

SOCI 436 - Issues in Sociology & Social Justice

Instructor: Dr. Bill Carroll

Course Description:

Sociology has, from its inception in the nineteenth century, had a complicated relationship with currents, movements and practices of social justice. In this course, we explore that relationship, focusing on the contemporary scene and the future possibilities that lie within that scene. Although SOCI 436 is a sociology course, our definition of sociology is broad, and moreover, the course is also an elective in the interdisciplinary Minor/Diploma Program in Social Justice Studies. I hope the course will take on an interdisciplinary flavor as our discussion progress.

The course will involve more discussion than lecture. This makes for a dynamic and interesting experience, but it also requires commitment and preparation by all members of the class.

SOCI 436 is not only a seminar-style course; it is also a writing course. Throughout the term, students will write a number of small reflective essays, leading to a term paper which is due in December.

Course Format:

Participation is crucial to this course's success! I will begin each session with a relatively short lecture, introducing the topic and readings, and giving you some background as to how they fit into our course problematic, i.e., the complex relationship between sociology and social justice. But most of our time together will involve discussion.

The course will have a slightly different format on Mondays, compared with Thursdays.

On Mondays (and a couple of Thursdays), a good part of the session will involve small-group discussions. After a brief lecture, the class will divide into small groups, with the objective of digging into the assigned reading. Although there is no requirement for your groups to meet outside of class, this is certainly a good idea. In these sessions, individual members of small groups will assume one of three different roles within the small-group discussion. **To enact these roles effectively, you need to do the reading in advance, and prepare notes to guide your own contribution.** Here is a description of the roles, which I have adapted from Parrott and Cherry (2011):

- **Q&A leader.** For this role, you develop a series of questions, along with brief answers, to highlight the main points of the assigned readings. You are also responsible for facilitating group discussion, which typically includes calling on individuals to share questions of their own and ensuring that all individuals have

an opportunity to share their insights.

- The **passage master**, in contrast, chooses and summarizes a few important passages from the readings. These passages may give key information, back up the information given, or summarize key points. They may also be passages that are controversial, contradictory with other material, or sections that the passage master simply finds interesting for some reason.
- The **creative connector** role requires that you make connections between the readings and other social, cultural, political, historical or economic ideas and examples. This may include connecting to other course readings or texts in popular culture (advertisements, YouTube clips, news stories, television, movies, etc.).

Within the small groups the three roles will rotate from person to person over the term. The small-group discussion period will be followed by a plenary session, involving the entire class. The plenary session gives us a chance to synthesize ideas coming out of the parallel small-group discussions. At the plenary, the Q&A leader of each group will present an informal report. Other group members should offer support and elaborate, and members of other groups should feel free to comment and take things in another direction (however, do keep your comments focused around the broad course theme!). **The aim in all this is to develop a multifaceted understanding of course material, through active participation, engagement and reflection, rather than through passive reception.**

Most **Thursday sessions** will have more of a workshop format, varying in specifics. Some of them will involve reflective writing on your part – small assignments that can build toward your term paper.

Course Evaluation:

Participation 20%

Participation will be assessed on the basis of your overall attendance/willingness to participate. Students should come prepared to discuss the reading(s) relevant to the stated theme that day.

Reflective writing based on eight small-group sessions 24%

Each student will keep a journal (blog) on the course website, with entries reflecting on eight small-group sessions. Reflections can be no longer than 250 words, and must be submitted to your CourseSpaces blog within 72 hours of the session. Each of eight entries is worth 3% of your final grade (3x8=24). Guidelines will be distributed.

Reflective writing based on five workshops 25%

Each student will write brief reflective essays based on five of eight workshop sessions. These sessions will occur mostly on Thursdays and will vary in format. These essays can be no longer than 300 words, and must be submitted to your CourseSpaces blog within 72 hours of the session. Each of five essays is worth 5% of your final grade (5x5=25). Guidelines will be distributed.

Term paper 31%

The term paper gives students an opportunity to apply knowledge from the course, on the basis of further reflection and library research. This paper should be no longer than 2000 words (excluding bibliography). Guidelines will be distributed.

Course Pre/Co-requisites:

Minimum third-year standing; and declared Honours or Major in Sociology; or permission of the Department.

Recommendation(s): SOCI 215, and one of SOCI 315, SOCI 331, SOCI 335, SOCI 355 recommended prior to SOCI 436.

Topics May Include:

Sociology, Knowledge and Power

Becoming an ally

Public Sociology

Critical Sociology

Re-visioning Sociology?

Sociology and alternative policies

Sociology, radicalism and the left

Course Readings

Most readings will be posted to the CourseSpaces website, as pdfs. There are two required textbooks:

Anne Bishop (2015) *Becoming an Ally* third edition. Halifax: Fernwood.

Terry Eagleton (2016) *Hope without Optimism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

** This on-line outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.