

**Department of Sociology
University of Calgary**

**SOCI 435
Sociology of Knowledge
Fall 2013**

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Office hours: Mondays 9-10:00 am; Wednesdays 2-3:00 pm; and by appointment

Course Description:

All social activities are in some way coordinated through socially organized modes of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge studies these modes and practices, exploring how they operate in specific times and places, and how they shape our experience. What are the categories through which we know and speak of our world? Which ways of knowing are authoritative in a given setting? Whose knowledge is privileged, whose rejected? What counts as truth? How does information circulate?

In this course, our focus is on one significant practice of knowledge: *the process through which particular situations are identified as social problems, and various solutions to these problems are proposed, acted upon and evaluated*. Much sociology is concerned with social problems – describing or measuring their manifestations and explaining how and why they occur. In the sociology of knowledge, however, we take a different perspective: bracketing concerns about whether something really is a problem or what it really involves, we ask instead, how did this version of the world – this sense of a problem – come about? Often there is controversy. Different versions of the problem and its solutions are fought over by various claimsmakers – experts, activists and policymakers – and further worked up when represented in the media. What are these competing ways of knowing and naming? What is the work that goes into promoting or contesting a particular version of a social problem? Why and how does one version come to be more successful than others? What role do journalists, the mass media and social media play in the construction and circulation of knowledge about social problems? How is knowledge of social problems taken up by policymakers and professionals in their work? How do these societal practices of knowing social problems shape our own everyday lives? How do we ourselves participate in them?

Required Readings

Joel Best, *Social Problems*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton: 2013).

A collection of journal articles, available online. The list of readings, with links, is at the end of this syllabus.

Assignments and Assessment

A note on attendance:

This course is like a combination lab and seminar with occasional short lectures. It will be heavy on student presentations, class discussions, in-class practice exercises, and small group work. There is no separate grade for participation and attendance, but regular attendance and participation are crucial for learning the analytic practices you will be expected to demonstrate in tests and assignments. Please bear this in mind when you are deciding whether this course is right for you.

Reading notes 10 %

For each assigned journal article (not textbook chapter), you may write one typed, single-spaced page of notes and commentary, following guidelines posted in Blackboard. Post these to the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard by 9 am on the day of the class when we will discuss the reading. The number of times you turn in notes is up to you. Each set of notes (for one article) is worth 1 point, to a maximum total of 10 points. Incomplete or weak notes may be given half credit or no credit. Notes for the article on which you will serve as discussant *cannot* be submitted for reading note credit, as you will be turning those notes in for your discussant grade.

Serving as discussant 10 %

For most of the journal articles we read, 1-2 students (depending on total enrollment) will make a short presentation summarizing the main argument of the article, linking it to course theory and other readings, discussing it critically, and relating it to local or contemporary situations.

Each student must sign up as discussant for one article. If two students are signed up for the same article, each prepares individually, and during the presentation, the two discussants take turns offering their summaries, ideas, and questions.

Guidelines for preparation will be posted in Blackboard. After the discussion, you will turn in a copy of your notes. There is no page limit for these notes; 2-3 pages would be usual.

Tests 35%

There will be two in-class tests. Tests will comprise a combination of fixed choice, short answer and essay questions. Questions will be based on the textbook and the articles, as well as lectures and class exercises.

Short assignments 10%

These short assignments (1-3 pp.) are related to your term research project (see below). They provide a structured way to help you focus your project, gather appropriate materials, and practice your analytic skills. The point value of the assignments is kept low, since the main purpose is to help you prepare for your final paper. However, you must complete SA2-5 in order to receive full credit for your final paper.

- SA1. Looking for news about social problems (1.0)
- SA2. Choosing a social problem to study (1.0)
- SA3. Identifying claimsmakers (2.0)
- SA4. Analyzing a media report (3.0)
- SA5. Annotated bibliography (3.0)

Term project and final paper 35%

You will research the social construction of a social problem that has current relevance within Canada and that is the object of claimsmaking by activists, experts, media, and possibly government policy makers as well. The focus of your research and analysis will be the ways the social problem is framed by various claimsmakers, whom you will identify through your research. Your project will culminate in a 12-15 pp. paper due November 20.

Readings and class exercises will help you develop the conceptual, research and analytic tools you need for this project. The small assignments listed above will take you through the stages of your research. You will have opportunities to discuss your research and analysis in class.

Grading

Your final letter grade will be determined according to the following schedule:

95-100	A+	67-69	C+
90-94	A	63-66	C
85-89	A-	60-62	C-
80-84	B+	55-59	D+
75-79	B	50-54	D
70-74	B-	49 or less	F

Instructor's Policies

Classroom atmosphere: Stimulating discussion thrives in an atmosphere of mutual respect. My goal is an environment in which everyone feels inspired, welcome and safe to participate in discussions. Every person in the class has a role to play in creating and maintaining that environment.

