SOCI 202
Constructing Social Problems—Tentative Outline
(Soci 202 can be completed asynchronously)

Course Description

Back in February of this year, very few of us were worried about problems associated with the nation’s parents and grandparents living in long-term care facilities. We did not use terms like physical distancing and contact tracing. Pandemics were interesting topics we could learn about on Netflix. Today, the problems linked to long-term care, physical distancing, and pandemic surveillance and risk management are obvious to everyone.

Soci 202 focuses on how social problems are socially constructed. The social construction of social problems is not about people making problems up. It’s not even about subjective interpretations of otherwise objective problems. The social construction of social problems is about the ways in which human beings identify and come to think about certain issues as social problems at particular times, in specific places, and with different levels of intensity. It’s also about how we avoid thinking about otherwise problematic issues as social problems by denying, rationalizing, justifying or downplaying their significance.

In the fall term, we will examine the social construction of the following social problems: popular hazards, terrorism and torture, the fight against breast cancer, asylum seekers, serial killing, Halloween sadism, poor single mothers, infectious disease, surveillance, and public shaming. We will also consider different kinds of media messaging and how perceived problems that at some points in time occupy a considerable amount of attention and debate habitually decline in importance (only to be replaced by new issues and concerns).

**An optional synchronous (live) introduction to the course will be held on Zoom at 1:00pm PST on Thursday September 7. A link to the meeting will be posted on CourseSpaces under ‘Week 1’.

Instructor/Contact Details
Format

There has been considerable discussion at UVic about synchronous versus asynchronous teaching (that is, live versus recorded). By June 2020, enough evidence has emerged that synchronous teaching poses challenges for some students based on time zones, internet connections, and access to available/reliable technology. SOCI 202 will be taught primarily using an asynchronous model. The course will consist of pre-recorded lectures, instructional video links, and assigned weekly readings. Students will be offered plenty of opportunity to interact with the instructor—especially about paper writing. The course can be completed without any synchronous interaction (if desired).

Soci 202 will be taught using CourseSpaces, Kaltura, and either Zoom or Skype. Most students will be familiar with CourseSpaces. CourseSpaces is the University of Victoria’s primary Learning Management Tool (LMS). CourseSpaces will serve as our ‘home site’ where all course content (lecture links, videos, outlines, announcements, grades) will appear. Zoom is a video conferencing tool that most students have probably heard of if not used. If you have not used Zoom before, it’s very easy. Skype is a telecommunications application enabling video chats. Kaltura is video hosting platform where our lectures will be stored. You will be able to link to Kaltura directly through CourseSpaces (think of Kaltura as UVic’s version of YouTube). You will also have the opportunity to create your own video in this course.

1. Lectures and Instructional Videos. Pre-recorded (asynchronous) lecture video clips will be posted on CourseSpaces each week by Monday at 1:00pm Pacific Standard Time (PST). The lecture videos will appear in video files and narrated PowerPoints ranging from 3-20 minutes in length. You simply need to log onto our CourseSpaces site, go to the week we are studying, click the video, and watch (just like YouTube). The purpose of lectures is to reflect on and explain aspects of assigned readings for the week. In some weeks, additional instructional videos will also appear on CourseSpaces. Lecture material is testable and might at times offer explanations of concepts that do not appear in readings.

2. Weekly Question Forum. After completing the assigned readings and watching the lecture and instructional videos, you will be able to post questions on the weekly discussion forum available on CourseSpaces. The forum will be open by 1:00pm...
on Mondays PST. I will make every effort to respond to questions, posts, and discussions, either in text or video format, in a timely manner.

3. **Officer Hours/Instructor Contact.** You may arrange individual or group meetings with the instructor any day of the week using Skype or Zoom. Simply arrange a convenient time via email (shier@uvic.ca). Optional synchronous tutorials may also be offered via Zoom from week to week.

4. **Quizzes.** Ten multiple choice/true and false quizzes will open on CourseSpaces at 1:00pm on Thursdays in Weeks 2-5, 7-9, and 11-13. You will be allocated a set amount of time to complete the quizzes (to be determined). The quizzes will appear on CourseSpaces in the week we are studying. The quiz will remain open until midnight PST on the day it opened. Questions will be drawn randomly from a large question bank (your quizzes will not look the same as your friend’s). You must complete quizzes in the timeframe allocated.

**Readings**

There is no textbook for this course. There are several academic papers assigned for weekly reading. All papers are available online (through CourseSpaces).

**Evaluation**

10 Online Quizzes  
50%

Students will complete 10 weekly online quizzes worth 5%. Weekly quizzes will be held on the dates listed below.

4 Part Term Paper  
50%

Students will write a term paper in four parts. The range of topics students can write on is wide.

**Part 1** By October 1, you will need to demonstrate that you are ‘getting started.’ The easiest way to do this is to explain to me what your topic is, what research papers you have found on the topic, and what kind of argument you might make in the paper (or at least how you are thinking about the topic). This can be done in writing or, better, in a brief video chat. I will provide direction and advice at this stage. (5%)

**Part 2** The ‘Kaltura media assignment’ is a term paper proposal. It is due by 15 October. In any way you deem fit, I would like you to upload a Kaltura video explanation of your paper-in-progress. In previous years, this part of the paper would have taken the form of an annotated bibliography or a formal written proposal/plan. Making videos should be fun. I encourage as much creativity as possible. The videos will only be seen by the instructor and/or the Teaching Assistant. You will
receive feedback, either in video, audio, or written form. Details will be presented when the course begins. (10%)

Part 3 A draft introduction to your paper will be submitted/uploaded no later than 1 November. I will explain in class/tutorial how to do this. The draft introduction will be no more than two pages. (10%)

Part 4 The final paper is due no later than 8 December. It will be approximately 8-10 pages in length. (25%)

**Evaluation Dates**

| Quiz 1 | September 17 |
| Quiz 2 | September 24 |
| Quiz 3 | October 1 |
| Quiz 4 | October 8 |
| Quiz 5 | October 22 |
| Quiz 6 | October 29 |
| Quiz 7 | November 5 |
| Quiz 8 | November 19 |
| Quiz 9 | November 26 |
| Quiz 10 | December 3 |

Getting Started By October 1  
Video Assignment By October 15  
Draft Introduction By November 1  
Final Paper By December 8

**Who Can Take This Course?**

Students from outside Sociology and/or the Faculty of Social Science regularly ask if they can handle this course. The answer is yes! Some of my favourite students come from the engineering and the natural sciences.

**What Student Have Said About This Course**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean is very well prepared, relevant, and genuinely cares about us learning and succeeding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>He is a very good teacher and the concepts he explains are clear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>He chose interesting topics to discuss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Hier is a brilliant instructor. He is enthusiastic and extremely knowledgeable about the course material. Dr. Hier is quite pleasant and easy-going, doesn't mind reiterating information that is in the syllabus, is always well-prepared, and enjoys student</td>
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Comments

Discussion.

Comments

His lectures are very engaging! Very interesting case studies and material.

Deep knowledge of the material

He knew a lot about the topic at hand and was able to relay stories about his personal research. Felt like we were learning from the best.

AMAZING! I heard mixed reviews of this course before I signed up, so I was apprehensive going in. I REALLY enjoyed it and Dr. Hier was awesome. By far my favourite class this semester, and one of my top 3 favourite courses I've taken in university. Dr. Hier was super engaged and you could tell he a) is super knowledgeable and b) really enjoys what he is doing. He is also absolutely hilarious and genuinely made me laugh out loud.

I learned so much and the content was so interesting. I really looked forward to class even though it was long and kind of late at night, and I enjoyed studying for it and writing the paper, too. I can't say enough good things. Dr. Hier is up there with Bruce in the top tier of profs in the sociology department. I hope I can take more courses with him, and it would be awesome to do my honours with him as a supervisor, to be honest.

Also his TA Nicola is AMAZING and SO helpful. She deserves a raise or a teaching position at UVic!!

Overall such an awesome course.

Engaging lecturer— wasn't just copying notes from a slide. I appreciated the way he used videos and pictures throughout the lecture in providing examples. I never skipped a class because they were so valuable and I never felt like time was being wasted. He has a good sense of humour and made lectures enjoyable and fun

– offered multiple types of resources (newspapers/videos etc)
– was enthusiastic about the topics

Very passionate and knowledgeable lecturer. Entertaining and informative.