

**Department of Sociology  
University of Calgary**

**SOCI 401.46  
Sociology of Risk  
Winter 2015**

**Course Times:** Monday 11:00-11:50am, Wednesday 11:00-11:50am, Friday 11:00-11:50am  
**Course Location:** SA119

**Instructor:** Dr. Dean Curran

**Office:** SS 918

**Email:** [dcurran@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dcurran@ucalgary.ca)

**Phone:** 403-220-6520

**Office Hours:** Monday 2:00pm–3:10pm, Friday 10:00am–10:50am

**Course Overview**

This course provides an introduction to contemporary sociology of risk. The first part of the course introduces the primary theoretical approaches to the sociology of risk: the cultural approach, governmentality, edgework, and risk society. The course builds upon these theoretical approaches to look at specific areas of concern of contemporary risk: individualization, inequality, the relation of capitalism and risk, and the politics of risk.

**Aims and Objectives**

At the end of this course, students should have knowledge and understanding of:

- The dominant approaches to risk in contemporary sociology.
- The debates regarding whether we are living in a ‘risk society’ and if so, how this risk society should be conceived.
- How these debates over sociological approaches to risk relate to key debates in contemporary sociological theory, regarding modernity, realism and constructivism, and how to understand shifts in contemporary inequalities.

This course should also enhance students’ ability to:

- To theorize in a critical and analytical manner about how to conceive of risk and how particular risks relate to social life.
- Write clearly and cogently about contemporary social theory.
- Make a contribution to existing debates in the sociology of risk by fashioning and defending their own arguments.

**Theory and Theorizing**

In this course it is essential that students engage in a theoretical manner with the course material in their participation, presentations, and writing. It is essential that students not merely describe and summarize the readings. A theoretical analysis seeks to abstract certain key ideas, arguments, concepts from the specific content of a text and then reconstructs the arguments, ideas, or concepts in such a way that we are able to better grasp the relations between different ideas and concepts. This process of abstraction and reconstruction may be for the purpose of:

better understanding a specific concept of a theorist (such as Weber's "rationalization" or Durkheim's "anomie"); better understanding the relation between the different concepts of a specific thinker (such as how Marx's theory of class relates to his theory of value); or better understanding the relation between two thinkers' conception of social reality (such as the connection between Marx's understanding of "alienation" and Durkheim's "social facts"). This improved understanding through the process of abstraction and reconstruction may be for such purposes such as: (1) helping to better understand the theorist's work in their own terms, (2) critiquing the work of the thinker, or (3) identifying how to apply the basic theories of a thinker to a very different context than the one for which they were originally formulated.

### **Course Content**

In exploring contemporary risk, this course is highly theoretical, as well as making extensive reference to empirical evidence to evaluate and apply these theories. While SOCI 331 and 333 are not formal prerequisites for this course, it is advised that students who do not have a basis in theoretical approaches to social life may find the content in this course quite challenging.

### **Required Texts**

- Anthony Giddens (1990) *Consequences of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Readings in Course Reader. It is available from the University of Calgary Bookstore. Readings in the Course Reader will have '(CR)' beside them

Students are expected to bring the readings to the class to discuss the material.

### **Teaching and Learning**

#### Format of the Course

- 13 three X a week 50 minute lectures and discussions (with exceptions of weeks
- reading days). Fridays will be days devoted primarily to discussion.
- 2 in-class tests (**March 1<sup>st</sup>, March 28<sup>th</sup>**)
- 1 Theory Paper (**Due April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016**)
- 1 Take-home Final Exam (**Due April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016**)

### **Course Assessment**

Participation: 10%

Theory Paper: 35%

Tests: 25% (higher scoring test is worth 15%, lower one 10%)

Final Exam: 30%

### **Course Participation (10%)**

Students are expected to regularly attend the lectures and to have completed the readings prior to the Wednesday lecture. It is important that each student be prepared to contribute to the discussion of the readings, both for their own learning and for the benefit of the class as a whole.

