

Professor Ruth Porter Groff
Office: 148 McGannon
Hours: T/Th after class; and (for maximum flexibility) by apt.
E-mail: ruth.groff@slu.edu

POLS 3740/PHIL 3930: Theorizing Structural Power: Capitalism, Racism, Patriarchy

This course concerns both (a) the metaphysics of macro-level social phenomena and (b) the methodological and epistemic assumptions that are presupposed by the investigation of such phenomena. It is thus a course in both social ontology and the philosophy of social science. It's important that you appreciate this point: the course doesn't just count as an advanced philosophy class; it actually *is* an advanced philosophy class.

Unlike similar courses, this course is designed to teach you to think (philosophically) about structural power. It's easy to imagine that individual people, or even numbers of individual people, affect things (or don't) -- or, we might say, exercise their causal power(s) (or don't). But individual persons are not the only type of socio-political entity that causes effects in the world. Organized relationships *between* people, and between groups of people (e.g., institutions such as the state), as well as whole systems of activity, such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy, do too.

We will begin by thinking carefully about the nature of irreducibly sociological phenomena, of 'social facts,' as Durkheim called them. We will consider both (a) irreducibly sociological entities and the properties thereof; and (b) irreducibly sociological properties had by individuals. We will contrast the view that such entities and such properties exist (and ought to be studied by social scientists), with the view they don't, and therefore can't be studied -- that, in the end, it is only individuals, bearing non-relational properties, that exist.

Next we will identify the distinct logics of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy respectively, by considering each of these systems on its own, in the form of what is sometimes called an 'analytic abstraction'. We will then consider the fact that, concretely, these systems are interconnected; they operate simultaneously, sometimes in tandem, sometimes at cross-purposes. Our goal will be to figure out how best to conceptualize a situation in which each of these systems both conditions, and is conditioned by, each of the others, such that at present none of them exists independently of the others -- even if they have different histories and distinct, characteristic features.

Often these questions are addressed via an investigation of identities, subjective experience and/or the notion of 'difference.' We will be mindful of these issues, but they will not serve as our primary lens. Rather than thinking about individuals (or even pluralities of individuals), we will be thinking about social formations -- and, at the meta-level, about how to think about them most astutely.

Given that this is an upper-level course in philosophy, I am assuming that you enjoy thinking abstractly, and have experience doing it. Students with no theory background are welcome to take the class, but are encouraged to consult with me before doing so.

General Expectations and Policies

The bottom line requirement for this course is that you do difficult reading very, very carefully (more than once, in most cases), and that you come to class prepared to talk about the material with others, in

order to understand and evaluate it. **If, for whatever reason, you are not in a position to take on a high level of intellectual responsibility and commitment, you should think hard about whether or not you will be able to meet this expectation;** this may not be the course for you to take this semester. The same is true if you know that you dislike thinking at a high level of abstraction.

Attendance is mandatory unless you are sick or face an emergency situation. **Please do not attend class if you are sick** (do, however, send me an e-mail ahead of time to explain your absence). Irregular participation will result in a significant reduction of the final grade or in failure. Cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. In keeping with the 5 principles of Jesuit education at SLU, I take it that comportment in the classroom will be good-natured, considerate and intellectually disciplined.

All written and oral work must be either (a) your own ideas, expressed in your own words, or (b) properly referenced. Plagiarism will result in a failure for the course, at a minimum. I encourage you to ask me, if you have any questions about academic integrity, as not knowing that you have plagiarized does not make it acceptable to have done so. **Standard SLU language regarding academic honesty is attached.**

If you have a learning disability that may impact your classroom performance, you must contact the Disabilities Services office, located in the Student Center, to arrange for appropriate accommodations. Please also let me know. **Standard SLU language regarding resources and accommodations is attached.**

Access to Me

The easiest way to contact me is through e-mail, which I check frequently. In most cases I will be able to get back to you within 24 hours, if not sooner; if you haven't heard back, send me another e-mail. I retrieve phone messages when I am in my office, but I am not on campus every day. I'm also delighted to talk to you in person.

Learning Outcomes

In order to pass POLS 3740/PHIL 393, you will have to have acquired a basic grasp of the course material, such that you can: (a) correctly define and apply the concepts that we have covered; (b) accurately summarize course readings; (c) compare and contrast positions defended by the authors that we have read; (d) write a paper in which you defend a thesis pertaining to the content of the course, showing that you are able to think dialectically about structural power.

Demonstrated ability to do these things will indicate that you have gained an introductory-level understanding of what it takes to theorize structural power, and that you are better equipped to assess our own political situation critically than you might otherwise have been.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

1. Participation [including a portfolio, submitted intact at the end of the term (consisting of summaries of readings and reactions to questions and prompts, integrated into a final piece of writing)] – 40%.
2. Midterm exam – 20%

3. 2 short analytic papers – 15%

- #1 (5pps) - “Benchmark” – graded solely for the purpose of feedback (and you cannot pass the class without doing it), but doesn't count toward final mark;
- #2 (5pps) - 15%

4. Final paper (6-7pp) – 25%

- This paper will be an analysis of an issue of your choosing, using the tools of the class. You will be required to address, and critique, alternate accounts of the issue, in the course of developing your own analysis. Due at the end of the term.

