Theory in Anthropology

Spring 2021 ANT 370

Friday - 1:10 - 4:00

1 credit

This course will take place online synchronously.

Sessions will be recorded and significant aspects of class will be asynchronous to ensure ease of access for everyone.

Instructor's information

Dr. Michael Polson Email (Outlook):

Course meeting Zoom link:

Personal zoom room (this is where all office hours will take place):

Office hours:

Tuesday 1:30-2:30 Thursday: 2:30-3:30

If these times do not work, please contact me to make an appointment at another time.

More about me: www.michaelpolson.com

What is this course about?

This course will introduce and interrogate a variety of ways anthropologists have produced and deployed theoretical thinking. "Theory," at base, is a way of apprehending and explaining the world around us. Like the world around us, it is: collectively produced, or shared; rooted in conflict and debate; and, like our socio-material realities, ever-changing.

This course is less interested in a "history of theory" or a methodical reading of "the canon," and more interested in giving you ways of thinking theoretically to make sense of the world, in whatever ways you may engage with it. Though anthropology has disciplinary roots stemming at least to the 19th century, we will focus mostly on the period since the mid-twentieth century. It was in this period that the production of anthropological knowledge underwent an epistemological and material upheaval, as colonized peoples—who had been the object of anthropological gazes—revolted, social movements upended systems of imperial knowledge production, and, in the US, the Vietnam War underscored the stakes and limits of US imperialism. We will be exploring theoretical approaches that draw from varied schools of thought that have emerged during (and before) this period, like feminist, queer, abolitionist and

indigenous anthropological theory, structuralist, poststructuralist, Marxist, and interpretivist theories, not to mention the theoretical struggles over "culture," anthropology's historic object of inquiry. We will also attend to the conditions and contexts of theory production – what they attempt to understand; what debates and events they stem from; what they propose to do in the world.

This course has a decent amount of reading for the first seven classes. You are expected to engage with all of the readings. This may not mean reading every single word but it means reading most words and skimming the rest for key arguments and the structure of argumentation. Equally important, you are expected to consider how the readings speak to or differ from one another and, perhaps, cohere as "an approach." For the first seven weeks, you will either write a 1-2-page synthetic response or present on another person's response

Early in the semester you will choose (in conversation with me) a topic to theorize. This will serve both as a "heuristic," or tool for thinking through the course material, as well as a practice in applying and producing theory yourself. Once you select your topic, you will produce a prospectus that frames your inquiry, write an annotated bibliography that explores several different ways of theorizing/approaching the topic, lead the class in an exploration of the topic and its attendant literature, and produce a final paper that will theoretically frame and explore the topic.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- 1) Understand key trends and developments in anthropological theory;
- 2) Critically assess, compare, and discuss theoretical texts;
- 3) Apply theoretical frames and produce theoretical insights.

This course fulfills the requirement for Social-Scientific Thought (SSRQ). It can also be credited toward fulfillment of the Anthropology major and minor.

What required texts, materials, and technologies will I need?

I intend to put all readings online as accessible PDFs. Students will be responsible for retrieving readings for their projects from the library resources. Please consult resources below for assistance in navigating those resources.

Students should also have access to the following platforms, available from <u>Davidson T&I</u>. Please contact them for assistance and resources to get access and training. Other platforms and programs may be used:

Zoom Google Drive (docs, spreadsheets, slides etc.) Hypothes.is Google Chrome

Course format

Generally, the course will include:

- Three to six readings and/or materials per class (see below);
- EITHER:
 - o a synthetic response due in a shared Google Doc by 6PM Thursday evening OR

- a 1-2 paragraph response of that synthesis posted to Google Docs and ready to present/read in class
- Synchronous sessions that consists of:
 - Brief check-in on logistical concerns (including a "parking lot" for questions)
 - Lectures to provide context, history, etc.
 - Rotating exploration/discussion of class readings
 - Synthesis presentations and responses
 - Small group discussions
 - Videos and other outside materials
 - Break(s)
- For those attending asynchronously, a period (by Tuesday at noon following Friday's class) to respond to readings, class discussions, questions, etc. (See "Participation")
- In the second half of the course, we will likely use Hypothes.is as a mode of collective reading and annotation.

