



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 2261B-001
Contemporary Social Problems
Winter 2026

DRAFT until start of term

Instructor: Dr Scott Schaffer
Office Hours: TBD and by appointment
Department of Sociology
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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 for use on the Perusall platform. Access codes for these books need to be purchased from the University Bookstore; purchasing them directly through Perusall will mean subjecting you to the vagaries of the market by having to pay in US dollars. I personally recommend buying the print versions as well (through online

booksellers), but *they are not required*. Each of the books, whether in print or ebook format, is approximately CAD\$14.

James Fulcher, *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: 9780191039010)

Manfred B Steger and Ravi K Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: 9780192589552)

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 TA 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 lecture	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 5
Second examination	20% -- in class on Th Mar 12
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

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.

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

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.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration](#) – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html . Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner. Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Once the request and supporting documentation have been received and reviewed, appropriate academic consideration, if granted, shall be determined by the instructor in consultation with the academic advisor, in a manner consistent with the course outline. Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam, unless otherwise specified in the course outline. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup text/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty Academic Counselling Office.

Students who fail to write a make-up test or special examination will receive a grade of zero on that assessment. No other make-up opportunities will be provided unless further academic consideration is granted by the student's Home Faculty Academic Counselling office.

Religious Accommodation: Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning: In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence or University approved emergency during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Code of Student Conduct: It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize him or herself with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed, and

that they are aware of any antirequisite course(s) they may have taken. Students must familiarize themselves with the Student Responsibility for Course Selection policy https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf and the Registration and Progression policy https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf. Students are responsible for the successful completion of the Graduation Requirements for their degree program https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf.

Support Services:

Office of the Registrar Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

[Faculty Academic Advising](#) - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

[USC services](#) offers information about student the health/dental plan, Bus Pass, food support services, Peer support Centre etc <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

[Mental health](#) – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

[Health & Wellness Services](#) – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>. Additional on-campus services are also available <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/services/index.html>.

[Accessible Education](#) provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. 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.

[Gender-Based and Sexual Violence](#) – Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: http://uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

[Western Libraries](#) – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.

[Writing support](#) – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>

Bookstore: Search for Textbook availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search>