Critical Social Thought

The major and minor in critical social thought are administered by the Critical Social Thought Committee: Professor Cocks (politics, director of advising), Hornstein (psychology), Remmler (German studies); Associate Professor Alderman (English; on leave 2015-16), Cotter (chemistry), Crumbaugh (Spanish, Latina/o, and Latin American Studies), Day (on leave Spring 2016), Martin (English), Rundle (theatre arts, gender studies), Wilson (economics and Africana studies). Assistant Professor Hernandez (Spanish, Latina/o, and Latin American Studies; on leave 2015-16).

Affiliated faculty: Blaetz (film studies), Datla (history), Davis (art history), Douglas (psychology), Gabriel (economics), Gill (politics), Gudmundson (Latin American studies), Gundermann (Spanish, gender studies), Lawrence (educational studies), Markovits (politics), Moseley (economics), Renda (gender studies), Rogers (English), Savoy (environmental studies), Smith (politics), Tucker (sociology), Wartenberg (philosophy).

Overview

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, history and society, and the ways in which ideas both generate and are generated 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.

Contact Info

Patricia Ware, senior administrative assistant
Iyko Day, chair
Website: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/criticalsocialthought

Requirements for the Major

Declaring the Major

Each student who major 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 draft of this proposal must be submitted to the program chair for faculty discussion and approval four weeks before the end of the first semester of the student’s junior year, or four weeks before the end of the second semester of her sophomore year if she plans to be away in the fall of her junior year.

Normally, students will have the opportunity to write their proposals as part of one of the foundational courses, 248, 249, or 250/250CL. In their senior seminar at the 300-level, students will be expected to present their proposals as they hone the abstract of their final research paper.

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, Topics in Critical Social Thought, or
  - 250/250CL, Classics in Nineteenth-Century Critical Social Thought; and
  - 253, Critical Race Theory, or
  - 256, Rethinking (Under)Development in Latin America, or
  - 280, Literary and Cultural Theory, and
  - a 300-level seminar

- 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.

Requirements for the Minor

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.

A draft of this proposal must be submitted to the program chair for faculty discussion and approval weeks before the end of the first semester of the student’s junior year, or four weeks before the end of the second semester of her sophomore year if she plans to be away in the fall of her junior year.

Normally, students will have the opportunity to write their proposals as part of one of the foundational courses, 248, 249, or 250/250CL.
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 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, Marxist Economic Theory; Gender Studies 101, Introduction to Gender Studies; Religion 226, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. First-year students interested in CST as a major may also apply to the instructors of 200-level courses in CST (CST-223 through CST-256).

First-year students interested in critical social thought are urged, moreover, to arrange a meeting with the program chair, Iyko Day, and/or the director of advising, Joan Cocks, at their earliest convenience.

Students may also consider first-year seminars taught by faculty in the program such as: FYSEM-110AN Animals and Others, FYSEM-110CW Goodbye, Conventional Wisdom, FYSEM-110M1 U.S. Multiethnic Literatures: Refracting America, FYSEM-110RR Remembering as Reconciliation in the Wake of Violence.

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 website at http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/criticalsocialthought/courses, 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

CST-223 United Colors of Neoliberal America
Not Scheduled for This Year
What can Brown do for you? This question captures a central theme of this course: how a word like 'Brown' evolved from a 1970s signifier of antiracist coalition building into a motto of the United Parcel Service (UPS), selling speed, efficiency, and access to networks of the global economy. Using interdisciplinary methods, we will explore the way multicultural imagery, Civil Rights discourse, and state policy have converged in the service of global capitalism. Focusing on fiction (e.g. Octavia Butler, Karen Yamashita), film (e.g. Crash, Sleep Dealers) and secondary sources, we will examine the impact of neoliberal multiculturalism and how cultural producers amplify and challenge its logics.
Croslisted as: English 223
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives
Other Attribute(s): Speaking-Intensive
I. Day
Credits: 4

CST-248 Science, Revolution, and Modernity
Not Scheduled for This Year
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?
Croslisted as: History 248
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
D. Cotter
Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors
Notes: Gateway course for minor in Conceptual Foundations of Science
Credits: 4

CST-249 Topics in Critical Social Thought

CST-250 Topics in Critical Social Thought

CST-250CL Topics in Critical Social Thought: 'Classics in Nineteenth-Century Critical Social Thought'
Not Scheduled for This Year
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, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, focusing on the style as well as the substance of their theoretical works. The course will highlight their competing notions of the clash between appearance and reality, the logic and historical trajectory of domination and subordination, the basis and function of religion and morality, and the place of reason and irrationality in social life.
Croslisted as: Politics 239
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is limited to first years, sophomores and juniors
Credits: 4
Critical Social Thought

CST-252 Topics in Critical Social Thought

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.

Crosslisted as: Africana Studies 208
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives
L. Wilson
Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors
Advisory: Critical Social Thought 248, 249, or 250 recommended but not required
Credits: 4

CST-253 Introduction to Twentieth-Century Critical Race Theory

Fall
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.

