Faculty of Social Sciences

SIMP58, The Structure of Social Theory, 7.5 credits

Samhällsvetenskaplig teori: Uppbyggnad och struktur, 7,5 högskolepoäng

Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by Graduate School Board on 2024-06-03 and was last revised on 2025-09-23. The revised syllabus comes into effect 2025-09-23 and is valid from the spring semester 2026.

General information

The course is offered as an interdisciplinary single subject course in Social Sciences at the second-cycle level and as a mandatory course within the second semester of the Master of Science Programme in Social Scientific Data Analysis.

Language of instruction: English

Main field of study	*Specialisation*
Human Geography	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Development Studies	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Political Science	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Sociology of Law	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Gender Studies	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Social Work	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Social Anthropology	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Sociology	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, the student shall be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

- demonstrate knowledge of how concepts can be operationalised and applied to classify and understand social theories;
- demonstrate knowledge of how levels of analysis can be used to classify and understand social theories;
- demonstrate knowledge of differences between the aims and functions of theories.

Competence and skills

- demonstrate the ability to identify ontologies and epistemologies of social theories;
- demonstrate the ability to communicate the strengths and weaknesses of social theories for given aims;
- demonstrate the ability to summarize and critique the theoretical structure of a social scientific work;

Judgement and approach

- identify and reflect upon the normative implications of social theories.

Course content

The student will learn to understand and review the structures of social theories. In contrast to courses that teach theory only from the perspective of given scholars, themes, and content, this course aims to demystify theory-driven research by making the practical knowledge of meta-theory explicit. The student will thereby acquire the practical tools to understand and evaluate theories, which will enable them ultimately to better use, build, critique, and adapt theory.

The course highlights a.) concepts and their relationships as the building blocks of theory and teaches the student how to identify these as well as b.) the levels of analysis (e.g. micro, meso, or macro) and c.) functions and their corresponding levels of abstraction of theories (e.g. 'middle-range' 'critical,' or 'grand' theories). The course will introduce these 'building blocks' of theory structure and illustrate how these blocks work in the context of an example topic area of social theorizing. The student will then learn to directly apply these in the understanding and critiquing of a specified body of theoretical content. The course will culminate with the student simultaneously using all of these 'building blocks' within their critical review of different theoretical approaches on the selected topic.

Course design

The teaching consists of lectures, workshops, and seminars.

Unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, compulsory participation is required in workshops and seminars. Students who have been unable to participate due to circumstances such as accidents or sudden illness will be offered the opportunity to compensate for or re- take compulsory components. This also applies to students who have been absent because of duties as an elected student representative.

Assessment

The assessment of the course consists of an individual written assignment.

The course includes opportunities for assessment at a first examination, a re-sit close to the first examination and a second re-sit for courses that have ended during that school year. Two further re-examinations on the same course content are offered within a year of the end of the course. After this, further reexamination opportunities are offered but in accordance with the current course syllabus.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: U=Fail, E=Sufficient, D=Satisfactory, C=Good, B=Very Good, A=Excellent
The grade for a non-passing result is Fail. The student's performance is assessed with reference to the learning outcomes of the course. For the grade of E the student must show acceptable results. For the grade of D the student must show satisfactory results. For the grade of C the student must show good results. For the grade of B the student must show very good results. For the grade of A the student must show excellent results. For the grade of Fail the student must have shown unacceptable results.

The course grade is based on the result of the written assignment. To pass the course, the student must have received at least the grade of E on the assessed component using the grading scale E-A, Fail, and participated in all compulsory components.

At the start of the course, students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied on the course.

Entry requirements

To be eligible for the course students must have a Bachelor's degree with a major (i.e. at least 90 ECTS credits) in Development Studies, Gender Studies, Human Geography, Political Science, Social Anthropology, Social Work, Sociology or Sociology of Law, or the equivalent.

Oral and written proficiency in English equivalent to English 6/B (advanced) from Swedish upper secondary school is a requirement. International qualifications will be assessed in accordance with national guidelines.

Further information

The course cannot be included in a degree together with *SIMP56: Using Social Theory, 15 credits.*