



POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Programme Title: Social and Cultural Theory VLE

Awarding Body: Staffordshire University

Teaching Institution: Staffordshire University.

Final Awards: Postgraduate Certificate
Postgraduate Diploma
Masters Degree

Intermediate Awards:

Mode of Study

UCAS Codes: N/A

QAA Subject Benchmarks: N/A

Professional/Statutory Body:

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EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

The **main** educational aims of the Award are to:

- Provide an intellectual framework, which encourages critical examination of the contested and evolving meanings that surround socio-cultural theory.
- Provide rigorous academic education that is in accordance with the national qualifications framework, in an extension at Masters' level of the themes of relevant benchmarked standards in the area of study, and the University's corporate plan.
- Encourage the development of academic skills, including argument, analysis, critical exposition, precision, and methodological practice.
- Provide a combination of compulsory modules that equip students with advanced knowledge of key skills in the area of study and core theoretical skills.
- Prepare students for further academic work and for careers by the provision of more transferable skills: critical and methodological thinking skills, verbal and written communication skills, time and resource management skills, research methods skills, and personal and social (on-line etiquette) skills, including teamwork.
- Ensure the intellectual quality and currency of the curriculum through the promotion of research, and scholarly activity to fit in with the remit of the University Mission Statement.
- Consolidate links across all developing VLE Awards in the Faculty, whilst building up an interdisciplinary postgraduate on-line community.
- Develop students' confidence and professionalism in their relation to both their on-line colleagues and tutors and their work.
- Encourage the use of all forms of on-line stimuli for learning in visual/aural and written forms of teaching.

The **specific** aims of the award in **Social and Cultural Theory VLE** are:

- To provide a comprehensive overview of the nature of social and cultural theory, critical theory and within such, the role of some aspects of contemporary continental philosophy.
- To provide opportunity to acquire knowledge of the historical and cultural contexts against which to set an understanding of the development of the discipline.
- To provide a comprehensive overview of contemporary social theories.
- To provide a comprehensive analysis of questions of culture, identity and new philosophies.
- To enable students to develop advanced research skills and virtual learning skills to enable them to produce scholarly activity.
- To provide a complementary Award to our existing VLE portfolio and to encourage further development of on-line virtual learning environments.
- To provide an opportunity for further and complementary study and expertise through the availability of suitable options.

What is distinctive about this programme?

The **MA Social and Cultural Theory VLE** will provide a programme of modules designed to offer an advanced knowledge of Social and Cultural Theory and to encourage students to develop a sophisticated and critically-informed approach to the issues which inform these disciplines. The teaching team will provide a supportive and intellectually exciting on-line study environment which is responsive to the individual needs of distance learning students. In addition the award will encourage the development of a range of skills including argument, analysis, theoretical exposition, description, precision, good methodological skills and IT skills. This will enable the development of confidence and professionalism in relation to work, learning and interaction with other on-line students.

The MA Social and Cultural Theory VLE is a programme of study in contemporary social and cultural theories. Such theories are particularly pertinent to our ever changing, global and technologically driven world. The discipline allows us to consider wide ranging ideas from questions of power, ideology, class, identity, gender, sexuality, technology, time and space through a complex range of different sociological and cultural/critical ideas and philosophies from areas of contemporary continental philosophy. It is pertinent that the growing world of on-line communities like Facebook, Myspace and You Tube have revolutionised the ways in which we 'see' ourselves, the ways in which we 'create' our own identities, and the ways in which we communicate. We **are** the technologies we use, and the educational environment must embrace the proliferation of ways through which we experience our realities. An educational framework which utilises the very technologies which it also critiques is thus fascinating and exciting. This is what Social and Cultural Theory VLE facilitates. Many of the theories and ideas which are expounded in our live award are here taught through an on-line VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). This innovative method of learning is full of potential for our learning but also for our enjoyment. We will be considering such ideas in the course itself! We also aim to prepare students for either further academic work, or for other careers where the general skills acquired will be of invaluable benefit.

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

What will this programme teach me to do?

