SOCI 309 ¹
Contemporary Social Theorizing

Instructor: Dr. Michael Ma

Course Description:
What are social practices of everyday life (Henri Lefebvre)? How do we engage with the social? For myself, I have engaged with the “social practices of everyday life” in my involvement with social movement building and resistance to neoliberalism for over 25 years. But through this experience I have also experienced immense and overwhelming social containment, absorption, and co-option of these efforts. It is enough to make someone cynical about being involved in any kind of social resistance to the state. And I have been thinking and trying to theorize about these “social practices” of resistance for some time.

Most recently, for the last 10 or 15 years, I have been involved in working with peers to mobilize community in the area of harm reduction and overdose prevention, but it isn’t easy. On the level of everyday organizing it often feels like all our efforts to change society are met with the impossible task of over-turning sedimented power and social inertia. What does this mean for “Contemporary Social Theorizing”? What is the point of theorizing society if it isn’t connected to the world live in? What is the point of theorizing if it does not change anything?

In this course, we will explore these exact questions and challenges. We will examine how social theory can be a tool for understanding and critiquing the complex dynamics of power, resistance, and co-option in contemporary society. We'll investigate how theoretical frameworks can illuminate the mechanisms of neoliberal absorption and help us develop more resilient strategies for social change. Through engaging with key thinkers from Marx to intersectional theorists, we'll consider how theory can inform praxis and vice versa. Students will be encouraged to apply theoretical concepts to their own experiences of activism, community organizing, and/or the absence of such experience, fostering a dialectical relationship between abstract ideas and concrete realities.

Course Outcomes/Objectives:
This course aims to give students the analytical tools to navigate the complexities of social change, while critically examining the role and limitations of theory itself in transforming society.

Course Pre/Co-requisites:
SOCI 210 - Classical Social Theorizing

¹ This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.