Syllabus for Contemporary Sociological Theory Spring of 2016
Responsible teacher: Patrik Aspers (PA)
Course if given together with Dominika Polanska (DP) and Sebastian Kohl (SK).

1. General information
7.5 credits
Education cycle: First cycle 2016, half-speed
Grading system: Fail (U), Pass (G)
Entry requirements: 180 credits including 90 credits in sociology or social psychology
Responsible department: Department of Sociology
Language: The class will be taught in English.

2. Learning outcomes
After the course the student should:
• have enhanced their capacity to develop theoretical concepts, their interrelations and implications, and to understand how to connect them with empirical material
• have acquired in-depth knowledge of selected contemporary sociological theories
• have insight into the use of different sociological theories and the connection between present sociology and classical sociological theories
• have the capacity for critical reflection on recent theory development
• have enhanced their ability to discuss and analyze sociological theoretical thinking in written and verbal form

3. Course content
The aim of this course is to increase the faculties needed to not only know of, and choose among existing theories, but above all to critically engage and develop theoretical concepts and theory. The course focuses on some theoretical traditions that, taken together, represent a selection in relation to which most contemporary theories can be understood. The course, thus, does not cover all important contemporary theories, nor should the list be read as a selection of the best theories. During the course a scheme for the analysis of theory will be developed by the participants together, covering central questions that we can pose to any theory, for example, how is change accounted for, but also analyzing its assumptions, for example, ontology.
There are, in addition, ample opportunities for students, after discussion with the course instructors, to select texts relevant for their own work. Literature chosen by the students should ideally be relevant to their interests and must engage with
contemporary theoretical debate in sociology.

In addition to lectures and seminars, the students are expected to develop their theoretical competence and their ability to read and critically analyze contemporary theoretical literature in group and individual assignments.

4. Instructions
The course consists of lectures (L), seminars (S), and group and individual assignments (date of hand in is marked). Active participation in seminars is compulsory. A student who misses more than five lectures/seminars cannot be graded. Absence from compulsory elements must be compensated by assignments.
The students are expected to have a good background in sociological theory.
This course is connected with the qualitative method course that follows later in the spring. In that method course the discussion of theory continues, but then with a more inductive focus, discussing, for example, the role of design and evidence in relation theory.

5. Assessment
Assessment is based on assignments and individual contributions at the seminars.

If something is missing in a submitted assignment it must be supplemented and resubmitted within 14 days of the result becoming available to the student.
### 6. Schedule and literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time [room]</th>
<th>L/s</th>
<th>By</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Hand in</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19/1</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1025]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Introduction – Assessing theory (first 15 minutes possibly also Dominika and Sebastian)</td>
<td>A, X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26/1</td>
<td>11:15-12 [2:1026]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Egological approaches and rational models</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26/1</td>
<td>13:15-15 [2:1026]</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Egological approaches and rational models</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1026]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Network theory (relational sociology)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1025]</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Network theory (relational sociology)</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1026]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Goffman</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1026]</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Goffman</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1023]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>(PA)</td>
<td>Göran Ahrne Lectures on Organizational theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>23/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1025]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Foucault</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>24/2</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1025]</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Foucault</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>10:15-12 [2:1026]</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>System Theory (Luhmann)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>Instructor(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td>10:15-12</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Institutional Theory</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>9/3</td>
<td>10:15-12</td>
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<td>SK</td>
<td>Institutional Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>22/3</td>
<td>10:15-12</td>
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<td>(Possible seminar on request)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>30/3</td>
<td>9:15-12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>PA, SK, DP</td>
<td>Presentation of final papers</td>
<td>A, X</td>
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L= Lecture; S= Seminar; A= Assignment; X=Hand in written assignment.
Detailed outline of literature and assignments

Class 1

Required readings

Recommended readings

Assignment
Each student must in the first class address the following questions: Why do we need theory?; What is theory?

