

ML 6501 (Fall 2026)

Theory and Foundations Seminar 3 credits.

Instructor Information

Instructor
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Office Hours
Wednesdays, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm

General Information

Description

This advanced course in theory and methodology is designed to provide master's-level students of French, German, Japanese, and Spanish with a comprehensive understanding of the key theoretical frameworks and research methodologies relevant to language, intercultural, and textual/media studies. The course will explore foundational concepts in critical theory and equip students with the tools needed to analyze cultural production and conduct research in their respective language disciplines. The readings cover a range of influential concepts in contemporary theory and methodologies, from semiotics to structuralism to post-structuralism, to environmental humanities, translation studies, media studies, and gender, queer, and feminist studies. The Theory and Foundations seminar will be centered around in-depth discussion.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

Master's Level

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- ✓ Gain an understanding of the contemporary contexts of critical theory
- ✓ Improve their oral fluency in expressing opinions, interpreting works, and discussing current events, texts, and films
- ✓ Understand the role of theory in the intersections of cultural studies, literary criticism, current events, and political movements
- ✓ Have read excerpts of seminal texts in theory needed for graduate students in French, German, Japanese, and Spanish
- ✓ Research historical, social, political and cultural contexts around philosophical concepts/moments
- ✓ Improve their formal writing skills with focus on syntax, argumentative writing, and critical analysis
- ✓ Be able to apply theoretical methodology when interpreting and discussing a variety of texts

Course Requirements & Grading

Assignment	Date	Percentage of Final Grade
Attendance and participation		30%
In-class presentations (3)		20%
Student postings		30% (2% per posting)
Final assignment		20%

Description of Graded Components

Class participation: Students should come to class having read the assigned readings, and are expected to engage actively in class discussions. This is a course that will rely heavily on class discussion and participation is the largest grade component for the course, so students should keep that in mind when they attend class. If you have an unexcused absence, your participation for that day will be recorded as zero. However, while class attendance and participation for each day of class will be tracked, students will also be evaluated based on in-class attentiveness and engagement with the material *over the semester as a whole*.

Please also check “Attendance and Participation” policy in the syllabus.

Students are permitted one unexcused absence without penalty.

Presentations: Students will sign up to present on three of the readings over the course of the semester. This presentation does not need to be formal with a powerpoint, but it does require the student to give an overview of the assigned reading, offer some interpretations of some of the passages, provide counterarguments to the author, and lead classmates in discussion.

Student Postings: On Mondays, students should submit a **minimum 500 word** response on the assigned readings. These can be a reflection on key aspects of the work that left a deep impression, or a questioning of any part of the reading that left the student confused. The posting can also include an attempt to illustrate what the theory describes with a concrete example.

You are not required to adhere to strict citation styles for weekly postings, but **you should cite the readings (page number, author) or any other relevant source when quoting them in your posting**, unless the posting prompt specifies otherwise. Postings should have a clear argument or central thesis statement, supported by what you have gleaned from the readings or other relevant materials. Your writing should demonstrate your understanding of the week’s course materials, and clearly state your viewpoint on the arguments made in the readings; the postings should not be simple summarizations or descriptions of any of the course materials. **Postings that do not cite any readings/sources to support their argument, or do so in a perfunctory fashion that does not effectively engage with the readings, will be deducted points.**

These weekly postings will be referenced in class for discussions. The instructor may call on students to elaborate on an argument they made or clarify their thoughts in their posting.

Final Assignment: Application of one or more of the assigned theoretical texts to student’s own academic interest. This can take the form of a chapter/section that can be incorporated into the student’s MS thesis, or an independent paper that conducts a case study utilizing a key theoretical framework.

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Course Materials

Course Website and Other Classroom Management Tools

Announcements, course readings and other materials will be made available online through Canvas, or the Georgia Tech Library. If a library link is provided, it is because the material cannot be downloaded, and is only accessible through in-browser viewing or online borrowing through a library-affiliated platform. Students should take care to confirm they are reading the correct assigned materials.

Course Expectations & Guidelines

Requirements for Written Work

Student postings should cite their sources. They do not need *formal* citations but they **must include at minimum the author name and page number/timestamp** if you are citing/quoting from a publication or media work. If citing from a source outside of assigned class readings or media, students should include a link or a formal citation. Failure to cite even just with (author name, page number) will result in deducted points.

Students are always welcome to request feedback on their writing.

