Course description

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

So begins Part One of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. This sentence also stands at the beginning of a tradition in philosophy, history, and politics that places everyday human labor and struggle at the heart of historical change. This course offers an introduction to this tradition, with an emphasis on its origins in the 19th century and its development in the 20th century, particularly in the work of writers associated with the Frankfurt School. As we will see, this critical tradition draws its strength from the ways in which it considers questions of power, economy, society, and culture as inextricable from each other rather than as separate disciplines. Because it holds that cultures and ideologies cannot be understood without considering how given societies and economies are organized, the tradition of critical theory is materialist; because it highlights the importance of struggle and contradiction, it is dialectical. Topics we will consider include capitalism, revolution, utopia, mass culture, dialectical reasoning, historical materialism, the state, fascism, antifascism, and the human relationship to nature. Readings will include works by Karl Marx, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon, Angela Davis, and others.

Your best resource for understanding these texts and succeeding in this class is the collective, dialogic inquiry that will occupy most of our class time. In other words: we will be talking about these texts together, asking each other questions about them, and testing out conflicting interpretations and ideas in order to refine our impressions and understandings. It is not just the texts that participate in a dialectical tradition — our class discussions will too.
Tentative semester plan*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed. 1/22</td>
<td>Introduction to course</td>
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<td>Wed. 1/29</td>
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<td>Wed. 2/5</td>
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<td>Mon. 2/10</td>
<td>Marx, <em>Capital vol. I</em> (MER 302–336); Marx’s <em>Capital</em> (1–13)</td>
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<td>Wed. 2/12</td>
<td>Marx, <em>Capital vol. I</em> (MER 336–388)</td>
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<td>Mon. 2/17</td>
<td>Marx, <em>Grundrisse</em> (MER 278–290) and <em>Capital vol. I</em> (MER 403–431)</td>
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<td>Wed. 2/19</td>
<td>Marx and others on “primitive accumulation” (MER 431–438; MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 2/24</td>
<td>Lukács, “The Phenomenon of Reification” (MC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed. 2/26</td>
<td>Introduction to the Frankfurt School</td>
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<td>Mon. 3/2</td>
<td><strong>Take-home midterm due in class</strong></td>
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<td>Wed. 3/4</td>
<td>Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics” (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 3/9</td>
<td>Adorno &amp; Horkheimer, “The Concept of Enlightenment” (DoE 1–34)</td>
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<td>Wed. 3/11</td>
<td>“Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment” (DoE 35–62) &amp; <em>Odyssey</em> (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 3/16</td>
<td>“The Culture Industry” (DoE 94–136)</td>
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<td>Wed. 3/18</td>
<td>Jürgen Habermas, “Myth and Enlightenment” (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 3/23</td>
<td>Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance” (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 3/30</td>
<td><em>One-Dimensional Man</em>, Ch. 4 (84–120)</td>
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<td>Wed. 4/1</td>
<td><em>ODM</em> (241–257), Marcuse &amp; Adorno, “Letters on the German Student Movement” (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 4/13</td>
<td>The Authoritarian Personality (MC)</td>
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<td>Wed. 4/15</td>
<td>Angela Davis, excerpt from <em>Are Prisons Obsolete?</em> (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 4/20</td>
<td>Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism” (MC)</td>
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<td>Wed. 4/22</td>
<td>Barbara Jean Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the USA” (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 4/27</td>
<td>Marxism and anti-colonialism (MC)</td>
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<td>Wed. 4/29</td>
<td>Marxism, feminism, and social reproduction theory (MC)</td>
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<td>Mon. 5/4</td>
<td>Marxism and ecology</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Take-home final exam due by email on Wednesday, May 13</strong></td>
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* This schedule may change as we go along. Always check MyCourses regularly for detailed, updated assignments.
Readings

Reading will be your primary activity for this course, at least in the sense that you will spend much more time on reading than on doing other things. Since four-credit courses at Binghamton expect students to do at least nine and a half hours of work outside the classroom in order to succeed in the course,† this means that you should probably expect to spend about six to eight hours on the readings every week, give or take. A typical reading load for one class session is about 30–40 pages. Skimming the required reading just before class won’t cut it.

