**Introduction to Critical Theory Syllabus**

**Spring 2024**

**Dr. Roger K. Green**

**MSU Denver Honors Program**

Instructor: Dr. Roger K. Green

Contact: rogerkgreen@gmail.com (I get a lot of email so Include this Class in Subject Line)

Office Hours: By Appointment

Meeting place: Auraria Campus, KC 315

Tuesday-Thursday: 3:30pm-4:45pm

Prerequisite(s): Enrollment in the Honors Program or Permission from the Honors Director

**Course Description:**

This course gives a basic introduction to the discourse known as critical theory as it emerged in Germany during the 1920s and continues to evolve today. It covers the historical precedent and major thinkers contributing to the conditions of crisis in the fledgling liberal democracy of Weimar Germany and reactions from both left and rightwing camps to that crisis. It tracks the Frankfurt School’s temporary move to the United States and the legacies left by thinkers associated with the movement, including the shift toward postcolonial, “French,” and gender theory. We contextualize the historical knowledge with more recent discussions of democratic crisis and a perceived threat of “nihilism” and through discourse on neoliberalism. We will all along ask what thinking tools earlier critical theorists may give us in addressing current social crises.

**Course Materials:**

All course readings are easily available online at [www.ccctheory.org](http://www.ccctheory.org). From the homepage click on the Intro to Critical Theory link in the top menu.

Students need regular internet access. Most of the readings are also linked in the syllabus schedule below, but in a few cases, PDFs are only available on the website or findable through library database access.

In addition to being an introduction to philosophical literature and fundamental philosophical terms and concepts, this course is designed to provide both content and context to develop critical reading and thinking through the following areas:

● **Comprehension:** the ability to interpret primary source materials (which are often difficult) and to express complex ideas and arguments;

● **Analysis and evaluation:** the ability to discuss and distinguish different perspectives, approaches, and methods to philosophical questions;

● **Synthesis:** the ability to compare, contrast, and relate ideas across contexts, cultures, and history with awareness of the appropriate differences and similarities of those ideas;

● **Writing:** developing clarity and precision in expressing ideas, integrating appropriate evidence in support of those ideas (particularly from primary texts), exegesis of complex problems, and creativity of expression;

● **Communication:** articulating, discussing, criticizing, and defending ideas both in verbal discussion and in writing.

**Evaluation / Grading Procedures**

**Grading Scale**

94% - 100% = A

90%-93% = A-

87%-89% = B+

83% - 86% = B

80%-82%= B-

77%-79% = C+

70% - 79% = C

70%-72% = C-

67% - 69% = D+

60%-66% = D

59% and below = F

**Grade Breakdown and Assignments:**

Participation and Attendance 40%

Introductory Reflection: 5%

Midterm Essay: 20%

Oral Presentation of Final Reflection 15%

Final Essay: 20%

\* Please note that due dates for commonplace book assignments and formal reading responses are NOT listed below in the course schedule. They will vary and will show up in your to do list in Canvas. It’s your responsibility to be attentive in class to those instructions. Many basic terms and concepts will be covered there.

**Inclusive Excellence:**

Inclusive Excellence (IE) is the recognition that a community or institution's success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni constituents. This comprehensive approach requires a fundamental transformation by embedding and practicing the five dimensions of Inclusive Excellence in all that we do: Intrapersonal Awareness, Curriculum Transformation, Inclusive Pedagogy, Inclusive Learning. This adheres to the Association of American Colleges and Universities definitions as well.

**Dr. Green’s Commitment to Inclusive Excellence**

While my course lectures will at times point to the limitations of liberal politics of recognition, as a faculty member, I honor and value Inclusive Excellence in practice. As part of my commitment to inclusive excellence, I try to incorporate diversity as a framework of my courses by highlighting intellectual differences among authors, audiences, perspectives or theories. Because every reader and writer has an age, race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality and intellectual perspective, diversity can become a part of the fabric of every student’s development. These identities include, but are not limited to, ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, immigration status, intellectual differences, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Please note that I do not consider political party affiliations or ideologies to be identity categories in need of active attention for inclusive pedagogy.

