

SOC 220: CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE HIMALAYAS
Section xxx, 5 Credit Hours



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COURSE DESCRIPTION & OUTCOMES

Sociologists suggest that the *origins and causes of social problems lie outside of individuals*, even though the effects of such problems are reflected in the behavior of individuals. This class examines a variety of contemporary social problems, taking a critical view of American society, and contextualizes these issues within the cultural, economic, and political spheres of the United States in juxtaposition to Himalayan culture.

You will be asked to explore social issues both at home and abroad, with the goal of fostering a more nuanced worldview and expanding global consciousness, looking beyond western perspectives for “solutions” to these social issues. In other words, what do we learn about environmental practices (or gender? race? poverty? labor laws? the welfare state?) in both cultural contexts when we employ a critical comparative lens?

Through our examination, you should be able to demonstrate an ability to communicate to others the complexities of contemporary social issues and to apply different theoretical explanations. By the end of the course, you should additionally have an increased knowledge and understanding of the sociological perspectives used within the discipline broadly, and have an opportunity to think about how to promote social change and implement advocacy efforts, while exploring the implications of doing so.

The course is divided into three broad themes: *Perspectives & Values*, *Thinking about Fairness & Inequality*, and *Democracy & Advocacy*. In addition to the core text, other assigned readings and materials will be housed within our Canvas course. While travelling, hard copies of articles will be provided as needed.

*Please note that we will be practicing mindfulness throughout this course. What this means may differ depending on the day, but in general, we will begin each session with a silent meditation for 5-7 minutes. (*If you are late to class, please wait until we have finished our meditation to enter the room, after which I will open the door and allow you into class). While meditating is not mandatory, it is important that you are respectful and quiet during that time. Meditation may be a new practice for you, and you will receive instruction at the beginning of the course. It is both relevant to our course content, and a useful tool in general.

Learning Outcomes & Objectives:	Assessments
1. Characterize how each of the three major sociological perspectives apply to contemporary social issues cross-culturally.	Learning logs, Readings, Discussions, Advocacy Project
2. Characterize the potential impact of selected social issues on society	Learning logs, Readings, Discussions, Advocacy Project
3. Articulate a proper research methodology on a selected contemporary issue relevant to the Himalayan region.	Advocacy Project
4. Use multiple perspectives to think critically and solve problems	Learning logs, Readings, Discussions, Advocacy Project
5. Explore the history, culture, economy, and political climate of Himalayan communities/American communities	Learning logs, Readings, Discussions, Advocacy Project, Fieldwork & sources of local knowledge*

CORE LEARNING ABILITIES

WCC's core learning abilities (CLAs) – quantitative literacy, information literacy, communication, critical thinking, and global awareness – are skills taught and reinforced throughout our curriculum. These skills are integral to students' professional and personal lives. This course will give you the opportunity to practice and develop information literacy.

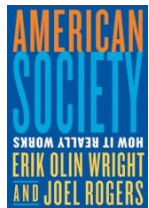
MY PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The following passage is an edited version of a speech delivered by Adrienne Rich, at the convocation of Douglass College, in 1977. In its original unedited form it was directed specifically towards women. I find the messages within to be more or less universal, relevant today, and in line with my own philosophy of teaching:

“If university education means anything beyond the processing of human beings into expected roles, through credit hours, tests, and grades . . . it implies an ethical and intellectual contract between teacher and student. This contract must remain intuitive, dynamic, unwritten; but we must turn to it again and again if learning is to be reclaimed from the depersonalizing and cheapening pressures of the present-day academic scene. The first thing I want to say to you who are students, is that you cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education: you will do much better to think of being here to claim one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb "to claim" is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. "To receive" is to come into possession of: to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon . . . I want to suggest that there is a more essential experience that you owe yourselves . . . [t]his is the experience of taking responsibility toward yourselves . . . Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work . . . Responsibility to yourself means that you don't fall for shallow and easy solutions-- predigested books and ideas . . . It means that you refuse to sell your talents and aspirations short . . .”

While I point you towards your own responsibility in claiming your education, I also recognize my responsibility in guiding, fostering, and engaging with you in the process.