Class 2

Required Readings:

Class 3

Each student should read at least 2 out of the following texts:
Alfred Schutz 1967 [1932], The Phenomenology of the Social World (section 1). In German, English or Swedish.

Assignment
Prepare short presentations (5-10 minutes) of one of the texts you have picked, serving the purpose of facilitating the analysis of the theory. The class takes responsibility that all texts are presented (selected). We may not have time, however, to analyze all texts.
Class 4
(Attend the lecture, and you may prepare yourself by reading texts that Swedberg has published on theorizing)

Class 5
Required readings

Each student should, in addition, read at least 2 out of the following texts:

Class 6
Hour 1: In this class we analyze the text

Hour 2: In this class the author is present and students prepare critical questions on theory development/theory building in relation to the text
[Will be made available]

(Background text)
Class 7 (Goffman I)

*Required readings:*


*Recommended readings:*


Class 8 (Goffman II)

For the seminar: Read the required literature and prepare a presentation (10 min) drawing on the main theoretical arguments outlined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In your presentation focus on the questions: How is the theoretical framework constructed and which are its central concepts? What are the shortcomings of this kind of theorizing and what are its advantages? In what way could Goffman's theoretical framework or concepts be used in your own work?

Class 9 (Organizational theory I)

Göran Ahrne will present

*Required Readings:*

Comments by: Hondrich
Ahrne, G 81994) Social Organization, London: Sage (Chapter 2)

Class 10 (Organizational theory II)

For the seminar each student has to prepare a presentation (10min), which gives an account of the sociology of organizations’ theoretical framework and presents two arguments’ in favor of using this perspective in sociology and two arguments that critique the same tradition. In what way could this theoretical framework be used in your own work?

Class 11 (Foucault I)

*Required readings:*

...

**Recommended readings:**


Or other texts available at: http://foucault.info/

**Class 12 (Foucault II)**

Prepare a presentation for the seminar (10 min) outlining the main theoretical arguments brought forward in Foucault’s book “Discipline and Punish” and the central concepts used in his analysis. In your presentation cover what you regard as Foucault’s main theoretical contribution, and discuss the applicability of his theoretical approach on your doctoral work.

If you wish to dig deeper there are several other texts of Foucault published online at http://foucault.info/.

**Class 13 (System theory I)**

Background texts for the comprehension of the lecture:


**Class 14 (System theory II)**

Students are supposed to prepare in groups presentations about about exemplary sub-system parts of Luhmann’s theory:
- Science as a subsystem
- Love as Passion
- Education as subsystem

In a written assignments students are expected to describe a special sub-system or its features, possibly relevant for their research work, in a 3-page essay.
Class 15 (Institutional theory I)

Background texts for the comprehension of the lecture:

Hall, Peter und Rosemary Taylor, 1996: Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms. Political Studies, Bd. 44, 936-957


Class 16 (Institutional theory II)

In-depth study of one of the three current institutional theories, historical institutionalism:

Students are supposed to present in three groups the country chapters of one of the major works in the subfield in which historic institutionalism is applied:


Background reading:

Thelen, Kathleen, 1999: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics. Annual Review of Political Science, Bd. 2, 369-404

Written student assignment: Students are expected to write a 3-page essay in which they critically evaluate one of the country cases in Skocpol’s work with reference to institutional theory.

Class FINAL

To the final class each student brings the final paper. Each student presents the theory of own choosing, relevant for the ongoing dissertation project, using the analytic scheme we have developed in the course. Prepare an oral presentation, which should not exceed 10 minutes. After all presentations, we will, together, compare them, and discuss and evaluate also our own scheme.

The final paper should be between 4000-5000 words. It must position the theory in a social context, describe it, and analyze the selected theory using our scheme. The theory should be critically examined. What are the week spots? what is missing? The overall aim of the paper
should be that you critically examine its empirical applicability. What empirical material can be used, what methods must be used, what are the empirical domain limitations?