At the end of your studies you should be able to:

Postgraduate Certificate

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the main social and cultural theories. (knowledge & understanding; communication)
Demonstrate the independent learning abilities required to advance their knowledge and understanding of key theoretical texts and debates and to develop new skills of theoretical reasoning to the issues in exploring social and cultural theories. (learning; enquiry; reflection)
Engage in debate and critical analysis through some awareness and evaluation of the range of methodological and epistemological issues and debates, and scholarship in the field of study, and be able to undertake research to investigate specific social or cultural issues and questions. (analysis; application)

Postgraduate Diploma

Engage in critical enquiry through comprehensive understanding and critical evaluation of methodological issues applicable to social and cultural theories, and where appropriate, propose new insights (knowledge & understanding; problem solving; reflection)
Engage in problem solving through systematic and creative evaluation of complex issues and debates by identifying and employing appropriate problem solving methods of analysis and conceptual frameworks (learning; enquiry; problem solving)
Demonstrate proficiency in undertaking and communicating the technical-academic skills of research, preparation, planning, writing and presentation; the intellectual-academic skills of argument and debate, analysis and critical self-awareness; the social-academic skills of self-confidence, professionalism and communication (learning; enquiry; communication)
Demonstrate the capacity to integrate theoretical, textual, visual, aural, empirical and ethnographic considerations in their work (analysis)

Masters

Utilise a range of different critical theories to explore questions of social and cultural critique (knowledge & understanding; problem solving; reflection)
Demonstrate reflection and the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment by exercising initiative and personal responsibility, self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems and acting autonomously in planning and implementing dissertation research at level 7 (learning; enquiry; application)
Utilise a wide range of technologically orientated frameworks of visual, aural and written sources of VLE into their own learning mechanisms and presentational delivery of their work (learning; enquiry; application)
Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret social and cultural theory within the context of wider social and cultural processes (enquiry)
Recognise and select appropriate strategies to communicate the findings of research enquiry and to research potential sources of publication (enquiry; communication)
Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret social and cultural theory within the context of wider social and cultural processes (analysis; application)

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE, MODULES AND CREDITS

Award: MA SOCIAL AND CULTURAL THEORY (Distance Learning)

September Start

YEAR 1	Teaching Block 1	Core AM70001-7 Contemporary Social Theory (30)
	Teaching Block 2	Core AM70002-7 Culture and Identity (30)
YEAR 2	Teaching Block 1	Core AM70000-7 Researching Media, Culture and Society (30)
	Teaching Block 2	Options (30)
	Teaching Block 3	Core AM70006-7 Dissertation Project
YEAR 3	Teaching Block 1	
	Teaching Block 2	(60)

February Start

YEAR 1	Teaching Block 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Core AM70000-7 Researching Media, Culture and Society</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(30)</p>
	Teaching Block 1	<p style="text-align: center;">Core AM70001-7 Contemporary Social Theory</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(30)</p>
YEAR 2	Teaching Block 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Options</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(30)</p>
	Teaching Block 1	<p style="text-align: center;">Core AM70002-7 Culture and Identity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(30)</p>
YEAR 3	Teaching Block 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Core AM70006-7 Dissertation Project</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(60)</p>
	Teaching Block 1	
YEAR 4	Teaching Block 1	
	Teaching Block 2	

Option Modules					
Teaching Block 1		Cats	Teaching Block 2		Cats
			AM75173-7 or AM75170-7	Work Experience Project (VLE)	15
			AM75166-7	New Media and Society (VLE)	30
			AM23556-7	Consumer and Media Cultures in a Globalising World	15
			AM70003-7	The Body and Visual Cartographies	30
			AM25586-7	Concepts in International History	30
			AM25589-7	Civil Society: Origins, Development and International Context	30
			AM25622-7	Research Methods in Social Studies	30

Potential Awards:

Postgraduate Certificate (60 credits) - comprises AM70001-7, AM70000-7

Postgraduate Diploma (120 credits) – comprises PG Cert plus AM70002-7 and 30 credits of option modules

Master of Arts (180 credits) – comprises PG Dip plus AM70006-7

Progression:

In order to progress from one stage of an award to another (i.e. PgC to PgD, PgD to Masters), you must normally obtain a Pass in all modules. Otherwise, award specific regulations must permit compensation of a failed module or retrieval of failure at a subsequent stage of your programme of study.

HOW WILL I BE TAUGHT AND ASSESSED?

