

SOCI 390¹

Special Topics: The Sociology of Substance Use

July 5, 2023 - August 21, 2023
Tuesdays 2- 4:20pm (online, synchronous)
Weekly asynchronous content and assignments

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Course Description:

Substance use is an important health, social, and economic issue, and refers to the use of any type of drug that the federal government categorizes as having a higher-than-average potential to become addictive (Health Canada, 2009). This course is an introduction to the sociological study of substance use, with a specific focus on substance-related harms and problems (including alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs). It introduces students to basic concepts and debates in the field concerning causes, consequences, stigma, interventions, and prevention. The substance use field is filled with debates and controversies, and students will be asked to apply their sociological lens to examine problematic substance use from the perspective of the user, broader society, service providers (health systems, enforcement, in the community), and as policy makers. Students will be given opportunities to question media portrayals about addiction and people who use substances, as well as why certain substances are legalized while others are illegal, and to compare Canadian strategies for addressing the harms associated with substance use with other global approaches.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Define basic concepts and debates in the substance use field, with attention to stigma, harm reduction, enforcement, prevention, and treatment.
2. Analyze and discuss substance use in Canadian society from a sociological lens and other comparative (e.g., public health, law, lived experience) perspectives and identify implications for health and society.
3. Discuss how social factors (e.g., gender, class, race) and inequities shape individual and institutional perspectives of substance use and addictions.
4. Interpret evidence about substance use, and related debates from the standpoint of the user, society and culture, service provider and policy maker.
5. Integrate existing and acquired knowledge about substance use and society as well as apply it to current and global debates in a sociologically informed manner.

¹ This outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. A detailed course outline will be made available in July before the first day of class. Only that outline is to be considered official.

Course Pre-requisites:

No pre-requisites required for this course.

Topics May Include:

Substance use, Substance-related problems, Addictions, Stigma, Social determinants of health, Health inequities, Prevention, Harm Reduction, Intervention, Treatment, Enforcement

Required Resources May Include:

Resources will be posted on Brightspace. Students will be expected to read 2-3 journal articles each week, as well as listen to podcasts and watch videos. Readings will need to be completed in advance of the scheduled classes to which they apply.

Select chapters from Maté, G (2009). *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Toronto: Random House of Canada.

We acknowledge and respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and ƵSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.