

CSPT 501/601 — Core Course in Cultural, Social and Political Thought

FALL-SPRING 2020-2021

Contact

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Course time/place: Select Wednesdays, 1:30-4:20 (irregular intervals)

Zoom office hour: Wednesdays 11:00-12:00 (or by appointment)

ID: 945 4800 5268

Link: <https://uvic.zoom.us/j/94548005268>

Zoom virtual classroom info

ID: 955 0519 3645

Link: <https://uvic.zoom.us/j/95505193645>

PLEASE NOTE: this course will take place at irregular intervals over the FALL and SPRING semesters

Course description

In this course, we will examine some key questions and problems of contemporary cultural, social, and political thought. The course will cover a breadth of theory and will dig into this literature in ways that go beyond what you may have experienced previously. As the wide range of readings and topics in this course indicates, the intention is to train the student in the “foundational” approaches in cultural, social, and political thought so that they might be prepared to thoughtfully and creatively engage in contemporary debates. “Foundational” is in scare quotes because foundations have been challenged in the last 50-70 years; and what this means, of course, is that the very definition of “foundation” is not stable. This may be something to think about throughout the duration of the course.

It is in the nature of disciplines to always deviate from themselves according to the pressures exerted by the contemporary world in which we live, and by unexpected questions, angles and perspectives that challenge the disciplines’ constitutive methods.

As many of the readings that we will undertake are challenging, it is important to remember that the goal is not to understand every word on the page, but instead to really engage with the works in a way that is meaningful to you, to latch onto parts of the text that speak to you and then push yourself to understand the rest through that. When reading Walter Benjamin, for example, if you see connections to what is happening in current culture, society and politics, then I encourage you to explore that. Understanding theory is only part of the goal; the other goal is to help you to reflect on the contemporary world and to begin to develop your own theoretical framework. The students and faculty of CSPT together generate spaces of research that take seriously the idea of reflecting on discipline in an effort to develop individual approaches to research outside of a discipline whilst maintaining fidelity to that discipline's research questions. Indeed, the program works from the position that theory itself—whatever else it may mean—necessitates such activity.

This course thus offers a truly interdisciplinary experience for the students. We will read works of philosophy, theory, literature, media, history, anthropology, law — all in modes of analysis that cannot be accounted for in traditional disciplinary terms. The intent is to develop theoretical knowledge by going through interwoven themes and problematics (problématiques), grouped together as “constellations,” rather than the common practice of moving from one canonical theory or thinker to another. Furthermore, the course readings move through disciplinary approaches in order to encounter different ways of thinking about topics. This course and its assignments are thus not an extension of what you do in your home discipline, but rather a way to push outside of that discipline.

As an instructor, I expect students to come to the class having read the assigned readings and to be prepared to *thoroughly* engage with the material. A regular class will involve a brief presentation of context, key concepts and problems associated with the readings, followed by discussion. Students are expected to engage in class discussions. Participation is of primordial importance. That is why the take-home exam and participation are closely linked (for more information, see the “**Description of assignments**” below). Furthermore, class discussions will help students to develop their work in an ongoing manner.

A basic pedagogical tenet for me, as an instructor, is that knowledge is formed in dialogue. One engages with knowledge through critique, and one brings one's presuppositions and hypotheses to the table to put them to the test. There is no use in being afraid to speak, of regretting having spoken, or of being intimidated by others (who might appear to know way more than you), because speaking can enable previously unseen dimensions to emerge. I will strive to create an environment where students feel free to speak without being judged. I also believe in the idea of focusing on one thing carefully: too often, emerging scholars feel that they have not read enough... but have they read one text carefully enough? What is it that inspires you, or prods you,

or makes you think or see things differently? At the heart of what inspires me is the idea that learning new things requires going outside of received ways of knowing. It is a process of wonder and astonishment (according to the Greek notion of *thaumazein*, “wonder”), and of “intellectual adventure” (Halberstam quoting Rancière).

Assignments

Participation	25%
Presentation	15%
Final paper proposal	5%
Final paper	35%
Final Take-home exam	20%

Description of assignments

1. **Participation** in this course is vital, and that is why it is worth 25%. Group discussion in a seminar context develops crucial skills for the academic, professional and social spheres. For each class, students will be expected to speak about the reading, and how they see it in relation to the rubrics they are developing for the final exam. **In this way, the final exam preparation begins already in the first class**, since students will be encouraged to think about themes and problems in relation to course readings from the outset.
2. **Presentation.** Each student will do **one presentation (15%)** based on a topic directly related to the course. These presentations will take place during a half-day symposium at the end of the second term. Presentations may not exceed 20 minutes. The presentations are intended to be project-based presentations that explore an idea related to (a) course reading(s) in view of/based on the **final paper**. It is recommended that students be prepared for any audio-visual problems by testing the apparatus before the class. It's highly recommended to limit the use of audio-visual elements during the presentation, since it can work against the presentation if not used correctly. For instance, if there is a video you'd like to show the class, it can be shared prior to the symposium.
3. **Proposal.** The final paper **proposal (5%)** must demonstrate a clearly defined topic based on key concepts and problems in the course, based on course readings. This 2-page assignment (not including bibliography) must demonstrate a relative grasp (and a certain depth of reading) of the field.
4. **Final paper.** The **final paper (35%)** builds upon the proposal and goes in depth following a theoretical argument to it's (in)conclusion(s), in a rigorous way. The paper must be based on course readings.

5. **The final exam** will be based on **key questions that emerged through discussion in the course**. The take-home exam will require you to survey all the required readings from the term. You will need to
- i. devise **three rubrics** into which you can organize all the material from the term
 - ii. write **three 1000-1200-word essays**, one on each rubric, outlining your logic of inclusion/exclusion, the continuities and discontinuities among the material, the cultural, social and/or political aspect(s) you see uniting the material you have grouped under each rubric
- Each essay should be no longer than 1200 words.
 - You do not have to discuss all texts under each rubric, **but each course text must be discussed at least in one rubric**.

Late Assignments:

Deadlines are firm: late assignments will not be accepted unless accompanied by documentation (medical or extenuating). Please notify the instructor in advance of any late assignment.

Please consult the [UVic Policy on Academic Integrity](#) regarding **plagiarism**.

A detailed schedule will be provided separately via [the Brightspace page](#).

There are NO texts to purchase at the bookstore