

- Faculté des sciences économiques
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Social Work Theories I (5TS2018)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Doctorat en travail social	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	3

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj=demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Automne

Equipe enseignante

Lisa Marie Borrelli, Professor ITTS, UniNE
Francesca Morra, PostDoctoral Researcher, HES-SO Valais-Wallis
Martina Ambruso, Doctoral Researcher, HES-SO Valais-Wallis

Contenu

This course introduces key approaches from the anthropology of the state and examines their relevance for social work theory, research, and practice. Drawing on classical and contemporary contributions by authors such as Max Weber, Philip Abrams, Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Timothy Mitchell, Veena Das and Deborah Poole, as well as Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, participants will critically explore how the state is produced and experienced through bureaucracy, authority, governmentality, coercion, civil society, and everyday institutional practices. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which social work is embedded in these relations of power and participates in mediating encounters between individuals and state institutions.

The first two sessions introduce and critically discuss foundational theoretical perspectives on the state and their implications for understanding social work. The third session focuses on participants' PhD projects, using the course literature to reflect on their own research questions, theoretical positioning, and empirical material. The final session, organised by Francesca Morra and Martina Ambruso within the "Social Work as Police Work" research project, brings these debates into dialogue with concrete empirical cases, examining the intersections between social work, state authority, control, and professional practice.

Forme de l'évaluation

The evaluation will take place within the course, via a threefold structure:

- 1) Questions and comments need to be sent BEFORE the class on the texts that are discussed in the respective session. For each reading there will be "discussants" attributed, who are supposed to bring in a reflected view on the texts.
- 2) Written reflection of the discussed texts after each class (1/2 page per date) and its potential role for the PhD topic.
- 3) Presentations and practical exercises during the class (third session in particular).

Exams and retake exams are organized by the ITTS. The relevant procedures will be explained in class or communicated separately where necessary.

Modalités de rattrapage

In case of a first failed attempt to pass the course the retake will include a presentation and a longer written assignment that builds on the presentation (5 pages).

Exams and retake exams are organized by the ITTS. The relevant procedures will be explained in class or communicated separately where necessary.

Documentation

Some preliminary mandatory readings (to be read and prepared before the class):

Abrams, Philip (1988). Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1(1): 58-89. (the chapter is also available in the Sharma/Gupta Reader)

Das, Veena, & Poole, Deborah (2004). *Anthropology in the margins of the state*. School of American Research Press; James Currey. (Selected chapters)

Foucault, M. (1978). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect, Studies in Governmentality*, with Two

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Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 87-104. (the chapter is also available in the Sharma/Gupta Reader)

Sharma, Aradhana, & Gupta, Akhil (Eds.) (2006). The Anthropology of the State: A Reader (1 edition). Wiley-Blackwell. (selected chapters)

Weber, Max (1921/1968). Chapter: Bureaucracy. In Economy and Society. (G. Roth, C. Wittich, Eds., G. Roth, & C. Wittich, Trans.) Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 956-1005. (the chapter is also available in the Sharma/Gupta Reader)

Potential readings:

Gramsci, Antonio (2012). Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (Repr.). Lawrence & Wishart. (selected chapter). (the chapter is also available in the Sharma/Gupta Reader)

Mitchell, Timothy (1999). Society, Economy, and the State Effect. In G. Steinmetz (Hrsg.), State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn. Cornell University Press, (pp. 76-97). (the chapter is also available in the Sharma/Gupta Reader)

Thelen, T., Vettters, Larissa, & Benda-Beckmann, Keebet, von (2017). Stategraphy. Toward a Relational Anthropology of the State. Berghahn. (selected chapters)

All other documentation will be available on Moodle.

Pré-requis

Registration as a PhD student at the ITTS, a Swiss university or as auditor in the perspective of being a future PhD student of the ITTS.

Registration at messagerie.itts@unine.ch until 20 September 2026.

Forme de l'enseignement

Teaching periods

- Thursday 22.10.2026; 09:15 – 17:15
- Friday 23.10.2026; 09:15 – 17:15
- Thursday 03.12.2026; 09:15 – 17:15
- Friday 04.12.2026; 09:15 – 17:15

Venue

Room B29, Av. du 1er-Mars 26, University of Neuchâtel

Objectifs d'apprentissage

Au terme de la formation l'étudiant-e doit être capable de :

- Analyse critically foundational texts in social work/sociological/anthropological theory;
- Explain the development of anthropological state theory an international and comparative perspective;
- Present the relation between this classic literature and social work theory;
- Present various schools of thought in the discussed field;
- Discuss the relevance of theoretical approaches and concepts to professional practice.

Compétences transférables

- Integrate the societal context in theory development;
- Discuss the relevance of a theoretical approach for a specific research question.
- Apply the concept of situated knowledge when dealing with theories;