### **Theory Paper 35% (Due April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016)**

The theory paper is a core component of assessment for this course. The paper assignment is intended to enable students to develop a substantive theoretical paper and to further develop the skills associated with this task. The readings in this course are intended to provide an in-depth

introduction to many of the key debates in the sociology of risk. Students are heavily encouraged to plan ahead and consult with the instructor regarding their proposed essay topics. The paper should be 3000 words (10% allowance either way).

### **Take Home Final Exam (30%) (Due April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016)**

The final exam will take place during the exam period and will cover the entire course material, both readings and lectures.

### **General Referencing Guidelines**

Always include page numbers of the source you are referencing - just using a date is not enough. Harvard style (in text citations with date and page e.g. (Beck 1992: 22) is recommended). This is important for all writing in the course and failure to properly reference can significantly affect marks in papers and summaries (see criteria for strong papers below).

### **Submission and Late Policy**

The term paper is to be handed in as a hard copy in class to the course instructor the day of class that it is due. The paper will receive a late penalty of FIVE (5) MARKS PER FULL OR PART DAY (a weekend counts as two full days). Any paper more than one (1) week late without a valid extension will receive a mark of zero (0). Late notice accommodations are unlikely to be allowed for late entry other than illness or another serious and documented situation – talk to me prior to the deadline. Please note essays are not to be submitted to the sociology main office.

### **Instructor Contact Policy**

**Email:** Please use “SOC 401” in the subject line of all course-related emails. It may take up to 48 hours (not including weekends) for me to respond to you. Email responses will also be kept short. To discuss anything in-depth, come along during office hours.

**Office Hours:** During office hours you are free to drop by without an appointment at any time. If you are unable to make that time, please contact me in advance so that we can try to arrange an appointment. Office hours are a very effective and efficient way of providing help and I encourage all students to make use of my office hours.

### **Class Etiquette**

Use of cell phones or internet on laptops are disruptive to lectures and discussions and are not permitted.

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

## **Plagiarism**

Academic misconduct in general is discussed below. Plagiarism is a particularly important form of academic misconduct. The University of Calgary Calendar indicates that “Plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work as if it were the student’s own work when it is not. Any ideas or materials taken from another source written, electronic, or oral must be fully and formally acknowledged.” <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>. **All cases of plagiarism must be forwarded to the university administration and the penalties for plagiarism can be very severe.** <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-2.html>

## **Course Notes (Important, but not written by me).**

**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.

**Handing in Papers, Assignments** The main Sociology Department office does not deal with any course-related matters. Please speak directly to your instructor.

**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.

Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are only available online.

**Ethics 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 Faculty 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. Research with human subjects should not be undertaken in this theory course.

**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>

**Deferrals:** When possible, please provide advance notice 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, misreading the syllabus, and scheduling conflicts with other classes or employment 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](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).

**Student Representation:** The 2015-16 Students’ Union VP Academic is Stephan Guscott: email: [suvpaca@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suvpaca@ucalgary.ca). The Faculty of Arts has four SU representatives who may be contacted at any of the following email addresses: [arts1@ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts1@ucalgary.ca), [arts2@ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts2@ucalgary.ca), [arts3@ucalgary.ca](mailto:arts3@ucalgary.ca), and [arts4@ucalgary.ca](mailto: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>

**Emergency Evacuations:** In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom, please proceed to the assembly point at ICT Food Court. Please check these assembly point locations for all of your classes at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

**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.

**Academic Accommodation:** *Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services ; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).*

*Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.*

*The full policy on Student Accommodations is available*

*at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf)*

## **Schedule of Risk Course**

Week 1: Introducing Risk

### **Part I: The Theories**

Week 2: Douglas and the Cultural Approach

Week 3: Governmentality Approach

Week 4 Edgework

Week 5: Risk Society I

Week 6: Risk Society II

### **Part II: Explaining Contemporary Risk?**

Week 7: Modernity and Risk I

Week 8: Modernity and Risk II

### **Part III: Key Issues**

Week 9: Risk and Individualization in a Competitive Age

Week 10: Is Capitalism Dangerous for the World?