Requirements and Grading

Grading is broken down as follows:

- 1) Social Reading Groups 10% of final grade (2% x 5 classes)
 - In the last five classes we will use Hypothes.is to collectively annotate and discuss course readings. Each week, you should offer a total of 4 original comments or responses to at least two of the readings. At least 2 posts must be an original comment (not just a response to others). *These should be done by midnight Thursday night*, so that they can be useful for those presenting the next day. In generating comments and responses, focus on the following elements:
 - identifying the article's core argument;
 - identifying critical supporting evidence for that argument and/or key concepts;
 - and one of the following:
 - o ask a question about the piece (if there is something unclear);
 - o make a connection/comparison/contrast to other pieces we have read.

Evaluations for Reading Group

- This element is graded on the basis of completion (not qualitative grading).
- At the end of the semester, this means you should have posted *at least 20 responses*. More responses will reflect well on your participation grade.
- 2) Syntheses & Response/Discussion 35% of final grade (5% x 7 classes)
 - For the first seven weeks (excluding the first week), you will *either* produce a synthesis that comparatively analyzes the week's readings *or* you will write a 1-2 paragraph response to another student and then present their synthesis and your response in class as a way of stimulating discussion. Things to note:
 - 1) One half of the class will write a synthesis, the other half will produce a response;
 - 2) The synthesis is due in a shared Google Doc folder by 6PM Thursday night;
 - 3) The response is due by the start of class on Friday;
 - 4) If you are writing a synthesis, how you do so is somewhat open but they should:
 - a. Compare the various pieces to one another, asking and exploring

- i. What core argument and concepts each offers
- ii. What their limitations are,
- iii. How one piece might address, contrast or compare with another,
- iv. What questions the readings raise or lead to,
- v. And/or any critiques or questions that remain for you.
- b. Introductions and conclusions are not needed;
- c. If you're having trouble, just make three solid comparative observations;
- d. Use evidence/support/specifics from the readings;
- 5) If you are writing a response to the synthesis:
 - a. Critically and appreciatively assess the connections being made;
 - b. Feel free to annotate or highlight (on Google Docs, for us to see, if you like) the synthesis;
 - c. Be prepared to present the points made by the synthesizer in class;
 - d. Feel free to have a discussion with the synthesizer and the people in class about the points made.

Evaluation for Discussion/Presentation

• This element is based on completion of the elements listed above. Full completion gets full credit.

3) Theorizing X – 50% (see breakdown below)

In lieu of a midterm and final you will complete an ongoing project that allows you to use and produce theory yourself. In the first several weeks, you will **meet with me to discuss an idea**, then you will **write a prospectus** based on that discussion, which includes a framing statement on the topic and a plan for the ways you will go about theoretically exploring it (7% of grade). These prospectuses will be subject to review by your peers in class.

Based on this prospectus, you will complete an annotated bibliography, first as a draft (5%), then, after peer review, as a working (and then final) document (15%). This annotated bibliography will consist of an abstract of each item and eventually a bulleted list of 5-10 key points that relate back to your chosen topic. It will consist of subsections that allow you to group the readings in terms of their approach, orientation, school, angle, etc. Each subheading will have a brief comparative statement and the overall bibliography will have a 1-2 page overall statement that threads together the readings in an overall analysis. The bibliography will serve as your reading list over the final 6 weeks of class and the final document will be due the last day of class (4/23).

In the course of the final 5 weeks, each of you will **lead class discussion** (5% of **final grade**) around your topic. You are able to assign a reading (up to 15 pages) for the class to read (which you should discuss with me) and are encouraged to coordinate with me as a co-facilitator prior to your presentation.

