

SOSC1850
UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY
Fall 2014

Mon: 3:00-4:20pm
Fri: 10:30-11:50am
Rm 2464 (via lift 25-26)

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Office Hours: One hour after each class or by appointment.

Teaching Assistant: Stephen Choy
Office Hours: **Fri 3-4pm, Rm 3001** (via lift 4)

The purpose of this course is to engage you in a discussion about how we can be more *sociologically mindful* in our understanding of modern life. As participants in human societies we all have ideas about the way our society works. The sociological perspectives that we shall examine in this course, however, are more well-thought out, based on evidence, and challenge our “common sense” understandings.

What do I mean by sociologically mindful? This is an age in which we often explain our behaviour in terms of our individual achievements, personalities, or even our genetic make-up. The sociologist, however, looks at human behaviour as the product of groups, organizations and culture.

In order to master this sociological outlook, we shall examine a number of topics in our everyday lives from the point of view of sociological perspectives and methods. These topics will include: culture, deviance, inequality, religion, mental health, social change and development, gender, intimate relationships and the family.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Intended Learning Activities

An appreciation of the importance of sociology for understanding modern societies.	By discussing the relevance of sociological ideas in our lives
A mastery of sociological ideas	By reading the works of prominent sociologists
The ability to think sociologically	By undertaking a number of in-class experiments, exercises and discussions that will encourage you to see how your own behaviour is shaped by groups, culture and organizations.

Reading:

For each week, there will be a chapter (or part thereof) from the text book, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach* by James M. Henslin, Pearson New International Eleventh Edition available in the University Bookstore (HK\$311). I encourage you to purchase the book. I shall, however, also make copies of it available at the Reserve desk of the University Library. It is important that you have the most recent edition and not an older one. For some classes, I shall also assign some more detailed “additional readings.” These will be original works of important sociologists that further illustrate the ideas being discussed. These articles can be downloaded from the LMES webpage for the course (log in at lmes.ust.hk and look for Sosc1850 Fall 2014). You must read the assigned texts before coming to class in order to understand the class, and I shall call on you to answer questions about them in class.

Requirements and Assessment:

There will be two short closed-book **exams**; an in-class Midterm and a cumulative Final during the examination week. The Final Exam will include materials covered on the entire course. Questions will be a mixture of multiple choice and short answer. They will, in equal proportion, test your understanding of the readings and the in-class lectures, exercises and discussions.

In addition, each student will complete a short (approx. 500 words) **written assignment** for the course. This is to be done individually (not in a group). In the assignment you will have an opportunity to conduct some original sociological research and write up the results. Details of the assignment and how to undertake it will be announced toward the end of September and you will be given one month to complete it.

The Final Grade

Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	50% (cumulative)
Written Assignment	25%

Up to 10 per cent **extra credit** may be awarded to individual students who make regular and outstanding contributions to the in-class discussions, or who frequently ask relevant questions.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE¹

INTRODUCTIONS

- Sep 1. **Is it all just common sense?**
Sociology and Common Sense quiz
- Sep 5. **What is sociology?** Themes, People, and Events

PART I. CULTURE, SOCIALIZATION AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

We've all heard of the term *culture*, but what does it take to become competent in understanding unfamiliar groups of people? We begin by learning how to be more aware of our own culture, and to develop an appreciation of language and symbols in understanding human behaviour. Using classical sociological and psychological theories of socialization we try to understand how society shapes the way in which we think about ourselves, about others, and the world around us.

- Sep 8. **What is culture? And are you ethnocentric?**

- Sep 12. **How do you study another culture?**
Henslin: Chapter 2 (pp. 45-71)

- Sep 15. **Who Are You?**
Socialization and the Social Construction of Reality
Henslin: pp. 73-86
Additional Reading: Howard Becker: *Becoming a Marijuana User*

- Sep 19. **What do you mean?**
Culture, Language and Symbols

PART II. DEVIANCE

The sociological focus is not so much on the individual who commits a deviant act, but the ways in which human societies apply sanctions and labels to offenders. We shall examine the significance of social labelling and its implications for education, criminal justice and mental illness. We also examine a number of experimental studies that demonstrate the power of the immediate situation and peer pressure that encourage acts of violence. We take a broad view of deviance to look at everyday acts of deviance that we frequently commit in our own lives.

