University of Manitoba  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
Community and Social Reconstruction  
SOC 3840 A01  
3 Credit Hours, First Term, 2013/14  
335 Isbister Building  

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TEXTS:  

The books are listed in the order in which they will be discussed.  

COURSE DESCRIPTION:  
As a species, we are coming to a critical juncture. We have been here for some 200,000 years and during most of that time, we lived in small, cooperative groups. We had very limited impact on local ecosystems because of our population size and technology. Things have changed dramatically in the past 400 hundred years and, with the use of fossil fuels, extraordinarily in the last 100 years. We are now changing the course of nature and have precipitated a mass extinction event. The current trajectory of modern society is unsustainable and a significant reorientation will be needed if we wish to avoid extinction. Tinkering with the status quo will not be enough. In this course, we will seek to understand how we got into this predicament, what is wrong with the “business as usual” model, and what kind of change will be necessary to move to a sustainable path. This is a course on social and community reconstruction. During our time together, I hope to assist you in
developing your sociological imagination. This course is in line with Derrick Jensen’s call to “Dismantle Globally, Renew Locally.”

We will begin by briefly exploring the rise of the current global social landscape which is dominated by a few powerful nation states, a growing number of “failed” states, and is characterized by a general reduction of the welfare state programs provided by them. We will then expand this review to consider the impact of the concentrated power of transnational corporations, and the effects of the global market structure on communities, working people, and the ecosphere. We will consider alternatives to economic globalization.

There are limits to what can be achieved by revamping the structure, size and operating conditions of corporations by focussing on them alone. We will give serious consideration to Barnes’ call for the minting of new institutions such as commons trusts and common property to constrain capitalism in the interests of human beings and the rest of the community of life. Our focus will not only be on his “two engine” economy, but also on how commons trusts create “social spaces” for citizens to enlighten themselves and to directly help shape economic and social policy and the use of technology. This will complete our overview of the macro structures that need to be reconfigured in order to achieve sustainability and justice.

We then move on to consider the effects of modernity on the local communities and the other intermediate-scale social formations which are, arguably, the proper study of sociology. We will consider the proposition that some of the local and personal problems created by powerful states and market economies can be solved by revitalizing “civil society” or the so-called “third sector.” We will explore the notion that the significant problems thrown up by modern human institutions can be partly addressed by small, local, community groups. We will explore some actual efforts such as intentional communities (e.g. co-housing, community land trusts, the community of Gaviotas located in Columbia, and Evangeline in P.E.I.). To assist in this exercise we will consider Hopkins’ “transition concept” which outlines the concrete steps that some communities are undertaking in preparation for the “low energy” society, which will arrive with “peak oil.”

The city is our most ambitious technology. Cities are human built environments, which are intended to meet the needs of large and highly concentrated human populations. Over half of humanity lives in them. The movement of people and goods in urban space has become increasingly reliant on an infrastructure that uses trucks and cars. With the advent of peak oil, these urban transportation systems will become increasingly dysfunctional, expensive and will ultimately need to be replaced by more centralized transportation systems. Many cities are now undertaking Energy Descent Action Plans (EDAP) to anticipate some of the key problems when fossil fuels will become so scarce and expensive that cities will need to be re-developed. We will direct our attention to ecocities (which are outlined by Register) as well as megacities. and consider such experiments as underway in the Brazilian cities of Porto Alegre, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte. We will look at the proposition that economic justice and sustainable human communities will not be possible until we implement an alternative to capitalism with values and principles that foster fundamentally different social relations and better serve the larger community of life.

One of the key challenges confronting the grass-roots community approach to social reconstruction
is how the various local communities would be connected to each other and how they might be connected to the larger social structure of the global political economy. We will consider the Emilian model in operation in Italy, the Panchayat Raj model of India, and the Mondragon experiment in the Basque region of Spain. This exploration will provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the potential and the limits of community and larger scale social reconstruction.

In sum, our task is to gather up the ideas developed throughout the course in order to assess whether there is an alternative to capitalism, how it might operate, and how it might be introduced. All in all, this course provides an opportunity to reflect on what fundamental social and community reconstruction would entail. Our work here will reflect well on Derrick Jensen’s enjoiner to “Dismantle Globally, Renew Locally.”

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

There are four assignments. You are expected to use lecture material, in class videos, assigned readings and assigned video material to complete your assignments. You will have ample material to draw upon from course content but you should also rely upon information you have acquired from other places. You will be evaluated by way of the following activities:

**First Take Home Assignment- 25%**

**October 9th due date**

**READING:** Kueneman/Bowness, "Toward a Sociology of Community Syntality,” pp. 1 -26.
Broswimmer (entire book)
Lewis and Conaty, Ch. 1&2

Other sources:

- “The Corporation” documentary: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y888wVY5hzw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y888wVY5hzw)

Please address the following questions, which are of equal value:

1. Identify the central problems created by capitalism and transnational corporations both for human beings and the ecosphere.
2. Discuss ways to address these problems. Include a discussion of the guiding principles that will guide these proposed interventions along with concrete recommendations about the kind of changes that are needed and why they are necessary.
Second Take Home Assignment- 25%
October 30th
READING: Barnes summary
Brownlee and Kueneman, “Transitioning from Endgame to Sustainability: Revisiting the Commons Trusts Model”
Lewis and Conaty, Ch. 9, 10 & 11

Please answer the following questions, which are of equal value:
1. Outline Barnes proposal for the creation of countervailing institutions such as common property and common trusts. Discuss how commons trusts and worker cooperatives can be used to counterbalance private property and corporations. Be sure to outline what the proper role of the state would be in this approach for creating greater social equality as well as a sustainable production process.

