

Syllabus

Social Change (FUTR 6331)

Fall 2011

Course Time/Location: Thursday, 5:30-8:30 pm US Central Time

Cameron 229

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Appointments: By request

Prerequisites: none

Overview

This course reviews classical and contemporary theories of social change – how and why societies change over time. It involves reading, discussing, analyzing, and writing. It is a typical graduate seminar in which students prepare readings before class, discuss them in class or online, and write up their best ideas in a clear and well-supported manner.

Objectives

The objectives of the course are:

- Learn how different thinkers have explained the phenomenon of social change over time
- Understand the assumptions that each explanation requires
- Reflect on one's own explanation(s) of social change
- Be able to explain social change using the different theories reviewed
- Apply the appropriate explanations to historical and contemporary social change
- Create alternative scenarios for contemporary social changes using different explanations and their associated assumptions

Required Texts

- Trevor Noble (2000), *Social Theory and Social Change*, New York: St Martin's Press.

This text covers many of the theories in the course in a clear and consistent manner. We will read more than three-quarters of this book over the course of the semester.

The other readings are articles taken from classical and contemporary sources. They include theoretical pieces as well as descriptions of actual social changes. Some of these are original texts so they can be challenging to read. Still, reading what a noted author actually said is important.

This course is about ideas, assumptions, and explanations about social change. We read for the overall point of each piece, not for the details. We read to be able to explain that overall point, its support and its implications. Most of all, we read for insight —

- What am I learning that I did not know before?
- What ideas or responses do I have about what this author is saying?
- What contribution (in the form of an observation or a question) can I make the discussion about this theory?

So the reading is to stimulate our thoughts, and the thoughts are a prelude to communication—first in discussion and eventually in written form.

Framework

The foundation of the course is built around three documents:

- The course [generalization](#), basically what this course is about.
- The [outcomes](#) of the course, basically class discussion (in class and online), an initial essay, four short papers, and a two final papers.
- The [levels](#) of outcomes, how well you demonstrate the ability to understand and analyze theories and examples of social change in those papers.

Your first step is to study these documents, ask any questions you wish, and then get into the introductory activities.

The first content section is a consideration of the ways in which theories differ, basically the assumptions that writer make about fundamental reality—the material world, human nature, society, etc.

The rest of the course is divided into sections (weeks), each of which begins with an introductory paper and a set of readings. The readings are chosen to explain and illustrate the theory covered in that section. Everyone reads some of the readings, usually from the text; others are read by just a few based on a random allocation.

We discuss each reading using the following general questions:

- What is the main point(s) of the reading/theory?
- What evidence or examples are supplied or are otherwise available to illustrate that the theory is valid?
- How does that theory appear in historical, contemporary or potential future social changes in addition to the evidence presented in the reading(s)?
- What part of the reading/theory does not make sense or might even be wrong? And why?
- What does this reading/theory assume about people or society that distinguishes it from other theories?

Your objective is not to memorize the details in these readings. Rather you should focus on the main point (the theory), the examples, the issues and the assumptions that the

theory suggests. Most of all, and more so as the course goes on, use the reading to stimulate your own ideas, theories and examples of social change and compare them with the author's and with each other's.

The course therefore is about understanding and developing theories of social change and applying those theories to actual changes going on today. We study what others have written or said about social change, not as an end in itself, but as a means to create and use our explanations of social change. You demonstrate your ability to understand, develop and apply these theories by participating in class discussion and on the discussion boards (i.e., by offering valuable insight and information to your classmates) and by writing papers. Essentially, this course requires thinking, analyzing, and reflecting about types of change and their consequences.

Topical Schedule (see separate Schedule doc for details on each week)

Week 1: Orientation, theory

Week 2: Assumptions, Critical thinking

Week 3: Progress

Week 4: Development

Week 5 & 6: Tech I and II, Materialism

Week 7 & 8: Ideas I & II, Idealism, Culture

Week 9: Cycles

Week 10: Conflict

Week 11: Markets

Week 12: Power

Week 13: Evolution

Thanksgiving – No class

Week 14: Emergence

Approach

Each section contains activities designed to help us understand the theory and its application.

1. Each week begins with reading the introduction which places the readings in context and contains many of the main points of that theory and how the readings illustrate those points.
2. The second activity is to read the required readings, as noted within the readings. You should answer the five questions about each of the authors in the required reading in order to be able discuss them in class; some students will post their summaries.
3. One or more people are then assigned to some of the other readings at random. They are responsible for leading a discussion about one of those readings, either in class or online. The discussion leaders answer the five general questions (posted above) about their reading while others post responses and additional material about the reading and/or about the discussion leaders summaries.

Postings, in all cases, should be substantive--that is, they should add materially to the discussion. So think about how you can further the discussion with each of your postings. Good responses and questions clearly reference the pertinent portion of the reading (by quoting the text, if possible). They genuinely add interesting points or seek clarification for points that you do not understand, questioning others with respect and without taking a point too harshly. To express disagreement with another person's contribution or with an author's concepts, begin with what you agree with and recognize that the other person may have contributed something of value or even that she or he is actually right according to their frame or mental map. Different perspectives are encouraged; provide adequate support for your argument and read/listen openly and respectfully to others in order to find the underlying assumptions that form different opinions. See Regents University's guidelines for further direction.

<http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/academics/msf/guidelines.shtml>

4. Finally, find some article from a current publication or from the Internet that illustrates the theory. Be looking for those throughout the semester. People are explaining social change in the media and the blogosphere all the time. Post the reference to the article under the URL and provide a short annotation about what the article is about and how it illustrates this theory.

