



University
of Victoria

POLI 322 Sweatshops and the Politics of the Clothing Industry

Instructor Spring 2023: Dr. Marlea Clarke

Course delivery: POLI 322 will be delivered on campus and face-to-face.

Prerequisites: None. 2nd year standing recommended

Course description:

This course will explore the contemporary clothing industry and its history to investigate the complexities and tensions of one of the world's largest and most important industries. The global clothing industry presents a conundrum. On one hand, the industry offers potential benefits in terms of creating employment and economic growth for individual countries. On the other hand, the industry is notorious both for exploiting workers, especially women and racialized workers, and for the environmental degradation that overproduction and overconsumption of 'fast fashion' exacerbates. We will explore the political and economic challenges of trying to monitor and regulate a global industry, and explore specific examples where the clothing industry has promoted employment and economic growth as well as problematic examples of "sweatshop" labour and lax environmental regulation. Through a focus on the clothing industry, we will examine broader trends in workers' rights and resistance, capitalism and consumption.

Course outcomes/objectives:

- Examine the roots of exploitation in clothing production by tracing its origins and outlining the contemporary global dimensions of the industry
- Compare the role of state and global institutions in shaping the industry, working conditions in factories and global trends in production and trade
- Develop basic hands-on skills in 'auditing' (assessing clothing and retail companies performance in terms of workers' rights and the environment)

Topics may include:

'Sweatshop' practices

Consumer behaviour and patterns of consumption

Labour standards and regulation

Trends in workers' rights and resistance

This summary provides an overall sense of the course and is not an official course outline. Detailed course outlines will be available for all registered students on the first day of class.