



**Course Description and Objectives:**

*Theory*, whether critical, literacy, representational, social, scientific, normative, or of some other kind, serves as the foundation for the sorts of critical analyses, unpackings, reshapings, and explorations we do as scholars of contemporary problems related to texts and technologies broadly construed. Our goal in this course will be to analyze and apply theories as lenses through which we view a problem and as mouthpieces through which we give new voice to that problem.

Our specific focus will be on the transitions between structuralism and post-structuralism, and between modernity and postmodernity, through a lens focused on the impacts of information technologies on the living individual.

Students in this class will:

- Identify the structures of theory across various disciplines and their relation to applied and procedural topics,
- Engage in scholarly analysis of course texts and their position in interdisciplinary discourses,
- Improve interpretation, critical analysis and synthesis, and argumentation skills with regard to theory, and
- Cultivate a theoretical toolkit for future graduate coursework and research.

**Format and COVID-19:**

This course will take place in UCF’s newly formalized “v-mode,” initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. V-mode courses are synchronous virtual courses, meaning that we will meet weekly at our scheduled time, but by digital conferencing rather than face-to-face. Specific course guidelines would include:

- Our weekly Zoom meeting will take place at the scheduled class time. Recordings of class session will be made available as soon as possible following the class session. Participation in the live meeting is required; however, credit for missed sessions can be earned with no justification needed by simply viewing the session later.
- Given the intensity of the Zoom format, live course meetings may vary in length depending on weekly discussion topics. Follow-up discussion with colleagues and/or me by email or Slack is encouraged, regardless of length of the session.
- During Zoom calls, video participation is encouraged but not required. The requirement to participate in discussion can be satisfied through text chat or audio connection. If you need to step away during the course session, you should feel free to do so with no penalty.
- Students will need a reliable internet connection and Zoom-compatible device for course sessions. Please reach out to Dr. Beever if you foresee difficulties satisfying this need.
- In the event of a personal medical emergency, you may request additional flexibility and accommodation from me. I will do my best to be helpful.
- Remember that this format for our course is in place primarily to keep one another well and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please reach out to me if you need other resources to maintain your own safety and wellness.

**Office Hours:**

Office hours will be held on Zoom. I will guarantee to be available “live” during official office hours from 10:00am-12:00pm on Wednesdays and will work with you to find a mutually agreeable time to meet in other formats as needed. If I cannot make an office hour, I will make an announcement by email and will reschedule individual appointments as needed.

**Instructor Contact:**

Dr. Jonathan Beever

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**Required Texts & Materials:**

- Barthes, Roland (1978). *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. S.H. Barthes. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Baudrillard, Jean. (1995). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. University of Michigan Press.
- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. (2008). *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics*. MIT Press.
- Haraway, Donna. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. Taylor & Francis.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman*. University of Chicago Press.
- Other readings and multimedia content provided through our UCF webcourses site.

**Recommended Readings:**

- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. (2016). *Updating to Remain the Same*. The MIT Press.
- Wheeler, Wendy (2016). *Expecting the Earth: Life/Culture/Biosemiotics*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Floridi, Luciano. (2011). *The Philosophy of Information*. Oxford University Press.

**Assignments and Expectations:****1. Academic Activity Verification (0%)**

This mandatory activity is required by UCF to document your activity in this course at the beginning of the semester. You will complete a one-question quiz to satisfy this requirement.

**2. Participating Attendance (20%)**

This is a discussion-based course and benefits greatly from your thoughtful preparation and participation. Your participating attendance is required, and can be satisfied either by engaging with the class live (preferable) or viewing the recorded session later (acceptable).

On-camera participation is recommended but not required. We all will have moments of interruption and I expect us each to be understanding of one another. That said, your participation (by chat, voice, or video) is required.

Since class will be held by Zoom, **you must comment in the chat window during class** in order to be recorded as present.

3. Argument summaries (weekly) (20%)

Argument summaries should be focused on clear and concise analyses of the major arguments or claims, along with the central concepts and ideas that support them. Treat these summaries as extended annotations in the sense that they should serve as reminders for you later in the term of what each reading was about, connections among them, and questions, comments, or concerns you had as you read. Since these summaries are for your benefit, and some readings are going to be more interesting to you than others, I am not setting a word or page length for this assignment.

These summaries will be due each Tuesday night before class by 11:59pm, so that I will have time to read through them as I prepare for Wednesday's discussion.

While reading is a necessary condition for coming to class prepared, I understand that these are interesting times. Therefore, you must complete these summaries for at least 10 of the class sessions.

4. Critical Syntheses (15%)

Critical syntheses are intended to let ideas breathe. We'll move quickly through some dense reading and complex theoretical concepts and positions. Scholarly work is half understanding those ideas and half putting them in critical conversation.

For these assignments, which will be due periodically throughout the term, your goal is to identify and work within critical spaces – gaps (not the stores) or seals (neither the mammals nor the singer) – among authors leading up to each of these assignments. You'll write 500-1000 words as clearly and concisely as you can bringing two concepts or positions together and pushing the synthesis forward. You may choose to do this by applying theoretical concepts to a problem of interest to you. Ending with a critical question rather than a constructive question is ok.