Furthermore, these texts are hard. Sometimes really hard. So one of the most important things you’ll be learning this semester does not involve assimilating facts or information, but figuring out how to deal with conceptual and linguistic difficulty. A major part of this process is changing your reading and note-taking strategies. You will probably find that you need to read these texts more than once. You’ll need to develop the habit of active note-taking: what seem to be the key concepts of a given text? what is its basic argument? what questions do you have? Formulating a specific question will often take you more than halfway towards understanding a difficult point or concept. Get a physical notebook and use it as your reading notebook – this is the place where you can write down the basic argument of a text, words you need to look up, quotations you want to remember, questions you want to ask the group or me.

Required and recommended texts

These texts are available in the campus store. You may find them more cheaply on powells.com.

- **Also required: a reading notebook just for this course.**

myCourses

Other readings available for download on myCourses will be indicated as “MC”. **You must print out hard copies of all reading assignments distributed electronically and bring them with you to class.**

- For more information on the credit hour policy, see: [https://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/faculty-staff-handbook/handbook-vii.html#A8](https://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/faculty-staff-handbook/handbook-vii.html#A8)


**Major assignments**

**Presentations** (30% of your final grade)
You will be giving two presentations this semester. The first one is a short, individual presentation where you facilitate discussion of one of the readings. The second one is a longer group presentation in which you and a partner will summarize and outline a reading, propose connections to other readings and ideas we’ve discussed, discuss a passage of your choice in more detail, and pose a couple precise, well-formulated discussion questions to the whole group.

**Exams** (40% of your final grade)
A midterm and a final exam each constitute 20% of your final grade. They will both be take-home exams consisting of several short essay questions.

**Blog posts** (15% of your final grade)
Our course blog is a space where you can react to readings, formulate your first impressions of a text, pose questions for others to consider, and respond to the ideas and questions of other students. The conversations that take place on the blog will help lay the groundwork for our class discussions. You must write eight posts over the course of the semester, and each post must be at least 300 words long. You may complete these whenever you wish, keeping these guidelines in mind:

- the focus of your posts must be the reading assigned for the next class;
- four of your posts must initiate a topic (due 10pm the night before class);
- four of your posts must respond to someone else’s entry (due by noon on the day we discuss the text);
- your first blog entry must be posted by our third class (Wednesday, 1/29) and your last blog entry is due by the last class (Monday, 5/4);
- you must read all blog posts before every class, even when you haven’t written one.

Further details about the blog and how to access it can be found on myCourses, under “Course information.”

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**Public speaking**
Being able to speak on a complex topic in front of a group of your peers and being able to lead a discussion that aims to understand a difficult problem are two of the most valuable skills you can learn in college, no matter what you do later in life.

**Data management**
Almost all of your written work, including everything described on this page, will be created digitally. Sometimes, technology fails. It is your responsibility to protect your work so that it isn’t lost even if a device is.

Make sure that everything you write for this class (and all other classes) is backed up in more than one place. I recommend:

- Saving files to your computer’s hard drive
- Using an external backup like a USB drive
- Saving a copy of your work to a cloud service such as Google Drive, iCloud, Sync, or DropBox. As a BU student, you have a free Google Drive account with unlimited storage. Ask me if you don’t know how to access it.

**Software for writing and presenting**
All students at Binghamton have free access to Microsoft Office, including Word and PowerPoint. [https://www.binghamton.edu/its/about/organization/technology-support-services/hardware-software/office-365.html](https://www.binghamton.edu/its/about/organization/technology-support-services/hardware-software/office-365.html)

Another good option is Google Docs (for writing) and Google Slides (for presentations): [drive.google.com](http://drive.google.com)
Course goals, assumptions, and expectations

Goals

By the time you complete this course, I would like you to:

• be familiar with some major texts, concepts, and questions in the work of Marx and of the Frankfurt School;
• be familiar with the basic historical contexts of this tradition;
• see an improvement in your ability to parse and analyze difficult texts – this doesn't mean understanding every detail of a text, but becoming aware of what you do understand, and being able to articulate what you don't understand and why;
• see an improvement in your ability to work through difficulties, problems, and questions in dialogic inquiry with others – this involves learning how to formulate questions, refine first impressions, and supporting claims and questions with textual evidence;
• be more confident and skillful speaking about complex topics in front of a group of people – this includes thinking about the verbal and non-verbal aspects of how you communicate, reflecting on the clearest and most precise way to summarize a difficult text or idea, formulating insightful questions that will generate discussion, and responding to questions and feedback from your audience;
• notice yourself wondering about the complex interrelationships among economy, power, society, and culture even when it isn't part of an assignment.

