

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Sociology
2020-2021

Sociology 9009B
Evidence Based Policy
Tuesdays: 1:30-4:30

Instructor

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be taught in three stages. First, we will explore current ideas and issues in evidence based decision and policy-making and the context for several contemporary debates. The second phase of the course will focus on technical knowledge for those seeking to influence public policy – such as evidence mapping, reviews and other tools. In the final weeks of the course the focus shifts towards application – applying skills learned to reach different audiences Students will be expected to present their ideas and receive constructive, critical feedback.

TEXT

There is no text for this course.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will develop new and more detailed knowledge and perspectives on the vital role of quality research in informing public policy and debates. Outcomes include:

1. Enhanced knowledge of the public role of science and research
2. Acquiring a more detailed understanding of how scientists can and do influence policy.
3. Detailed understanding of key scientific concepts such as replication, reproduction, transparency, etc. and their importance in policy debates.
4. Ability to apply these concepts within the context of critical discussion and analysis.

EVALUATION

Evidence base assessment assignment	20 marks
Marketing assignment:	30 marks
Blog assignment:	20 marks
Poster assignment:	30 marks

Evidence base assessment assignment:

Pick a program or policy of interest to you and your work in the field. Then write an one page assessment of the evidence base – the body of research that is available – in support of that program. Your assessment should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Is the Program Based on Research?
2. Has the Program Been Independently Evaluated?
3. Was the Program Rigorously Tested?
4. Has the Program Evaluation Been Replicated?
5. Was the Program Tested in Canada?

Other criteria:

- only use journal articles found in the university's library databases (fully indexed, reputable sources that have an impact factor; do not use online journals from Google)
- focus on program evaluations
- keep your word count and use of jargon low.

To help you out, I am attaching the assessment form we use at CAN-SEBP to do evidence assessments. It's simple and easy to use ... and that's the key! This assignment is tasking you with being able to distill a volume of information (or lackof) to a layperson audience.

Other assignments:

To do the remaining assignments, you must pick an 'audience'. If you want to change 'minds', whose minds do you want to sway? Is your audience academics, communities, professional groups and/or governments. The clearer you are on exactly who your audience is, the easier this will all be.

Marketing assignment:

You will be tasked with creating or revamping TWO things: a LinkedIn account, a CV/resume and a Twitter account. You will tailor all three of these to attracting appropriate interest from your new audience – through pictures, posts, tweets, job titles, stories, etc. You will then print out each and submit to me with a 3 page (1 page per LinkedIn, CV and Twitter) explanation of how you chose your content/presentation style for each and why you think it will attract the interest of your target audience.

Presentation of ideas: blog

Today, a thoughtful commentary on social media, blog or other websites can generate a significant degree of interest. Remembering your selected audience, and the topic for which you would like to see some policy change, craft an one-page blog aimed at persuading readers. You may be as creative, thoughtful, data-driven, scientific as possible, but just keep the tone and content pitched at your audience.

Poster assignment:

You are being asked to radically rethink the presentation of research in poster-form. This is a fairly typical academic poster:

Consciousness as a Core Neurocentric Criterion for Neuroethical Consideration, Responsibility, and Guidance of Moral, Social and Legal Regard and Treatment of Human and Non-Human Beings
Sherry Loveless¹ and James Giordano^{2,3}

¹Animal Behavior and Conservation Program, Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, NY, USA,
²Neuroethics Studies Program, Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, DC, USA,
³Human Science Center, Ludwig Maximilians Universität, München, GER

Groundwork and Premise

- Recent discussion and extant cautions regarding the care and treatment of humans with disorders of consciousness fuel broader implications of what consciousness "means" for ontological and social standing. However, neuroscientific investigations of a number of non-human species, including (most if not all) mammals, birds, reptiles, and cephalopods are also demonstrating the presence of substrates and mechanisms that can evoke and sustain hierarchically complex processes (and not merely sensory or first order perceptual functions) that are definable as "consciousness".
- In light of this – and a speculative view to current and near-term progress in computational systems (i.e., artificial intelligence) – we herein advance (propose the work of Richard Ryder) and call for consideration of consciousness as a second-tier criterion (beyond painience) for moral (and legal) regard and conduct.