You will use your syntheses to guide discussion in the related class session, which will take shape around your thinking rather than assigned readings.

5. Theoretical Bot-ulism (5%)

This assignment asks you to become bacterial to a theory's ecosystem, either producing the equivalent of a toxin attacking its integrity in critical fashion or harmlessly floating through its environment in an exploratory manner.

You will produce a Discord or Twitter bot using basic JavaScript skills which will put in dialogue two authors you have synthesized. You may choose to do this assignment for either of the two syntheses we will develop over the semester.

This work is of central importance to our work in theory for two reasons. First, it offers a strategy for developing a new lens on the relationships among theories and theorists we will attend to in class. Second, it proposes an exploration of the

connection between the theoretical and the procedural through coding technologies. Through your work on this bot, you will be introduced to the practices and procedures of JavaScript, a popular programming language central to the behavior of web pages.

Leading up to this project, I will do some conceptual framing of JavaScript as a theory, before asking you to use it to critique theory. Since this is exploratory and introductory work, your grade for this assignment will be earned through evidencing at least some JavaScript function through the both. You will also journal briefly about the experience of developing the bot and its impact (if any) on your thinking about theory.

In support of this work, there are many excellent learning resources online, including the W3Schools.com tutorial here, <https://www.w3schools.com/js/default.asp>, and the Javascript.info tutorial here, <https://javascript.info/>, that can serve as self-paced exercises to get familiar with some basics. Specific to the assignment, you can explore <https://www.freecodecamp.org/news/create-a-discord-bot-with-javascript-nodejs/> and <https://tracery.io>.

We will dedicate some amount of class time, contingent on need and interest, across the semester to this assignment. We will struggle together to either/both put the fun in functional, or/and the bot in botulism.

6. Paper proposal with annotated bibliography (10%)

Treat your proposal for your final paper as if it were a conference paper proposal. Your proposal should be between 3-5 short paragraphs, including a few references to central works on which you will draw, and emphasize your central claim or thesis.

This assignment will differ from an actual conference proposal in at least one important way: I am requiring annotations for your reference list. Annotations should do at least two things. They should foremost tell us why you included it as an entry - why is it important for your argument? Second, they should tell us something about the content - main thesis, approach, important premises, etc. I don't expect that should take you more than 2 short paragraphs or approximately 100-200 words total for each. The majority of references should be to peer-reviewed sources. Citation format should be appropriate to the field of your topic.

7. Peer review of paper proposals (5%)

As if paper proposals were conference proposals, you will each be asked to complete peer reviews of those proposals. These will provide constructive feedback for the author, and develop important peer-review skills.

We will make reviews available to one another so that the feedback can be used to revise and strengthen the author's approach to the final paper, and to see other's approach to reading and reviewing.

8. Final paper (20%) and lightning presentation (5%)

Your final project for this class will have two parts. First, your final paper will focus on applying a theoretical concept or position to a problem in a literature-informed way. This application should advance new insights on that problem.

The paper should be formatted following guidance from a theory-supporting journal venue in your area of research, including in terms of length, citation format, and audience. Identify this venue in a footnote on the first page.

Note that I am not requiring paper drafts as a formal assignment in this class. I encourage you to work with me, your peers, scholarly-minded friends, or an attentive pet to make sure your paper is as clear as possible.

During our final exam session, you will present your final paper as a lightning talk – a brief 3-5 minute overview with a compelling hook. We will then do a collective discussion about those projects.

### Course Grading:

| Letter Grade | Percent Score |  | Letter Grade | Percent Score |
|--------------|---------------|--|--------------|---------------|
| A            | 90-100        |  | C            | 68-75         |
| B+           | 87-89         |  | D+           | 66-68         |
| B            | 80-86         |  | D            | 60-65         |
| C+           | 76-79         |  | F            | <59           |

Grades will be reported in webcourses.

### Academic Integrity:

I trust it is unnecessary to say that plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course and/or the placement of a "Z" designator with your grade. Academic dishonesty will subject you to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule and <http://z.ucf.edu> for further information.

Beyond plagiarism, we will uphold professional conduct expectations ([T&T Handbook, p. 20](#)). And beyond upholding norms, we will strive proactively to foster a constructive ethical culture through our work in this class.

### Course Accessibility Statement:

It is my goal that this class be an accessible and welcoming experience for all students, including those with disabilities that may impact learning. If anyone believes the design of this course poses barriers to effectively participating and/or demonstrating learning, please meet with me (with or without a Student Accessibility Services (SAS) accommodation letter) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. Helpful information is found at SAS: Ferrell Commons 185; 407-823-2371; [sas@ucf.edu](mailto:sas@ucf.edu). You are welcome to talk to me at any point in the semester about concerns, but it is best if we talk at least one week prior to the need for any modification.

**Teach Act Statement:**

The materials for this course are only for the fair use of students enrolled in this course for purposes associated with this course and may not be retained or further disseminated. The instructor receives no royalty payments for any materials used in this course.

**Syllabus Subject to Change:**

I anticipate that I will follow the schedule outlined here, but I may make adjustments based on your interests and what decisions we make together in class. All changes will be clearly announced in person and online. Remaining in the course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes and responsibility for being aware of them.