The final product will expand on that bibliographic exploration by applying it to your object of inquiry and producing a tentative theorization of it. This means setting the various approaches in dialogue with one another, thinking through the stakes and implications of their application to the object, and provisionally theorizing the object/topic itself. This can take the form of a paper but I am also open to other ways of

getting at these elements, including: a podcast, a video; an interactive, multimedia, or app-based (e.g. Twitter, Instagram) project; an online Zoom event that you will organize, MC, and structure; etc. If you choose these alternative formats, you should consult with me first. The final product will be worth **18% of your grade.**

4) Participation – 5% of final grade

For students attending class online <u>synchronously</u>, I will be assessing participation. This does not necessarily mean talking a lot, but rather, making timely and insightful contributions and giving active attention during class time. Class discussion is a centerpiece of this course. As much as possible, please leave camera on. For students attending <u>asynchronously</u>, generate and share a Google doc with the professor. This will contain responses to the readings and/or class period (above and beyond the syntheses included above). Responses are due noon on Tuesday. Responses should be 250 words max. Responses should address questions and discussions that emerged during class with a clear connection to how they relate to the reading. Since this class only occurs 13 times, you are allowed only <u>2 unexcused "absences"</u> (either synchronously or asynchronously). After that, you should <u>make up</u> for missed classes by following the directions for "asynchronous" attendance above. I am relying on you to let me know if you have exceeded 2 missed classes as I do not want to police synchronous/asynchronous attendance in this wild time.

NOTE: All class sessions will be recorded and posted on Moodle. If for some reason, class recordings are not available, please post a reading response ("OR" option above). Evaluation: This grade is based on a cumulative assessment for how much you participate in class over the course of the semester. More than 2 absences will result in a grade reduction of 2.5% (See policies below).

What are the course policies?

Communications

I am available by email. I will make every effort to reply to you within 36 hours. If you don't hear from me after that period, please follow up!

I am available for office hours (Tuesday 1:30-2:30 and Thursday 2:30-3:30). I encourage you to sign up for slots for these hours—to discuss ideas, review papers and grades, talk about class, and so on. I would love to talk to each of you individually at least once but this is not mandatory. I am also available to meet outside of my set office hours if they do not work for you. Just get in touch with some proposed times.

Also, please visit the Moodle site often for updates. I will be posting updates and announcements there. When they are particularly urgent, I will send those announcements via email.

An Invitation: Student Support in Times of Covid-19

This is a unique time we are living through. All of us are dealing with different life circumstances. I am here to support you in any way I can, though I will not always have the skills or capacities to do so. I am more than happy to have flexibility around modifications to

help you benefit from and complete the course, should you need them. Please do not hesitate to bring your concerns to me!

Respect, Open Minds, Critical Minds

A prerequisite to this course is an open mind and an ability to listen to others. We will be discussing many issues, some of which likely affect people in the classroom deeply. Keep in mind: we are all products of different experiences. Sometimes unearthing the assumptions that anchor those experiences can be upsetting, inspire passions, and challenge deeply set ideas. Because of this, it is important that we collectively create a space in which different ideas and expressions can be heard, discussed, and, from time to time, change us. Please respect each other by listening and not reacting in a hurtful or rash manner. Please be aware of the kinds of space you occupy in the classroom relative to other students. If offering critique, please be constructive. If we all do this, we will find an open reception for our own thoughts.

A major part of keeping an open mind is to check assumptions about your classmates. Some may have grown up in the United States, while others have not. Some may have grown up wealthy, others poor. Some in cities, others in rural places. Some in communities of color, some in all-white surroundings. Some may be queer, or straight, or not have a sexuality at all. Some may have had the opportunity and exposure to be intensely politicized while others are being exposed to politics for the first time. You cannot know these things at a glance. Therefore, no matter where you are in your academic or political trajectory, challenge your assumptions about your classmates and what you think you might know about them.

Just as we each bring valuable (and necessarily limited) perspectives to the class, the authors of the readings do the same. Please disagree with them. That said, also understand that each author is not simply an individual but is speaking within and as the result of a larger social process of sharing, deliberating, discussing, and arguing in collective learning environments like this one.