Week 11: Risk and Inequality

Week 12: The Politics of Risk: Emancipatory or Culture of Fear

## **Course Readings**

### **Week One: Introducing Risk**

**January 11, 13, & 15, 2015**

- Giddens, A. (1990) *Consequences of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 124-149.

## **PART I: THEORIES OF RISK**

### **Week 2 Douglas and the Cultural Approach**

**January 18, 20, & 22, 2015**

- Douglas, M and Wildavsky, A. 1982 *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Introduction, pp. 1-15. (CR)
- Douglas, M. (1992) "Risk and Danger" in *Risk and Blame*. London: Routledge, chapter 3, pp 38-54. (CR)
- Curran, D. (2016) "Douglas' Cultural Theory of Risk" in "The Sociology of Risk and the Ineliminability of Realism" in *Risk, Power and Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 27-31.

### **Week 3 Governmentality Approaches**

**January 25, 27, & 29, 2015**

- Ewald, F. 1991 'Insurance and Risk' in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Rose, N (1990) *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge, introduction, pp.1-11. (CR)
- Curran, D. (2016) "The Governmentality Approach to Risk" in "The Sociology of Risk and the Ineliminability of Realism" in *Risk, Power and Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 31-37.

#### **Week 4 Edgework**

**Feb 1, 3, & 5, 2015**

- Lyng, S. (2008) “Edgework, Risk, and Uncertainty” in J.O. Zinn (ed *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp.106-37. **(CR)**
- Lyng, S. (2014) ‘Action and Edgework: Risk Taking and Reflexivity in Late Modernity’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 17(4): **443-460. (CR)**

#### **Week 5 Risk Society I**

**Feb 8, 10, & 12, 2015**

- Beck, U. (1992) ‘From Industrial Society to the Risk Society: Questions of Survival Social Structure and Ecological Enlightenment’, *Theory, Culture, and Society* 9(1): **97-123. (CR)**
- Beck, U. (1992) “On the Logic of Wealth Distribution and Risk Distribution “*Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London, Sage, **chapter 1, pp. 19-50. (CR)**
- Young, N. (2015) “A Dangerous New World: The Risk Society Thesis” in *Environmental Sociology for the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, **pp. 96-114. (CR)**
- Curran, D. “The Theory of Risk Society” and “Risk and the Ineliminability of Realism” in *Risk, Power and Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, **pp. 40-43.**

#### **Reading Week No Class**

#### **Week 6 Risk Society II: World Risk Society**

**Feb 22, 24, and 26, 2015.**

- Beck, U. 1999 *World Risk Society*, Malden, MA: Polity, chapter 1, **pp. 1-18. (CR)**
- Beck, U. 1996 ‘World Risk Society as Cosmopolitan Society? Ecological Questions in a Framework of Manufactured Uncertainties’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 13(4): **1–32. (CR)**
- Curran, D. “Risk and the Ineliminability of Realism” in *Risk, Power and Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, **pp. 43-52.**
- Beck, U. 2006b ‘Living in the World Risk Society’, *Economy and Society* 35(3): **329-45. (CR)**

### **PART II: EXPLAINING CONTEMPORARY RISK?**

#### **Week 7: Modernity and Risk I**

**March 1 –Test #1**

**March 3 & 5, 2015**

- Giddens, A. (1990) *Consequences of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, **pp. 1-65, 70-78.**

#### **Week 8: Modernity and Risk II**

**March 7, 9, & 11, 2015**

- Giddens, A. (1990) *Consequences of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, **pp. 79-124, 137-44, 150-173.**

### **PART III: KEY ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY RISK**

#### **Week 9: Risk and Individualization in a Competitive Age**

### **March 14, 16, and 18, 2015**

- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) “Losing the Traditional” *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequence*. London: Sage, pp. 1-21. (CR)
- Giddens, A. (1993 [1992]) “Love and Sexuality” from *The Transformation of Intimacy* in P. Cassell (ed.) *The Giddens Reader*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 303-315. (CR)
- Silva, J.M. (2012) ‘Constructing Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty’ *American Sociological Review* 77(4): 505-522. (CR)