Teaching and Learning

The Postgraduate Programme of **Social and Cultural Theory VLE** is being developed and will be taught by a multi-disciplinary group of academics all of whom have long teaching experience and an active interest from different disciplines in, and engagement with, social and cultural theory. They are all engaged in current research activity and projects, most of them recently entered in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008. In devising the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the Postgraduate Programme in Social and Cultural Theory by Distance Learning the team is drawing from this expertise, developing new knowledge for application to the Award from their own research areas and is also cognisant of current national, University and Faculty-wide concerns with the following principles and issues:

- Widening student access and recruitment
- Inclusion and diversity
- Promotion of life-long learning
- Student focussed and student led learning
- Transmission of transferable skills
- Employability

The team has also been influenced by the challenges presented by the current emphasis on employability and the need for the majority of students to find paid employment on graduation. Our teaching, learning and assessment strategy has therefore been influenced by both the need to address the requirements of students at point of entry and to create an active overall learning environment which strengthens their position regarding employability in future job markets. We recognise, however, that students choosing postgraduate study are often pursuing specific interests rather than seeking employability skills *per se*. The programme therefore offers a curriculum suited for those seeking employment in the media, social, cultural and creative industries. Overall, we are concerned to provide an educational experience that is not only distinctive in terms of curriculum content and delivery but also facilitative in terms of employability.

The online modules are designed to enable the students to become familiar with both a style of delivery from module to module as they progress through and also to become familiar with a style of learning task.

For all students, teaching and learning self-instructional material is housed and delivered from within one of the University's virtual learning environments (currently Blackboard). The taught modules consist of weekly learning activities containing information, directed reading, viewing and listening [through hyperlinked web-based documents] and tasks (that may have formative or summative exercises associated with them.) Throughout the Award, learners are also encouraged to further develop their own independent learning capabilities. Interaction between students and tutors during each module is enabled through discussion forums and email interchange. Team teaching is also a part of this distinctive delivery style, giving the students the opportunity to experience a range of approaches and academic specialisms.

The Postgraduate Programme in Social and Cultural Theory VLE articulates also with the work-related learning agenda. One of the core modules (Researching Media, Culture and Society) offers specifically transferable skills beneficial to the world of

work, whilst the Work Experience Option gives students an opportunity to combine a module with some work related activities. Work-related experiences will also be discussed in online forums, and students and tutors will learn from each other. Work-related modules which are available as 15 or 30 credit options will be facilitated by on-line preparation and support from relevant tutors where appropriate. Procedures exist within the University for obtaining the informed consent of employers for work-related learning. Overall, the Postgraduate Programme in Social and Cultural Theory VLE is concerned to provide an educational experience that is not only distinctive in terms of curriculum content and delivery but also facilitative in terms of employability.

Distance learning is a generic term covering a range of different approaches to studying away from an institution. We have adopted an approach with the following characteristics:

Assessment

The team recognises the importance of enabling students to benefit from a range of different forms of assessment which are enhanced by on-line delivery. On the Postgraduate Programme in Social and Cultural Theory students will be exposed to some variation on the standard written coursework, including essays, portfolios, and projects based around visual and aural materials. The variety of forms of assessment will ensure that students will be exposed to forms of assessment to enable them to demonstrate a range of learning outcomes appropriate to the particular modules. This variety will be extended to include more diverse forms through use sound and image, as the Award team develops confidence and training in teaching and learning within a VLE. Students are advised to print off hard copies of material.

Assessment strategy

All of the assessment consists of coursework rather than examinations. The coursework takes a number of forms including essays, reports, virtual seminar 'presentations', annotated bibliographies and a range of shorter submitted tasks (such as short responses to questions, evaluations of documents, critical analyses and comparisons). Specific details about the format required for each assessment are provided in the Module Handbooks and the information that is associated with each Activity.

The overall result will be based on at least three forms of assessment: virtual presentations, written coursework and the Master's project. The presentation requires students to demonstrate the presentation, discussion, and analytical skills required in both the academic and external environments. The essay, which will constitute the main form of assessment for the award, is modelled on the published paper which is the main method of professional discussion in the humanities and social sciences. Consequently, presentations, essays and other written assignments should have a clear structure facilitating the presentation of an analysis or clear line of argument that focuses directly on the question under review. Essays and other written assignments should follow correct academic conventions of referencing and citation.

