

SUBSTANTIVE AREA: Theory
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OVERALL SCOPE OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE EXAM

Sociological theory can be understood as growing out of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought and the conditions of nineteenth-century industrial society. Founding figures such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel drew freely from a wide array of historical, philosophical, economic, and anthropological materials to formulate ways of understanding the conditions of modern society and social life more generally. They did not fit their ideas to a disciplinary conception of thinking, though they are now acknowledged as generating the major theoretical paradigms of the sociological discipline. In this sense sociological theory is continuous with social theory more generally.

Students are expected to be conversant with the key figures originating sociological theory, as well as major ideas and theorists that figure into its traditions and contemporary practice. They will formulate a reading list based on four or more themes that cover the range of sociological theory. The exam is an opportunity for students to develop an ability to frame major themes and questions in sociological theory, to demonstrate their knowledge of the key writings in these areas, and to become competent to create and teach a course on sociological theory. Though not necessary, students are encouraged to frame one or more of their themes according to their emerging research interests.

EXAM PREPARATION

USE OF READING LISTS

Students are expected to develop a comprehensive reading list based on four or more themes, which, taken together, cover a broad range of sociological theory. Students will develop their list and themes in consultation with the committee, with expectations of likely revisions. The process of developing themes and reading list is a crucial part of the theory area exam, indeed, an aspect of the broader scholarly skill of bibliography. Preparation for the exam itself not only involves factual knowledge of the theorists and their theories, but the ability to understand and communicate their argumentation.

REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED COURSES

Students should have completed the required theory introductory course and one or two advanced graduate theory classes (exceptions may be negotiated with the committee for students with strong prior background).

EXAM FORMAT

Students will develop two questions from each of the four themes of their reading lists, to propose to the committee. The committee may accept questions as proposed, revise them as needed, or even substitute other questions if needed. During the exam itself, students will choose one of two questions for each theme. They will take the exam in two parts: day one for two of the four themes; day two for the other two themes.

EXAM SCHEDULING

Students should initially consult with the committee chair concerning the scope and trajectory of the exam process. Otherwise, please consult the “Guide to Area Exam” in the Graduate Student manual for the department regarding how schedule your exam.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CITATIONS

Students are expected to be familiar with names and key ideas of authors used, and, where multiple works of one author is used, to know from which work idea is being presented. Citation where necessary is encouraged, but it is understood that without notes precision may not be possible.

EXAM RESULTS

POLICIES REGARDING RE-WRITES

The committee reserves the right to recommend a partial rewrite of the exam if one or more questions are evaluated to be deficient.

FEEDBACK

Committee members will share evaluations of the exam and recommendations, aiming for feedback by a couple of weeks after the exam. The student will be informed through email by the committee chair of the outcome, and will be expected to meet with the chair to go over specific comments and criticisms.