This concentration provides students an opportunity to engage in the interdisciplinary study of critical theory, one of the most influential movements in inciting thought and society to critical self-reevaluations. Critical theory can be described as the application of philosophical thought to cultural and social phenomena with the aim of identifying formations of knowledge and the relations of power underlying them and making them possible. It is, therefore, defined not through the objects analyzed—which are found across the arts, humanities, social sciences, and even natural sciences—but through its distinctive methodology. Critical theory has contributed to the revision of traditional analytical approaches and to the formation of new fields of study that are central also to Macalester College, such as the analysis of ideology, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, gender studies, and race and ethnicity studies.

Faculty

Kiarina Kordela, professor of German and director of the critical theory concentration, focuses on philosophy, intellectual history, critical political economy, psychoanalysis, comparative literature, political theory, film theory, and biopolitics.

Morgan Adamson, assistant professor in the Media and Cultural Studies Department, focuses on film and media theory, documentary and avant-garde cinema, critical theory and cultural studies, film and video production, and critical political economy.

Karin Aguilar-San Juan, associate professor of American studies, focuses on urban sociology and Asian American studies.

Andrew Billing, associate professor of French and francophone studies, focuses on 18th-century French literature, Enlightenment political and moral philosophy, colonialism, and critical theory.

David Blaney, professor of political science, works on the social and political theory of international relations and global political economy, exploring identity, and time and space in international relations.

Justin Butler, visiting assistant professor of Hispanic and Latin American studies, focuses on contemporary poetry, critical theory, and continental philosophy.

Ernesto Capello, associate professor of history, focuses on Latin American cultural and social history, comparative urban history, and transnationalism.

Julia Chadaga, assistant professor of Russian studies, focuses on 19th- and 20th-century Russian literature and culture.

Erik Davis '96, associate professor of religious studies, focuses on Buddhism, Asian religions, the theory of religion, and Cambodian funeral rituals.

Olga González, associate professor of anthropology and Latin American studies, focuses on memory and secrecy, visuality and representation, vernacular/popular art, violence and subjectivity, and Latin America.

Zeynep Gürsel, assistant professor of international studies, focuses on global media, visual anthropology, ethnographic and documentary film, news and journalism, politics in everyday life, and cultures of work.

Corie Hammers, associate professor of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, works on race, sex, work and nation in the global economy; feminist/queer theories and methodologies; and LGBT studies.

Duchess Harris, professor of American studies, focuses on 20th-century African American political history and civil rights.

Joanna Inglot, Edith M. Kelso Professor of Art and Art History, focuses on modern and contemporary art, particularly in Europe and the United States.

Anastasia Kayiatos, visiting assistant professor of Russian studies, focuses on 20th-century Russian culture, queer theory, disability and affect studies.

John Kim, associate professor of media and cultural studies, is a theorist and practitioner of new media, with interactive installations at museums and galleries; and a programmer and designer at Internet startups.

Joy Laine, adjunct professor of philosophy, focuses on the philosophy of mind and language in the context of both Western and Indian philosophical traditions.

Andrew Latham, professor of political science, focuses on international security, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, medieval international relations, and medieval political thought.

David Martyn, professor of German, focuses on comparative literature, literary theory, culture from the 18th century to the present, philosophy, and literature written in German by “foreign”-language authors.

Mark Mazullo, professor of music, performing pianist and musicologist, focuses on cultural analysis of music, with specialties that range from Beethoven to Radiohead.

Diane Michelfelder, professor of philosophy, focuses on 20th-century European philosophy; the ethical and social implications of technology; and the integration of liberal arts and engineering education.

David Chioni Moore, associate professor of international studies and English, studies literatures and cultures of the Black Atlantic world, postcoloniality, the post-Soviet world, and globalization.

Malin Palani, visiting assistant professor of theater and dance, studies the encounter of performance with the more-than-human objects, animals, landscapes, and machines; and technology in performance.

Khaldoun Samman, professor of sociology, focuses on world historical-comparative and urban sociology, globalization, sociology of religion, and modes of identities in the Middle East.
Sonita Sarker, professor of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies and English, focuses on feminist and postcolonial theories, transnational comparative women’s writing, and sociopolitical activism.

Joëlle Vitiello, professor of French and francophone studies, focuses on 20th-century French, francophone, and Haitian literature, culture, and cinema; and postcolonial identities, violence, and genocide in the francophone world.

Concentration Requirements
A concentration in critical theory consists of 24 credits: five courses selected from core and elective courses (at least three must be core) and one course or project that involves a major research paper.

Core courses focus directly on the founders and architects of critical theory and offer a basic understanding of the genealogy, purpose, and philosophical, historical, and intellectual background of critical theory, providing students with the fundamental conceptual framework and terminology of the field.

Elective courses either use critical theory-oriented approaches, or focus on more peripheral representatives of the field, or address specialized subfields within critical theory. They offer students a chance to acquire more detailed mastery of specific topics in the field of critical theory and its applications in contemporary discourse.

Recent Topics Courses
Advanced Feminist/Queer Theories
Concepts of Freedom from Leibniz to Agamben
Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud
Dead White Men
Existentialist Metaphysics
Foundations of Political Theory
German–French Dialogues in Philosophy and Theory
Marxism and Religion: Religion as Ideology

Metaphysics in Secular Thought
Performance Theory Seminar
Postcolonial Theory
Theoretical Perspectives on the French Enlightenment
Value: the Bad, the Cheap, and the Ugly

Honors Projects
Rothin Datta ’16 (New Delhi, India), “Capitalism, Religion and the Ideological Construction of Hindu Nationalism”
Nick Huelster ’12 (St. Paul), “Testimony at the Crossroads of Critical Theory”
Leigh York ’11 (Watkinsville, Ga.), “Antinomic Politics: the Constitutive Contradiction of the Biopolitical State”

Special Opportunities
The Critical Theory concentration can easily be combined with various majors, including ones that offer a semester of study abroad in other countries. Our Twin Cities location gives students the chance to attend public lectures and seminars offered by major international figures in critical theory.

Internships
Knowledge of critical theory provides an asset in conducting internships in a wide range of fields from journalism, editing, and teaching to museum curating and work in the media industry.

After Macalester
Vanessa Barrera ’15 (Fremont, Calif.) is attending graduate school at Yale University.
John Kreitzberg ’15 (Newtown Square, Pa.) is attending graduate school at the University of Chicago.
Parker Field ’15 (Bone Lake, Wis.) is catalogue raisonné intern at the Arshile Gorky Foundation in Chaska, Minn.

Camille Kasavan ’14 (New York) will be serving with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia.
Kevin Priestley ’14 (Palmer, Alaska) is attending graduate school at the University of Minnesota.
Hanna Backman ’13 (Vaasa, Finland) is an editor at Mask Magazine and editorial intern at 29th Street Publishing in New York.
Nick Leyh ’13 (Kansas City, Mo.) is attending graduate school at Duke University.
Hana Masri ’13 (Verona, N.J.) is attending graduate school at the University of Wisconsin.
Tommy Symmes ’13 (Concord, N. H.) is attending graduate school at Rice University.
Leigh York ’11 (Watkinsville, Ga.) is attending graduate school at Cornell University.
Sarah Brumble ’06 (Portland, Ore.) is senior writer and researcher, blog editor, and social media editor at Atlas Obscura in New York.
Sara Kieny ’06 (West Hartford, Conn.) started Film Presence, a marketing company that specializes in independent films, including the 2011 Oscar-nominated Hell and Back Again.
Anne Marie Spidahl ’06 (Des Moines, Iowa) recently published the novel Nothing and is pursuing a PhD at the University of Minnesota.
Ben Davis ’01 (Seattle) published 9.5 Theses on Art and Class and is an internationally recognized art critic with Artnet.