The titles of all forms of assessment are designed to reflect the learning objectives and planned skill enhancements of that module, as included in the module descriptor. Some modules will require two pieces of assessment, allowing feedback from the first to assist in preparation for the second (offering an element of formative

assessment). For the remaining modules, the assessment will be a single longer essay allowing a specialist undertaking within the objectives of the module. This focus on larger pieces of written work will meet the needs of students in full-time employment who work on their own in the evenings and on weekends. It will also reflect the emphasis on report writing in their working environments, and enable them to engage in sustained individual preparation and research for their assignments. Throughout the Postgraduate Programme, formative feedback will be regularly provided in tutorials, in one-to-one discussions, and in discussions relating to formal assessment feedback. This aspect of assessment is critical to those taking a VLE course. Within each module students are set tasks early on and will be provided with prompt feedback in order that they feel prepared for formal assessments. It will be strongly recommended that students participate in these tasks in order to receive this important advice.

The Dissertation will be the result of sustained research on the part of students and will be considered to be the defining element of the Master's level.

The assessment workload has been devised to ensure that the distribution of work across the award is appropriate, equitable and balanced. This balance comprises two elements:

- the workload is approximately equal regardless of the combination of modules taken
- learners experience a range of assessment types across the Award and these are delivered in such a way that the assessment load is as even as possible throughout the duration of the course.

As an assurance of quality, another member of the teaching team second marks a proportion of the assignments. Specimens of submitted work are also scrutinised by the external examiner for the Award. Feedback is normally provided within two weeks of submission.

With reliance on assessment of submitted assignments there may be a question of 'security' of assessment normally partly overcome by the use of unseen examinations. The University is currently implementing the use of a plagiarism search engine that requires all students attending Staffordshire to submit both hard copies of assignments and electronic versions on disk so that they can be checked. As submission of all assignments received from the distance learners will be electronically transmitted it will actually be easier to apply the plagiarism check. Students will of course be warned of the use of this checking method.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment does **not** count towards module grades, but it is an important part of undertaking a distance-learning course. Information in the weekly Activities direct learners to undertake many tasks that are not assessed – this is part of the 'active learning' approach that is fundamental to the way in which we have approached the design of the course. We advise learners to work through all of these tasks because only by doing this will they be able to achieve the knowledge and skills needed to fully gain from the experience of study at postgraduate level.

Some of the formative tasks can be immediately self-assessed by comparing answers or notes to those included as part of the Activity. For some of the formative tasks, learners are directed to submit work to the tutor or to share work with their

learner group. Learners are sometimes provided with individual feedback from tutors on formative assessments and sometimes with collective feedback commenting on the profile of work across the group. When work is shared with a learner group, individuals can compare their work with that of others, comment on each other's work and sometimes work collaboratively to produce joint documents that are then evaluated, thus enhancing peer group assessment.

Feedback on Assessment: from Tutors

The team regards this as a key aspect of student learning. The team will normally operate within a framework which comprises four elements:

1. Informal feedback on draft essays for year one core modules if requested by students
2. The return of written work to students within a maximum of 20 working days of submission
3. Provision of written commentary comprising:
 - annotated engagement with the student's text, and
 - summary of overall strengths and weaknesses
4. The opportunity to receive further feedback from tutors when work is collected.

The team in line with University strategy regards this as a key aspect of student learning. The team will normally operate within a framework which comprises three elements:-

- The on-line return of work to students within a normal maximum of 20 working days of submission
- Provision of written commentary comprising (a) annotated engagement with the student's text and b) summary of overall strengths and weaknesses.
- The opportunity to receive further informal feedback from tutors when work is returned.

As well as feedback from tutors on performance in individual modules the Faculty will also monitor students' overall progression and achievement in relation to assessment. This will occur at the Assessment and Award Boards in the second and third semesters. Finally, quality of assessment will be ensured by double-marking procedures and moderation by External Examiners.

Submitting Work

Standard Method

- *The standard method for submitting work is to use the BLACKBOARD assignment submission facility. Full details on how to use this are in the guide to blackboard that you will receive at the start of the course. It works pretty simply. You create files on your own computer, and 'drop' these into the submission area for the module tutor.*

Back Up Methods

If for any reason you are not able to access BLACKBOARD you should use one of the following back up methods:

- *Email your file as a an attachment to the module tutor* – you should warn the tutor that this method is to be used (by email or phone message) and then send an email clearly indicating that there is submitted work attached. The tutor will then reply to confirm receipt of the work.
- *Print out your work and post it to the module tutor* – you should warn the tutor that this method is to be used (by email or phone message) and then post it with sufficient time to meet the deadline and a method of confirming date of posting and guaranteeing delivery. **This is a rarely used last resort.**

Deadlines

Explicit deadlines for submission of formally assessed work will be included in the documentation that you receive for each module. It is important that you read these carefully and clarify any doubts you may have with the module leader.

