

University of Calgary
Department of Sociology
Sociology 401

Sociology of Compassion

Spring 2009

Instructor: Dr. Mark B. Durieux

"No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey."

-- C. Wright Mills,
on the "sociological imagination"

"True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
linking the sociological imagination to compassion

Course Outline

General orientation - Overview and goal

One doesn't have to be Nostradamus to feel uneasy about humanity's future over the coming decades. At a macro level, our species appears ill-equipped to face the social and ecological problems of enormous quality and scale which now threaten it. Thus, we are currently witness to rapid climate change, staggering consumption in the face of fundamental scarcities (i.e, food and freshwater, education, health, shelter, energy), massive environmental degradation, escalating social inequality and income insecurity alongside a booming global population that's expected to reach 10 billion in just a few years, the pervasive use of violence to "settle" disputes, and so on. At a more micro level, we find social problems that seem too numerous to count. What are we to do?

To start, we must do three things, and these form the basic premises guiding this course. ***The first is that we must recognize that a wide-spread and realized culture of compassion is both urgently needed and fervently desired by many. The second is that we must explore and release the fullest possible potential of sociology's "sociological imagination" - as well as many other aspects of sociology - to act as the vital means to answering humanity's call for compassion. The third is that we must here create a vibrant learning community that will allow us to explore and develop our personal and communal sociologies of compassion in a collaborative, participatory, and democratic manner that will model this skill set to civic society at large.*** Obviously, a lot may be at stake with this course.

Details - Lecture time and location

Weekdays: Mondays, Wednesdays **Times:** 14:00 - 15:50 **Room:** SS 012

Instructor: Dr. Mark Durieux

Office: SS 902; **Tel:** (Soci Main Office) 220-6501 **(Preferred contact is by email via mbdurieux@shaw.ca).**

Office Hours: ½ hour before class.

Texts & other related or required materials

1. Bornstein, David (2007). *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Selected class handouts, lecture notes, and readings may also be considered required materials and will be presented as needed.

Student assessment

Summary: Activities, worth, deadlines.

1. **Discussion Sparks** (10%). Each Sunday evening, based on upcoming material (see the course calendar!), students must submit through BlackBoard 4 provocative insights and/or questions (2 chapters at 2 each) for discussion in the upcoming week's classes. **Students, unless excused by the instructor, must also be present in class to introduce and present their "discussion sparks"**. Whether one leads discussion will be determined by random selection. Grading for each week is pass/fail, with a pass representing a B grade (75%). **Students who do not attend class without adequate justification and who cannot, therefore, lead discussion when called upon will not receive a passing grade even if they have submitted their discussion sparks.**
2. **Quizzes** (30%, see BlackBoard, Course Documents) based on the text, lecture, supplementary or class discussion material. Quizzes will be approximately 5 true/false items per chapter (although the occasional multiple choice item may be included). Quizzes are due within 7 days of the posting date (except for the last week which will be due TBA) by 11:55 pm. After that, the quiz will be closed.
3. **Sociology of Compassion blog participation** (25%). (See <http://www.ourstory.com/compassion>). Each student participates weekly in this international blog. Students are required to post a minimum of 2 thoughtful 150+ word blog posts per week. **The deadline each week is Sunday evening by midnight.** At the semester's conclusion, each student submits a blog log of their postings (embedded within appropriate context) for evaluation as a digital file (i.e., MS Word .doc file). **These blog logs will be graded according to the course grading scheme.** If students would like preliminary feedback on the quality of their postings, they may submit by email a sample collection of their first three weeks of blog entries to the course instructor who will evaluate the sample for feedback purposes only on a simple pass/fail basis (again, see the course grading scheme, where a pass represents a "D" grade of 50%) while providing brief feedback.
4. **Team Paper** (30%). Written by teams of 2-3 students. **"Better than Bornstein"** overall goal. Here, take a compassionate individual, cause, or issue not discussed in Bornstein's text and theoretically analyze it and write it up from a sociology of compassion perspective. Minimum word length: 2,000 words.
5. **6. Personal Course summary** (5%). Document your personal journey and engagement with the sociology of compassion in a minimum of 1,000 words. Pass/Fail, with a pass representing a B grade (75%).

Grading scheme.

A+ >95%; A 90-94% (Excellent: superior performance);
A- 85-89; B+ 80-84; B 75-79 (Good: Clearly Above Average Performance);
B- 70- 74; C+ 67-69; C 64-66 (Satisfactory: Basic understanding);
C- 60-63; D+ 55-59; D 50-54 (Minimum Pass);
F <50 Unsatisfactory Performance.

Research Ethics:

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.

Academic Misconduct

Cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. Students are advised to consult the University/College Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Term assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self- addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.