



The University of Western Ontario

SOCIOLOGY 2261B-001
Contemporary Social Problems
Winter 2025

Instructor: Dr Scott Schaffer
Department of Sociology
Email: scott.schaffer@uwo.ca

Course Description: Today's society is beset by many contentious social problems (e.g. racial/ethnic discrimination, sexual assault, poverty & inequality & the decline of the middle class). In this course, students will use a sociological perspective to examine the causes, consequences, and solutions to some of society's most troubling social problems.

Prerequisite(s): None.

Antirequisite(s): SOC 2140.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Show understanding of the ways in which sociologists approach the issue of “social problems,” and how societies decide what constitutes a social problem;
- Demonstrate knowledge of the varieties of theoretical approaches to the study of social problems;
- Show comprehension of the ways in which sociologists have conceptualized the global social forces at work in the production of social problems;
- Develop clear, well-thought, and increasingly sophisticated responses to questions posed;
- Display facility in and fluency with core sociological and theoretical concepts and utilise them in the development of oral and written arguments; and,
- Provide thoughtful discussion regarding the roles of agency and responsibility in social action.

Course Material: There are two (2) books that you are required to purchase for this course. I personally recommend buying the print versions, but *they are not required*. Previous editions are acceptable. Each of the books is \$13.80 in print form, and \$4 as an ebook.

James Fulcher, *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: 9780198726074)

Manfred B Steger and Ravi K Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: 9780198849674)

There are also a number of required readings available through the Perusall platform, which is where you will do part of your weekly work. These readings are available without charge. Links to sociological dictionaries and writing guides will be posted on Owl/BS.

Communication: You are responsible for the checking the course Owl Brightspace site on a regular basis for news and updates. This will be the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the course.

For questions or messages that are very brief — in other words, you believe it will take no longer than three minutes to respond to — you can message Dr Schaffer or the TAs via the MS Teams channel. For questions that will take longer to respond to but are not conversation-length discussions, please use email. For conversation-length discussions, please arrange an appointment or come by office hours.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Weekly work: Perusall (readings/discussion)	10% -- due weekly at start of class
Weekly work: Entry and/or exit tickets	10% -- due weekly at start and/or end of lecture
Weekly work: In-class discussion and recitation	10% -- assessed weekly
First examination	20% -- in class on Th Feb 6
Second examination	20% -- in class on Th Mar 13
Final examination	30% -- occurs during April exam period
Lecture attendance and course engagement	Discretionary non-negotiable adjustment of up to +/-3%

Please note the following regarding your work in this course:

- We will be using standards-based assessment in this course, which means that you do not “lose marks” — marks are earned through the quality of the work submitted – in other words, we start marking up from 0, not down from 100.
- There are three forms of weekly work to do: the Perusall readings/annotations/discussion (linked to the Owl site); the entry and exit tickets for each class session; and the participation in discussion in both formats of the class session. The Perusall and in-class discussions will be evaluated on a numeric basis; the entry and exit tickets will occur in class and are for credit, half-credit, or no credit.
- Each of the three forms of weekly work will have eight (8) submissions. You are allowed to miss two (2) from each category without any penalty (so the six remaining submissions would be averaged to calculate your mark). If you miss three or more submissions within a category, then *all* missed work for that category will receive a grade of 0. Because of this flexibility with regard to these submissions, the professor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for these missed elements.
- For the midterm exams: if you are unable to write the exam in class on the assigned day, the weight of that exam will be shifted to the subsequent exam. No formal academic consideration request is required. It is possible to have all the weight shifted to the final exam, making it 70% of your course mark. This is inadvisable.
- Dr Schaffer’s evaluation of your performance throughout the course and the extent to which it is reflected in your course grade drive any kind of discretionary adjustment based on that performance (so if someone’s mark is a C+ but they clearly worked their ass off during the term, it could be adjusted by up to 3 marks). Note that requesting this discretionary adjustment will immediately and irrevocably disqualify you from receiving it.

Course Schedule, Lectures, and Readings:

The course reading and lecture schedule will be posted on Owl /BS prior to the start of the course.

Important Policies

Academic Consideration for Missed Work: Please see the notes above regarding submission of course assignment components. All required documentation for absences must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty. Individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds or for other reasons.

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. The student medical certificate is available at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.

Accessibility Options: Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/academics/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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.

Artificial Intelligence: Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, with students expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Essays, written assignments and/or lab reports should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work. Students should also generate their own figures (e.g., graphs, diagrams) rather than using AI generated ones. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and effective learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and all them to produce original written contributions. The same principles also apply to the use of translation software to support the writing the essays and other written assessments.

Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

Academic Policies:

Please review the Department of Sociology “Important Academic Policies” document https://sociology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/courses/Academic_Policies.pdf for additional information regarding:

- Scholastic Offences
- Plagiarism
- Copyright
- Course Selection
- Absence from Course Commitments
- Missed Tests and Exams
- Religious Accommodations
- Accessibility Options
- Mental Health
- Gender-Based and Sexual Violence statement