Trajectories Toward Machine System Consciousness?

- The issue that lurks over the horizon of such possibilities is whether increasing complexification in generatively encoded "intelligent machines" could instantiate some form of consciousness.
- At minimum, the system would become auto-referential, develop awareness of its internal state and of external conditions and be able to discriminate between itself and things that are not itself. This is an important step, as it would lead to relationality – a set of functions that provide resonance or dissonance with particular types of (internal and/or external) environmental conditions, reinforcements and rewards for achieving certain goals or states.
- In this way the system would acquire and obtain a sense of what Antonio Damasio has called "a feeling of what happens"; in other words, a form of consciousness (and self-consciousness) – although it is likely that it will not be identical to human consciousness.
- Prima facie, this would not matter; the question is not what type of consciousness, but whether consciousness exists. (This opens discussion – if not a Pandora's Box – about whether the occurrence of consciousness in various organisms represents a distinction of kind or degree, and what that would "mean").

So What?

- We opine that the question really is: what then? Not only as regards the trajectories of such machine systems, but as regards human response and responsibility. What will we do with – and about – this? This prompts derivative questions of if, and in what ways we can be prepared for such new developments
- Granted, the likelihood of conscious machines – as exciting as it may be – is still years away, even given the most fruitful predictions. Any prediction involves relative probabilities of if, how, and what trajectories such as those described here will occur. There is always an element of chance, and thus, the whiff of the fictional.
- Yet, rigorously-modeled and pragmatic "what if" speculation is important to 1) developing realistic scenarios – and an appreciation for the tenuity of the timelines involved in such occurrence(s), 2) "what about" questions raised by the nature and implications of scientific and technological development(s), and 3) the ways we form and formulate philosophical beliefs, ethics, policies and laws.

A Role for Neuroethics

The creation of - and discovery that - an entity is conscious is not esoteric.

- Could such neurocentric criteria (e.g. the ability for pain/suffering, some form of consciousness) and the type and extent of these properties sustain a revision in the ontological status afforded to all things that possess consciousness? Could consciousness be fundamental to establishing any such entities as "persons" (i.e., given recent re-examination of term and construct)?
- Any ethical approach must begin from and be based upon fact, and the discipline of "robo-ethics" has been proposed and developed to appropriate the realities of potentially conscious machines - There is merit to this; however, it may be that a more fundamental perspective is required that enables a deeper and broader view of the issue(s) and its implications.
- We posit that the issues at hand are:
 - If, and to what extent other entities are conscious (and self-conscious – and how this is assessed)?
 - How we as humans 1) regard conscious entities (e.g. – as "beings", "persons", etc.), and 2) direct treatment of, and interactions with them.
- In this light, we argue that neuroethics can contribute crucial dimensions and insights to this topic and its articulation – at least at present.
- Important to this approach is consideration of the "neuro" prefix as synecdoche: Not simply referring to things "neural", but rather engaging examination of what is known and yet unknown in/about neural systems, and the functions (i.e. – sensation, perception, cognition, emotion, consciousness) that such systems obtain.
- Perhaps such inquiry will also prompt questions of whether certain neurocognitive capabilities/ characteristics represent not simply consciousness, or a "person", but life.
- Ongoing neuroethical debates regarding the use of neurological criteria to ascertain death and the status of the human embryo reveal and reflect the contemporaneity – and gravitas – of these issues.

Facing the Future

- We recognize that wholly objective neurotechnological assessments of consciousness and realistic discussions of machine consciousness are still incipient. But, the speed and breadth of technological development are such that neuroethical address of these issues and questions must be equivalently paced and iterative, so as to retain preparatory.
- We believe it's folly not to critically assess what this science holds for the present, foolhardy not to recognize the promise and perils that such science and technology may incur, and frighteningly dangerous not to devote time, effort and resources to studying, and developing ways to be prepared for, and prudently guide each and every step ahead.

Disclosures: None
Conflicts of Interest: None

Academic Poster

I would like you to experiment with some more 'audience friendly' designs that will actually a. cause people to stop and engage; b. allow people to easily understand your presentation; c. learn something they can take away.

