“Social research is something much too serious and too difficult for us to allow ourselves to mistake scientific rigidity, which is the nemesis of intelligence and invention, for scientific rigor, and thus to deprive ourselves of this or that resource available in the full panoply of intellectual traditions.”

Pierre Bourdieu

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? How do we choose our methods? How does social theory structure social reality and vice versa? What is social theory, anyway?

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, 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 predominant social theorists you have encountered or soon will encounter in countless bibliographies, and partly a discussion of how to move between theory and actual research. 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) and why theorists’ personal biographies and soci-geo-historical contexts matter. It is a seminar appropriate for all social science or area studies graduate students interested in any or all of the above.

Seminar Requirements
This is 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. Here is how the course grade is portioned out.

Seminar participation 25%
Weekly questions for discussion 5%
Readings journal 15%
Synthesis and review papers (3) 55% (15, 15, and 25)

Seminar Participation
Participation constitutes a significant part of the seminar grade. There will be little 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. That is, during the seminar, 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. I will also use these questions to stimulate our discussions.

Readings Journal
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, 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 12:00 p.m. on the day those readings are being discussed. At the end of the semester, everyone will submit for formal grading a final paper version of the entire journal at our last meeting. These should be present in a three-ring binder no larger than 1½ inches. It should also include a cover page with your name.

Synthesis and Review Papers
The principal writing requirement will be a series of short essays that review and synthesize the seminar readings. There will be three such essays, two of 1200-1500 words each and one of 2200-2500 words. Each will follow the completion of a major section of the seminar. They build cumulatively one upon the other as we complete more readings. That is, the first paper will draw on the first section’s readings, the second will draw on the first and second, and so on. The third and longest of the three essays, while focusing on the final third of our readings, will therefore draw upon the entire seminar reading list. The first two are due one week after the completion of Parts I and II. The third will follow Part III is due December 6.

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.
**Required Readings**

The following required books are available at FIU’s bookstore. Most are also available as used copies through on-line booksellers.


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


Pred, Alan. 2004. *The past is not dead.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. 0816644063


**WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE**

**INTRODUCTION**

Week 1: August 23
Orientation and introductions, no readings

**PART I: OBJECTS, SUBJECTS, AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD**

Week 2: August 30

Week 3: September 6

Week 4: September 13

Week 5: September 20
PART II: SOCIETY-SUBJECTIVITIES-CULTURE

Week 6: September 27

Week 7: October 4

Week 8: October 11

Week 9: October 18

Week 10: October 25

Week 11: November 1

PART III: SOCIAL THEORISTS AS REFLEXIVE SUBJECTS

Week 12: November 8


Week 13: November 15


Week 14: November 22


Week 15: November 29