Finally we live in a society—and are enmeshed in a language—that privileges the binary of male and female. This is despite the increasing understanding that there is a wide range of gender diversity in the world. To de-center the privileging of a male/female binary, to challenge the everyday assumptions we make about gender, and to give space for a diversity of genders in the classroom, I propose that when referring to other people we either utilize their name or, if in the third person, by "they" or "their." We do this all the time already ("Have you seen the waiter?" "I don't know where they went."), so this should not be a major challenge. If it does feel like a challenge, please imagine the types of impositions binaristic he/she language has upon transgender, genderqueer, or non-binaristic people. That said, since this course is online, please feel free to clarify your pronouns in your Zoom handle (name and pronouns).

Attendance and Punctuality

Online attendance is not required. However, to receive credit for online attendance, you should be logged in and ready to go at the start of class (Friday, 1:10PM). I will be signed in a few minutes early as often as possible to field any logistical questions and just to chat. Join me! If you are more than 30 minutes late (or if you have technical difficulties that bar you from being in more than 80 minutes of our 170 minute class), you are still welcome to join but I ask that you submit an "asychronous" response (detailed in "Participation" under grade) to account for the day's participation.

You are allowed to miss 2 unexcused classes with no penalty. I strongly encourage you to read for classes you miss and to watch the class recording. After the first two classes you should submit an asynchronous response to class (see "Participation" grade above) in order to avoid attendance penalties (2.5% penalty on overall grade for absences after first two). I understand these are exceptional times, so please be in communication if events are keeping you from consistent attendance.

Preparation

Come to class, synchronously or asynchronously, prepared. This means:

- Read /view/listen to all the required readings included on this syllabus.
- Have the readings (and slides or docs, if applicable) open during class periods.
- Check the Moodle site and/or your email at least by the night before class for any additional items I may want you to look over.
- Have assignments when they're due.
- Figure out a system for taking notes during class and stick to it.
- When attending synchronously, please pay attention. You do not have to stare deeply into the screen at all times, but please be sitting upright (and comfortably), have a clear workspace (on your computer or on a physical desk), and place your phone on airplane mode (unless you need it for accessing sites/apps relevant to class).

Davidson College Honor Code

Each Davidson student is honor bound to refrain from stealing, lying about College business, and cheating on academic work. Stealing is the intentional taking of any property without right or permission. Lying is intentional misrepresentation of any form. Cheating is any practice, method, or assistance, whether explicitly forbidden or unmentioned, that involves any degree of dishonesty, fraud, or deceit. Cheating includes plagiarism, which is representing another's ideas or words as one's own. Each student is responsible for learning and observing appropriate documentation of another's work. Each Davidson student is honor bound to report immediately all violations of the Honor Code of which the student has first-hand knowledge; failure to do so is itself a violation of the Honor Code. http://www.davidson.edu/about/distinctly-davidson/honor-code

Access and Disability Services Accommodations

The college welcomes requests for accommodations related to disability and will grant those that are determined to be reasonable and maintain the integrity of a program or curriculum. To make such a request or to begin a conversation about a possible request, please contact the Office of Academic Access and Disability Resources, which is located in the Center for Teaching and Learning in the E.H. Little Library: Beth Bleil, Director, bebleil@davidson.edu, 704-894-2129; or Alysen Beaty, Assistant Director, albeaty@davidson.edu, 704-894-2939. It is best to submit accommodation requests within the drop/add period; however, requests can be made at any time in the semester. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive.

Other resources you should keep in mind include:

| Campus Police | 704-894-2178 or 911 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Dean of Students Office | 704-894-2225 |
| Student Health/Counseling | 704-894-2300 |
| Chaplain's Office | 704-894-2423 |
| Georgia Ringle, Health Educator | 704-894-2902 |
| Town of Davidson Police | 704-892-5131 |
| | |