The main requirements for the written assignments are:

- **Specificity and concreteness**
 - Students should cite specific scenes/shots from the visual media works, or passages from the readings, to demonstrate their points. Writing that does not substantively illustrate *through specific examples* will be deducted points. Writing that is primarily composed of vague, broad, generalizing statements will be penalized.
 - "Soft power is important in a globalized world" may be fine as an opening sentence, but I expect student writing to go beyond simply stating "soft power is important." The post or essay should have one or two clear and specific central points it is making.
- **Understanding of context**
 - The citations should also be used correctly *in context*, and not just simply for a convenient quote; your writing should demonstrate that you understood the cited section within its own context, and the cited passage or scene should make sense for your argument. This means that simply quoting a passage or describing a scene is not enough. There should be also a persuasive explanation of how that cited section relates to, or demonstrates, your argument.
- **Reflection**
 - The most important part of your writing is that your *own* thoughts come through.
 - Do not summarize entire plots when discussing a media work. Mention the narrative only as needed.
 - Citing examples and quoting passages is for the goal of reaching your own conclusions about a question. Citing for the sake of fulfilling a requirement, without actual thought, is pointless.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Course Policy on Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- AI-generated written work is prohibited in this course
 - AI tools include but are not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, etc. Written assignments should be based on the student's own absorption and understanding of the assigned materials and researched information, and therefore communicate the student's thoughts and responses with appropriate citation of sources. Writing that fails to cite its sources is plagiarism.
- Written assignments will be graded on substantiveness, not grammar/spelling
 - While some students may want to use spell-check or grammar-check tools, mistakes in spelling or grammar will not result in any deductions. Poor writing - that is, lack of sound reasoning,

illogical and un-fluid structure, vacuous and cliched language, and absence of substantive reflection - will be penalized.

- When researching information, students are expected to draw from trustworthy academic, institutional, or journalistic sources for their writing
 - Unreliable sources such as blogs, social media posts, or e-commerce websites are not considered valid sources for factual information, though they can be cited as examples of a phenomenon or trend. The student is also wholly responsible for any false citations, AI-hallucinated facts, or incorrect information in the assignment, and the assignment will be graded accordingly for shoddy research.
 - When using journalistic news site sources, students should do their best to use actual news reports for finding factual information, not opinion pieces, listicles, etc. Students should use their discretion and try to avoid works of journalism that make broad, generalizing claims without the rigorous research to support them.
 - If using online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia, follow the citations in the wiki article to confirm the veracity of the information. If you cannot verify it yourself, you should not use the information.
- Students are required to disclose the instances of AI usage in the brainstorming or research process.
 - The disclosure should clearly highlight how AI was utilized for the assignment, along with an explanation of why the use of AI was absolutely necessary. The explanation does not count toward the final word count of the assignment.

Policy on Lecture and Course Materials

Students may not audio/video-record any lecture or class, unless they submit written permission from the Office of Disability Services (see below). Students are also not permitted to distribute any of the materials made available on Canvas or any other Georgia Tech platform.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404)894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to participate in class activities. If students engage in activities that indicate their **inattention or non-participation** in the classroom activities (e.g. falling asleep, text-messaging, doing homework, reading irrelevant materials, etc), this will be reflected in their participation score. Students may use their electronic devices in class inasmuch as they use the devices to reference the readings and engage with the course material. Failure to comply with this will result in lowering their participation and performance grades. Students **are allowed to miss a class** without penalty once.

At the same time, the GT rules and regulations (<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>) will be honored, which allow the absences due to the participations in institute activities, attendance in funerals, participation in particular religious observation, jury duties, etc.

Students who miss class due to illness or emergency should notify the instructor when they can and then should file an [IAA form](#) with the Registrar's Office. The instructor will be notified by e-mail if the absence is approved.

Collaboration & Group Work

Students should complete all homework assignments and projects by themselves unless otherwise specified in the syllabus/by the instructor.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Late assignments will be downgraded a letter grade for every day they are late. If you have major conflicts or extenuating circumstances, **please contact the instructor at least 24 hours in advance** to request an extension. Again, students who have an illness or an emergency should notify the instructor when they can and then should file an [IAA form](#) with the Registrar's Office. Lateness due to illness/emergency will not be penalized.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectation that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Electronic devices will be allowed to reference readings and take notes during discussion if students prefer not to print. Laptops must be closed during presentations and video screenings.

Campus Resources for Students

Georgia Tech offers many resources for students in need including counseling services, personalized research assistance, tutoring, and academic support. Please check out http://ctl.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/campus_resources_students.pdf for more details, and feel free to ask me if you need any assistance in finding these resources.

