

IS 40490 Theory in Action
Autumn 2011
Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00 Room: SILS 107
SILS 107

Quotable Quotes

There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly why the universe is for and why it is here, it will be instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened.

Douglas Adams

No theory is good unless one uses it to go beyond. Andre Gide

It is the theory that decides what we can observe. Albert Einstein

Instructor

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Objectives

The purpose of this course is to promote the understanding and knowledge of theory use and development.

Different theoretical paradigms will be examined, and the use and development of theory in current research will be discussed. Students will have the opportunity to synthesize theories into theoretical frameworks for their chosen research focus, including their thesis or dissertation research topic.

Learning outcomes

A student who successfully completes the course will be able to articulate different purposes and approaches to theory; critically discuss, compare and synthesize theories; and identify how theories relevant to their research interests can inform their future research

Students are required to:

- Review and critique literature related to topics covered by the course
- Discuss the literature and its implications for research
- Present an overview of a theory relevant to their research interests
- Synthesise theories in an area of research that is of interest to them.

These requirements are intended to help students:

- (a) Gain a better understanding of theory and theory development processes;
- (b) Constructively discuss ideas with others to increase everyone's understanding and appreciation of research; and

(c) Develop theoretical frameworks, or categorization schemes, to better understand relationships among research within a discipline and across disciplines.

Assessment strategies

Written critiques and participation: 20%

Group Presentation: 30%

Paper synthesizing theories: 50%

Students who audit the module will receive a certificate indicating they audited (attended) the course.

Assessments

1. Written critiques of research articles and participation (20%)

Due each session

Each student is required to read the articles assigned and write a short critique on each article assigned for each module session. The critique should highlight your impressions and perceptions of the research discussed in the article. Examples of topics which may be included in a critique include:

- questions that emerged as you read the article (e.g., your interpretation of the issues may differ from the author's interpretation);
- suggestions for improving the research described in the article;
- ideas about additional research in the same area;
- relationships among this article and other research.

Please note you are not required to discuss all the above topics in each critique. Rather, they are suggestions for things to think about and note as you read each article. Each critique should be no longer than one paragraph.

The purpose of these critiques is to help students develop skills in understanding and synthesizing research articles. Students can also use their critique as a basis for initiating discussion during the seminar. For example, the same questions and ideas in the critiques may be excellent starting points to discuss during the seminar.

Here are two examples of critiques.

Critique of Sample-Paper-1

- Great ideas presented
- Difficult at times to see how ideas all hang together. A graphic or table illustrating this would be useful I think.
- Development of commemorative practices in late 19th C. may also be related to other concurrent developments in society such as the increase of social organizations (e.g., see the book, *Bowling Alone*) and changes in technology (e.g., camera and phone). Also what is the role of economics and politics in memory? (This is discussed somewhat later in paper.)
- P.7: I suspect social memory influences the individual and vice versa. Question: who is

privileged to construct social memory?

- P. 9: The author mentions “the accelerating pace of time”. What does this mean?

Critique of Sample-Paper-2

- Definition of formation process in general is missing from this paper.
- Environmental/non-cultural processes also seem to influence what is formed/created in the first place, e.g., an area that has lots of clay often leads to the development of pottery.
- The author seems to suggest formation processes have patterns, but chaos theory suggests there could be some randomness to a formation process as well.
- P. 10: Is creating a “fully representation sample” ever possible? Who judges this?
- Is the formation process a continuum that also includes creation and collection in use?
Creation <-> collection in the field <-> collection in place/museum <-> collection in use -
All of which are influenced by cultural and environmental processes.

All critiques are due at the beginning of each session. You should bring two copies of your critiques - one to turn in, and one you can refer to during the seminar sessions. It is your responsibility to turn your critique in at the beginning of each class session.

2. Small Group Presentations on Theories (30%)

Due date varies

Students will be assigned to small groups. Each group is required to select two theories, provide an overview and synthesis of the theories to the class, and lead a class discussion on the theory. The overview should include key aspects of the theory. In addition the overview may include: background of the researcher(s) who developed the theory, the impact the theory has had, and/or why the theory is relevant to the students’ research or interests. Both theories should be compared and contrasted.

The presentation should last 30 minutes, and the discussion should last 15 minutes.

Each group will be assigned a session during which they must present their selected theories and lead a discussion on them.