Assumptions

As a reader, writer, and teacher, I believe that

• learning is active, collective, and dialogic – we do not merely assimilate information, but rather we develop and refine our ideas, impressions, questions, and beliefs in conversation with others;
• critical reading and critical writing are inextricable; the better you read, the better you will write, and vice-versa;
• difficult texts are often interesting because they are difficult – because they are dense, require our active engagement, and can generate conflicting interpretations;
• the ability to participate in shared inquiry, speak in front of others, lead a discussion, articulate and grapple with questions that don’t have simple answers, and bring a critical eye to questions of everyday life – these are invaluable skills and broadly transferrable to other areas of life and work outside of college.

Office hours

Here are some things you can use office hours for:

• Asking questions big or small, even about the meaning of individual words
• Testing out ideas or interpretations
• Learning more about the expectations or structures of the course
• Making me aware of difficulties or problems you may be having

If you can’t make it to office hours on Monday or Wednesday mornings, remember that you can make an appointment for another time—just email me!

Dialog

It isn’t an accident that “dialectic” and “dialog” are etymologically related.
Expectations

To succeed in this course, you must

• attend class regularly and punctually. Attendance and participation count for 15% of your final grade. You are granted two absences for whatever reason. Use them wisely. Beyond these two, each additional absence will lower your final grade. Missing more than seven classes will result in an automatic F for the semester.

• not plagiarize. All work you produce for this course, from notes to essays, must be your own. Plagiarized work gets an automatic F. Binghamton University’s academic honesty policy can be found at the following link. I expect that you are familiar with it, and trust that if you have questions, you’ll ask: https://goo.gl/kerJSu

• read the assigned texts actively, thoroughly, and critically. In my experience, this generally means that you will read or view them more than once and take active notes by rephrasing the argument, identifying parts you find interesting or don’t understand, and writing down your questions. Your interactions with the texts are also a dialogue – treat them as such;

• complete all 8 blog posts – each one you miss will cost your final grade approximately 2%;

• read all blog posts before each class, even if you didn’t post for that class – these blog posts are an integral part of our class discussions;

• complete your presentations and your exams thoroughly, thoughtfully, and punctually;

• be responsible for finding out and making up what you miss if you are absent;

• engage thoughtfully and generously with other students in class discussion, informal written responses on the blogs, and other settings;

• ask any questions you have – I probably won’t know that you haven’t understood something unless you tell me;

• challenge yourself, your assumptions, your habits of mind, and your ideas – we learn and grow by leaving our comfort zones and familiar haunts.

Grading scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>64-70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;64%</td>
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If you’d like to know your current grade at any time, come see me in office hours.

What’s a good grade?

These points are what you must do succeed. I consider a ‘B’ to be a successful grade. By definition, an ‘A’ is reserved for work that excels by exceeding these basic requirements. If you wish to receive an ‘A’, you must meet these baselines and surpass them on your own initiative: participating actively in class discussions, coming up with your own questions of (and interests in) the texts, and producing excellent work that not only shows that you have learned the material, but that you have something to contribute to the conversation as well.
Other details

Email and technology

• With the exception of presentations, we will not be using any electronic devices in class. If you use a phone, tablet, or computer during class aside from these exceptions, you will be counted half-absent for the session.
• I will use email and MyCourses to communicate with you about this course. I do this with the expectation that you check MyCourses and your email on a regular basis, and respond when a response is called for.
• The best way for you to contact me, besides coming to see me in office hours, is to email me. I usually respond to emails within 24 hours, but cannot guarantee that this will always be the case. There will be times when I do not have the time or resources to respond to an email immediately, and some questions require more time to answer than others. Please plan accordingly. If you email me in the evening, for example, I probably won't respond that night. But if more than a day goes by and you haven't heard back from me, please feel free to (politely) remind me of your question. Please take advantage of my office hours, which is generally a much more useful and efficient way of discussing questions than email is.