| Date | Class topic/ unit name | Pre-class work for students | Assignments due |
|------|--|---|--|
| 1-29 | Welcome | Lynn Bolles, Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, Bernard Perley & Keri Vacanti Brondo "Introduction: A Contested Canon" Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Reader. In publication. p1-5 Ghassan Hage. Towards An Ethics of Theoretical Encounter. Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Reader. Bolles Et Al Eds. In publication. (1-7) Alpa Shah. "Ethnography? Participant observation, a potentially revolutionary praxis." HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 7, no. 1 (2017): 45-59. (12) Catherine Lutz. "The Gender of Theory" In Women Writing Culture/Culture Writing Women. Behar & Gordon. 1995. (13) 37p In-Class – a take on the Boasian school: https://www.npr.org/2019/08/20/752630522/how-a-few-renegade-thinkers-helped-usher-in-a-new-era-of-anthropology | |
| 2-5 | Anthropology & The Anti-colonial Break | Asad, Talal, "Anthropology & the colonial encounter." The Politics of Anthropology. Huizer, Mannheim, & Gruyter. 2011. p87-94 (9p) David Price. "Buying a Piece of Anthropology: Part I: Human Ecology and Unwitting Anthropological Research for the CIA" Anthropology Today. 2007. (5p) David Price. "Cold War Anthropology: collaborators and victims of the national security state." Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power 4, no. 3-4 (1998): 407-413 (6p) Vine De Loria. "Anthropologists and Other Friends" Custer Died for Your Sins. (23p) Ortner, Sherry B. "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." Comparative studies in society and history 26, no. 1 (1984): 126-166. (34p) 77p If Time: David Price. "Part II: The CIA and our Tortured Past." Anthropology Today. 2007. In class: Leith Mullings' Presidential Address, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0pYT0KzzQo | Synthesis Round 1 |
| 2-12 | The Fate of "Culture" | Adam Kuper. "Culture Wars" Culture: The anthropologists' account. Harvard University Press, 2009. p1-20 (20p) Eric Wolf. "Introduction" Europe and the People without History. Univ of California Press, 2010. (20p) Ortner, Sherry B. "Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties." HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 6, no. 1 (2016): 47-73. (19p) Lila Abu-Lughod. "Writing Against Culture" Recapturing Anthropology. Fox, ed. 1991. (11p) 70 pages | Synthesis Round 1Make appointment with me re: theory topic ideas |

| | | If time: Sylvain, Renée. "Disorderly development: Globalization and the idea of "culture" in the Kalahari." American ethnologist 32, no. 3 (2005): 354-370. (14) | |
|------|--|---|---|
| 2-19 | Political Economy & Some Directions in Studies of Capitalism | Josiah Heyman. "Political Economy" Handbook of Sociocultural Anthropology. Carrier & Geweritz, Eds. 2013/2020. (17) Katharyne Mitchell, Sallie Marston, & Cindi Katz. "Life's work: An introduction, review and critique." Antipode 35, no. 3 (2003): 415-433. (18p) – Note: only read to p433 Neil Smith. "Introduction" Uneven development: Nature, capital, and the production of space. University of Georgia Press, 2010. (9) Michael Watts. "Political Ecology" A Companion to Economic Geography. Sheppard & Barnes. 2002. (18p) Melamed, Jodi. "Racial capitalism." Critical Ethnic Studies 1, no. 1 (2015): 76-85. (8) pages | Synthesis Round 2 |
| | | - FYI: More on social reproduction: Ferguson & McNally. https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/social-reproduction-beyond-intersectionality-an-interview-with-sue-ferguson-and-david-mcnally/ | |
| 2-26 | Power, Governmentality & the State | Leslie Gill. "Power" Handbook of Sociocultural Anthropology. Carrier & Geweritz, Eds. 2013/2020. (15) Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women." American Ethnologist 17, no. 1 (1990): 41-55. (12) Tania Murray Li. "Governmentality." Anthropologica 49, no. 2 (2007): 275-281. (6) Scott, James C. "Introduction" Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed. Yale University Press, 2020. (8p) Brodwin, Paul. "Technologies of the self and ethnographic praxis." Medical Anthropology 36, no. 1 (2017): 77-82. (7) Natalie Morningstar. "Neoliberalism" Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology. 2020. See: https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/neoliberalism (7p) | Synthesis Round 2Prospectus Due Wednesday, Feb 24 |
| 3-5 | Writing, Representation, Voice | James Clifford & George Marcus. "Introduction: Partial Truths" Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography. Univ of California Press, 1986. (1-19) Simpson, Audra. "On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship." Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue 9 (2007). (11) | Synthesis Round 3 |