### **Week 10: Is Capitalism Dangerous for the World?**

#### **March 21 and 23, 2015**

- Polanyi, K. (1957[1944]) “Market and Nature” *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon, pp. 178-191. (CR)
- Newell, P. and Paterson, M. (2010) “What futures for climate capitalism?” in *Climate Capitalism: Global Warming and the Transformation of the Global Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 161-181. (CR)
- Urry, J. (2011) “High Carbon Lives” in *Climate Change & Society*. Cambridge: Polity, ch. 3, pp. 48-65. (CR)

### **Week 11: Risk and Inequality**

#### **March 28 Test #2**

#### **March 30, April 1st 2015**

- Curran, D. 2013 ‘Risk Society and the Distribution of Bads: Theorizing Class in the Risk Society’, *British Journal of Sociology* 64(1): 44–62. (CR)
- Beck, U. 2013 ‘Why “Class” is too Soft a Category to Capture the Explosiveness of Social Inequality at the Beginning of the 21st Century’, *British Journal of Sociology* 64(1): 63–74. (CR)
- Curran, D. (2015) ‘Risk Illusion and Organized Irresponsibility in Contemporary Finance: Rethinking Class and Risk Society’. *Economy and Society* 44(3): 392-417. (CR)

### **Week 12: The Politics of Risk: Emancipatory or Culture of Fear**

#### **April 4, 6, & 8, 2015**

- Beck, U. (2015) ‘Emancipatory catastrophism: What does it mean to climate change and risk society?’ *Current Sociology* Vol. 63(1): 75–88. (CR)
- Furedi, F. (1997) *Culture of Fear*. London: Cassell, Chapter 1 “The Explosion of Risks” pp. 15-39. (CR)
- Scott, A. 2000 ‘Risk Society or Angst Society? Two Views of Risk, Consciousness and Community’ in B. Adam, U. Beck and J. van Loon (eds) *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, London: Sage, pp. 33-46. (CR)

### **Week 13**

#### **April 11 Review (Term paper due)**

#### **April 13, independent review day**

## **Criteria for Strong Papers:**

This is a checklist to help evaluate papers submitted in this course. The greater degree to which each question can be answered positively to a high level, the stronger the paper.

### **I. Thesis Statement**

Is it identifiable and clear?

Is it manageable rather than being too broad for a short paper?

Is it something substantive and does it provide the key argument(s) of the paper?

Does the paper actually then follow closely follow the thesis?

### **II. Theoretical Understandings**

Does the paper identify the key elements of the concepts that it is discussing?

Does it explain these concepts clearly and accurately and in sufficient depth?

Does its further discussion of the concepts demonstrate an overall understanding of the theorists involved in the paper, as well as integrating other literatures into the paper well?

Does it move beyond simply describing or summarizing the readings to analyze them and their underlying reasons and understandings?

Can it apply these concepts to new contexts and arguments in an insightful way?

Does the paper manifest a critical understanding of the subject matter of the paper?

Does the paper manifest a certain level of originality or creativity in understanding and critically analyzing the theorists discussed?

### **III. Writing Quality**

Is the grammar and spelling correct?

Is it clear what the meaning of the sentences and paragraphs is?

Does it follow a clear structure, and provide the reader with an understanding of where the argument is proceeding, rather than being disorganized or disjointed?

### **IV. Evidence**

Does the paper provide reasons for the arguments and conclusions that it makes?

Are the reasons provided clear and persuasive and backed by proper evidence?

In making claims about a certain thinker's ideas does it provide proper evidence of these claims through proper citation (book and page number) and argumentation?

### **A Paper**

The paper will be very good in all these dimensions.

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### **B Paper**

The paper will be good on all of these dimensions, or adequate on some dimensions and very good on other dimensions.

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### **C Paper**

The paper will be satisfactory on all of these dimensions, or poor on some and good (or very good) on others.

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### **D Paper**

The paper is poor on many of these dimensions.

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### **F Paper**

The paper will be inadequate on several of these dimensions.