Disability-related Equal Access Accommodations

Students wishing to request academic accommodations to insure their equitable access and participation in this course should notify me by the second week of class. Authorizations from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are generally required. We encourage you to contact SSD at (607) 777-2686 to schedule an appointment with the Director or Learning Disabilities Specialist. Their website (www.binghamton.edu/ssd) includes information regarding their Disability Documentation Guidelines. The office is located in UU 119.

One more thing

Please send me an email me with the phrase, “Micky Mouse has grown up a cow” to show that you’ve read this syllabus.

Email etiquette

Our correspondence with each other should be clear, professional, and considerate. Emails are not like text messages—you should use standard capitalization, punctuation and address (“Hello Dr. Gelderloos,” “Hello Prof. Gelderloos,” or just “Hello professor”). Give your email a subject line that is more informative than “Question,” since a clear and specific email subject will help me respond to you in a timely and useful manner.

Never write something like, “Get back to me ASAP, thx!” – this makes a bad impression.

Before you hit “Send,” ask yourself these questions:
• Is what I am asking clear?
• Are there any mistakes or typos in my email?
• Is the tone of my email professional and polite?
• Have I tried to answer this question on my own, either by asking a classmate or by looking at MyCourses or the syllabus?
Getting help when you need it
Everyone struggles sometimes. If you're having a rough time during the semester because of this class or for other reasons, please feel free to come see me—if it has to do with something that I can't help you with, I'll do my best to connect you with resources on campus that can help. You might also find these links useful:
- The University Counseling Center's self-help screening tool, which includes useful links to campus offices and resources: [https://www.binghamton.edu/counseling/self-help/index.html](https://www.binghamton.edu/counseling/self-help/index.html)
- How to make an appointment at the University Counseling Center: [https://www.binghamton.edu/counseling/appointments/index.html](https://www.binghamton.edu/counseling/appointments/index.html)

Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns
Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, including non-binary pronouns, for example: they/them/their, ze/zir/zirs, etc. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns so you may be asked to indicate the pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation (you are not obligated to do so). If you use a chosen name, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not however, tolerate repeated comments which disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name. Chosen name and personal pronouns may evolve over time, so if at any point during the semester you would like to be addressed differently, please let me know.

Intellectual property
Reproduction or distribution of any course material is prohibited without the author’s consent. This includes this syllabus, any worksheets or presentations made available over the course of the semester, exam prompts, and the course lectures. You may not record class lectures or discussions without explicit permission, nor may you upload any course materials to the web without explicit permission.
Discussion guidelines‡

Because much of our thinking in this class will be done together, in group discussion, and because we’ll be addressing difficult questions – questions that are conceptually difficult, and questions that are often politically, historically, ethically, and emotionally contentious, please come to every class with these guidelines in mind.

• Speak up! You have something to say: an idea, an interpretation, a connection between ideas or parts of a text, some background knowledge, a question, a reformulation – even if you feel lost, voicing your own uncertainty is an important form of participation.
• Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
• Be intellectually generous: assume the best interpretation of other people’s comments and don’t set up straw-man arguments.
• Never assume you agree with the person or people you’re speaking to; be respectful and generous in your engagements, but don’t confuse your solidarity with others for agreement with them.
• Respect everyone’s right to hold beliefs, opinions, and ethical commitments that differ from your own.
• Listen carefully to what others are saying, even (and especially) when you disagree.
• Earnestly try to characterize arguments you disagree with fairly.
• Critique ideas, not people.
• Be willing to examine your own assumptions, modify your first impressions, and revise your ideas.
• We all have the right to our opinions, but these opinions must be informed opinions. Defend your conclusions, reactions, and opinions with evidence.

Other ideas?

What additional discussion guidelines would you suggest?

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• _______________________________________________________________________
• _______________________________________________________________________
• _______________________________________________________________________
• _______________________________________________________________________

‡ Some of these are borrowed from the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching; others are from “How Not to Coerce Argumentative Assent,” by Grace Lavery.