**Attendance & Participation Grade**

Students lose 2% of their *final course grade* each time they miss class. I make no distinction between excused or non-excused absences. This excludes religious observances or jury duty. Please notify me in advance, in writing, of any possible class or assignment conflicts due to religious observances. When in class, please be fully present and as undistracted as possible. If you speak in class but clearly have not read or finished reading the text for the day, you will be asked not to speak and marked absent.

A maximum of eight absences can be made up by extra reading responses. In other words, the course demands you attend about 80% of class meetings, and the other 20% has some flexibility. Every absence that you don’t make up will count off your final grade. My teaching methods emphasize the classroom as a discursive environment, and that means that much of the learning comes from both listening and contributing to others. Missing class damages the community-space of the classroom. Philosophical study is inherently discursive. In my classes, we try to generate an ongoing discussion that attaches to larger discussions in academia. As a class, we use the classroom as a space to articulate our positions within those discussions both in writing and in talking. When you miss class, it cannot be simply answered with a question like “what did I miss?” Again: **Up to eight absences can be made up with extra formal reading responses on the material assigned for the days you were absent. Those must be turned in via Canvas before finals week.**

**Class Participation**

Talking about philosophical texts is a learned skill. It is what makes our field different from simply pontificating about deep questions of life, book club, or leisure-reading group. When students speak in class without having done the reading for the day or regularly arrive late, it is unprofessional and disrespects our shared learning space by preventing other students from contributing. Disrespecting that space will therefore affect students’ participation grade. For these reasons, I hold attendance, *informed* *participation*, and acknowledgement of appropriate audiences as fundamental to your course grade. This is reflected in the grade breakdown above. If you don’t regularly speak in class discussions, your participation grade will be a maximum of 30 out of 40 percentage points.

Every day in class students will provide a brief, one-minute synopsis of the reading’s main points followed by two discussion questions and any remarks on things they need clarification on. Attendance is not “just showing up” in body. While you lose part of your overall course grade for missing class, most of your participation points will be based on your discursive *contributions* to our environment.

**Disruptive Behavior Policy**

Cellphones are not permitted to be in use in my classrooms. They should be on silent and out of site. Use of laptops or tablets are permitted for specific in-class activities involving textual reference. They should not be opened or on your desk otherwise. Headphones should be removed from ears before entering the classroom.

**Disruptive In-Class Behavior:**

Because participation is part of your grade for this class, disrupting class time will not be accepted. Disruptive behavior can be carrying on side conversations during class lecture, diverting class discussion from the topic for the day, participating in class discussion when you have not done the reading for the day, or dominating class discussion and distracting the professor or learning environment. You will also lose participation points for being “checked out” and unresponsive during class-time or being “too cool” to participate in discussions. Racial or gender slurs directed at another student or the professor will not be tolerated, nor will comments meant to silence or intimidate others. Active or veiled threats of violence are unacceptable.

**Model In-Class Behavior**

Students should generally:

* respect themselves, others, the University, and surrounding community;
* honor differences and gain an appreciation for living in a diverse society;
* maintain high standards of their personal and academic integrity;
* understand the impact of their actions and choices upon themselves, others, the University, and surrounding communities; and
* seek opportunities to repair harm, restore trust, and acknowledge the impact of their actions and choices.

**Mature Discussions**

A good scholarly discussion is a collective activity that is a **learned skill** we practice daily in class. We talk differently in professional environments than with our friends and family. I expect all students to engage in a professional manner with the material for the day and to keep the discussion progressive and on track. Some days I will refuse to speak and only track student discourse to encourage students to articulate thoughtful responses to the literature. That method is called Critical Discourse Analysis. Class discussion is not the space for long-winded anecdotes about what it felt like to read the text. If you are comfortable talking in a group, please be aware that others are not necessarily like you and leave them space to enter the conversation. This is a balance we all need to be to collectively attend.