REQUIRED TEXTS



Wright, Erik Olin & Joel Rogers. 2010. *American Society: How it Really Works*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course will employ a combination of teaching methodologies. It will be set up as a hybrid course, using Canvas to house the articles and additional material, largely to facilitate the first week of intensive instruction while still at Whatcom Community College, and following up for the week after our return from Ladakh, India. Please log in to Canvas regularly to keep up to date with course announcements and assignments. Because access to the internet while traveling will be intermittent, we will be bringing hard copies of necessary readings during our time in country. We will therefore be discussing material while abroad, sometimes on the road, and will need to

be flexible in delivery of content, relying largely on small group discussions of material and more traditional bare bones instruction methods.

1. Participation [25% of total grade]

A large part of your grade hinges on your active participation. In addition to your physical presence in the classroom during class time (or on the road!), I expect you to come prepared and ready to share your insights, critiques, and opinions in a respectful manner. I understand that it can at times be intimidating to speak in class. I still remember being told by a professor in the safety of her office at the end of my first semester of grad school that I needed to talk more! Believe me, I get that it doesn't always come naturally. But this is a skill that is worth developing, and an important part of your education. Try to remember that you are not being graded on your opinions, experiences, or politics. Instead, I am looking for evidence of your attempts to grapple with the material, and comments that demonstrate your completion of the readings in addition to personal experiences or observations. Sometimes you will express something in a way that causes a light bulb to go off in one of your classmate's heads. This is what we want! And at other times, it will be your turn to listen. Do your best to prepare yourself for engaging in discussions by completing the readings and taking notes (bring these to class!), and then come to class with a little bit of courage, and, for those natural talkers, a bit of self-awareness. We all have much to learn from each other.

Rush Writes: You will occasionally be asked to respond to an exercise or reading in class. These responses will be turned in to me at the end of class, and returned to you once accounted for. They will be graded pass/fail, and you will receive participation points for their completion. There will be no make-ups for these assignments, and you must be in class to complete them.

2. Weekly Learning Logs [35% of total grade]

You will be required to keep learning logs throughout the course – sometimes focused on readings, and when relevant, on the fieldwork you will be engaged in. Details on my expectations for your logs will be covered at the beginning of the course, and learning logs will be submitted on a weekly basis via Canvas (with the exception of while we are traveling). Typically, learning logs will ask you to use the IDEA model (outlined below) to reflect on the reading.

Identify (I) an idea or concept that stands out for you (i.e., confuses, intrigues, or creates conflict for you, provides stimulation for further thought, etc.).

Describe (D) the paragraph, page, or chapter, and the circumstances surrounding the point you are focusing on (this component is the “context” for your idea/thoughts).

Explain (E) your opinions/thoughts related to the context – do you agree, or disagree with what you have read, etc.?

Analyze (A) why/how you have come to have that opinion. For instance, what personal biases or assumptions did you discover? – And/Or- What additional thoughts or ideas did it generate and what do you think can be learned from your IDEA's?

3. Advocacy Project on Contemporary Social Issue of Choice [40% of total grade]

Advocacy can happen at a number of levels and can include community organizing at a local level or more ambitious organizing at a national level and even global arenas. Individuals and communities can advocate to politicians to change governmental policy, to other people to get support for their cause or to businesses to support causes or change their operational practices.

Several social problems/issues compete for our resources and attention. You are likely more or less sympathetic towards certain social issues – problems that speak to you perhaps because you are personally affected by them or have seen those close to you harmed by them.

With this assignment you are tasked with the goal of raising awareness of your particular issue and bringing a voice to the people who are affected by it - ideally creating the momentum for meaningful social change. While this is an academic exercise, it should provide the foundation for real-world tactics and tools that could be implemented should you choose to do so.

Pick an issue relevant to our course that you are passionate about and summarize the historical roots of this issue. You should identify whether political, public or corporate action is required to positively impact this issue, devise a strategy for organizing citizens (or groups) for the purposes of advocacy and then explain the steps you would encourage them to take to advocate for the cause either to policymakers or businesses. Your strategies should include both on-the-ground strategies and online-strategies, with a justification for each. Finally, you will include an appendix of materials you create with the intent of spreading awareness and inciting action. Please refer to the outline of the paper below for details on each section.

