SOCI 438/520 – Issues in Contemporary Sociology: Corporate power, fossil capital, climate crisis

INSTRUCTOR: Bill Carroll

Course Description and Objectives

This graduate seminar combines the sociology of corporate power with the political economy of fossil capital and the political ecology of climate crisis. The course does not require a specialized academic background in these areas, and is open to graduate students in sociology and related fields. Topics will include:

a) the sociology, political economy and political ecology of fossil capitalism as a distinct way of life now in global crisis;

b) modalities of corporate power in this field, ranging from networks of capital ownership and governance, through practices and discourses of corporate hegemony in civil society, media and state, to carbon commodity chains and popular resistance at flashpoints along them; and

c) a survey of sociopolitical developments and policy alternatives that could initiate a just transition to low carbon ‘energy democracy’.

Our work in the course will centre to some extent upon the case of Canada, but will extend to other national cases and to the transnational level.

Course Format and Delivery

The course will be delivered in a novel way, within the second Summer Institute of the Corporate Mapping Project (CMP), a SSHRC Partnership based in the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria (http://corporatemapping.ca). Most of our face-time will be concentrated within one intensive week (27 May – 1 June, 2019). Some sessions will be facilitated by course director and CMP co-director Bill Carroll and other CMP team members; others will be student-led. To take this course, students must have the week of the CMP Spring Institute, 27 May - 1 June, free from other commitments.

Although that week will be most intense, preparation for the course will begin a few weeks earlier, as students read the core texts and begin to work with fellow students in small groups, in preparation of class presentations which will be a focal point for several sessions. In the weeks leading up to the Institute we may also hold videoconference sessions, to introduce each other and focus our studies.
In the weeks following the Institute, students will complete term papers, which are due by 2 July 2019. The term paper will be worth 50% of the final grade. Participation and reflective journaling will comprise the other half.

This course will help students already participating in the CMP (e.g., as research assistants) to deepen their knowledge of the issues at the heart of the Project. For students not already participating in the CMP the course will provide an opportunity to become involved, particularly through publishing their term papers on the CMP website (some student papers from the 2017 Institute are available at https://www.corporatemapping.ca/student-papers/).

* A more detailed course outline will be distributed to students by April 2019.