

SOSC1850
UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY
Fall 2021

Mon and Wed 12:00-13:20 room 2464

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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 systematic research 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.

Requirements and Assessment

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 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 substitutes for class attendance. You are responsible for taking your own notes during the classes and for catching up and obtaining

notes from others/watching the online video of the class if you miss a class (details of arrangements for students studying outside of Hong Kong will be provided shortly).

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 until 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://w5.ab.ust.hk/cgi-bin/std_cgi.sh/WService=broker_ba_p/prg/ba_std_main.r

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 Eleventh Pearson edition and not a different 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>)

Examinations

There will be two short closed-book **exams**; an in-class Midterm on October 19th 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 (details of arrangements for students approved to not be in Hong Kong will be provided shortly).

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.

Final Grade Breakdown	
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Midterm exam	25%
Final Exam (cumulative)	50%
Written Assignment	20%

Extra credit

I greatly appreciate participation in the class but in a large class this can be difficult to “grade”. However, my teaching assistant will keep a record of your participation and I will consider awarding a small amount of extra credit (up to 5%) to the top 10 participants in the class at the end of the semester.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE¹

INTRODUCTIONS

Date	Topic	Reading
Sept. 2	How much do you know about your own society? Sociology and common sense	
Sept. 7	What does it mean to think sociologically? How did sociology begin? What are themes of modern sociology?	

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.

Date	Topic	Reading
Sept. 9	What is culture? How can we be less <i>ethnocentric</i>?	
Sept. 14	How to study another culture?	Henslin: Chapter 2 (pp. 45-71)
Sept. 16	Who am I? Socialization and the Social Construction of Reality	Henslin: pp. 73-86 Additional Reading: Howard Becker <i>Becoming a Marijuana User</i>

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

Sept. 21	Why language matters Culture, Language and Symbols	Additional Reading: Sherryl Kleinman: <i>Why Sexist</i> <i>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.

Date	Topic	Reading
Sept. 23	Who are the law breakers? Non-Sociological Perspectives on Deviance	
Sept. 28	How to think sociologically about deviance?	Henslin: pp. 217-231
Sept. 30	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. 5	Why do college students cheat? Normalizing Deviance Situational Ethics and College Student Cheating.	
Oct. 7	Why can life be 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, 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.

Date	Topic	Reading
Oct. 12	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
Oct. 14	Chung Yeung Festival. No Class	
Oct. 19 MIDTERM EXAMINATION. Your Attendance is required.		
Oct. 21	How to think sociologically about suicide	
Oct. 26	What does it mean to be poor? Defining poverty.	
Oct. 28	How to think sociologically about poverty?	
Nov. 2	Are poor people victims? Situational constraints	
Nov. 4	Does social class matter? Class, Theory and the power elite	Henslin: pp. 260-267, 285-315 Additional Reading: Time Out Magazine. The Men Who Rule Hong Kong
Nov. 9	Gender Inequality: Biology or Culture?	Henslin: pp. 321-334
Nov. 11	How to think sociologically about gender?	Henslin: pp. 87-97
Nov. 16	Men and women at work	
Nov. 18	Men and women 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.

Date	Topic	Reading
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Nov. 23	Why can't we find true love? The Romantic Love ideal and the search for intimacy.	
Nov. 25	How has family life changed?	Henslin: pp. 519-526, 507-514
Nov. 30	How have young people's lives changed?	

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.

Coming Late and Leaving Early

The class will not begin until all students are seated and quiet. When students come late to the class, 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 in the exams. Some instructors solve this problem by locking the doors after the class has begun. To minimize disruption, however, I will reserve some seats nearest to the doors on one side of the classroom to assist 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 theatre while the class is in progress.

As with late students, students who leave the class early disrupt the class and miss important information too. 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 a 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 me 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, Tablets, Texting and Computers

Mastering a sociological outlook will require your full attention during 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 use to simply require that electronic devices be switched off during the class. But I know 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 return text messages.

I will therefore 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 phone calls during the class, your name will be recorded, and *your Final Grade for the course may be affected*.

One exception to this, however, will be when we do the Mentimeter quizzes.

Eating and Drinking in the Classroom

Bringing food into the classroom leaves a mess and smell for your classmates. This is not a conducive atmosphere for learning. Would you like it if your classes were held in a McDonald's restaurant? I wouldn't think so! For this reason, the University prohibits eating in the classroom. 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. (details of exam arrangements for students approved to study outside of Hong Kong will be provided shortly).

PowerPoints

I'm happy to share my PowerPoints with you after each class, however, please note the following:

PowerPoints are intended only as outlines for each class and not substitutes for class attendance. Some students ask me to put more detailed lecture notes on the Canvas 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 of class.

It is impossible for me to release PowerPoints *before the class*. This is because the PowerPoints may give away answers to my questions as well as information that will compromise my in-class exercises and activities. Also, providing PowerPoints in advance does not allow me the flexibility to change the content of the class and PowerPoints in accordance with student's interests.

Finally, please respect my copyright, and *please do not share my PowerPoints or any other materials* on course-sharing websites, on social media, or anywhere else on the internet. If we find you have done this – and we look around the internet quite often for our materials, we will ask you to take them down and may have to report you to the website and to the University for violating our copyright.

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 120 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, in 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 examination (October 18th). 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.