With this assignment, you should demonstrate your ability to remember, understand and apply the course's content on advocacy and activism, as well as content relevant to the social issue of your choice. Moreover, you should come away with a foundation of real tools that can be put to use in enacting meaningful change.

OUTLINE AND DIRECTIONS

TITLE: _____

INTRODUCTION [Three paragraph minimum, 8 credible sources cited within the body of the text and included in a reference section at the end of the paper].

Describe the community and social problem you are focusing on. Provide the historical context for the issue in this particular community, and how it helps us understand current debates surrounding the social problem of concern. In other words, what is at stake? Who are the stakeholders? Why should we care? And what about the history of this community do we need to

understand before organizing a plan to promote social change in this area? This section will require outside research (but should also draw from relevant course readings), and should include a minimum of 8 credible references.

PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION [Two paragraph minimum].

Be specific, and include both on-the-ground grassroots organizing as well as methods of online activism. To a degree, I have already dictated your methods in the sense that I am asking you to create specific materials, as outlined below. Regardless, I do expect you to outline and justify the timing and implementation of your methods and materials.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS [One paragraph minimum].

What will be your main obstacles? What resistance do you foresee? How can an understanding of the history of this community and this particular social issue help you plan to overcome these obstacles? What groups of people do you need to reach out to in order to garner support? What other entities/organizers should be included in the work?

SELF REFLECTION [One paragraph minimum].

What assumptions are you making about the social issue? Where might your own biases and western perspectives be clouding my judgment? How are you working to check your biases?

APPENDIX:

Materials

Prepare materials for distributing awareness about your issue and to inspire action. With each format, think about your audience, and include a justification/explanation paragraph following each section. For instance, when you include the single image, be sure to explain how you came to the decision to use that particular image to capture the spirit of your issue.

1. *Letter to a local government representative*

Write a one-page letter to a local government official that summarizes the issue at hand and includes relevant research and facts. [be specific, and be prepared to actually send the letter].

2. *Letter to the Editor*

Write a 300-word letter to the editor of a community newspaper. This likely will draw heavily from your letter to the local government representative, but should the tone should reflect a different audience (i.e. your community members).

3. Public Service Announcement

You've been allotted a 30 second time slot for a Public Service Announcement (PSA) based on your social issue. Include a copy of the text that will be read during this time. Also include other relevant details, such as whether you will include sound effects? Who will read it? What type of voice (will it sound masculine, feminine, androgynous, young, old, etc – be specific, and justify your choices)? Please refer to the following resource for guidance on constructing a PSA: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/promoting-interest/public-service-announcements/main>

4. Instagram

Create three Instagram posts in the style of [Humans of New York](#). If you are not familiar with this project, it began as an online collection of quotes/short stories and portraits of residents of New York: <https://www.instagram.com/humansofny/>

For your purposes, your posts should of course include humans from your own community of choice. You will need to include a portrait or image representative of that person (with their consent) and also include their thoughts on the particular issue you are exploring. You should tailor the prompt accordingly, and be thoughtful about whether it makes sense to include community members from different generations, occupations, or other demographic variables. Please note that it is not necessary for you to actually post these to Instagram, and this assignment does not require you to create an Instagram (or Twitter) account for that matter, but is meant to provide the material as if you were to actually post these.

****IMPORTANT:** Be sure to check in with me about your plan for this particular part of the project prior to starting it. It is important to think carefully about the wording of your prompt, and your choice of subjects. You will include your prompt for this with your [Proposal for the Project](#)

5. Spokesperson

Choose a “dream” celebrity advocate for your cause, and justify your choice. [Celebrity is up to interpretation, and could mean a local celebrity.] *Include a brief justification for your choice.*

6. Twitter

Now, distill the message down to a single tweet (140 characters or less). While directed towards businesses, the following tips on writing effective tweets can be helpful: <https://blog.twitter.com/2013/tweet-tips-most-effective-calls-to-action-on-twitter>

7. Image/Art

Choose a single image or art piece that represents/symbolizes the issue in your community (can be an original piece, or borrowed, but please indicate its origin). *Include a brief justification for your choice.*

8. #hashtag

Finally, create a hashtag. For some fun inspiration:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwq_GraOC9E
Again, please include a brief justification for your choice.