- Sep 22. **Are criminals bad people? Non Sociological Perspectives on Deviance**

¹ All topics and reading subject to change. Please listen carefully for announcements in class.

- Sep 26. Sociological Perspectives on Deviance. Labelling Theory
Henslin: pp. 217-231
Additional Reading: William Chambliss: The Saints and Roughnecks
Additional reading: LD Rosenhan: Being Sane in Insane Places
- Sept 29. **Why do good people do bad things?** Obedience to Authority:
The power of the situation. Henslin pp. 185-188
Additional Reading: Stanley Milgram: Obedience to Authority ch 1.
- Oct 3. **Why do college students cheat?** Normalizing Deviance
Situational Ethics and College Student Cheating.
- Oct 6 **Why is social life so embarrassing?** Deviance and everyday life.
Henslin: pp. 120-133

PART III. MODERNIZATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

We now move to the larger historical and social forces that govern our everyday lives, the rise of industrialization and the transformation of our work and belief systems, and we discuss some of the resulting problems including alienation, *anomie*, suicide, poverty and inequality among the rich and the poor, men and women.

- Oct 10. The Ideas of Emile Durkheim. Henslin: pp. 21-22, 119-121
Why do we need Religion?
Additional Reading: Randall Collins: Sociological Insight. Ch2.
Sociology of God. pp. 30-58.

**Oct 13. MIDTERM EXAMINATION (in class).
Your Attendance is required.**

- Oct 17 Why do people kill themselves? Anomie and Suicide.
- Oct 20 **Who is poor?** Some Facts About Poverty
Are poor people lazy?
- Oct 24 Situational constraints faced by the poor.
- Oct 27 Class Theory and the power elite.
Henslin: pp. 285-315, 260-267
Additional Reading: Time Out Magazine. The Men Who Rule Hong Kong.
- Oct 31. Are men equal to women in today's society?

The Facts of Gender Inequality

- Nov 3. **Biology or culture?**
Biological explanations of gender differences
Henslin pp. 321-337
- Nov 7. Gender and language
- Nov 10. Social Representation of Women in the Media
Henslin pp. 87-91
Additional Reading: Sherryl Kleinman: Why sexist language matters.
- Nov 14. **Who does the housework? And why?** Gender in the home.

PART IV: FAMILY EDUCATION AND INTIMACY

Despite our enormous technological and economic achievements over the last few hundred years, men and women today express a great deal of dissatisfaction with their family lives and intimate relationships. In the final part of the course, we examine changing trends in intimate life, the search for intimate relations in modern society, the changing nature of the family and childhood, and problems associated with modern family life.

- Nov 17. **Why can't we find true love?** The Romantic Love Ideal and the search for intimacy.
- Nov 21. The transformation of the Family
- Nov 24. **Why are there so many divorces these days?**
Henslin pp. 519-526, 507-514
- Nov 28. Catch up and review

RULES AND PROCEDURES

This is a large class with a diversity of students from many backgrounds. Most of you will be studying in a second language (English) because this is the only language that we all share. Some of you may not have taken social science classes before. Others may be accustomed to different academic environments in which there are different expectations. This means that we need to have some common rules and understandings about how the class is to proceed so that everyone has an opportunity to learn and perform well.

Attendance

The surest way to achieve a high grade on this course is to *attend all the classes* and, whilst doing so, *to disconnect yourself from, and put away all electronic devices*. The Powerpoint slides shown in the class and placed on the course webpage are intended only as outlines of the materials covered. They are not substitutes for class attendance. You are responsible for taking your own notes during the classes and for catching up and obtaining notes from others if you miss a class.

Students often ask me to put more detailed notes on the course webpage. My experience, however, has been that if you don't have the time or inclination to attend the class, it is unlikely that you will have the time or inclination to study the materials outside class. Further, I do not permit any recording or filming of the classes. I will do my part to make the classes worthwhile, going *slowly*, and making frequent summaries to assist those with language difficulties. Fair enough?