In preparation for the presentation, each group should select two papers or book chapters from their selected theories (one reading from each theory) and make a copy of it available to the entire class at least one week before their presentation. This will become the required reading for the week of the group’s presentation. Note, papers analyzing or discussing a theory created by someone other than the paper’s author are not acceptable to assign to the class. That is, the paper assigned to the class to read must be a paper presenting an author’s (or authors’) theory.

The purpose of this assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to learn about a theory relevant to their research, learn about other theories, and increase their skills in discussing and synthesizing theories.

3. Theoretical Research Paper (50%)

Draft due: Dec 5

Feedback on colleague's draft due: Dec 8

Final paper due to instructor: Dec 13

Each student must write a research paper that synthesizes a variety of theories relevant to their own research topic/research question. The purpose of this assignment is to provide students the opportunity to develop skills and expertise in writing a theoretical framework section of a grant proposal, master's thesis or dissertation proposal.

Each paper should cover the following:

(a) *Introduction* (1-2 pages)

The topic or question(s) that is the focus of your research. The importance and/or relevance of the topic should be briefly described.

(b) *Synthesis of Relevant Theories* (15-20 pages)

Relevant theories should be described and synthesized, i.e., compared and contrasted, presented in a cohesive/inclusive framework. There should also be some discussion about how the theories were developed (including assumptions embedded in the theories), how they have been used, and what the theories (individually and as a whole) do and do not address. How do the theories inform your research topic or question?

(c) *Future theory development* (1-2 pages)

Drawing on your discussion of theories in the previous section, describe how you might proceed to further address your research topic or question.

An electronic copy and paper copy of your paper must be turned in.

Aspects that will be considered when reviewing and evaluating papers include:

1. Clarity of purpose
2. Comprehensiveness
3. Conceptual ability
4. Creativity
5. Strength of student's position
6. Written communication skills
7. Documentation

Additional, basic requirements for the paper include:

1. Should be double-spaced, typed, with wide margins and numbered pages. A font size 12 Times New Roman or equivalent font and font size should be used.
2. Follow the APA style guide for citation and reference formats- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Edition). (2010). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. [Some APA style guide info is available here](#) ▶

Each student is required to give detailed feedback to another student's draft paper.

Each student will also receive detailed feedback on her or his draft from another student. Drafts and comments on draft should *not* be sent to the instructor. During the seminar we will discuss the type of detailed feedback students would like to receive on their papers, and the instructor will let each student know who will review their paper and which paper they will be asked to review.

UCD Policy on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Assignments must be the individual work of the student or original work of the group for group assignments. Students' work that is not will be penalised according to the UCD Policy on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.

UCD Policy on Late Submission of Coursework

- Coursework submitted at any time up to one week after the due date will have the mark reduced by two grade points (e.g., from B- to C+).
- Coursework submitted more than one week but less than two weeks after the due date will have the mark reduced by four grade points (e.g., from B- to D+).
- In other words, if you miss a deadline for submission, you may use the remainder of the week to improve your submission without additional penalty.
- Coursework received more than two weeks after the due date will be accepted but will be awarded a Fail grade.

Weekly Schedule and Required Reading

13 Sept: Introduction

The discussion this week will be a general introduction to UCD, the course and the instructor. We will cover the course objectives, expectations with respect to the course, and mechanics of the course. We will explore anxiety regarding theory development. Students will also have the opportunity to introduce themselves and their research interests.

Required reading:

[Greene, B. \(2009\). Questions, not answers, make science the ultimate adventure. *Wired Magazine*, 17\(5\).](#)

Simon, Roger I. (1992). *Against the Grain* (pp. 79-100). NY: Bergin & Garvy.
The fear of theory, pp.79-100 (available in Blackboard)

Feyerabend, Paul. (1993). *Against Method*. New York: Verso. Pages vii-13, 268-272. (available in Blackboard)

20 Sept: What are the purposes of theory?

Various disciplines and groups within disciplines have different perspectives on what theory is, its utility, and how theories are developed and propagated. In this class we will review and discuss several of these perspectives. This is a topic we will revisit periodically throughout the semester, as we read and critique a variety of authors.

Required reading:

Kuhn, Thomas S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (available in Blackboard)

V. The Priority of Paradigms (pp. 43-51).

VI. Anomaly and the emergence of scientific discoveries (pp. 52-65).

XIII. Progress through revolutions (pp. 160-173)

Polanyi, M. (1974). *Personal Knowledge*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (available in Blackboard)

Chapter 6: Intellectual Passions: pages 134-160.