You can find examples of more creative posters on www.crimcom.net

OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READING

January 5: Course Introduction - ONLINE

Ideas

January 12: What does it Mean to be Evidence-Based? (EBP Intro)

January 19: Anti-Science

January 26: Interventions

February 2: Policy environments

February 10: Bad Ideas

ONLINE TEAMS MEETING – Feb 10

Know how

February 22: The Art of Dissent

February 23: Negotiating the Tough Stuff

March 2: Communicating for Different Audiences 1

ONLINE TEAMS MEETING – March 2

March 9: Communicating for Different Audiences 2

March 16: Case Study of info Styles

March 23: The Art of Presentations

March 30: Class wrap up

ONLINE TEAMS MEETING – March 30

Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines

Only serious and unforeseeable reasons will be accepted as grounds for being late for any assignments. The need for an extension must be discussed before the due date of the assignment (seminar, test, term paper) and documented through the appropriate channels.

A Note on Plagiarism

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. See Scholastic Offences (below) for the link to Scholastic Discipline regulations.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com: <http://www.turnitin.com>

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals_discipline/index.html

Accommodation

Only in exceptional circumstances may a student be provided special accommodation in the completion of a course requirement (i.e., exams, papers). To request a one-time accommodation (brief illness, family emergency), the student should inform the professor when they are able so accommodation can be made. Accommodation for an ongoing disability may be requested through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at Western. SSD is a confidential service, working with students and their programs, normally their graduate chair, to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. The following website provides further information http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/14.html

Students are encouraged to consult the program graduate chair if they would like to discuss whether this option would be appropriate for their situation.

Completion of Course Requirements

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter - December 30, Summer -August 31). Only in exceptional

circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness Western for a complete list of options to obtain help: http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The Wellness Education Centre (lower level UCC) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs: <http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html>

Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Living Well website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information:

http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html

Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre:

<http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#>

Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>

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Evidence Based Assessment example

Program Title:

Co-Response Team (CRT)

Program Blurb:

CRTs are a form of specialized police response to persons in crisis, with a goal of improving police interactions with such individuals and diverting them away from the criminal justice system. While the structure and composition of CRTs vary widely by jurisdictional needs and resources, CRTs are typically comprised of either: (1) an officer-mental health practitioner pair who work together on shift and respond to crises at the request of frontline officers; or (2) an on-call team that is based out of a local hospital or community-based service that also respond to crises at the request of frontline officers.

Assessment:

Is the Program Based on Research? **N**

It is unclear whether the origins of CRT are based on research.

Has the Program Been Independently Evaluated? **Y**

Certain aspects of CRTs have been independently evaluated in numerous jurisdictions, such as Canada, Australia/New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Findings from Canadian jurisdictions show that: CRT officers divert more persons in crisis to hospital than non-CRT officers, persons in crisis have positive interactions with CRT officers, CRTs spent less time at crises, persons in crisis have better engagement with outpatient services following an interaction with a CRT, and that CRTs are able to reduce unnecessary hospital transfers, among other findings.

Was the Program Rigorously Tested? **N**

To-date, CRTs have not been rigorously tested at levels 4 or 5 of the Maryland Scientific Evidence Scale.

Has the Program Evaluation Been Replicated? **Y**

Certain aspects of CRTs have been evaluated in numerous jurisdictions, such as Canada, Australia/New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Was the Program Tested in Canada? **N**

CRTs have been evaluated in some Canadian jurisdictions, such as Toronto (Lamanna et al., 2015; Kirst et al., 2014), Halifax (Kisley et al., 2010), and Hamilton (Fahim et al., 2016).

Comments/Cautions:

The evidence on CRTs is promising, but more research is needed across several outcomes (i.e., officer-level outcomes and program-level outcomes).

Suggested Readings:

Kisely, S., Campbell, L. A., Peddle, S., Hare, S., Pyche, M., Spicer, D., & Moore, B. (2010). A Controlled Before-and-After Evaluation of a Mobile Crisis Partnership Between Mental Health and Police Services in Nova Scotia. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 55(10), 662-668.

Lamanna, D., Kirst, M., Shapiro, G., Matheson, F., Nakhost, A., & Stergiopoulos, V. (2015). *Toronto Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT): Outcome Evaluation Report*. Centre for Research on Inner City Health and St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto.