

# **“What is Theory?” and “How do we know that we have one?”**

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## **Abstract:**

Building on foundational contributions from Aristotle to contemporary theorists, this seminar revisits and expands upon Bacharach’s widely cited definition of theory as “a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints.” While influential, this definition fails to adequately distinguish theories from other products of theorizing like models and propositions. It addresses longstanding confusion about what qualifies as theory; are topologies and classifications theories, or do models and frameworks qualify as theories. It reframes the relationship of theory with practice, distinguishes theorizing from building theories and clarifies the roles of theory in research. Ultimately the seminar highlights the poverty of relying on models and describes how truly engaging with theories opens the landscape of research to endless opportunities.