

Theoretical Synthesis for Research, Writing, and Teaching

Fall 2022

MCC-GE 2901.001

Tuesdays 9:30 am - 12 pm

Location: East Building, Room 712

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Office Hours: Wed. and Thurs., 2-4 (sign up for Zoom mtgs using Google Calendar)



[Word Cloud based on number of total mentions of theorists' names in MA Core sections (one per instructor) plus Core Culminating Exam Bibliography]

Course Description

Theoretical Synthesis is a 0-2 credit class designed to help MCC MA students develop skills in close reading, concise and critical synthesis of theoretical texts, drawing connections across texts and schools of thought, and creatively organizing bodies of knowledge. These skills, central to academic research, are also essential for research and communications practices across a wide range of professional fields. Students will start by re-reading texts they have read before in core and topical courses, consolidating and deepening their understanding; they will then progress to identifying texts and literatures they would like to explore for their own intellectual and professional development. The course consists of three sections, drawing on such assignments as the creation of annotated bibliographies (150 word maximum synthesis and critique of each text), conceptual maps, and syllabi, which students are encouraged to produce and circulate for publics beyond the academy. Each class will be organized around a class exercise. This class is a workshop requiring active engagement and peer review. My role will *not* be to provide you with the “answers” but rather to help you learn how to evaluate the quality of your own and others’ syntheses and critiques.

Learning Objectives

Students taking this course will hone their skills in theoretical analysis, comparison, synthesis, and writing. They will learn how to: 1) create an annotated bibliography (a listing of readings with short summaries noting key arguments) and a comparative synthesis of multiple texts; 2) create conceptual maps: visual renderings of authors and schools of thought, arguments, and concepts and their relations to one another (geographical, historical, logical, epistemological, methodological, and/or normative); and 3) create syllabi that provide a rationale for a particular set of readings and organize them coherently into sub-topics. Skills learned and honed in this class are eminently practical and will provide students with valuable resources for lifelong learning and professional development.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Each assignment must be finished and posted online one full day before the class meets and will be the focus of class activity. Attendance and participation is therefore mandatory and is inseparable from the assignment grade: i.e., if you miss class, your assignment grade will be significantly lower.

Core Annotations I: 10%

Core Individual Text Maps: 10%

Core Multi-Text Conceptual Map: 10%

Core Revised Syllabus: 10%

Area of Study Annotations I: 10%

Area of Study Annotations II: 10%

Area of Study Multi-Text Comparative Synthesis: 10%

Area of Study Multi-Text Map or Syllabus: 10%

Final Project (including Presentation): 20%

Assignment Guidelines: Post all assignments to each week's Discussion Forum, no later than 12 noon the day before class; late postings will be downgraded.)

Grading Policies

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited and will be closely monitored in this class. Key skills emphasized in this course will be 1) learning how to reformulate the ideas of others in your own words, and 2) learning how to properly cite others' works. Do not take even short bits of phrases from other authors without attribution.

To be clear: You should not rely on secondary sources (including Wikipedia or other online sources) in creating your annotated bibliographies, conceptual maps, or syllabi. Instead, to gain the maximum benefit from this course, you should work on developing your skills in analyzing and comparing primary texts (texts *by* rather than *about* the author generating particular ideas).

“Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated. Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score and/or other materials, which are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: Copy verbatim from a book, an article or other media; Download documents from the Internet; Purchase documents; Report from other's oral work; Paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis and/or conclusions; Copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.” (NYU Steinhardt School of Education Statement on Academic Integrity)

Grading Standards:

A = excellent. Outstanding work in all respects. Your assignments are thoroughly researched, appropriately documented, logically organized and rhetorically convincing. Your analysis is comprehensive, sound, appropriately critical, creative, and original. In short, you not only get it, but also begin to see through it!

B = good. Your understanding of course materials is complete and thorough, and there is at least some evidence of your own critical intelligence at work. You demonstrate basic competence in research, writing and oral presentation.

C = adequate. Your writing is vague and incoherent or riddled with grammatical or spelling errors. You do not make proper use of source materials, and there is little depth or concreteness to your research or analysis. Your understanding of concepts and ideas is incomplete and often misguided, but there is at least some evidence that you are engaging with the course.

D = unsatisfactory. Work exhibits virtually no understanding or even awareness of basic concepts and themes of course. Your participation has been inadequate or superficial. Either you have not been paying attention or you have not been making any effort.

F= failed. Work was not submitted or completed according to the basic parameters outlined in the course syllabus and any additional information provided about assignments (basic requirements for page length, topical focus, types and number of primary and secondary sources, deadlines, etc.).

