

ISS 6346 Theory and Inquiry

Prof. Vrushali Patil

Office: SIPA 329

Class Time: Tuesday 11 am-1:40 pm. EST

Phone: 305-348-4418

Office Hours: Thursdays, 11 am-12 pm EST

Class Location: GC 275A

Email: patilv@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.

The class is divided into two main parts. In Part I, we will read about theory construction, model building, and methods. The point is to use this broader framing work to think about your own research project and inform your research project. In Part II, we will apply what we have learned to different texts in the social sciences. Again, we will continue to think about implications 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.

1.Seminar Participation (25%)

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. Your informed and thoughtful participation will contribute toward this grade.

2. Readings Journal (10%)

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 summaries for each week's readings, as well as 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 submit journal entries on Canvas no later than 6:00 a.m. on the day the readings are being discussed. Again, the purpose of these is for the maintenance of your notes for the semester and for the duration of your graduate/academic work. You may go back and add to them/adjust them as you see fit. I will not be giving fine grained feedback on these, though you will receive credit for timely submission.

3.Weekly Questions for Discussion (5%)

Each participant will prepare a minimum of *two typed questions* from the assigned readings, to be submitted on Canvas by 6 am the morning of class. These should be substantive, thoughtful questions. They should not be done as an afterthought, but rather incorporated into your note taking as you read. We will discuss your questions in class. These questions should contribute significantly to our discussions.

4.Assignments (10%)

Each week, you will be asked a series of questions about the assigned reading and your own research project. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability in a substantive and thoughtful way. Submit on Canvas by 6 am the morning of class.

a.On Theory Maps

As part of your assignment each week, you will create a Theory Map, or 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 key or 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.

5. Final Paper (45%) and Paper Presentation (5%)

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 be a research statement and answer this prompt:

What is your central research question? Provide a review of the literature (for more on literature reviews, see [The Literature Review | A Complete Step-by-Step Guide \(scribbr.com\)](https://www.scribbr.com/literature-review/)) pertinent to this research question and make a literature argument based on this review (that is, based on your review of the literature, which approaches are more appropriate for your questions?). Based on your literature review and literature argument, present a theoretical framework for your research. Identify the key concepts, definitions, and variables that organize your theoretical framework and research question. Be clear on the methodology that will you use to gather evidence to answer your research question.

The paper is due during our scheduled Final Exam (date/time TBA).

Additionally, 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.

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> or “Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words” at <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.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1996. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 9780226458120

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York; London: New Press. 978-1620973493

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2008. Selections from *Black Feminist Thought*. Routledge. 2nd. Edition. 9780415964722

Itzigsohn, José and Karida L. Brown. 2020. *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois*. NYU Press. 978-1479804177

Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera and Molly Geidel. 2020. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Decolonising Practices and Discourses*. Polity. 978-1509537839

*There will also be additional required readings, which will be either provided on Canvas (and indicated by a (C)), or available as an E book through our Green Library (and indicated by (E)).

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: August 23

Orientation and introductions, no readings

PART I: THEORY, THEORY CONSTRUCTION AND METHODS

Week 2: August 30

Kuhn, Thomas. *The structure of scientific revolutions*.

AND

(C) Chapter 11 from Jaccard and Jacoby, *Theory Construction...*

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 1: a)How is this relevant to your research? B)What are your research questions? C) Identify key concepts in your research and the relationships between them. Create a Theory map on your research.

Week 3: September 6 (C) Chapters 1-4: Jaccard, James and Jacob Jacoby.

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings

- Assignment 2: a)How is this relevant to your research? B)Refine research questions. C) Refine Theory map for your research.

Week 4: September 13

(C) Chapters 5, 6, 7: Jaccard, James and Jacob Jacoby.

(C) Sayer, R. Andrew. 1992. *Method in social science* PART I (pp. 1-117)

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Assignment 3: a) Identify evidence gathering strategies (methods) necessary to answer your research questions. B)Identify variables c)Refine Theory map

Week 5: September 20

(C) Chapter 10, 12: Jaccard, James and Jacob Jacoby.

(C) Sayer, R. Andrew. 1992. *Method in social science* PART II (pp. 118-266)

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 4: a)Think about issues brought up in this reading and their implications for your research, and adjust your theory map accordingly. b)Refine theory map

Week 6: September 27: No class this week; Work on Research Statement

There is no class and no reading assignment this week. Instead, I want you to work on your research statement (look at your prompt for your final paper for guidance). Locate at least ten scholarly sources that are relevant to your research and prepare the statement. Your statement needs to be at least a few pages long, no more than 10 pages.

- Assignment 5: Submit your Research Statement at the regular time.

PART II: DECONSTRUCTING THEORIES AND METHODS

Week 7: Oct 4 (C) Marx, Karl, 1932. Part I (to about page 42) from *A Critique of the German Ideology*

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 6: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis.
b) Find a research article or book that takes a Marxist/class/materialist approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 8: October 11 Itzigsohn and Brown, 2020. *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois*

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 7: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis.
b) Find a research article or book that takes a Du Boisian or anti-racist approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 9: October 18 (C) Foucault, Michel. 1990. *History of Sexuality*.

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 8: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis. B) Find a research article or book that takes a Foucauldian/poststructuralist/discursive approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 10: October 25 Everything EXCEPT Chs 5, 6, 7, 9, from Collins, P.H. 2008. *Black Feminist Thought*

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 11: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis. b) Find a research article or book that takes a Black feminist or intersectional approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 11: Nov 1 Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*.

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 12: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis. b) Find a research article or book that takes a critical affect or emotions approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 12: November 8 (E) Delanda, Manuel. 2016. *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 9: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis. B) Find a research article or book that centers issues of scale or space in relation to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 13: November 15 Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera. 2020. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Decolonising Practices and Discourses*.

Submit:

- Reading Journals
- Questions on readings
- Assignment 10: a) For the assigned reading, create a Theory map/variable analysis. b) Find a research article or book that takes a coloniality/decoloniality approach to your research topic and read. Discuss how such an approach can be relevant to your research.

Week 14: November 22

In class student research presentations

Week 15/Finals Week: Date/Time TBA

In class student research presentations

***Papers due today, by Midnight on Canvas and in Hardcopy in class**