**Formal Essay and Reading Response Formatting**

All typed assignments should follow MLA format conventions. Repeated format errors will result in lower grades. Descriptions and examples can be found free at the Purdue Online Writing Lab or “OWL”: <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html>

Here is a link to a sample paper for how your spacing, font, and citations should look: <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_sample_paper.html>

**Everyday Responses**

Every day in class students will provide a brief, one-minute synopsis of the reading’s main points followed by two discussion questions and any remarks on things they need clarification on.

**Reading Response and Short Essay Writing Guidelines (used for making-up absences)**

There is some formal writing required for all students throughout the semester. You will get specific instructions for the essays. Students are also able to make up nine absences by writing a reading response to the readings for each class missed. All formal writing needs to be turned in through Canvas and in MLA format.

If you are making up a missed class, go to the attendance date in your Canvas Modules and submit your response there. Each response should be written for a *wider audience* than our class. It should paraphrase and summarize the content of the reading with brief citations, providing textual support in MLA format. It should directly identify the main idea or thesis of the reading as you understand it. It often helps to present a *theme* you noticed in the text and engage with critical readings we cover in class or that you research on your own. It should also record your reflections, opinions, and criticism of the readings through a professional synthesis of concepts presented in the reading while building on previous readings from our class.

By “criticism” I’m not looking for knee-jerk, consumer criticism about whether you liked or disliked the reading, found it challenging or boring or exciting, etc. We are not here to say what the author should have done to make it better or to read as consumers.

While it’s okay to write in first-person, you should not narrate your reading with self-referential phrases like “as I was reading, I was reminded of…” or “I was confused when…” or say how enlightening it was for you – how you’d “never thought of that before,” etc. Instead, your criticism should be professionally discursive (and civil). Disagreements are fine. Long, accusatory diatribes are not okay. By “professionally discursive,” I mean it should engage with the material we are reading in class and seek to further critical discussions we have been having in class. Responses should illustrate that you have read, engaged with, and tried to understand the text to the best of your abilities. A good way to do this is to employ specific analytical terms that come up in class in your reading.

At the end of each response, you should provide **two well-thought discussion questions for class discussions**. Go beyond yes/no or taste-based questions about what people liked or disliked. Go beyond overly general questions like, “what did you all think?” Reading response formatting should be used if you are making up an absence.

**Late Work**

Late work will not receive a higher grade than a “D” (65%) of the assignment. I usually set Canvas assignments to be due at midnight. As long as the work is in by 8am the next morning, I won’t consider it late. I don’t generally close Canvas assignments, so if you’re wondering if you can turn something in late, the answer is always yes up to finals week. Students requesting extensions on a formal essay should notify me no less than twenty-four hours before a paper is due. Students with specific accommodations letters will of course have individual cases.

**Midterm Essay**

Students will write a formal midterm essay. You will receive specific guidelines sheet in canvas. Like reading responses, it must be in MLA format.

**Oral Presentation Final**

Final examinations will be **timed**, oral and presented as online videos. Students will upload their presentation notes and outline to Canvas with their video. More details will appear closer to the final.

**Religious observances:** Please notify me in advance, in writing, of any possible class or assignment conflicts due to religious observances.

**Disability Access**

CU Denver’s disability access policy is the following: The University of Colorado Denver is committed to providing reasonable accommodation and access to programs and services to persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who want academic accommodations must register with Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in Academic Building 1, Suite #2116 (Phone: 303-315-3510; Fax: 303-315-3515). I will be happy to provide approved accommodations, once you provide me with a copy of DRS’s letter. DRS requires students to provide current and adequate documentation of their disabilities. Once a student has registered with DRS, DRS will review the documentation and assess the student’s request for academic accommodations in light of the documentation. DRS will then provide the student with a letter indicating which academic accommodations have been approved. However, I do not require CU Succeed students to go through the DRS office. I will accept either a 504 plan issued by D’Evelyn or I will make arrangements with you on your request at any time.

