

# Critical Social Thought

The major and minor in critical social thought are administered by the Critical Social Thought Committee: Professors Ahmed (English), Alderman (English), Cocks (politics, *director of advising*), Cotter (chemistry), Grayson (religion), Martin (English), Ple-shakov (Russian and Eurasian studies), Remmler (German studies; *chair*), Wilson (economics).

Affiliated faculty: Blaetz (film studies), Cobb (mathematics), Datla (history), Douglas (psychology), Gabriel (economics), Gill (politics), Gudmundson (Latin American studies), Horstein (psychology), Lawrence (educational studies), Moseley (economics), Renda (gender studies), Savoy (geology, environmental studies), Smith (politics), Tucker (sociology), Wartenberg (philosophy)

## Contact Persons

Patricia Ware, *senior administrative assistant*  
Karen Remmler, *chair*  
Joan Cocks, *director of advising*

## Critical Social Thought Web Site

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/criticalsocialthought>

Critical social thought is designed for students with a passion for ideas, a desire to ask probing questions about social realities, and an independent approach to education. This interdisciplinary program explores the place of thought in history and society, and the ways in which ideas both generate and are generated by concrete practice. Critical social thought embraces the historical forces that have shaped contemporary experience; the creative expressions that have emerged to represent that experience; and the conceptual and political tensions between truth and uncertainty, individuality and community, power and freedom, cruelty and justice in the modern age. Treating common sense and conventional beliefs as points of departure rather than predetermined points of arrival, critical social thought pivots on questioning the taken-for-granted from all angles.

While acquainting students with a variety of intellectual traditions, this program also requires each of its majors and minors to combine different thinkers and currents of thought to engage with a theme or question of her original design. A few examples of past themes students have chosen to pursue are: the Western canon and its critics, the causes of peace and conflict, postcolonial studies, architecture and the social organization of space, social inequality, ethical values and social change, disenchantment, fractured identities in cross-cultural context.

## Declaring the Major

Each student who majors in critical social thought (CST) shall meet with the program chair and the director of advising, preferably during the first semester of her sophomore year, to discuss her intellectual interests and to select two advisors from the critical social thought faculty who will help her sculpt her curriculum around a central question of her choice. To declare her major in the program, the student must submit to the chair a title describing her question, a list of the courses she proposes to take for credit in her major, and the signatures of her two CST advisors. Later, she must compose a two-to-three-page proposal that identifies the focus of her program, explains its genesis and significance, and lists the courses she has taken and intends to take to satisfy the requirements of the major. A final draft of this proposal with the signatures of her two advisors shall be submitted to the program chair by the end of the first semester of the student's junior year, or by the end of the second semester of her sophomore year if she plans to be away in the fall of her junior year.

## Requirements for the Major

### Credits

- A minimum of 40 credits in the program, including three core courses

- 20 of the 40 credits shall be at the 300 level and divided between two or more departments or programs.
- No more than a total of 8 credits of independent study (295, 395) may be counted toward the major in addition to 8 credits of 395 senior thesis work.

### Courses

- *Required core courses (students may take all of these core courses but must take at least):*
  - 248, Science, Revolution, and Modernity *or*
  - 249, Enlightenment and Modernity *or*
  - 250, Classics in Nineteenth-Century Critical Social Thought *and*
  - 251, Twentieth-Century Theory and Its Discontents *or*
  - 252, Literature and Politics *or*
  - 253, Critical Race Theory *or*
  - 254, Postcolonial Theory *or*
  - 255, Human Agency and Historical Transformation: Pivotal Moments in the Development of Capitalism *and*
  - 350, Seminar in Critical Social Thought (writing and speaking intensive; to be taken in junior or senior year)
- Majors are also required to take at least one course within four of the program's six fields, which are briefly described below. Courses to fulfill this requirement may be selected in consultation with a major's advisors from either traditional disciplines or other interdisciplinary programs, as well as from CST courses.

*Critical social thought is an interdisciplinary major. Students who pursue an interdisciplinary major automatically fulfill the College's "outside the major" requirement (see page 8).*

### Declaring the Minor

Each student who wishes to minor in critical social thought shall meet with the program chair, preferably by the end of the second semester of her sophomore year, to discuss her minor interest and to select an advisor from the program faculty. In consultation with her advisor, the student shall shape her minor

program around a question of her own design. By the end of her junior year, she shall submit to the program chair a two-page proposal that explains the substantive focus of her minor and lists the courses that count toward it.

### Requirements for the Minor

#### Credits

- At least 16 credits, including three courses at the 200 level or higher and at least one course at the 300 level

#### Courses

- At least one core course at the 200 level (see above)
- The four courses must cross at least two departments.

