

Special Topics Courses: 2015-2016

SOCI 298 - Sociology of Business

This course is designed to give students a broad overview of the impact of business on our daily lives. The course examines “business” not just from a corporate approach, but rather based on our daily social interactions and exchanges, which are essentially business transactions. Students will learn the essentials of “business” thinking, the questions one should be asking, and how to start thinking in broader-based terms. Work, the first marketers, globalization, technology issues and global transfer, risk and consumer decisions will be considered from a sociological perspective.

This course is for students of all backgrounds. For social science, science and arts students, it will provide a background in understanding business and the key issues that one should know. Business students will gain knowledge on a very different approach and acquire insight into the social aspects of business.

SOCI 298- Economy, Society, and Biodiversity

This course explores the intersection of economies, societies, and biodiversity. More specifically, the course provides students with tools to understand and explain the embeddedness of economics in social processes, and in turn, of social processes in ecological dynamics. The course is divided into three main sections. The first part of the course provides students with the foundations to understand basic concepts pertaining to the current culture of capitalism and concomitant socio-economic formations. A historical context of these processes is explored accordingly, as are their paradoxes and contradictions. The second part of the course relies on classic and contemporary critical sociological theories to explore issues of inequality, social justice and environmental problems that emerge from contemporary capitalist socio-cultural formations and processes. Finally, the third part of this course investigates movements within civil society in general, the Global South, and even within capitalist cultures which presents themselves as alternatives to environmentally damaging and socially inequitable forms of capitalism.

SOCI 398- Sociology of Urban China

This course explores the rapid transformation of Chinese cities in the past 30 years. We aim to understand bigger, structural questions in the making of urban China, such as political reform, global events, and environmental challenges. The course also invites us to consider controversies, predicaments, hopes and fears that characterize everyday practices in Chinese urban life. By contrast and comparison, we further reflect upon our own experiences in Montreal. This reflection helps us to consider differences and similarities of urban development in the global economy.

SOCI 398 Consumer Society

This course considers the historical emergence of consumerism in advanced industrial economies and continues to examine the developing characteristics of consumer societies in the present. Topics include the role of consumer goods in mediating social status and personal or collective identities, the relationship of consumerism to present ecological concerns, and the role of advertising and promotional discourse in the creation of new habits and expectations in everyday life.

SOCI 498: Legal Systems

This course is an introduction to socio-legal theory. ‘Socio-legal theory’ is work that addresses the relationship between law and society from theoretical and philosophical perspectives. It includes the different ways that legal philosophers and sociological theorists have defined the concepts of ‘law’ and ‘society’, as well as their relationship to each other. The first part of the course will focus on the central methods of conceptualising law drawn from philosophy, including natural law and positive law. These philosophical approaches view law as an objective entity that makes human existence in groups possible. In other words, law is a framework in which society operates. The second part of the course considers the central methods of conceptualising society drawn from sociology. The focus of this section is on the writing of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, who each defined society as an objective entity and law as a product of the way society operates. The final part of the course looks at contemporary socio-legal theory and recent critical developments in the study of law and society, including Foucault’s view of law, the relationship between law and violence, and critical legal studies.

SOCI 498 Media Sociology and Journalism

This course invites both sociology and journalism students to participate in developing a critical sociology of media that situates journalism in its biographic, institutional and social-historical contexts. Our first task will be to define what news and information is from the point of view of both sociology and professional journalism. First, a selection of classical sociological (Marx, Bourdieu, Luhman, Habermas) and contemporary approaches to journalism studies (Butler, Entman, Curran, Couldry, McQuail, Benson, Clark) are introduced. Second, we situate the diversity of acts of journalism (mainstream, local, national, alternative, citizens J, Student J.) inside relations between the various types of journalists and journalisms, the emerging political economy ethnographies of news organizations, the subjects that make up the news and their relation to audiences/societies that they imagine. These elements of media sociology and journalism studies are demonstrated through a press analysis of specific topics related to student interests.

ANTH/ SOCI 498 Cultural Imperialism

This is a research seminar that brings into focus the anthropology and sociology of contemporary empire-building. Topics of study may include: nation-building, global and domestic counterinsurgency, “humanitarian intervention,” the ideologies of militarism, the militarization of the social sciences and the broader society, the national security state, soft power, the media and information operations, hegemony and capital accumulation.

ANTH 498 Thinking Beyond Humans

This course is based on the counter-intuitive premise that in order to understand how humans have come to have such a major impact on the world around us we need to give up those ways of thinking that have always placed humans at the centre or at the vanguard of history, and to discard our certainties about who, what and where we are. The course is an opportunity to explore emerging themes in anthropological research, from environmental studies to cybernetics alongside key works of philosophy, literature and social science in the “post-humanist” tradition.

SOCI 498- Sociology of Suicide

Suicide has been a central topic of sociological interest since the late 19th century. But just as the world has changed dramatically over the last century and a half, so too has our understanding of suicidal phenomena. Today we recognize that suicidal phenomena take on many different forms and have different meanings for different people. Nevertheless, understanding suicide and its contemporary manifestations remains a crucial task if we are to formulate policies and practices which allow us to deal with suicide. Sociology has a distinctive contribution to make in providing such understanding and it is that contribution we will examine in this seminar.

Sociology 498: Play, Games and Digital Culture

This course provides an introduction to the critical cultural study of play and games in their myriad forms with an emphasis on digital play, including video games, but also play in the context of virtual worlds, social media, consumer robotics, art and performance, augmented and mixed reality applications and locative media. This course considers these forms of digital play as social technologies that are reframing the ways we interact and express ourselves, influencing spheres of cultural production and creating opportunities for collective imagination in our contemporary moment. At the same time students will be introduced to the fast growing field of play and game studies.

The course will survey important problems and discussion in the field of game studies from a sociological and anthropological perspective by pairing specific games and their communities of practice with readings drawing from a variety of theoretical perspectives. This approach will allow for the examination of a variety of issues necessary for developing a critical cultural analysis of digital and non-digital play and games, including the nature and practice of play, the social history of digital leisure, role of hardware, platforms and toys, human-machine relations, simulation and realism, spatiality and embodiment, gender and identity, authority and authorship, violence and addiction.

NB: While no previous experience with digital games is necessary, students should be prepared to devote a substantial amount of time outside of class to both the playing of video games on at least one platform (handheld, console, computer, Internet) and to the serious critical reading and writing that this class will involve.

SOCI/ANTH 498 Nationalism and Racism

Nationalism and racism are modern social phenomena. This course investigates the social conditions for their emergence and their political implications. Attention is given to case studies exemplifying these sociological developments.

SOCI 498 Capitalism and Crisis

This course makes an advanced study of the contemporary dimensions of capitalist society from an approach known as political economy, emphasizing the interconnectedness of those areas of social life we conventionally differentiate as the economy, politics and culture. The course focuses on the dynamics of *crisis*—the breakdown of socio-economic systems—and investigates crisis, in its various expressions, as a built-in dynamic of capitalist societies.