

Sociologiska institutionen

Kursbeskrivning för forskarkurs/Course Description for Doctoral Course

SO1FU23, 7,5hp

Theorizing in Sociology and the Social Sciences

The Content of the Course

The goal of this course is to teach students how to theorize in sociology and social science. The focus is on the students learning to theorize themselves, as opposed to reading and discussing texts in sociological theory. You can learn how to theorize in the same way that you can learn how to use methods in sociology, namely through exercises. For each meeting of the class an article on some aspect of theorizing will be assigned and also a task to complete. The task consists of the students selecting some phenomenon she finds interesting and then try to theorize it. The course will be given in English if some student does not speak Swedish.

Number of Students

No more than ten students will be admitted.

Expected results

Knowledge and understanding

After the course the student should have

- developed a capacity to theorize in sociology and social science
- understand the basic steps of theorizing
- be able to diagnose her own strong and weak sides in theorizing

Abilities and competences

After the course the student should

- be able to theorize on an elementary level
- be able to further develop this capacity on her own

Values and perspectives

After the course the student should be able

- to critically look at existing theories and decide their positive and negative qualities from the perspective of theorizing

The Teaching

Participants in the course should read the assigned text(s) before each meeting. Every meeting has two parts: a discussion of the assigned text(s) and a general discussion of the participants' own attempts to theorize in the assigned exercises. The amount of time assigned each of these two parts depends on the number of students.

Control of Knowledge and Examination

The grade depends on the quality of the execution of the task for each meeting, participation in class discussions, a short paper on the assigned literature, and an autoethnography. The autoethnography should be centered around an account of how the student has carried out her theorizing exercises, noting especially her strengths; as well as weaknesses. The autoethnography should be about ten pages, including references; the

paper on the literature some 3-5 pages.

Course Literature

1. Introduction. What is Theory?

Read: Robert K. Merton, "What is Sociological Theory?" *American Journal of Sociology* 50(1945):462-73 (JSTOR).

See also: Gabriel Abend, "The Meaning of 'Theory'", *Sociological Theory* 26(June 2008):173-99 (JSTOR); and Andrea Wilson Nightingale, "Wandering and Wondering: 'Theoria' in Greek Philosophy and Culture", *Arion* 9,2(2001):23-58 (JSTOR).

2. What is Theorizing?

Read: Richard Swedberg, "Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science: Turning to the Context of Discovery", *Theory and Society* 2012 (JSTOR).

See also: Richard Swedberg, "How to Theorize according to Charles S. Peirce," pp. 230-48 in *The Art of Social Theory*; Zhao Shanyang, "The Beginning of the End or the End of the Beginning? The Theory Construction Movement Revisited", *Sociological Forum* 11, 2 (1996): 305-18 (JSTOR).

Task: Choose some phenomena that interests you. Get some material on it and try to name what you are studying. Try also to construct a concept based on it; and continue the effort to construct a theory (perhaps with the help of a new concept or a typology; is it a process?). Try also to explain how the phenomenon has emerged (Task # 1).

3. The Role of Imagination in Theorizing

Read: C. Wright Mills, "Appendix: On Intellectual Craftmanship", pp. 193-226 in *The Sociological Imagination*,

See also: Charles Lave and James March, "An Introduction to Speculation", pp. 10-49 in *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences* (write to me and I will send you a copy; rs328@cornell.edu); Richard Swedberg, "Imagination and Art", pp. 188-209 in *The Art of Social Theory*.

Task: Choose some phenomenon you are interested in and study/observe it as much as you can (on the web or in real life etc). You should then try to name the phenomenon you have chosen, and also try to make a concept out of it (Part 1 of Task 2; this task has three parts).

4. The Construction and Use of Concepts

Read: Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide* (read as much as you can; focus on Chs. 1-3).

Task: Continue with your topic from last time: try to build the theory out and think more about it (Part 2 of 3 in Task # 2).

5. The Role of Definitions

Read: Richard Swedberg, "On the Use of Definitions in Sociology", forthcoming in *European Journal of Social Theory* (on my web page at Cornell University, Dept. of Sociology, among the articles "On Theorizing").

Task: Continue with your topic from last time: try to come up with an explanation for your phenomenon plus sum it all up (Part 3 of 3 in Task # 2).

6. To Study and Change Yourself as Part of Theorizing

Read: Michela Betta and Richard Swedberg, "Heuristics and Theorizing as Work on the Self," *Sociologica (Italy)* 12, 1(2018):21-5 (on my web page at Cornell University, Dept. of Sociology, among the articles "On Theorizing").

See also: Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*; Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*.

Task: Choose some phenomenon you are interested in and study/observe it as much as you can (on the web or in real life etc). You should then try to name the phenomenon you have chosen and also try to make a concept out of it (Part 1 of Task #3; this task has three parts).

7. Heuristics or How to Make Discoveries

Read: Andrew Abbott, *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. Read as much as you can.

See also: Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While Doing It*; Richard Swedberg, "Heuristics", pp. 127-45 in *The Art of Social Theory*.

Task: Continue with your topic from last time: try to build the theory out and think more about it (Part 2 of 3 in Task #3).

8. Art and Theorizing

Read: Robert Nisbet, "Sociology as an Art Form," *Pacific Sociological Review* 5, 2(Fall 1962): 67-74 (JSTOR).

See also: Christofer Edling och Jens Rydgren (ed.), *Sociologi genom litteratur*; Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*.

Task: Continue with your topic from last time: try to come up with an explanation for your phenomenon plus sum it all up (Part 3 of 3 in Task # 3).

9. Summing up of the Course; and How to Write an Autoethnography in Theorizing

Read: Richard Swedberg, "How to Make Sociology out of Data: Robert K. Merton's Course in Theorizing (Soc 213-214)", *The American Sociologist* 2019 (on my web page at Cornell University, Dept. of Sociology, among the articles "On Theorizing").

Litterature

These three books are obligatory reading (and you should order them yourself):

Abbott, Andrew. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W.W. Norton, 2004.

Goertz, Gary. *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*. Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2006.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 1959, 2000.

Recommended but not obligatory literature:

Becker, Howard. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While Doing It*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Third enlarged ed. (1968). New York: The Free Press.

Stinchcombe, Arthur. *Constructing Social Theories*. University of Chicago Press, 1968, 1987.

Swedberg, Richard. *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton University Press, 2014.