Introduction to Critical Theory

Critique is a sign of privilege. Poor people need a next step.
Rigoberta Menchú

**Course Purpose and Topics:**
A survey of social and cultural theoretical critiques at an introductory level, this course will prepare students for advanced level critical thinking, interdisciplinary solution building, and social change work. We will begin with theoretical frameworks in established fields of social critique, such as Marxism, feminism, anticolonialism, cultural studies, critical race theory, critical legal/justice studies, and women of color theory. The course also introduces emerging postmodern theories in postcolonial studies, poststructuralist feminism, post-Marxism, border studies, and queer theory. Suitable for first and second-year students, as well as upper level students who feel they have not yet been sufficiently exposed in their education to critical, interdisciplinary, and/or theoretical thinking.

**Course Requirements:**
You are responsible for the learning process in this class. To accomplish this you will be expected 1) to complete the assigned readings before coming to class, 2) to contribute active, informed, and constructive discussion, and 3) to attend class regularly. You will be asked to think through the sometimes difficult material with fellow students and the instructor in open exploratory discussions, and these class discussions will be a major part of the learning process for the course. Your grade will be determined as follows: attendance, preparation, and daily discussion, 40%; a quiz (on key terms) 15%; a short essay (on critical theory) 15%; a 10-12 page final paper (graduate students 25-30 page), 30%.

Note: Students with learning or physical disabilities will be given reasonable accommodations. If you need to request accommodations or other assistance, contact the Academic Support Services Office, extension 73553. Students who do not give their sources for ideas and information not their own or common knowledge are practicing plagiarism; they will be given one chance to rewrite the paper and correct the problem, and if it is not corrected they will not receive credit for the assignment.

**Required Readings:** (All readings are on Sakai or Honnold library reserve; texts may be purchased at Huntley bookstore)
- Chow, Rey, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Indiana U. Pr.
- Sakai Readings – see list at end of syllabus.

**Recommended Textbooks:** (Also available at Honnold library reserve and Huntley bookstore.)
Reading and Assignment Schedule:
(Readings in textbooks are marked with an asterisk (*); all others are from Sakai/reserve readings, except for recommended readings (marked with a ►).)

Week 1  Course Introduction: Why be Critical?
Sept. 1-3 Readings:  Handout (Simic).

Week 2  What is Critical Theory?

Week 3  Modernity I: Saussure and the End of Stable Meanings/Languages.

Week 4  Modernity II: Marx and the End of Stable Classes/Nations.
Sept. 22-24 Readings:  *Belsey, Poststructuralism, Ch. 2.
  Sept. 22 Short Essay Due: What is Critical Theory?

Week 5  Modernity III: Nietzsche and the End of Stable Truths/Discourses
Sept. 29- Readings:  *Belsey, Poststructuralism, Ch. 3.
  ►Nietzsche, Portable Nietzsche, 443-46, 450-54, 499-505.

Week 6  Modernity IV: Freud and the End of Stable Identities/Voices
Oct. 6-8 Readings:  *Belsey, Poststructuralism, Ch. 3 (cont.).

Week 7  The End of the Modern?

Oct. 20  Happy Fall Break.
Week 8  Caribbean Talks Back I: Fanon & the End of Classical Races/Colonialisms
Oct. 22 Readings:  *Belsey, Poststructuralism, Ch. 5.
  ►Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 7-14, 17-40.

Week 9  Caribbean Talks Back II: Lorde & the End of Stable Genders/Sexualities

Oct. 29 Key Terms Quiz.

Week 10 Rethinking Power and the Subject.

Week 11 Rethinking Power and the Subject (cont.) & Theorizing the Other.
  *Chow, Writing Diaspora, Intro., 1-26.
Course Schedule (cont.)

Week 12  Theorizing the Other (cont.) & Discourse Theory.
Nov. 17-19 Readings:  *Chow, Ch. 5, 99-119.
                     *Torfing, New Theories of Discourse.
                     Recommended:  *Chow, Ch. 6, 120-43.

Week 13  Discourse Theory (cont.).
Nov. 24 Readings:  *Torfing, New Theories of Discourse.
Nov. 24  Final Paper Topic Due.

Nov. 26  Happy British Imperialism Day.

Week 14  Disability Theory.

Week 15  Impossible Closure?

Mon, Dec. 14, 5 pm     Papers Due. (Time of scheduled final exam)
Sakai Readings


Fanon, Frantz, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Markmann, Grove Pr., 7-14, 17-40.