Feedback on Assessment

As well as feedback from tutors on performance in individual modules, the Programme Area, via the Faculty, will also monitor students' overall progression and achievement in relation to assessment. This will occur at the quarterly Award Boards. Finally, quality of assessment will be ensured by double-marking procedures and moderation by External Examiners.

BLACKBOARD

In order to provide for the effective management of the web based learning resources on this course we are using the BLACKBOARD package. The BLACKBOARD virtual learning environment is one of the market leaders internationally and has been well tried and tested by students around the world. It has a wide range of facilities for student-student and student-tutor interaction and extensive back up support.

The way we have used BLACKBOARD is to use an active learning philosophy structured around the specification of activities or tasks for students to interact – rather than just passively providing information for them to read. As the Award develops there will be a growing use of visual and aural data for the learning experience.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Entry Requirements (including ILETS score)

What qualifications would I need to join this programme?

Admission is by one or more of the following:

1. An Honours degree of a United Kingdom institution of higher education or international equivalent.
2. A Post-graduate Diploma or Post-experience Diploma recognised as being equivalent to an Honours Degree.
3. Accredited prior experiential learning.

In addition we would also accept non-standard applicants who have considerable relevant experience and a record of academic achievement.

ACCREDITED PRIOR LEARNING

Students may be considered for APL/APEL on the basis of credit achieved in prior study; work based training, substantial employment or other experiential learning. This will be considered in accordance with the APL/APEL Handbook. Evaluation is delegated to the Faculty which is required to assess each application according to the specified procedure. For the Masters, postgraduate diploma or postgraduate certificate awards a maximum of 75% of the total credits for the award may be set against accredited prior learning/experience.

Application from Overseas Students

The normal language requirement is Cambridge English and International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) examinations passed at WLTS 6.5 or other equivalent. Language ability is assessed through e-mail correspondence/interview. Applicants may also attend summer language schools run by the English Language Centre.

Disability Statement

Staffordshire University operates a policy of inclusive teaching and learning to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. Details about how to apply to have your needs assessed can be found at:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study_here/disabled_students/index.jsp

AWARD SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The Award is given a clear disciplinary direction by providing a core across three main modules and a dissertation. The core modules will cover the main theoretical frameworks in the first core, **Contemporary Social Theory** by working through a systematic analysis of a range of twentieth century social and cultural theorists and movements. The module takes an additional direction through some continental philosophies and their impact upon our contemporary world. The second core module will consider the relationship between **Culture and Identity**, with discrete sessions working through definitions of identity, multiple identities, cyberidentities, masculine and feminine identities, race and identity, the relationship between visual image and identity, concerns of the 'self' and identity and also memory, time, place, space and identity. Once again, both cultural and critical theory will be significant to this module, as well as contemporary philosophies of space, time, subjectivity and self. The Award draws on the wide interdisciplinary experience of a team from Media, Film, Sociology, History, Cultural Studies, English and Philosophy. The specialisms of these areas will be taught by an expert team which is highly research active. All have published in their discipline and this will provide additional confidence for potential students. Most of the staff have been part of the recent RAE exercise for research. It is pertinent that an award which embraces new technologies for learning is equally contemporary in its level of research expertise amongst its staffing. The third core module is **Researching Media, Culture and Society**. This provides an overview of a range of research methods employed in the social and human sciences, qualitative, quantitative and modes of textual analysis. A familiarisation with classical case studies illustrates the use of these methods.

A range of options is then available from which students have to choose to the value of 30 credits and finally a dissertation project of 60 credits enables them to proceed to concentrate on a specific area of interest and specialism in depth. There are also options which allow for students to follow a work experience programme thus embracing more entrepreneurial skills and development and a preparation for the future world of work. The summative development of on-line skills will be of major benefit to such students.

The programme is designed to be attractive to home and international students from a variety of social science or arts and humanities backgrounds who may wish to take a career in these directions or who may simply want to pursue an interest in such issues and/or professionals who may be employed in a wide range social or cultural industries.

Further information about the award can be found in the relevant Student Handbook and on the University Website. This includes information about optional modules, student support, and academic regulations.

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