

SOSC 1850 (LX)
UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY
Spring 2023
Self-paced, Online

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Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom.

The purpose of this course is to engage you in a conversation about how we can be more *sociologically mindful* in understanding ourselves and 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 watching concise video lectures that demonstrate 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 online thought experiments, exercises and online discussions that will encourage you to see how your own behaviour and those around you are shaped by groups, culture and organizations.

Requirements and procedures

1. Online lectures

The course is to be delivered entirely online and self-paced. The surest way to do well in the course is to *watch all the online lectures* and take notes. These (along with PowerPoint slides, readings, activities and documentary movies) will be posted on the Canvas website at the beginning of each week (Monday). Most of the lectures are short (approximately 6-12 minutes long). Some may be longer if they contain additional movie clips within them. I will release three to six video lectures (with accompanying PowerPoints and readings) each week. Please watch the lectures in the correct order, or they will not make sense to you. Also, I have designed them to be watched on a larger screen, not a mobile phone. Subtitles can be auto generated if watched on the Chrome Browser (instructions will be provided).

Aside from attending at least two of the three midterm quizzes and the Final Examination at HKUST (see below), *no other class attendance is required for this course.*

2. Readings

Any worthwhile university course in the social sciences requires that you do some reading outside of the class on your own. I have tried to keep these to a minimum. 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\$310.00) 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 will also make downloadable and hard copies available at the Reserve Desk in the University Library. Look out also for used copies. But please do not use other editions since the assessments will be based on this edition only.

For some weeks, there will also be additional readings. These will be original works of sociology. They will be available to you on Canvas in the module folders for each week. I have indicated the relevant readings for each class in the schedule below. Do not worry if you do not understand everything in the readings. I will indicate to you in advance what I want you to find out from them.

3. Three proctored closed-book midterm quizzes at HKUST

There will be THREE short non-cumulative closed-book midterm quizzes during the semester, which will be proctored face-to-face at HKUST (Covid restrictions permitting). I will drop the lowest score of these quizzes, which allows you to miss one midterm quiz, if you have to, without it affecting your final grade. This is a large class and it is impossible to schedule make-up quizzes for individual students.

Since the course has no designated meeting times, I have had to schedule the quizzes outside of regular class hours on Saturday mornings at 10-11am so they do not clash with your other classes.

4. Proctored closed-book face-to-face Final Examination at HKUST

There will be a proctored closed-book face-to-face Final Examination at HKUST, which will be scheduled by the University during the examination period at the end of the semester (16-29 May). The Final Examination is cumulative which means that it will cover the entire course content. Your attendance at HKUST is required for the Final Examination (Covid restrictions permitting). Again, since this is a very large class, it is impossible for us to offer a make-up examination without medical documentation to say why you cannot attend. As advised by the University, international students should not book their flights home before this date, since no makeup examinations can be offered if you are not present.

The quizzes and Final Exam will be mostly multiple choice and cover the content of the online lectures, and the readings (particularly the questions I ask you to answer for the readings in advance) as well as matters related to the course content raised on the Discussion Forums. There may also be one or two short answer questions. Questions will examine the application of concepts of the course, rather than the memorization of names and specific dates.

Quiz and Final Exam Dates

	Date	Time	Venue
Quiz 1	March 4 (Sat)	10:00 – 11:00	HKUST ¹
Quiz 2	April 1 (Sat)	10:00 – 11:00	HKUST
Quiz 3	May 6 (Sat)	10:00 – 11:00	HKUST
Final Exam	Scheduled by HKUST during final exam period (16-29 May)	Scheduled by HKUST	HKUST

5. Short written exercise

There will be a short written exercise (approx. 500-1000 words) which will allow you to undertake your own sociological research/analysis. The assignment will be completed individually. More details about the assignments will be made after the add/drop period.

The assignment will be due for online submission by midnight on **April 12th**. I may share the best assignments with the class.

How to get in touch with us.

1. Discussion Forums

Given that the lectures are virtual, the best way to talk to me, and for you to talk with your classmates, is on the Canvas Discussion Forums. Here you can post questions, comments, reactions, and feedback on the lectures, readings and assessments in the relevant forums. I will check them on most days. To be inclusive, all contributions to

¹ Covid restrictions permitting

the forums must be in English, the language that everyone shares and please, no foul language or personal attacks.

2. Email/Zoom

If, however, you need to talk to us privately, you may email sosc1850@ust.hk and, if necessary schedule a Zoom meeting with me.

The Final Grade

Canvas quizzes	35%
Final exam	45%
Written exercise	20%

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE²

INTRODUCTIONS

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 1 Feb 6 th .	<p style="text-align: center;">Introductions</p> <p>Activity: How much do you know about society? Take the Common-sense Quiz https://www.tryinteract.com/share/quiz/62f3c6b5bb3d6200188de967</p> <p>Watch lectures: 1.1 About this course 1.2 About the requirements and procedures 1.3 About the professor 1.4 Thinking Sociologically 1.5 How sociology began 1.6 Themes in modern sociology</p>	

PART ONE: CULTURE

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 with think about ourselves, about others, and the world around us.

² The dates of topics and readings may change. Please listen for announcements.