**Linguistic Diversity**

I fully endorse the National Council of Teachers of English from 1972:

*We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.*

In practice, this means students may use variants of English which they deem authentic to their own voices. This goes for writing on the page as well as talking in the classroom.  In class, we will discuss current issues such as “code meshing” and “code switching.”  I aim for an active approach to *Englishes*and linguistic diversity that can challenge some perceived conventions by requiring more focused and nuanced approaches to language.  *Part*of this requires an adult level of linguistic content and active approaches to what “civil” language means in varying rhetorical situations.  While I will occasionally use specific examples of “profanity” or markers that give us sociolinguistic information about gender, ethnicity, class, etc., I will not direct such language to students personally, and I expect everyone in class to do the same.

**Gender Designation**

I recognize that gender is fluid and shifting throughout our lives and that how we feel in our bodies may not always correspond to public conceptions of gender or the gender we assigned at birth, often out of a confusion among medical professionals between “sex” and “gender.” In the interest of inclusivity, if you have a preferred pronoun or other linguistic marker related to self-definition, please do let me know.  It’s of course okay for pronouns to change during our time together too, but please know communication helps and mistakes happen. Note that if you change your preferred pronouns, you need to let those around you know so they don’t unintentionally disrespect you. Part of why we have class as a community space is so we can practice healthier ways of communicating with one another than in past circumstances.

**Accommodations & Disabilities**

Students with disabilities must get a letter from the university documenting them. I am not a healthcare professional, and you do not need to submit doctors’ notes to me or disclose any disabilities. Please refer to CU Denver’s website for services to document disabilities. Documented disabilities are not retroactive for missed assignments. Professors are required by law to accommodate students with documented disabilities.

**Plagiarism / Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, is grounds for failing grades, failing courses, and disciplinary measures up to and including expulsion from the university. **This includes A.I. generated essays in part or in whole**. Turning in essays previously written for other courses that you wrote is still considered academically dishonest.

**Course schedule**

We will generally stay on this schedule, but I reserve the right to alter the reading schedule at any time. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to verify the reading and/or assignment for the next class so you can prepare accordingly.

\* Please note that due dates for commonplace book assignments and formal reading responses are NOT listed below in the course schedule. They will vary and will show up in your to do list in Canvas. It’s your responsibility to be attentive in class to those instructions.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: Introduction**

January 16: Course Introduction

**Homework:** Read Karl Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach and Herbert Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.pdf>

Read over Dr. Green’s terms and definitions

January 18: Introduction to Material Critique

**Homework:** Read the following background pages on Hegelian Dialectics:

1. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/>

2. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/#HegeDescHisDialMeth>

**Week 2: Germany and Europe During the Nineteenth Century: Counter-Enlightenment**

January 23: Hegelian Dialectic and Historical Consciousness / Early Liberal Progressivism

**Homework:** Read Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

January 25: Basic Marxian terminology

**Homework:** Read Schmitt’s *Political Theology* (pp. 5-66):

<https://ia802804.us.archive.org/14/items/carlschmittpoliticaltheology/Carl%20Schmitt%20-%20Political%20Theology_text.pdf>

**Week 3: Post-Positivism, Nihilism, and The Critique of Instrumental Reason and Liberalism from Right & Left**

January 30: Nietzsche’s critique of values, rightwing strong sovereignty as answer in post WWI Weimar Republic. Schmitt and the deciding sovereign.

**Homework:** Read Selections from V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*:

<https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf>

February 1: Russian Leninism and the Critique of Socialism

**Homework:** Read Max Horkheimer’s “Traditional and Critical Theory” (pp.188-243)

<https://criticaltheoryworkshop.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/horkheimer_traditional-and-critical-theory.pdf>

**Week 4: Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School: Where Did Marx Go Wrong?**

February 6: The Weimar Complex and the Exile of Critical Thought

**Homework:** Read Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” PDF on [www.ccctheory.org](http://www.ccctheory.org) under the Intro to Critical Theory page in the main menu.

February 8: Hitler’s claims to Exception

**Homework:** Read Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism’s Frankenstein: Authoritarian

Freedom in Twenty-First Century “Democracies.” PDF on [www.ccctheory.org](http://www.ccctheory.org) under the Intro to Critical Theory page in the main menu.