REFERENCES:

Please use APA style to cite your sources. Refer to the following style guide for questions on formatting: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

STUDENT EVALUATION

Course Grade Breakdown:

Participation	25%
Weekly Learning Logs	35%
Advocacy Project	40%

The grading distribution for this course follows WCC’s grading scale:

93 and up	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
60-69	D
59 and below	F

**A Note on “Incomplete” Courses:*

An “incomplete” for this course is discouraged. However, for a number of verifiable personal emergencies we may discuss grading options as long as you have shown sufficient effort and satisfactory progress as defined by the instructor (assignments up-to-date, 72% average on exams, group participation, good effort, and discussion with teacher). If circumstances in your life prevent your succeeding in this course at this time, you should withdraw before the official withdrawal date (check with the Registration Office) and try the course at another time.

POLICIES

Behavioral Expectations:

- ❖ Respect the ideas of others and their right to express themselves. Express differences in a considerate and constructive manner. Keep a balance between speaking and listening.
- ❖ Actively contribute to class discussions by sharing comments or questions that are directly related to the topic and express interest in the course content. Avoid inappropriate comments that are disrespectful, monopolize the discussion, or are

unrelated to the topic.

- ❖ Please turn off or silence cell phones prior to class. During tests, no cell phones or electronic devices allowed.
- ❖ Please make every effort to arrive to class on time. If you arrive late, please minimize the disruption to the class by taking your seat quietly.
- ❖ Please do not leave class early unless you have informed your instructor in advance.
- ❖ If you are absent, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate to obtain notes or handouts.

According to the **WCC Student Rights and Responsibilities** (WAC 132U-120-010), enrollment in Whatcom Community College carries with it the obligation to be a responsible citizen of the college community and to treat others with respect and dignity. Students shall be subject to disciplinary action for interfering with the personal rights or privileges of others or the educational process of the college. Students are prohibited from engaging in any unlawful conduct. Grounds for disciplinary action include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Disorderly, abusive, or bothersome conduct. Disorderly or abusive behavior that interferes with the rights of others or obstructs or disrupts teaching, research, or administrative functions.
2. Failure to follow instructions. Inattentiveness, inability, or failure of student to follow the instructions of a college official, thereby infringing upon the rights and privileges of others.
3. Sexual harassment. Engaging in unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature where such behavior offends the recipient, causes discomfort or humiliation, or interferes with job or school performance.
4. Plagiarism. Plagiarism includes submitting to a faculty member any work product that the student fraudulently represents to the faculty member as the student's work product for the purpose of fulfilling or partially fulfilling any assignment or task required by the faculty member as part of the student's program of instruction.

Disability Accommodations: Any student with a disability requiring auxiliary aids, services, or other reasonable accommodations should contact the Disability Support Services office in the Entry and Advising Center (LDC116, 360-383-3080 or 360-255-7182 [VP]).

*Please log in to CANVAS (<https://wcc.instructure.com/>) and check for links to information on various support services and resources available to you through WCC, including information on the library, tutoring, computer labs, advising, and the student help desk.

Late/Make-up work & Missed Exams: I will accept late work in extenuating circumstances. Please note that 10% of the grade will be deducted per day late. Without documentation from a doctor (or other documented extenuating circumstances). I cannot allow a missed exam to be retaken.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE: *The instructor reserves the right to change this schedule at any time and for any reason during the course of the semester. Any changes will be made know during class. It is the responsibility of the student to inquire as to any class announcements missed due to absence from class, and/or log in to CANVAS for updates and announcements.* Our text book, American Society, is indicated as follows [AS]



"Himalayas". Map. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Web. 14 Jul. 2016.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE

Introduction to Mindfulness Practice

Guest Presenter: Jill Burns, Mary Haberman, or Tim Burnett

Readings/Materials:

- Course Syllabus
- Reynolds, Gretchen. 2016. "How Meditation Changes the Brain and Body." New York Times, <http://nyti.ms/1R9wlyo>
- For the study abroad version of the course: Howard, Christopher. 2017. "Questions of Travel: Meanings, Experiences and Change in Tourism and Pilgrimage, in Mobile Lifeworlds: An Ethnography of Tourism and Pilgrimage in the Himalayas. Routledge

PERSPECTIVES & VALUES

East & West: Juxtaposing American with Himalayan Worldviews

Readings/Materials:

- Perspectives & Values [Ch 1: AS]
- What kind of society is American Society [Ch 2: AS]
- Dalai Lama. 1998. The Four Noble Truths.
- Davis, Wade. 2007. Light at the Edge of the World. Chapter 6: Land of Snows
- Bray, John (Eds.). 2011. Ladakhi Histories: Regional and Local Perspectives. Chapter 1: Locating Ladakhi History
- Prothero, Stephen. 2010. God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World and Why Their Differences Matter. Chapter 1: Islam; Chapter 5: Buddhism.

- Rizvi, Janet. 1996. Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia.
- [Journey from Zaskar: A Monks Vow to Children \[95 mins\]](#)

SECTION TWO: THINKING ABOUT FAIRNESS & INEQUALITY

Poverty

Readings/Materials:

- Thinking About Fairness & Inequality [Ch 11, AS]
- Persistent Poverty & Rising Inequality [Ch 13, AS]
- Gerlitz, J. Y., Hunzai, K., & Hoermann, B. (2012). Mountain poverty in the Hindu-Kush Himalayas. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 33(2), 250-265.
- Sandhu, H., & Sandhu, S. (2015). Poverty, development, and Himalayan ecosystems. *Ambio*, 44(4), 297-307.

Environmental Justice

Guest Lecturer: Charlie Ashbaugh, Director of Institute for Village Studies

Readings/Materials:

- The Environment [Ch 5, AS]
- Reports on the Flint, Michigan Water Crisis
- Bhasin, Veena. 2012. Life on the Edge among the Changpas of Changthang, Ladakh.
- Angchok, Dorjey, and Singh Premlata. 2006. Traditional irrigation and water distribution system in Ladakh.
- Vaux, Jr., Henry et al. National Resource Council. 2010. Himalayan Glaciers: Climate Change, Water Resources and Water Scarcity.
- McConnell, R. M. (1991). Solving environmental problems caused by adventure travel in developing countries: the Everest Environmental Expedition. *Mountain research and development*, 11(4), 359-366.
- Bishop, B., & Naumann, C. (1996). Mount Everest: Reclamation of the world's highest junk yard. *Mountain Research and Development*, 16(3), 323-327.
- Goehry, David. 2010. Ladakh, Kingdom of Sustainable Development?

Gender Inequality

Guest Lecturer: Sue Ann Heutink, Human Trafficking Advocate

Readings/Materials:

- Gender Inequality [Ch 16, AS]
- Human Trafficking Case Study: Bellingham vs Nepal
- Documentary: Born Into Brothels
- Poudel, P., & Carryer, J. (2000). Girl-trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and the position of women in Nepal. *Gender & Development*, 8(2), 74-79.

Work

Guest Lecturer: Elsie James, Medical Mercy Canada & Porter Advocate

Readings/Materials:

- Labor Unions [Ch 22, AS]
- Film: Sherpa, 2015 [95 mins]
- Howard, C. A. (2016). Touring the consumption of the Other: Imaginaries of authenticity in the Himalayas and beyond. *Journal of Consumer Culture*.
- Singh, J. S. (2006). Sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan region: Linking ecological and economic concerns. *CURRENT SCIENCE-BANGALORE-*, 90(6), 784.

SECTION THREE: DEMOCRACY & ADVOCACY

Connecting East & West to Organize for Change

Readings/Materials:

- Possible Futures [Ch 24, AS]
- Sen, Amartya. 1997. *Development as Freedom*. Introduction; Chapter 1: The Perspective of Freedom.
- Jha, Prashant. 2012. "A Nepali Perspective on International Involvement in Nepal." In *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace*, edited by Sebastian Von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Suman Pradhan. Cambridge University Press, pp. 332-360.
- Documentary: Girl Rising