Laptops, tablets and telecommunication devices: Laptop computers and tablets are permitted for the purpose of making notes or doing course-related work. If you are using your device for non-course-related purposes and this is distracting to me or to other students, you will be courteously asked to bring your use in line with course policy. Permission to use a computer or other electronic device in class may be revoked for students who continually flout class policy.

Late assignments: A late penalty (maximum 5% per day late) will be deducted from the grade on any assignments handed in after the due date/time.

Plagiarism: In accordance with University policy, I report all cases of plagiarism. Plagiarized essays get an automatic grade of 0; this includes papers that are only partially plagiarized (a few sentences or parts of sentences). Many students veer into plagiarism when they use textbook material or online sources without using quotation marks to indicate direct or near-direct quotes. To make sure this doesn't happen to you, learn how to paraphrase source material and how to present and cite quoted material correctly. Visit the website of the Student Success Centre for more information.

Rounding: If your final percentage grade falls on the cusp between two letter grades, I will consider your most recent grades (the last test, the major project) and your overall participation in the course when deciding whether to round your grade up or leave it where it is. This decision is not open to influence or negotiation.

Official University and Departmental Policies

1. Grade Reappraisal: Within two weeks of the date the exam/assignment is returned, students seeking reappraisal of examinations or assignments must submit a written response to the instructor explaining the basis for reconsideration of one's mark. The instructor will reconsider the grade assigned and will then book a time with the student to discuss his or her work and rationale. It should be noted that a reconsidered mark may be raised, lowered, or remain the same.
2. The main Sociology Department office does not deal with any course-related matters. Please speak directly to your instructor.
3. Academic Misconduct: Please refer to the website listed below for information on University of Calgary policies on Plagiarism/Cheating/Other Academic Misconduct: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>
4. Protection of Privacy: The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation does not allow students to retrieve any course material from public places. Anything that requires handing back will be returned directly during class or office hours. "If students are unable to pick up their assignments from the instructor, they provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment."
5. Ethical Research: Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.
6. Deferrals: If possible, please provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to write an exam or complete/turn-in assignments on time. All requests for deferral of a course component due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the health issue rather than after recovery. Deferrals will be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferral. Deferrals will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student. If you have missed a test for a legitimate reason, the instructor can require you to write a "make up" test as close in time to the original test as possible or can choose to transfer the percentage weight to another course component. If the instructor schedules a "make up" test for you, its date and location will be at the convenience of the Department of Sociology. Deferred Final Exam Form: Please note that requests to defer a Registrar scheduled final exam are dealt with through the Registrar's Office. Further information about deadlines, and where paperwork should be taken, is available on the form, which can be found at: http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/Sp_Su_DFE_App.pdf

Deferred Term Work Form: Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It's available at

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf>

Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

7. Student Representation: The 2013-14 Students' Union VP Academic is [name]; email: suypaca@ucalgary.ca. The Faculty of Arts has four SU representatives who may be contacted at any of the following email addresses: arts1@ucalgary.ca, arts2@ucalgary.ca, arts3@ucalgary.ca, and arts4@ucalgary.ca. You may also wish to contact the Student Ombudsperson for help with a variety of University-related matters: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds/role>
8. Emergency Evacuation: In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom, please proceed to the assembly point at the Professional Faculties Food Court. Please check these assembly point locations for your other classes at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>
9. Safewalk: The University of Calgary provides a "safe walk" service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the "Help" phones located around Campus.
10. Academic Accommodation: Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, must register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 293, phone 403-220-8237). Please provide academic accommodation letters to the instructor as early in the semester as possible and no later than two weeks after the course begins.

Course Schedule – Subject to revision (except for tests and assignment due dates)

Week/Dates	Readings & Assignment Due Dates
Sept. 9, 11, 13	Best, ch. 1
Sept. 16, 18, 20	Best, ch. 2 Best & Lowney article Jerolmack article <i>SA1 due Sept. 16</i>
Sept. 23, 25, 27	Best, ch. 3 Einwohner & Spencer article Olesen article <i>SA2 due Sept. 25</i>
Sept. 30, Oct. 2, 4	Best, ch. 4 A. Best article Carter article <i>SA3 due Oct. 4</i>
Oct. 7, 9, 11	Best, ch. 5 Parnaby article Malone, Boyd and Bero article
Oct. 16, 18	More on analysis of claimsmaking in media Mahood and Satzewich article <i>SA 4 due Oct. 18</i>
Oct. 21, 23, 25	Review <i>Test Oct. 23</i> Work on research projects
Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 1	Best, ch. 6 Chasteen article Maratea article <i>SA5 due Oct. 28</i>
Nov. 4, 6, 8	Best, ch. 7 Jensen and Gerber article Weitzer article

