

Political Science 9504B: *Critical Political Theory*

Short Course Outline 2025 Winter term

Course Information

Instructor: Nandita Biswas Mellamphy; graduate winter term; in-person on Thursday, 9AM-11:50 AM.

Course Description:

This course introduces graduate students to critical approaches in political theory, and focuses on building familiarity with – and understanding of how to use – political theory and critically oriented methods in developing research. The course will begin with the questions of what it means to be ‘critical,’ and how one takes a ‘critical’ approach in social science research. Moreover, what is the researcher supposed to ‘be critical’ of? The first part of the course will situate participants historically within some major theoretical and philosophical debates that have informed social sciences research, especially related to Interpretivism, Critical theory, Social Constructionism, Feminisms, and Post-colonialism.

The second part of the course will turn to an engagement with select reflexive and critical methodologies like narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, & gender and feminist analyses. Students will participate in workshops in which guest researchers using critical methods will talk about their research, design, and methods, and students will have a chance to ask questions and provide feedback in the form of a concise written field report.

The final part of the course culminates in individual student presentations in which participants will present on their research note ideas and course takeaways. Peers will get to ask questions and provide written peer feedback.

Every week, students will engage in deep reading, structured and/or unstructured oral discussion with peers, individual reflection, and some form of in-class assessment (ie. in-class essays, in-class field report, individual presentation, and peer feedback).

Course Evaluation Breakdown:

Seminar (Thinklab) Participation: $3 \times 5\% = 15\%$

Workshop Participation (1%) and written field report (2%): $3 \times 5\% = 15\%$

In-class essays: $3 \times 10\%/\text{ea} = 30\%$

Research note assignment: 20%

Individual presentation: 15%

Peer-feedback of presentations: $5 \times 1\% = 5\%$

Selected Course Texts:

Amy Allen. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Lois McNay, *The Gender Of Critical Theory: On The Experiential Grounds Of Critique*: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022.

Delanty, Gerard & Strydom, Piet (eds.) (2003). *Philosophies of social science: the classic and contemporary readings*. Philadelphia: Open University.

Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage

<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/assignments/fieldreport>

*In addition to these three books, journal articles are assigned and made available on a weekly basis on the course website.

Weekly Schedule: (subject to modifications)

Week 1/Jan 8	Introduction and icebreaker- course themes, mechanics, course assignments and assessments; in-class ungraded self-assessment.
Week 2/Jan 15	Thinklab 1- Being ‘Critical’: Understanding How Critique Matters Thompson, M.J. (2017). Introduction: What Is Critical Theory?. In: Thompson, M. (eds) <i>The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory. Political Philosophy and Public Purpose</i> . Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55801-5_1 Thompson, M.J. (2017). Critique as the Epistemic Framework of the Critical Social Sciences. In: Thompson, M. (eds) <i>The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory. Political Philosophy and Public Purpose</i> . Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55801-5_11 Macdonald, B. J. (2017). Traditional and Critical Theory Today: Toward a Critical Political Science. <i>New Political Science</i> , 39(4), 511–522. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2017.1378857 Braun, K. (2016). Critique as a two-dimensional project. <i>Critical Policy Studies</i> , 10(1), 110–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1129351 Luke, T. W. (2016). What is critical? <i>Critical Policy Studies</i> , 10(1), 113–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1131617
Week 3/Jan 22	Thinklab 2- Introduction to Philosophies of Social Sciences: Interpretation, Critical Theory, Feminism, and Post-colonialism Delanty, Gerard & Strydom, Piet (eds.) (2003). <i>Philosophies of social science: the classic and contemporary readings</i> . Philadelphia: Open

	<p>University. Pages: 1-18; 85-88 and 182-186; 207-212 and 218-233; 321-325 and 342-353; 365-377 and 410-415 and 416-418.</p> <p>https://www.scribd.com/doc/72096987/Philosophies-of-Social-Science</p> <p>Chandra, U. (2013). The Case for a Postcolonial Approach to the Study of Politics. <i>New Political Science</i>, 35(3), 479–491. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2013.813700</p>
Week 4/Jan 29	<p>Thinklab 3- Decolonizing Critical Theory</p> <p>Lois McNay, <i>The Gender Of Critical Theory: On The Experiential Grounds Of Critique</i>: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022. Introduction and chapter 1, 5.</p> <p>Amy Allen. <i>The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory</i>. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5.</p>
Week 5/Feb 5	<p>Research Workshop 1: Reflexive and Critical Research Approaches & Methods</p> <p>Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). <i>Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research</i>. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage. Pages 1-52, 91-102, 107-130, 135-140, 144-157, 159-170.</p> <p>Guest researchers (TBD) will join us to discuss these themes and answer questions about their own research practices.</p>
Week 6/Feb 12	<p>Research Workshop 2: Framing, Narratives, & Discourse</p> <p>Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). <i>Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research</i>. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage. Pages 227-261, 283-300.</p> <p>Biswas Mellamphy, N., Girard, T., & Campbell, A. (2023). Interpreting crises through narratives: the construction of a COVID-19 policy narrative by Canada's political parties. <i>Critical Policy Studies</i>, 17(1), 142–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2022.2067070</p> <p>Guest researchers (TBD) will join us to discuss these themes and answer questions about their own research practices.</p>
Week 7/Feb 19	Reading Week/No class

Week 8/Feb 26	<p>Workshop 3: Theory-building and Historical Archival Research (online)</p> <p>Van der Waldt G. Constructing theoretical frameworks in social science research. J transdiscipl res S Afr. 2024;20(1), a1468. https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v20i1.1468</p> <p>Delanty, Gerard & Strydom, Piet (eds.) (2003). Philosophies of social science: the classic and contemporary readings. Philadelphia: Open University. Pages: 147-151 (Martin Heidegger ‘The Age of the World Picture’).</p> <p>Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage. Pages 212-224.</p> <p>Guest researchers (TBD) will join us to discuss these themes and answer questions about their own research practices.</p>
Week 9/Mar 5	Presentations
Week 10/Mar 12	Presentations
Week 11/Mar 19	Presentations
Week 12/ Mar 26	Presentations
Week 13/Apr 2	Presentations/ Final forum