### For New Students

First-year students who are considering critical social thought as a major are encouraged to select courses, in addition to CST 100, with a critical or philosophical slant at the 100 and 200 level in the traditional disciplines and in other interdisciplinary programs (including, but not limited to, area studies programs, environmental studies, gender studies, and film studies). A small sample of courses appropriate for first-year students with an interest in CST are the following: Economics 210, Marxian Economic Theory; Educational Studies 109, Whiteness: The Other Side of Racism; Gender Studies 101, Introduction to Gender Studies; Politics 117, Globalization and Its Discontents; Politics 212, Modern Political Thought; Religion 226, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. First-year students strongly interested in CST as a major may also apply to the instructors of 200-level courses in CST (CST 248 through CST 255).

First-year students interested in critical social thought are urged, moreover, to arrange a meeting with the program chair, Karen Remmler ([kremmler@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:kremmler@mtholyoke.edu)) and/or the director of advising, Joan Cocks ([jcocks@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:jcocks@mtholyoke.edu)) at their earliest convenience.

CST 100s, Experiments in Critical Social Thought, is designed especially for entering students curious about the program.

## The Introductory and Intermediate Courses

Experiments in Critical Social Thought is a 100-level first-year seminar recommended for students who are curious about the program. Majors may take all of the intermediate core courses but must take two: 248, 249 or 250, and one of the following: 251, 252, 253, 254, or 255.

## The Capstone Course

The Seminar in Critical Social Thought is a one-semester, 300-level, speaking and writing course in which students will prepare and present a final analytical/research paper on some aspect of their CST theme. Required for all critical social thought majors.

## The Fields and Illustrative Courses

CST majors are required to take at least one course in at least four of the following six fields. Ordinarily, a major decides with her advisors what course would satisfy a given field. If, however, a student wishes either a fuller description or examples of courses that would satisfy each of the fields, she should consult the CST Web site at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/criticalsocialthought/courses.html>, where she will find illustrative courses for each, as well as a more thorough description of the field itself.

*Social and Political Theory:* On key tendencies and genres of critical inquiry, and competing conceptions of freedom, power, justice, and the good life

*Order and Transformation:* On the interplay between continuity and change, stability and disorder, tradition and experimentation in thought and practice

*Cultural Expression and Social Reality:* On the interpenetration of cultural representations, modes of perception, technological innovations, and practical reality

*Class and Political Economy:* On different social organizations of material production and their implications for relations among individuals, social groups, regions, and peoples

*Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality:* On racial power relations, colonial and postcolonial identities, ethnic and communal solidarities and hostilities, and varieties of nationalism

*Gender and Sexuality:* On identities and relations grounded in the masculine/feminine distinction; and their transformation by ordinary and unconventional selves, marginal subcultures, social movements, and state policy

## Course Offerings

**100s Experiments in Critical Social Thought** (First-year seminar) This course will examine the relationship among the lives of thinkers who broke with their own worlds, the new visions of reality they created, and the historical context that provoked and in turn was provoked by their ideas. Readings will include short theoretical and fictional works, memoirs and biographies, historical narratives, and secondary critical commentaries. *Meets Social Sciences III-A requirement*  
*C. Pleshakov*  
*Prereq. Fy; 4 credits*

**133f Gods and Monsters: Science and Scientists in the Modern World** (First-year seminar; Same as College Courses 133)  
*Does not meet a distribution requirement*  
*D. Cotter*  
*Prereq. fy or permission of instructor; 4 credits*

**248s Science, Revolution, and Modernity** Introduces critical analysis of science and technology by tracing the historiography of the Scientific Revolution. The significance of this extended intellectual episode has been assessed in radically different ways throughout the intervening centuries. As such, it provides a fertile ground on which to pose and answer important questions about science and its role in society. What does it mean to regard science as “revolutionary”? How are scientific developments shaped by, and how do they shape, the social, economic, and political worlds in which they are embedded? How is our contemporary understanding of

science and technology influenced by the stories we tell about the past?

*Meets Humanities I-B requirement*

*D. Cotter*

*Prereq. sophomore or permission of instructor; 4 credits*

### 250f Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Critical Social Thought

(Same as German Studies 231) An introduction to some of the great critical voices of the nineteenth century. We will explore the ideas of such mutinous thinkers as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Kafka focusing on the style as well as the substance of their works and the circumstances that provoked them to write and/or that their writings helped provoke. The course will highlight the tension between appearance and reality, the dialectic of domination and subordination, and the place of reason and irrationality in social life.