Grades are calculated according to the following scale: 94-100 A; 90-93 A-; 87-89 B+; 83-86 B; 80-82 B-; 77-79 C+; 73-76 C; 70-72 C-; 67-69 D+; 63-66 D; 60-62 D-; 0-59 F
Schedule (subject to revision):

9.6 Introductions

We will get to know one another; discuss the purpose and structure of the course; and discuss the MCC core seminar syllabi - what we appreciated and what we wish had been included or handled differently. We will pick three texts from previous MA core seminars to collectively analyze in the next class period: Re-read these texts, take notes identifying core themes you think should be included in a short annotation of each text, and be prepared to discuss these texts in class on 9.13.

PART ONE: CORE THEORY

9.13 Collective Exercise in Theoretical Synthesis

For this collective exercise in synthesis, come prepared to discuss and collectively create an annotation for the three texts that we identified in the previous class period. We may also examine some exemplary (or not so exemplary) published literature reviews and identify their salient features.

9.20 Core Annotations I

One full day before class - by noon on Monday - post in the week's Discussion Forum annotations of **5 texts** of your choosing from any one of the previous year's MA Core syllabi. Each annotation should be about 150 words, synthesize the key arguments, include at least one substantive critique, be supported with page citations, and when appropriate, with very brief quotes (generally of distinctive terms coined by the author).

9.27 Core Individual Text Conceptual Maps (3 texts)

One full day before class, post in this week's Discussion Forum three conceptual maps, each of a different text. Up to two can be derived from annotations you did in the two previous weeks; at least one must be from a new text (all three, if you choose, can be from new texts).

10.4 Core Conceptual Map

One full day before class, post in the Discussion Forum a chart or map that demonstrates the lines of similarity and difference among authors, texts, and sub-disciplinary schools of thought in relation to geographical, historical, logical, epistemological, methodological, or normative criteria (your choice). In class, be prepared to discuss the logic and methods you used to construct your map. As a class, we will also discuss similarities and differences among the maps.

11.1 Area of Study Annotations II

Write **5 more annotations** from your chosen Area of Study. Try to select texts that take different positions on a common question. Post your annotations in the Discussion Form one full day before the class meets.

11.8 Multi-Text Comparative Synthesis

Write a 250-300 word comparative synthesis of 4-5 texts (these can be from the previous two weeks or include additional texts) that represent a range of positions (from nearly identical to sharply opposing) views on a common question. Post your multi-text synthesis in the Discussion Form one full day before the class meets.

11.15 Area of Study Conceptual Map or Syllabus (your choice)

One full day before class, post in the Discussion Forum a **Conceptual Map** (*12-15 texts or more*) OR **Syllabus** (sufficient readings for a semester, i.e. roughly *at least 24 texts, plus course description and assignments*) related to your Area of Study interests. In class, be prepared to discuss the logic and methods you used to construct your map or syllabus; you are free to build on your multi-text comparative synthesis, but you can also rely primarily on new readings or organize your materials along different lines. As a class, we will discuss similarities and differences among the maps and/or syllabi.

PART III: NEW DIRECTIONS

11.22 New Research: Annotations and Suggested Lines of Comparison

Develop a list of **5 books or articles** in media, culture, and communication studies that you would like to read in the future. Draft short annotations of each (50-100 words max.) as well as a summary (up to 100 words) describing the theme of your selections and possible lines of comparison. Post your annotations/summary in the Discussion Form one full day before the class meets: ideally, some portion of this "new research" could be part of your final project. During this class period, we will also discuss ideas and rough drafts of final projects.

11.29 Independent Work

During this class period (optional to attend), you will have the opportunity to "workshop" with me and/or your fellow students a draft version of your final project that extends your initial "new research" annotations (as well as, depending on your project, your area of study readings), with additional readings and one or more of the following: *a syllabus* (that adds and organizes additional readings sufficient for a semester-long course); *a conceptual map* (that may or may not involve additional readings and identifies the comparative logic); or some other communications vehicle (*video explainer, podcast, infographic, collection/juxtaposition of images, interactive game, etc.*). Reflect also on how you might want to design your project and circulate it to reach publics beyond the classroom. During our regular meeting time, the seminar room will be available for your use and I will be available to meet one-on-one with students in my 6th floor office.

12.6 Final Project Presentations

12.13 Final Project Presentations

Friday, 12 noon, 12.16: Final Projects due (with 300-500 word rationale)