Course Schedule (subject to minor tweaks as semester unfolds)

Date	Topic	Reading, Notes, due dates, and more
8/25	Week 1: Introductions Read syllabus, Q&A	No reading
8/27	Week 1: What is Theory?	Submit: No postings. Instead, find 1 article on the idea of critical theory, literary theory, or "theory and foundations"; the article(s) should come from an academic journal or a literary magazine. Come to Thursday's class prepared to introduce and briefly discuss. Read: Judith Butler "What is Critique?" An Essay on Foucault's Virtue (linked through Canvas)
9/1	Week 2: Semiotics and Structuralism	Submit: Posting #1 (due 8/31, Monday night) Submit: Students should sign up for three (3) presentations over the course of the semester, each presentation on an assigned reading. Presentations will begin in Week 3. Read: Ferdinand de Saussure, <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> , p. 65 - 78

Date	Topic	Reading, Notes, due dates, and more
		Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances"
9/3		Read: Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," <i>Partisan Review</i> , 1967 Vol. 34 (1): 82 - 88 (view through Georgia Tech Library online access)
9/8	Week 3: Post-Structuralism	Submit: Posting #2 (due Monday night) Read: Robert Young, "Post-Structuralism: An Introduction," in ed. Robert Young, <i>Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader</i> , Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. 1 - 28. Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," <i>Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader</i> . 31 - 47 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i> , 3 - 25
9/10		Read: Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," <i>Image-Music-Text</i> , 1977. Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" in ed. Steven B. Smith, <i>Modernity and Its Discontents</i> , Yale University Press, 2016. pp. 299-314
9/15	Week 4: Language, Identity, Other	Submit: Posting #3 (due Monday night) Read: Edouard Glissant, <i>The Poetics of Relation</i> , xi - 37
9/17		Read: Jacques Derrida, "Différance" Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," <i>Oxford Literary Review</i> , 1982, Vol. 5, No. 1/2
9/22	Week 5: Representation	Submit: Posting #4 (due Monday night) Read: Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," <i>Archives of Infamy</i> , 2019. 141 - 173.
9/24		Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
9/29	Week 6: Afrofuturism and Futurity	Submit: Posting #5 (due Monday night) Read: Felwine Sarr, <i>Afrotopia</i> , Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. Introduction - p. 61
10/1		Read: Felwine Sarr, <i>Afrotopia</i> p. 62 - 90
10/6	Week 7: Fall Break	No class
10/8	Week 7: Post/Colonial	Submit: Posting #6 (due Wednesday night) Read: Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> ," <i>The Massachusetts Review</i> , Vol. 57 (1), Spring 2016. (Lecture originally delivered Feb 18, 1975)
10/13	Week 8: Empire	Submit: Posting #7 (due Monday night) Read: Frantz Fanon, <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> , London: Pluto Press, 1986. 9 - 40

Date	Topic	Reading, Notes, due dates, and more
		Homi Bhabha, <i>The Location of Culture</i> , London: Routledge, 1994. 1 - 27, 94 - 144
10/15		Read: Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> , New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 1- 31 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Orienting Orientalism, or How to Map Cyberspace," in eds. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, <i>Asian America.Net</i> , 2003.
10/20	Week 9: Nations and Nationalism	Submit: Posting #8 (due Monday night) Read: Benedict Anderson, <i>Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism</i> , p. 1- 8, 37 - 47
10/22		Read: Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema"
10/27	Week 10: Modernity and Media	Submit: Posting #9 (due Monday night) Read: Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
10/29		Read: Theodore W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>
11/3	Week 11: Feminist Theory	Submit: Posting #10 (due Monday night) Read: Judith Butler, <i>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</i> , Routledge, 1990. Chapter 1.
11/5		Read: Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," <i>Feminist Studies</i> , Spring 1980, Vol. 6 (1)
11/10	Week 12: Media Methods	Submit: Posting #11 (due Monday night) Read: Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity." <i>Differences</i> vol. 18, no. 1, April 2007: pp. 128-52
11/12		Thomas Elsaesser, "New Film History as Media Archaeology" Erkki Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archaeology of the Screen," <i>ICONICS: International Studies of the Modern Image</i> (Tokyo), Vol. 7 (2004), 31-82.
11/17	Week 13: Reception	Submit: Posting #12 (due Monday night) Read: Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," <i>New Literary History</i> , Winter 1972, Vol. 3 (2). 279 - 299.
11/19		Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
11/24	Week 14: Gaze	Submit: Posting #13 (due Monday night) Read: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," <i>Screen</i> , Vol. 16 (3), Autumn 1975.

Date	Topic	Reading, Notes, due dates, and more
11/26	Week 14: Thanksgiving Break	No class
12/1	Week 15: Narrative and Consumption	Submit: Posting #14 (due Monday night) Read: Henry Jenkins, <i>Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture</i> . New York: Routledge, 2013. 223-249
12/3		Otsuka Eiji, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative" Azuma Hiroki, <i>Otaku: Japan's Database Animals</i> , 25 - 74
12/8	Week 16: Environmental Humanities	Submit: Posting #15 (due Monday night) Read: Travis Holloway, <i>How to Live at the End of the World: Theory, Art, and Politics for the Anthropocene</i> Donna Haraway, <i>A Cyborg Manifesto</i> Achille Mbembe <i>Brutalism</i>
12/15	Final Assignment due	
12/21	Final Grade Submission deadline	Grades will be available to see in the registrar on 12/22.