*Meets Humanities I-A requirement*

*K. Remmler*

*Students with previous study of German may opt for German 232. Students with no previous study of German are encouraged to take German 101 or 103 to complement this course; 4 credits*

### 252fs Literature and Politics

*Fall 2009*

#### 252f(01) Politics as Performance

(Speaking-intensive course) This seminar explores the interdependence between theater and politics. Special attention paid to techniques of performance on political stages throughout history. Students read plays by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Calderon, and Brecht in order to analyze their rhetorical and dramaturgical structures. In the second half of the course, students develop and learn how to use performative skills in order to engage in multiple forms of dialogue around contemporary political controversies.

*Meets Humanities I-A requirement*

*H. Teschke*

*Prereq. soph, jr, sr. CST 248, 249, or 250 recommended but NOT required, or permission of instructor; 4 credits*

*Spring 2010*

#### 252s(01) Second Living: Imagined Worlds of Literature and Internet

We will study the tradition of imagined worlds in Western culture, with its mystique of utopia, social engineering, escapism, and selectiveness. Readings will include Thomas More, George Orwell, J.R.R. Tolkien, and J.K. Rowling; Jorge Luis Borges' works will be our methodological guide to the worlds of the Internet that, for the purposes of this course, may include Second Life and Postsecret.

*Meets Social Sciences III-A requirement*

*C. Pleshakov*

*Prereq. soph, jr, sr. CST 249 or 250 recommended but NOT required; 4 credits*

#### \*253f Critical Race Theory

(Same as African American and African Studies 208) This course examines the discursive relationship between race and law in contemporary U.S. society. Readings examine the ways in which racial bodies are constituted in the cultural and political economy of American society. The main objective is to explore the rules and social practices that govern the relationship of race to gender, nationality, sexuality, and class in U.S. courts and other cultural institutions. Thinkers covered include W.E.B. DuBois, Kimberle Crenshaw, Derrick Bell, and Richard Delgado, among others.

*Meets multicultural requirement; meets Social Sciences III-A requirement*

*L. Wilson*

*Prereq. soph, jr, sr. CST 248, 249, or 250 recommended but NOT required, or permission of instructor; 4 credits*

#### 254s Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonialism/Postructuralism

(Same as English 254) This course will bring together theorists from different traditions—postcolonial studies and European philosophy—who share a common project: (1) to identify the conceptual limits of modern or “Western” thought, and (2) to practice thinking beyond those limits. Their thought-experiments include imagining history beyond progress, politics beyond the state-system, and being beyond the self. We may read Césaire, Said, Galeano, Spivak, and Mbembe, and Foucault, Derrida, Badiou, Rancière, and

Agamben. We will try to pay as close attention to the texts in front of us as they do to their own subjects, in order to analyze the form of their thought and so to reflect critically on our own.

*Meets Humanities I-A requirement*

*S. Ahmed*

*Prereq. soph, jr, sr. CST 248, 249, or 250 recommended but NOT required, or permission of instructor; 4 credits*

### **255f Human Agency and Historical Transformation: Pivotal Moments in the Development of Capitalism**

Topics offered under this rubric will be designed to illuminate the interplay between continuity and change, stability and disorder, tradition and expiration in thought and practice, through investigation and analysis of moments or periods when historical actors made critical choices, witting or unwitting, that fundamentally shaped choices possible for later generations.

(Same as Economics 204, History 301) This seminar examines evidence and theories on the origins, development, and dynamics of capitalism and the modern state. We shall focus on the transition to (agrarian) capitalism in early modern England, the industrialization of production in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States, and the political and economic crisis of the 1930s depression. As we ask how fundamental changes in human communities come about, we shall consider the relative contributions of individual agency and social determination to the creation of a world so many now regard as either natural or inevitable.

*Does not meet a distribution requirement*

*J. Christiansen*

*Prereq. jr, sr, or permission of instructors; 4 credits*

### **295fs Independent Study**

*Does not meet a distribution requirement*

*Prereq. soph, permission of department; 1-4 credits*

### **350f Seminar in Critical Social Thought**

(Speaking- and writing-intensive course) A seminar for CST juniors and seniors in which both participating faculty and students present their independent research, respond critically to one another's work, and lead

discussions on relevant secondary readings. Every student will be expected to produce a substantial essay on a question in the broad field of social thought by the end of the semester. Students will be encouraged to cultivate agility in speaking, arguing, and writing.

*Meets Social Sciences III-A requirement*

*J. Cocks*

*Prereq. Critical Social Thought sr; other jr & sr with permission of instructor; seniors who intend to write a thesis must take 4 credits of Critical Social Thought 395 in the fall, in addition to this course; 4 credits*

### **395fs Independent Study**

*Does not meet a distribution requirement*

*The department*

*1-8 credits*