: 1) Concept map/variable analysis 2) Questions, 3) Discuss relevance to your research

**Week 14: November 25**

Assignment: 1) Personal research presentations

**Week 15: December 2**

Assignment: 1) Personal research presentations

**Week 16: December 9 (FINALS WEEK)**

PAPER DUE, 5:00 P.M.