

**Department of Sociology
University of Calgary**

**SOCI 435
Sociology of Knowledge
Winter 2010**

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Office hours: Wednesdays 1-3:00 pm; and by appointment

Course Description:

All social activities are in some way coordinated through practices of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge studies these practices, exploring how they operate in specific times and places. 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? How does information circulate? How is scientific facticity produced? What counts as truth?

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 proposed, acted upon and evaluated. Much sociology is concerned with social problems – describing 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. 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? Legislation, social policy and forms of professional practice are often based on prevailing versions of 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* (New York: W.W. Norton: 2008).

A collection of journal articles, all of which are available online. See list of readings on last page of this syllabus.

Assignments and Assessment

Reading notes 10 %

For each 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 11 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 (see below).

Discussant 10 %

On most days, 2-3 students (depending on total enrollment) will take the lead as discussants in a panel discussion of the article or articles assigned for that day. Each student must sign up as discussant for one article. This is not a group project; it's an in-class discussion for which each person prepares individually. Guidelines for preparation will be given in class. After the discussion, you will turn in a copy of your notes.

Midterm take-home essay 20 %

The topic of this essay (approx. 5-6 pages) will be assigned on February 11; the essay is due on February 23.

Group project 35 %

Teams of 4-5 people (depending on total enrollment) will collaboratively research the social construction of a particular social problem in Canada. Guidelines for this research will be posted in Blackboard and discussed in class. Your team will make an in-class presentation and produce a summary handout for the rest of the class. You will produce a longer (approx. 8-12 page) report on your project. Grading for this project will be on both a group and an individual basis.

Group grade – overall presentation, handout, overall organization of report 15 %

Individual grade – contribution to group effort, role in presentation, report section 20 %

Attendance at other groups' presentations is important and expected (every group deserves a good audience). I will be taking attendance during the presentations. Unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 5% per missed class from your individual contribution grade.

Final take-home essay (25%)

The topic of this essay (approx. 6-8 pages) will be assigned on April 15, due April 23. Resources for the essay include presentation content as well as course readings and guest lectures.

Grading

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

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

Instructor's Policies

Classroom atmosphere: Stimulating discussion thrives in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Our goal should be to create an environment in which the largest number of people feel both inspired and safe to participate in discussions. Every person in the class has a role to play in creating and maintaining that environment.

Courtesy: Please make this class and the other people in it your priority during the time the class is in session. That means not reading or sending text messages and email, surfing the Internet, or checking Facebook, etc.

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, including the unintentional kind. Make sure you know what counts as plagiarism and how to avoid it. Consult the Effective Writing Centre (<http://www.efwr.ucalgary.ca/writingcentre>) and the resource material posted in Blackboard.

Rounding: If your percentage grade falls on the cusp between two letter grades, I will look at your grades and your participation in class discussions over the semester in order to decide whether to round your final grade up to the higher letter grade.

Official University and Departmental Policies

Exam Policies: You must provide *advance* notice to the instructor if you are unable to take an exam. All requests for deferral of an examination 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 physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferred exams may be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. If you have missed an exam for a legitimate reason, you will be able to write a “make up” exam as close to the original exam as possible. The date and location will be at the convenience of the Sociology Department. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferred exam. Deferred exams will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

Ethics in 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.

Academic Misconduct: Cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. Students are advised to consult the University 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.

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 with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student’s responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**

Handing in Papers Outside of Class, Return of Final Papers, and Release of Final Grades

When students are unable to submit papers at class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant rather than at the Sociology Department main office.

Final papers will not be returned through the Sociology Department main office. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, (i.e., outside an instructor's office, the department office, etc.). Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will only be available for pick-up during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or the beginning of the next term.

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

Course Schedule – Tentative

Week/Dates	Readings & Assignment Due Dates
Jan 12 & 14	Best, ch. 1
Jan 19 & 21	Best, ch. 2 Best & Lowney article (Tues.) Jerolmack article (Thurs.)
Jan 26 & 28	Best, ch. 3 Einwohner & Spencer article (Tues.) Olesen article (Thurs.)
Feb 2 & 4	Best, ch. 4 A. Best article (Tues.) Guest speaker (Thurs.)
Feb 9 & 11	Best, ch. 5 Parnaby article (Tues.) Malone, Boyd and Bero article (Thurs.) <i>Midterm take-home essay given on February 11</i>
February 15-19	Reading Week – no classes
Feb 23 & 25	Best, ch. 6 Chasteen article (Tues.) <i>Midterm take-home essay due February 25</i>
March 2 & 4	Mahood and Satzewich article (Tues.) Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi article (Tues.) Guest speaker (Thurs. – tentative)
March 9 & 11	Best, ch. 7 Jensen and Gerber article (Tues.) Weitzer article (Thurs.)
March 16 & 18	Best, chs. 8 & 9 Bowditch article (Tues.) Campbell article (Thurs.)
March 23 & 25	Best, ch. 10 Linders article (Tues.) Pratt article (Thurs.)

March 30 & Apr 1	Best, ch. 11 Presentations (2) <i>Presentation reports due the day of your presentation.</i>
April 6 & 8	No readings Presentations (4)
April 13 & 15	Presentations (2) – if needed <i>Take-home final essay given out on April 15</i>
April 25	<i>Take-home final essays due</i>

List of Journal Articles – by Week

Note: All of these articles can be obtained through the University of Calgary library website.

January 18 & 21

Best, Joel and Kathleen S. Lowney. 2009. The disadvantage of a good reputation: Disney as a target for social problems claims. *Sociological Quarterly* 50: 431-449.

Jerolmack, Colin. 2008. How pigeons became rats: The cultural-spatial logic of problem animals. *Social Problems* 55, 1: 72-94.

January 26 & 28

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.

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.

February 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.

February 9 & 11

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

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.

February 23 & 25

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

March 2 & 4

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.

Jacobs, Keith, Jim Kemeny, and Tony Manzi. 2003. Power, discursive space, and institutional practices in the construction of housing problems. *Housing Studies* 18, 4: 429-446.

March 9 & 11

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

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.

March 16 & 18

Bowditch, Christine. 1993. Getting rid of troublemakers: High school disciplinary procedures and the production of dropouts. *Social Problems* 40, 4: 493-509.

Campbell, Marie L. 2001. Textual accounts, ruling action: The intersection of knowledge and power in the routine conduct of nursing work. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies* 7: 231-250.

March 23 & 25

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.

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.