You are additionally asked to write four short section papers, as described in the Outcomes, in order to demonstrate your ability to develop and communicate your own ideas about social change and to apply those ideas to real social changes. The four papers overall (two theory papers and two application papers) act as practice for the term papers. You can find suggested outlines for the papers in the Paper Outline document referenced in Overview 01. The deadlines for the first drafts of the short papers are:

Section Papers	Due dates
Initial paper	Sep 7
First theory paper	September 21
First application paper	October 5
Second theory paper	October 19
Second application paper	November 2

Two terms papers finish off the semester. One paper is your own theory of social change, integrating what you have learned in the course from the various sections. The second is a major application paper in which you explain a contemporary social change using at least two different theories to show how the same change can be understood and explained from different perspectives. You should also contrast the two theories by showing how the theories differ on the critical assumptions each one makes and by forecasting the alternative futures that would result if that theory and its assumptions were true. The deadlines for the first drafts of the term papers are:

Theory Application term paper proposals	November 16
Term Papers	December 8 (15 th if necessary)

Section and Term Papers may be turned in for initial review before these dates.

So in the end, there are activities for each reading (reading, response), for each section (post a URL) and for the course as a whole (section papers, final term paper).

Grading

There is no portfolio in this class! Your grade is based on the quality and timeliness of your work, and on how well you meet three primary criteria:

- Understanding the material in the readings
- Extending the material with your own evidence, applications and critiques
- Developing your own original ideas about social change

The breakdown:

Term Papers	40% (20% each)
Section Papers	40% (10% each, initial paper is not graded)
Activity Postings/class participation	20%

This course involves a lot of writing so it would be a good idea to review the Grammar Rules reference in the Overview. You can get help with your writing from the [Writing Center](#) at the university. They are very helpful people. Use them if you have any doubts about your ability to express yourself in writing.

You might also review some excellent papers turned in during previous semesters, which I will post under Foundation Documents. Note: I hesitate to show examples for two reasons: 1) People think these papers are perfect. (They are not!) 2) People tend to copy them. Therefore, follow them only generally, looking for how they 1) had a main point, 2) used readings (from here and elsewhere) along with their own experience to explain and support that point, and 3) drew a conclusion that was interesting. Also remember that these are some of the best over a number of years. Others have done well and been quite satisfied with this course without making this list. So work towards these; don't compare yourself with them right away. Learning takes time and practice!

Interaction

The key to any successful learning experience is interaction. Knowledge may be learned passively, but even that is debatable. Learners of all ages, and particularly adults, need to engage with the material to truly understand it. Even then the understanding one gets in school is only the beginning of a life-long understanding if

one continues learning, as one should, after the course or the degree is finished.

What is true for acquiring information is even more true for learning skills. No one ever learned to play golf, drive a car, raise a child or become a skillful futurist just by reading books or listening to lectures. The active learner begins there, with helpful instruction, but immediately moves into an interactive mode. She picks up the club, gets behind the wheel, changes the diaper or starts developing futures products to really learn what that skill is all about. An environment of supportive and helpful feedback then helps the learner advance both his knowledge and skill of that particular method or technique. That is the ideal for this class, and indeed it ought to be the ideal for every class. Learning requires interaction.

Interaction is difficult in today's learning environment on two counts. Even for those who can attend class, the default mode is still listening to lectures and taking notes. It is the instructor's intent to create a classroom environment that encourages interaction, discussion, practice and engagement with the material. But interaction is a two-way street. Learners must come to class prepared to engage in interaction as well.

The paper submissions, discussion boards and email in this course, therefore, are the most important tool for interaction. The readings and the activities contain the material over which to interact. Interaction consists therefore of posting activities on time, responding to others' activities in a substantive manner, responding to and using the instructor's comments as opportunities for dialogue and improvement, and posting related material to the Learning Company so we can all benefit from what others have found. Interaction is measured in this course, and it counts in the final grade; but true interaction and engagement with the material cannot be dictated nor measured. So let's get to it.

Check the online discussions frequently, contribute when you are compelled and have time; more interaction increases learning for everyone. And a good practice is to read the instructor's feedback to all the postings, not just your own. A lot of teaching goes on there, and not just for the one who posted the original message.

A final and important piece of interaction is between the instructor and the learner. There is belief that learners must work independently from the very beginning. That is the ultimate objective, but not the immediate objective. Collaboration among learners and between learners and the instructor is essential at the beginning of the learning process. Sharing draft products with others is encouraged as long as the final product is uniquely developed and submitted by the learner.

Social Change is a course with a great deal of interaction. My goal is that we have just as much and perhaps even more interaction online as we do during the class period and that perhaps that interaction is even deeper and more substantive because we can read, consider and respond with more forethought than a face-to-face discussion allows.

Other policies

Academic honesty policy All UH students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UH catalog. Plagiarism, using research without citations or using a created production (such as other people's words) without quotations or citations, will result in a grade penalty or failure of the course. Internet sources must be credited according to the sites recommended citation guideline if available. If no citation guideline is provided by the web source, then the date, URL site owner, and author must be included with the web material used.

Disabilities: If you have a disability and need a special accommodation consult first with the Coordinator of Health Disabilities Services, Bayou 1402, telephone 283-2627, and then discuss the accommodation with me.

Incompletes: A grade of "I" is given only in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that the student has been making satisfactory progress. An Incomplete Grade Contract must be completed.

Withdrawals: Refer to class schedule for dates to withdraw without evaluation from a course.