Mid-semester, you will be required to have a short meeting with me in my office, to check in on your progress in the course.

Your grade will be based on your performance on the assignments listed above. You must submit all assignments in order to pass the class. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work. I give letter grades, corresponding to qualitative assessment criteria. I do not grade on a distributional curve; your grade is based solely on the quality of your own performance. I am a very transparent grader, and I am happy to talk with you about how to do your best in the course and to develop intellectually. Grading criteria are attached. **Standard SLU language regarding numerical grades is also attached, although it does not apply in classes in which number grades are not assigned.**

Note

In this class, final grades designate the following:

A-range = Excellent at political philosophy;
B+ = Very good at political philosophy;
B = Good, solid work in political philosophy;
B- = Acceptable degree of competence in political philosophy;
C-range = Weak in the area of political philosophy;
D-range = Poor in the area of political philosophy.

I don't accept late papers, unless you have contacted me ahead of time or it is an emergency.

Books

The following books have been ordered through the SLU Bookstore, and are required. A few more may be added soon. Other materials will be available to you at no cost electronically.

Joe Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities and Future Reparations*
Allen Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*

Additional University Information

Academic Integrity Syllabus Statement

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%206-26-15.pdf.

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

Title IX Syllabus Statement

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; akratky@slu.edu; 314-977-3886) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web address: <http://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy> www.slu.edu/here4you .

Student Success Center Syllabus Statement:

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center, a one-stop shop, which assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.

- University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning) by visiting the Student Success Center or by going to www.slu.edu/success.

Disability Services Academic Accommodations Syllabus Statement

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability_services@slu.edu or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

Please note the College of Arts and Sciences' common grading scheme: A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; D=60-70;F=below 60.

POLSCI 3740/PHIL 3930: Capitalism, Racism and Patriarchy
Projected Reading Schedule – Note: schedule may change to accommodate class learning needs
Spring 2019

Introductory Concepts

Week 1 – Framing the Intellectual Project

Jan 15: First meeting: what to expect from the course

Jan 17: Introductory discussion – “What is a ‘social fact?’”

Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, ch. 1 [scan]

For examples: Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

<http://www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf>

Week 2 – Philosophical Vocabulary

Lecture-based (any readings tba)

Jan 22: Entities & the properties thereof

Jan 24: Positivism & ontological individualism vs. structural explanations & emergent phenomena

Week 3 – The Reality of Sociological Phenomena - Structures

Jan 29 & 31

Additional reading t.b.a.

Sally Haslanger, “What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?”

<http://sallyhaslanger.weebly.com/uploads/1/8/2/7/18272031/haslangerwhatisocialstructuralExplanation.pdf>

Week 4 – On the Relationship Between Structures and Individuals

Feb 5 & Feb 7

Mainly lecture; new readings t.b.a.

Analytic Abstractions

Week 5 – Abstraction #1: Patriarchy “On Its Own”

Feb 12 & 14

Allan Johnson, *The Gender Knot*, selections

Week 6 – Abstraction #2: Racism “On Its Own”

Feb 19 & 21

Joe Feagin, *Racist America*, selections

Charles Mills, “White Supremacy as a Sociopolitical System” [scan]

Week 7 – Abstraction #3: Capitalism “On Its Own”

Feb. 26 & 28

Mainly lecture; new readings t.b.a.

Week 8 – Abstraction #3 Capitalism “On Its Own” cont.

March 5 & 7

Wood, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism,” [scan]

Wood, “The *demos* versus ‘We the People: From Ancient to Modern Conceptions of Citizenship” [scan]

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – Discussion continued (if needed; otherwise begin Part 2 of the course)

March 19 & 21

Dialectical Dynamics: Patriarchy, Racism, Capitalism

Week 10 – Thinking Dialectically About Gender

March 26 & 28

Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” [scan]

The Combahee River Collective Statement

<http://ouleft.org/wp-content/uploads/BlackRadicalTradition.pdf>

Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism*, ch. 5, “In the Matter of X” [scan]

Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, “Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex”

<http://spe.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/spe/article/viewFile/13332/10215>

Week 11 – Thinking Dialectically about Race

April 2 & 4

Vanessa Wills, “The ‘White Privilege’ Concept in Marxism & in Critical Race Theory” [scan]

Adolph Reed, Jr., “Marx, Race, and Neo-Liberalism”

<https://libcom.org/files/Marx,%20Race%20and%20Neoliberalism%20-%20Adolph%20Reed.pdf>

Harry Haywood with Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, “Is the Black Bourgeoisie the Leader of the Black Liberation Movement?”

<http://ouleft.org/wp-content/uploads/BlackRadicalTradition.pdf>

Weeks 12-13 – Thinking Dialectically About Class

April 9 & 16 (no class April 11 or 18)

Wood, “Capitalism and Human Emancipation: Race, Gender and Democracy” [scan]

Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!

<http://ouleft.org/wp-content/uploads/BlackRadicalTradition.pdf>

Week 14-15 – Discussion Continued
April 23, 25, 30

May 2 (review)