

SOSC1850
UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY
Fall 2020

Mon and Wed 12:00-13:20 on Zoom

Prof. J. M. Groves. Room 3371, Division of Social Science, sosc1850@ust.hk
Office Hours: One hour after class.

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The purpose of this course is to engage you in a conversation 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 aspects of our everyday lives from the point of view of sociological perspectives and methods. These topics will include: culture, deviance, religion, social change, mental health, poverty, economic inequalities, 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

Any worthwhile university course in the social sciences requires that you do some reading outside of the class *on your own*. I have kept these to a minimum, but you must read the assigned texts before coming to class in order to understand the class and take part in it, and I shall call on you to answer questions about them in the class. Do not worry if you do not understand everything in readings. I will give you some indications in the class about what I want you to get out of them. Please do not wait for the week/night before the examination to do the readings.

For each week, there will be a chapter (or part thereof) from the electronically downloadable textbook, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach* by James M. Henslin, Pearson New International

Eleventh Edition. I encourage you to purchase the download (HK\$301.00) from the University Bookstore here:

https://cas.ust.hk/cas/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Flogin.psft.ust.hk%2Fcas%2Flogin%3Fclient_name%3D%2522CAS%2BPSFT%2522

I shall, however, also make both hard and soft copies of the text available at the Reserve desk of the University Library. It is important that you have the most recent Pearson 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 Canvas webpage for the course

(<https://canvas.ust.hk/courses/26013/files/folder/Course%20Materials/ADDITIONAL%20READINGS>)

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 part of the assessment will be based on your class attendance and participation. Canvas will record time that you log in and out of the Zoom meeting. My teaching assistant will also make a note of who participates in each class. Of course, in order to be counted as present, your camera must be turned on so that we know that you are there and you must attend the entire class. To take into account technical problems and other unforeseen circumstances, I will ignore up to three absences/no-camera shows without penalty. I will begin recording attendance and participation after the add/drop period.

Final Grade Breakdown	
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam (cumulative)	40%
Written Assignment	20%
Attendance	10%
Class participation	5%

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE¹

INTRODUCTIONS

Date	Topic	Reading
Sept. 7	How much do you know about your own society? Sociology and common sense	
Sept. 9	What is sociology? Themes, People 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 will understand how society shapes the way in which we think about ourselves, about others, and the world around us.

Sept. 14	What is culture? How can we be less <i>ethnocentric</i> ?	
Sept. 16	How to study another culture?	Henslin: Chapter 2 (pp. 45-71)
Sept. 21	Who am I? Socialization and the Social Construction of Reality	Henslin: pp. 73-86 Additional Reading: Howard Becker <i>Becoming a Marijuana User</i>
Sept. 23	Why language matters Culture, Language and Symbols	Additional Reading: Sherryl Kleinman: <i>Why Sexist Language Matters</i>

PART II. DEVIANCE

The sociological focus is not so much on the individual who commits a deviant act, but the ways in which societies apply sanctions and labels to rule breakers. We shall examine the significance of labelling and its implications for education, criminal justice and mental illness. We also examine a number of experimental studies that demonstrate the power of social situations 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.

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

Sept. 28	Are law-breakers bad people? Non-Sociological Perspectives on Deviance	
Sept. 30	Thinking sociologically about Deviance	Henslin: pp. 217-231
Oct. 5	Why do good people do bad things?	The power of the situation. Henslin: pp. 185-188 Additional Reading: Stanley Milgram: Obedience to Authority Chapter 1.
Oct .7	Why do college students cheat? Normalizing Deviance Situational Ethics and College Student Cheating.	
Oct. 12	What is embarrassment? 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, city life 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. 14	What is the point of religion? The ideas of Emile Durkheim	Henslin: pp. 21-22 Additional Reading: Randall Collins: Sociological Insight. Chapter 2. "The Sociology of God." pp. 30-58
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Oct 19 MIDTERM EXAMINATION. Your Attendance is required.

Oct. 21	Thinking sociologically about suicide	
Oct. 26	Day following <i>Cheung Yeung Festival</i> . No Class.	
Oct. 28	What does it mean to be poor? Defining poverty.	
Nov. 2	Are poor people lazy? Non-sociological theories about poverty	
Nov. 4	Are poor people victims? Situational constraints	
Nov. 9	Class Theory and the power elite	Henslin pp. , 260-267, 285-315 Additional Reading: Time Out Magazine. The Men Who Rule Hong Kong
Nov. 11	Gender Inequality Biology or Culture? Non Sociological theories about gender	Henslin: pp. 321-334
Nov. 16	Thinking sociologically about gender	Henslin pp. 87-97
Nov. 18	Gender in the workplace	
Nov. 23	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 satisfying intimate relationships, the changing nature of the family and youth, and problems associated with modern family life.

Nov.25	Why can't we find true love? The Romantic Love ideal and the search for intimacy.	
Nov. 30	Why so many divorces these days?	Henslin: pp. 519-526, 507-514
Dec. 2	How has family life changed? What does it mean to be young these days? The transformation of youth.	Additional Reading: Stephanie Coontz: The Way We <u>Never</u> Were

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. All of us, however, are adjusting to a new online learning environment. 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 and cameras

The University policy on cameras is as follows:

“Students should turn on the camera in class for class participation and interaction. For courses with participation scores, students with video turned off should expect lower participation scores.”

The surest way to achieve a high grade on this course is to *attend all the classes*, turn on your cameras and participate. 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 a substitute for class attendance.

While recordings of the Zoom classes will be made available to you, my experience 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 of class. I will do my part to make the classes worthwhile, going *slowly*, and making frequent summaries to assist those with language difficulties. Fair enough? I also have a lot of interesting interactive activities that students tell me they enjoy.

Your attendance will be recorded on Canvas. To count as attendance, you must:

1. Attend the whole class (absence of more than 20 minutes will count as a full absence)
2. Turn on your camera during the entire lecture (but not necessary in the Break) so that we know you are there (still photos or emojis do not count).
3. Log in with no more than one device. That other device may not have a camera and your attendance may not be recorded.

For the purpose of assessment, we will start recording attendance after the Drop add period (September 19th). To allow for technological problems and other unforeseen circumstances, I will allow for up to THREE absences/no-camera shows without penalty.

Participation

It is difficult for me to monitor and address the chat sessions in such a large class. Your participation will be more likely to be counted if you raise your hand electronically and unmute yourself. My teaching assistant will keep a record of the frequency of your participation.

Examinations

Until face-to-face proctored examinations are permitted, examinations for this course will have to be conducted online. I expect them to be completed under closed-book conditions without communicating with other students, consulting PowerPoints or the internet. Precautions will be taken to prevent misconduct, including:

Turning on your cameras so that we can monitor you and your computer.
Giving a limited time for your answers.
Shuffling questions and answers.

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 medical practitioner to say why you could not 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 sometimes 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 400 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 for the possibility that your grade may move up *or down* (if, 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 **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.