Nov. 13, 15	Best, ch. 8 Brown article Mäkitalo & Säljö article
Nov. 18, 20, 22	Best, ch. 9 <i>Research papers due Nov. 20</i>
Nov. 25, 27, 29	Best, ch. 10 Linders article Pratt article
Dec. 2, 4, 6	Best, ch. 11 <i>Test Dec. 6</i>

List of Journal Articles – by Week, and with Links

Note: If a link does not work, you can obtain the article through the University of Calgary Library online catalog.

Sept. 16, 18, 20

Best, Joel and Kathleen S. Lowney. 2009. The disadvantage of a good reputation: Disney as a target for social problems claims. *Sociological Quarterly* 50,3: 431-449.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=43017192&site=ehost-live>

Jerolmack, Colin. 2008. How pigeons became rats: The cultural-spatial logic of problem animals. *Social Problems* 55, 1: 72-94.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2008.55.1.72>

Sept. 23, 25, 27

Einwohner, Rachel L. and J. William Spencer. 2005. “That’s how we do things here”: Local culture and the construction of sweatshops and anti-sweatshop activism in two campus communities. *Sociological Inquiry* 75, 2: 249-272.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2005.00121.x/pdf>

Olesen, Thomas. 2006. “In the court of public opinion”: Transnational problem construction in the HIV/AIDS medicine access campaign, 1998-2001. *International Sociology* 21, 1: 5-30.
<http://iss.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/content/21/1/5.full.pdf+html>

Sept. 30, Oct. 2, 4

Best, Amy L. 2008. Teen driving as public drama: Statistics, risk, and the construction of youth as a social problem. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11, 6: 651-669.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=35546237&site=ehost-live>

Carter, Connie. 2009. Making residential cannabis growing operations actionable: A critical policy analysis. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 20: 371-376.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=35546237&site=ehost-live>

Oct. 7, 9, 11

Parnaby, Patrick. 2003. Disaster through dirty windshields: Law, order and Toronto's squeegee kids. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 28, 3: 281-307.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3341925>

Malone, Ruth E., Elizabeth Boyd, and Lisa A. Bero. 2000. Science in the news: Journalists' constructions of passive smoking as a social problem. *Social Studies of Science* 30, 5: 713-735.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/285762>

Oct. 16, 18

Mahood, Linda and Vic Satzewich. 2009. The Save the Children Fund and the Russian Famine of 1921-23: Claims and counter-claims about feeding "Bolshevik" children. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22, 1: 55-83.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2009.01342.x/pdf>

Oct. 21, 23, 25

No readings.

Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 1

Chasteen, Amy L. 2001. Constructing rape: Feminism, change, and women's everyday understandings of sexual assault. *Sociological Spectrum* 21, 2: 101-139.

<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=4273265&site=ehost-live>

Maratea, Ray. 2008. The e-rise and fall of social problems: The blogosphere as public arena. *Social Problems* 55, 1: 139-169.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2008.55.1.139>

Nov. 4, 6, 8

Jensen, Eric L. and Jurg Gerber. 1993. State efforts to construct a social problem: The 1986 war on drugs in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 18, 4: 453-462.

<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=10086368&site=ehost-live>

Weitzer, Ronald. 2009. Legalizing prostitution: Morality politics in Western Australia. *British Journal of Criminology* 49: 88-105.

<http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/content/49/1/88.full.pdf+html>

Nov. 13, 15

Brown, Debra J. 2006. Working the system: Re-thinking the institutionally organized role of mothers and the reduction of “risk” in child protection work. *Social Problems* 53, 5: 352-370.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2006.53.3.352>

Mäkitalo, Åsa and Roger Säljö. 2009. Invisible people: Institutional reasoning and reflexivity in the production of services and “social facts” in public employment agencies. *Mind, Culture and Activity* 9, 3: 160-178.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327884MCA0903_02

Nov. 18, 20, 22

No readings.

Nov. 25, 27, 29

Linders, Annulla. 1998. Abortion as a social problem: The construction of “opposite” solutions in Sweden and the United States. *Social Problems* 45, 4: 488-509.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3097209>

Pratt, John. 2009. From abusive families to Internet predators? The rise, retraction and reconfiguration of sexual abuse as a social problem in Canada. *Current Sociology* 57, 1: 69-88.

<http://csi.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/content/57/1/69.full.pdf+html>