Optional: from Chapter 1: Objectivity, pp. 3 – 17

[Smith, Dorothy. \(1999\). From women's standpoint to a sociology for people. In Janet L. Abu-Lughod \(Ed.\), *Sociology for the Twenty-first Century* \(pp. 65-82\). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.](#)

27 Sept: Are there different types of theories?

What different types of theories exist? Are some types “better” than other types? These issues will be explored this week.

Required reading:

Gregor, S. (2006). The nature of theory in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 30(3), 611-642. . (available in Blackboard)

[D'Andrade, Roy G. \(1986\). Three scientific world views and the covering law model. In D. W. Fiske & R. A. Shweder \(Eds.\), *Metatheory in social science: Pluralisms and subjectivities* \(pp. 19 - 39\). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.](#)

Kim, S. & Joeng, D.Y. (2006). An analysis of the development and use of theory in library and information science research articles. *Library and Information Science Research*, 28, 548-562. . (available in Blackboard)

4 Oct: Using quantitative methods to develop theory

What quantitative methods can be used to develop theory? An expert, Dr. Norman Su, will present this week's lecture.

Readings to be supplied

11 Oct: No class: ASIS&T Conference

18 Oct: Using qualitative and mixed methods to develop theory

How might qualitative or mixed methods lead to theory?

Required reading:

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical Sensitivity* (pp. 1-17). Sociology Press.

Sonnenwald, D.H., Whitton, M.C., & Maglaughlin, K.L. (2003). Evaluating a scientific collaboratory: Results of a controlled experiment. *ACM Transactions on Computer Human Interaction* (10)2, 150-176. (available in Blackboard)

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550. (available in Blackboard)

Optional: Hutchison, A.J., Johnston, L.H., & Breckon, J.D. (2010). Using QSR-NVivo to facilitate the development of a grounded theory project: An account of a worked example. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(4), 283-302. (available in Blackboard)

25 Oct: Guest researcher(s) from another discipline will talk about her/his use of theory

1 Nov: How can you present your theory?

How can you present your theory? How have others done it? How do others expect you to do it? The following readings explore these issues.

Required reading:

Weick, Karl E. (1995). What Theory is Not, Theorizing Is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 385-390. (available in Blackboard)

[Gopen, G.D., & Swan, J.A. \(1990\). The science of scientific writing. *American Scientist* \(November-December\).](#)

Available at: <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/the-science-of-scientific-writing/1>

Tufte, E.R. (1990). *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press. pp. 56-57. (available in Blackboard)
These pages are an example of persuasive presentation of data.

[Miller, G.A. \(1956\). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *The Psychological Review*, 62, 81-97.](#)

Read this paper as an example of excellent scientific writing.

8 Nov: Student presentations

15 Nov: Student presentations

22 Nov: Theory development processes

How do people construct theories? Is there a “how to” guide for constructing theories? It’s seems like a mysterious process. This week the readings provide some insights regarding how personal journeys by leading theorists.

Required reading:

Folger, R. (2009). The road to fairness and beyond. In: Smith & Holt (Eds.), *Great Minds in Management* (pp. 55-83). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (available in Blackboard)

Mintzberg, H. (2009). Developing theory about the development of theory. In: Smith & Holt (Eds.), *Great Minds in Management* (pp. 355-372). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (available in Blackboard)

Weick, Karl E. (2009). The experience of theorizing: Sensemaking as topic and resource. . In: Smith & Holt (Eds.), *Great Minds in Management* (pp. 394-416). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (available in Blackboard)

29 Nov: Theory development processes

How do people construct theories? Is there a “how to” guide or specific cognitive tasks for constructing theories? It’s seems like a mysterious process. This week the readings provide some insights regarding how personal journeys by leading theorists.

Required reading:

Smith, K., & Hitt, M. (2005). Epilogue: Learning to develop theory from masters. In: Smith & Holt (Eds.), *Great Minds in Management* (pp. 572-588). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (available in Blackboard)

Optional:

Kuhn, D. (2001). How do people know? *Psychological Science*, 12(1), 1-8. (available in Blackboard)

Dec 6: Drafts of papers to be exchanged among students for feedback

Dec 8: Feedback provided by students to the student whose paper they read

Dec 13: Papers due