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 2 Feb 13 th	<p style="text-align: center;">Culture</p> <p>Watch lectures 2.1 Thinking sociologically about culture 2.2 Body ritual among the Nacirema 2.3 Ethnography 2.4 Thinking sociologically about language 2.5 The Sapir-Worf Hypothesis 2.6 Language and gender inequality 2.7 Language and social class</p> <p>Watch movie: “Darkest” Africa</p> <p>Activity: Take the twenty statements test</p> <p>Read: Henslin Textbook: Chapter 2 Additional Reading: Horace Miner: Body ritual among the Nacirima Additional Reading: Sherryl Kleinman: Why sexist language matters</p>	
Module 3 Feb 20 th	<p style="text-align: center;">Socialization</p> <p>Watch lectures 3.1 Who am I? 3.2 Thinking sociologically about the self 3.3 Heredity or environment? 3.4 Becoming a marijuana user</p> <p>Watch movies</p> <p>Read Article Henslin Textbook pp. 74-84 Additional Reading: Howard Becker. Becoming A Marijuana User.</p>	

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.

Modules	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 4 Feb 27 th	<p style="text-align: center;">Thinking sociologically about deviance</p> <p>Watch Lectures 4.1 Non-sociological theories about deviance 4.2 Thinking sociologically about deviance 4.3 Labeling theory I Lessons in Discrimination 4.4 Labeling theory II The process of labelling 4.5 Labeling theory III Critical reflections on labelling</p> <p>Read Henslin textbook: 217-231 Additional Reading: William Chambliss. The Saints and Roughnecks. LD Rosenhan: Being Sane in Insane places</p>	<p style="color: red;">Quiz One March 4 (Sat) 1000-1100 at HKUST</p>
Module 5 Mar 6 th	<p style="text-align: center;">The power of the situation</p> <p>Activities My most embarrassing moment exercise Everyday deviance exercise</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>5.1 Conformity 5.2 Obedience 5.3 Critical review of Milgram</p> <p>Watch Movie: Obedience</p> <p>Read: Henslin Textbook pp185-188 Stanley Milgram Chapter 1. The Dilemma of Obedience</p>	

Module 6 Mar 13 th	Microsociology	
	Watch Lectures 6.1 Techniques of neutralization 6.2 Embarrassment 6.3 Goffman I. Roles, back and front Stages 6.4 Goffman II: communication, working consensus	

PART THREE: 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.

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 7 Mar 20 th .	Emile Durkheim	
	Watch lectures 7.1 The Division of Labour 7.2 Thinking sociologically about religion 7.3 Religion in Modern Societies Read Henslin textbook: pp. 21-23 Additional Reading: Randall Collins: the Sociology of God pp 30-53	
Module 8 Mar 27 th	Suicide	
	Watch lectures 8.1 Suicide: myths and facts 8.2 Durkheim's theory of suicide 8.3 the four types of suicide	Quiz 2 April 1st (Sat) 1000-1100 At HKUST
Module 9 Apr 3 rd	Economic inequalities I. Poverty and Inequality	
	Watch lectures 9.1 Defining poverty 9.2 Measuring inequality 9.3 Non-sociological accounts of poverty 9.4 The culture of poverty and situational constraints 9.5 The government's response to poverty	

<p>Module 10 Apr 11th</p>	<p align="center">Economic inequalities II. Social Class and Social Mobility</p> <p>Watch lectures 10.1 Social class and social mobility: definitions 10.2 Class analysis in Hong Kong 10.3 The power elite</p> <p>Read Henslin textbook: pp. 260-267, 287-315 Additional Reading: Time Out Magazine. The Men Who Rule Hong Kong</p> <p>Watch movie <i>Tell me things will be better tomorrow</i> http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/hong-kong-connection.2007-0208.mp4</p>	<p>Short Written Assignment due April 12</p>
<p>Module 11 Apr 17th</p>	<p align="center">Gender inequalities I</p> <p>Watch lectures 11.1 Non-sociological perspectives on gender. 11.2 Thinking sociologically about gender 11.3 Gender across cultures 11.4 Learning gender roles 11.5 Gender and Education</p> <p>Read: Henslin textbook Pp 87-91, 320-334</p>	
<p>Module 12 Apr 24th</p>	<p align="center">Gender inequalities II</p> <p>Watch lectures 12.1 Labour Force participation 12.2 The Gender wage gap 12.3 Men 12.4 Gender in the home</p> <p>Watch movie <i>House husbands</i> http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/hong-kong-connection.2013-1031.mp4</p>	

PART FOUR: FAMILY 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.

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 13 May 2 nd	Watch lectures 13.1 Thinking sociologically about love and intimacy 13.2 Trends in the Hong Kong family 13.3 The transformation of childhood and youth. Watch Movie Hopeless in Hong Kong http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/in-side-story.2006-0110.mp4 Read Henslin: pp. , 507-514, 519-526	Quiz 3 May 6th (Sat) 1000-1100 at HKUST
May 8 th	Catch up and review	

FINAL EXAMINATION TO BE HELD AT HKUST (COVID RESTRICTIONS PERMITTING) AND SCHEDULED BY THE UNIVERSITY DURING SPRING SEMESTER EXAMINATION PERIOD (16-19 May).