| | | Weiss, Margot. "The epistemology of ethnography: Method in queer anthropology." (2011): 649-664. (14) Olufemi Taiwo "Being in the Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Difference" https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/essay-taiwo (7) 51p If time: Geertz, Clifford. "" From the native's point of view": On the nature of anthropological understanding." Bulletin of the american academy of arts and sciences (1974): 26-45. (19) | |
|------|--|---|---|
| 3-12 | Assemblages, Ontologies and the Pluriverse | Latour, Bruno. "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern." <i>Critical inquiry</i> 30, no. 2 (2004): 225-248. (23) Ingold, Tim. Octopuses & Anemones. <i>The life of lines</i>. Routledge, 2015. (4) Astuti, Rita. "Taking people seriously." <i>HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory</i> 7, no. 1 (2017): 105-122. (16) PICK ONE: Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson, eds. "Bodies Tumbled Into Bodies" and <i>Arts of living on a damaged planet: Ghosts and monsters of the Anthropocene</i>. U of Minnesota Press, 2017 (11p) Arturo Escobar. <i>Designs for the Pluriverse</i>. <i>Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Reader</i>. In publication. (9) 63p If time: Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson. "Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene." <i>Arts of living on a damaged planet: Ghosts and monsters of the Anthropocene</i>. U of Minnesota Press, 2017 | Synthesis Round 3Bibliographic Draft Due |
| 3-19 | Anthropology in the Present Moment | Graeber, David. "Anthropology and the rise of the professional-managerial class." Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 4, no. 3 (2014): 73-88. (13) Jobson, Ryan Cecil. "The case for letting anthropology burn: Sociocultural anthropology in 2019." American Anthropologist 122, no. 2 (2020): 259-271. (7) Weiss, Margot. "Always after: Desiring queerness, desiring anthropology." Cultural Anthropology 31, no. 4 (2016): 627-638. (7) Harrison, Faye V. "Engaging theory in the new millennium." Companion to Contemporary Anthropology. New York: Routledge (2017). (20) Maskovsky, Jeff, and Ida Susser. "A critical anthropology for the present." After the Crisis: Anthropological Thought, Neoliberalism, and the Aftermath. Carrier, Ed. New York: Routledge, 2016: 154-174 (15) | Synthesis Round 4 (everyone writes/responds)Final bibliography reading list due |

| | | Kim Tallbear. Caretaking Relations, not American Dreaming. Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Reader. In publication. (7) | |
|------|---|---|--|
| 3-26 | -Presenters # 1-3 - embodiment | -TBD - Rosemary Joyce. Feminist Theories of Embodiment and Anthropological Imagination. Feminist Anthropology. 2006 (11) | Hypothes.is Round 1 fill in bibs |
| 4-2 | -Presenters # 4-6 -affect | TBD - White, Daniel. "Affect: an introduction." Cultural Anthropology 32, no. 2 (2017): 175-180. | Hypothes.is Round 2 fill in bibs |
| 4-9 | -Presenters # 7-9 -deplorables | TBD Moberg, Mark. "An anthropology of the Deplorable." In A Research Agenda for Economic Anthropology. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019. (13) | Hypothes.is Round 3fill in bibsCorrespond with me to confirm final project |
| 4-16 | -Presenters # 10- 12 - the Good | - TBD - Robbins, Joel. "Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good." <i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i> 19, no. 3 (2013): 447-462. (12) | Hypothes.is Round 4fill in bibsSubsection explanations due |
| 4-23 | Presenter #13, Speed Talks & Review | TBD | Hypothes.is Round 5overall bib description dueFinal bibs due on 4-26 at 11:59PM. |
| 5-9 | Final Product Due | | |