Crosslisted as: Africana Studies 208
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives
L. Wilson
Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors
Advisory: Critical Social Thought 248, 249, or 250 recommended but not required
Credits: 4

CST-256 Rethinking (Under)Development in Latin America

Spring
When and how did the notion of 'development' emerge and spread? Why does nearly every country now aspire to it? What stigmas and hierarchies does the term 'under-development' imply? Throughout Latin America, such language proves problematic not only as a material reality but also as a framework for understanding place, time, and selfhood. In this course, students rethink conventional wisdom about 'underdevelopment' through the study of writers, filmmakers, and painters from Latin America working at different historical junctures of the twentieth century.

Crosslisted as: Latin American Studies 287/DE
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Crumbaugh
Credits: 4

CST-280 Literary and Cultural Theory

Fall
An introduction to literary and cultural theory with an emphasis on twentieth century and contemporary thought. We will focus on crucial questions that have focused, and continue to focus, critical debate. These questions may include representation, subjectivity, ideology, identity, difference, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nation. Throughout we will be particularly interested in the ways in which language and form mediate and construct social experience.

Crosslisted as: English 280
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
Other Attribute(s): Writing-Intensive
A. Rodgers
Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors
Credits: 4

CST-295 Independent Study

Fall and Spring
The department
Instructor permission required.
Credits: 1-4
Course can be repeated for credit.

CST-391 Pivotal Political Ideas

CST-391CF Pivotal Political Ideas: 'Citizen and the Foreigner'

Spring
On the antinomy of the citizen and the foreigner. We will examine both classic theories of citizenship and practical challenges to those theories posed by diasporic groups and other cultural strangers such as exiles, refugees, economic migrants, and stateless populations. We also will consider the pressures placed on traditional notions of citizenship by transnational social and environmental problems, as well as by the power of global economic forces over domestic political communities.

Crosslisted as: Politics 391CF
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is open to Juniors and Seniors.
Prereq: 8 credits in politics, international relations, critical social thought, or permission of instructor.
Credits: 4

CST-391CN Pivotal Political Ideas: 'The Idea of Conservatism'

Not Scheduled for This Year
This course explores such contested political concepts as democracy, power, nationalism, freedom, identity, alienation, civil society, and the public sphere - as those concepts have been interpreted by diverse currents of political thought. This fall we will examine the idea of conservatism, focusing on the intellectual legacy of Edmund Burke, Leo Strauss, and Ayn Rand, as well as the political writings of contemporary conservatives and the platforms of popular tendencies such as the Tea Party movement.

Crosslisted as: Politics 391CN
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is open to Juniors and Seniors.
Prereq: 8 credits in Critical Social Thought or Politics.
Credits: 4

CST-391CP Pivotal Political Ideas: 'The Concept of Power'

Not Scheduled for This Year
This course explores such contested political concepts as democracy, power, nationalism, freedom, identity, alienation, civil society, and the public sphere - as those concepts have been interpreted by diverse currents of political thought. We will focus on the concept of power, with special emphasis on the work of three maverick scholars - Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and James C. Scott -- who in different ways have shaken up both conventional and radical thinking on the subject.

Crosslisted as: Politics 391PW
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is open to Juniors and Seniors.
Prereq: 8 credits in Critical Social Thought or Politics.
Credits: 4

CST-391CT Pivotal Political Ideas: 'Capitalism'

Fall
After reviewing the classic defense of capitalism as an engine of freedom, progress, and productivity, we will examine major shifts in the critique of capitalism from the early 19th to the early 21st century. This critical conceptual history will range over successive claims that capitalism foments labor exploitation and class inequality, imperialism, instrumentalism, the commodification of culture, the privatization of the commons, and the remaking of subjectivites to suit market imperatives. The course will conclude with Pope Francis's charge that the global capitalist system endangers 'whatever is fragile, like the environment' and devours everything 'in the way of increased profits.' Is Francis right, and if so, what are possible cures for these ills?

Crosslisted as: Politics 391CT
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Prereq: One course in political theory or critical social thought.
Credits: 4
CST-391SV  Pivotal Political Ideas: 'Sovereignty'
Not Scheduled for This Year
An exploration of the idea of sovereignty, from its articulation as absolute monarchical authority in the 16th and 17th centuries to its metamorphosis as popular sovereignty in the 18th and 19th centuries to current debates over whether sovereign power is outmoded both domestically and in international relations. Drawing on historical as well as political theoretical texts, we will assess sovereign power and sovereign freedom as political ideals and consider whether we should lament or applaud the difficulty of actualizing them in political life.
Crosslisted as: Politics 391SV
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is open to Juniors and Seniors.
Prereq: 8 credits in Critical Social Thought, Politics, or International Relations.
Credits: 4

CST-392  Portraits of Political Thinkers

CST-392HA  Portraits of Political Thinkers: 'Hannah Arendt'
Not Scheduled for This Year
This topics course explores the life, affiliations, and ideas of a political theorist who has made a special contribution to the self-understanding of our age. In addition to the writings by that thinker, we also will read biographies and secondary commentaries as well as selected essays by authors who have influenced our thinker or who have been influenced by her or him. The thinker for this year is Hannah Arendt, who has written controversial but influential works on revolution, violence, and totalitarianism; the nation-state and statelessness; imperialism and racism; and anti-Semitism and Zionism.
Crosslisted as: Politics 392HA
Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences
J. Cocks
Restrictions: This course is open to Juniors and Seniors.
Prereq: 4 credits in political theory, philosophy, or critical social thought.
Credits: 4

CST-395  Independent Study
Fall and Spring
The department
Instructor permission required.
Credits: 1-8
Course can be repeated for credit.