Coming Late and Leaving Early

The class will not begin until all students are seated and quiet. When students come late to the classroom, they disrupt the whole class by walking around the classroom to look for their friends while the class is in progress. They also miss important information that will be covered on the exams. Some instructors solve this problem by locking the doors after the class has begun. This, however, is an extreme measure and sends a negative message. To minimize disruption, I will reserve the seats nearest to the doors on one side of the classroom for late students. On the occasion that you have to come late to the class, please sit at these seats, rather than walk around the lecture theater while the class is in progress.

As with late students, students who leave the class early disrupt the class and miss important information. Each class will have a ten-minute break in the middle. Please wait until the break or the end of the class before leaving (except, of course, in the case of medical emergency or fire). If you get up to leave in the middle of a class, you will be asked to return to your seat. If you know, in advance, that you do have to leave early, please contact myself or one of the teaching assistants before the class so that we can seat you close to an exit to prevent disruption of the class.

Mobile Phones, Emailing, Texting and Computers

The use of electronic devices in classes is presenting a serious challenge to the learning environment at HKUST. Mobile phones disrupt the class. If you are using laptop computers (for whatever purpose, including note taking) or texting on your phone, you will miss important information. You

are also turning away from your classmates, the instructor, and the course content, and depriving everyone of a good learning environment.

I used to simply require that electronic devices be switched off during the class. But I have discovered that as long as the devices are in front of you, it is impossible to resist the temptation to play with them or continue to take calls and text messages. I am therefore going to require that all electronic devices *not only be switched off, but also put away* in a bag or purse and remain completely *out of sight* while the class is in progress. The class will not begin until this is done. If you continue to text or take phonecalls during the class, your name will be recorded and *your Final Grade for the course may be affected.*

Eating and Drinking in the Classroom

Bringing food into the classroom leaves a mess and smell for your classmates. This does not create a conducive atmosphere for learning. Would you like it if your classes were held in a McDonalds restaurant? I wouldn't think so. For this reason, the University prohibits eating in the lecture theater. There are many places where you can eat on campus. Please observe the "No Eating" signs in the classroom, and have your meals before or after the class.

Examinations

Examinations will be closed-book and must be taken without communicating with other students.

This is a large class and it is impossible to schedule make-up exams for individual students who miss exams, except where medical documentation is provided by a licensed Western medical practitioner to say why you cannot attend. If you have to miss an exam due to medical circumstances, you must contact us within a week after the missed exam to arrange a make-up, otherwise your entitlement to a make-up will be forfeited. The exam dates will be announced early in the semester, which will give you plenty of time to plan. Do not schedule job interviews or other activities on these dates.

Policy on re-grading

I have noticed that increasing numbers of students are expecting higher grades for their work. Students often contact me with a request that their work be re-graded with the hope of obtaining a higher score. You will, however, appreciate that the grading of 300 assignments and exams requires tremendous resources. We make every effort to grade your work accurately. If you do, however, request that your work/grade is reviewed, please be prepared that your grade may move up *or down* (if, the the latter case, we find your work more deficient than our original assessment). If you do ask us to look at your work again, please make sure that you have a very strong and clear justification for doing so.

A special note to **international students**: You have been instructed by the University during your orientation that you are required to stay for the entire exam period. Please do not book your flights home before the Final Exam or schedule other trips during the mid-term examinations (October 13). There will be no make up exams should you choose to do this and there will be no credit or re-weighting of scores for the exam that you missed.

A special note to **students who have taken Sosc1662 with Prof. Groves**: As introductory sociology classes, it is unavoidable that there will be some overlap between these two classes. I do not

encourage you to take both classes. It is better that you get a broader perspective in the social sciences by taking classes from other professors. If, however, you do decide to take both classes, please allow other students in class to answer questions that you may already know the answer to from Sosc1662. I do appreciate your cooperation with this.

A Special Note to **Final Year Students.** This is an introductory core course and it is designed primarily for First Year Students. Their English and study skills may not be as developed as yours and they may be taking a social science course for the first time. I care that every student performs well, so I will be making special efforts to go slowly and make frequent summaries of what we have covered so that they can follow. I do appreciate your patience while I do this. I encourage you to take more advanced classes if you feel that this course is too introductory for you.