**Week 5:** **Fast-Forward to Neoliberalism and the Politics of Recognition**

February 13: What Is Neoliberalism and Why Does it Emerge in the 1930s?

**Homework:** Read Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellow Knives Dene), “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada. PDF on [www.ccctheory.org](http://www.ccctheory.org) under the Intro to Critical Theory page in the main menu.

February 15: Indigenous Critique of Liberal Politics of Recognition

**Homework:** Read Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf>

**Week 6: Back to the 1930s &1940s: Critical Theory’s Aesthetic Turn**

February 20: Working through Benjamin on Works

**Homework:** Read Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”: <https://monoskop.org/images/7/7e/Adorno_Theodor_Horkheimer_Max_1947_1989_The_Culture_Industry_Enlightenment_as_Mass_Deception.pdf>

February 22: Optimism and Its Dissolution: Critical Theory in the U.S.

**Homework:** Read Hannah Arendt, “The Meaning of Revolution” (pp. 21-58)

<https://monoskop.org/images/b/bf/Arendt_Hannah_On_Revolution_1990.pdf>

**Week 7: Post WWII Liberalism’s Embrace of Frankfurt Intellectuals / Freudian Inflection**

February 27: Discuss Arendt

**Homework:** Read / watch Dr. Green’s gloss on psychoanalysis and summary of Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Note that Jung’s thinking and Eliade’s merged with fascism.

February 29: Freudianism and the Explosion of Psychoanalysis in the 1950s U.S. (*Eros & Civilization* thesis). Midterm assigned.

**Homework:** Read Herbert Marcuse’s “Repressive Tolerance”

<https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html>

**Week 8: 1960s: “Death to the Death Drive”**

March 5: Understanding Repressive De-sublimation against 1960s misunderstandings.

**Homework:**

March 7: Midterm Discussion / Catch-Up

**Homework:** Read Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence”

<https://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class_web/ES-200A/Week%203/FanonWotEviolence.pdf>

**Week 9: Negritude and Postcolonialism**

March 12: Discuss Fanon

**Homework:** Read Part 1 of Albert Memmi’s *Colonizer and Colonized* (pp.45-120):

<https://cominsitu.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/albert-memmi-the-colonizer-and-the-colonized-1.pdf>

March 14: Discuss Memmi

**Homework:** Read Michel Foucault’s Lecture, “1 February 1978” from *Security, Territory*, *Population*: [http://tems.umn.edu/Foucault,%20Governmentality.pdf](http://tems.umn.edu/Foucault%2C%20Governmentality.pdf)

**Week 10: Foucault on Governmentality**

March 26: Discuss Foucault

**Homework:** Read Michel Foucault’s Lecture, “8 February 1978” from *Security, Territory*, *Population*: [http://tems.umn.edu/Foucault,%20Governmentality.pdf](http://tems.umn.edu/Foucault%2C%20Governmentality.pdf)

March 28: Discuss Foucault

**Homework:** Read Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”:

<https://pcnw.org/files/Butler-ImitationandGenderInsubordination.pdf>

**Week 11: Queer Theory**

April 2: Discuss Butler

**Homework:** Read Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, Preface and “Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men”:<https://transreads.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-06-08_5cfba24a7c20f_judith-halberstam-female-masculinity-2.pdf>

April 4: Discuss Halberstam

**Homework:** Read Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law” (pp. 1-66)

<https://fswg.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/derrida-force-of-law.pdf>

**Week 12: Derrida, “Force of Law”**

Day 1: Discuss Derrida

**Homework:** Continue with Derrida

Day 2: Discuss Derrida

**Homework:** Read Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception*: <https://altexploit.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/giorgio-agamben-kevin-attell-state-of-exception-university-of-chicago-press-2005.pdf>

**Week 13: Agamben’s *State of Exception***

Day 1: Discuss Agamben

Day 2: Discuss Agamben

**Homework:** Finish your presentations

**Week 14: Presentations**

Day 1: Presentations 1 & 2

Day 2: Presentations 3 & 4

**Week 15: Presentations**

Day 1: Presentations 5 & 6

Day 2: Presentations 7 & 8

**Week 16: Final Essays Due**