2. Is the state likely to be willing to mint these new institutions? Why or why not? Under what conditions might they be more inclined to attend to the interests of working people and the ecosphere?

Third Take Home Assignment- 25%
November 20th due date
READING: Lewis and Conaty, Ch. 3 - 8

Please complete the following assignment:

It has been suggested that a more local approach to the organization of social and community life may provide better outcomes than those led by the state and market. This “civil society” approach would be guided by a different set of principles, structures, and processes. Discuss what they might be, why they may be preferable and how they are exemplified by patterned behaviour in real communities (cohousing, CLTs, Evangeline, Gaviotas, Bruderhof, RESO/PEP, etc.). Would the changes you contemplate be variations on current practices or will major social and community reconstruction be required? What would it take to generate the ground swell of support that would be necessary for major reconstruction?

Fourth Take Home Assignment- 25%
December 13th due date
READINGS: Hopkins (entire book)
Kueneman/Bowness, "Toward a Sociology of Community Syntality,” pp. 50-56.
Lewis and Conaty, Ch. 12
Kueneman, “EDAP Concept Paper - Sustainable Winnipeg of the Future”

Please answer the following questions, which are of equal value:
1. Given the size of the human population, we will be urban dwellers for the foreseeable future.
And yet Register points out a series of problems with current urban land use practices. Outline the key elements of his assessment and discuss what he thinks needs to be done to rectify the situation. He reimagines /Berkeley. How does he propose actually rebuilding it? (This will be helpful when you think about reimagining Winnipeg below).

2. Using Hopkins “transition concept” as well as other principles gathered throughout the course discuss some of the most promising features to be included in your proposal of how local community structures and infrastructure in Winnipeg could be reconfigured to provide greater resilience and social justice in an ecologically sustainable way.

DROPBOX SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Your written assignments are to be submitted through the course website on Desire2Learn. The submission procedure is described below. Be sure to follow these instructions carefully—failure to do so will result in a loss of marks.

1. Go to the D2L main page: https://universityofmanitoba.desire2learn.com/ (which is also listed under “Current Students” – “Online Services” – on the UM main page: http://umanitoba.ca/).

2. Enter your username (i.e. your UMnetID) and password.

3. Click on the SOC 3840 course website under “My Courses” on your home page.

4. Click on the “Dropbox” tab and find the appropriate folder (e.g., Assignment 1, 2, 3 or 4)

5. Click on “Add File.”

6. In the popup window that opens, click on “Choose File” and locate the file that you would like to upload from your computer.

7. Click “Open.”

8. Then click “Upload.”

9. In the “Comments” box, list the assignment name, your name, and student number.

10. Click “Submit.”

IMPORTANT: You should now see a message on screen saying that your submission was successful. You will also receive a CONFIRMATION EMAIL IN D2L indicating that your submission was received. If you do not see either the on-screen message or the email, try again; if there is still an issue, then try again. If that doesn’t work, then you can contact me and I will help to address the problem (rod.kueneman@ad.umanitoba.ca).
POLICY ON MISSED ASSIGNMENTS

If the take home assignment is not submitted on time, and prior arrangements for late submission have not been made, I will not accept it and you will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade. Students are to complete all evaluation activities for this course. In the event that an assignment is not received, the final grade will be calculated on the basis of the completed work and a letter grade will be deducted from that calculation of the final grade.

VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL DATE - November 13th

GRADING PROCEDURES

The following description of my grading scheme should make it possible for you to calculate your final grade in the course. You are encouraged to make your own computations to ensure that I have not made an error.

I find the normal grading system too constraining, so I have modified it to a limited extent by introducing the minus grade (e.g. A-, B-, C-). In the final grade submitted, however, I must conform to the university scheme.

Your answers are being evaluated on a letter grade system, not on a point system which is converted to a letter grade. The main benchmarks for the grade ranges can be described as follows:

D/F= an answer which is factually weak, faulty analysis, and very poor organization.

C= an answer which is mostly complete in terms of facts but suffers from poor analysis, organization and integration. Knowing the facts is a good start, but only a beginning.

B= answer is factually accurate and mostly complete as well as organized and integrated.

A= answer factually complete, well organized, sophisticated analysis which demonstrates a good degree of comprehension.

There is no grading curve used in the evaluation of our answers, as class could do very well or very poorly, I feel no obligation to artificially manipulate the distribution into a bell curve. Each letter grade has been assigned a numerical value to allow for averaging and the calculation of a final grade. The numerical value has been assigned to convert the letter grade into an interval scale. Thus a C≠ 30% rather a C is equi-distant from a C+ (4) and a C- (2) on the scale; a C is a factually complete answer which suffers from limited analysis. Mechanically, you assign each of your letter grades the comparable numerical weight in your calculation in the following way:

\[
\begin{align*}
A+ &= 10 & B+ &= 7 & C+ &= 4 & D &= 1 \\
A &= 9 & B &= 6 & C &= 3 & F &= 0 \\
A- &= 8 & B- &= 5 & C- &= 2
\end{align*}
\]
On a test with two questions, which received a letter grade of A- and C+, your average grade is \( \frac{8 + 4}{2} = 6 \) or B. I take all of your tests and assignments and calculate them together, as weighted by their relative value and derive a final numerical value for the course. The final cutting points for your letter grade are very important, because the minus grades must now disappear. They give you a higher final numerical grade because a weak A answer was an A- instead of a B+. But in the final analysis, all A- grades would become a B+. You would need some A or A+ grades to pull you over the cutting point. The cutting points are:

- **A+** (9.6 - 10) exceptional
- **A** (8.3 - 9.5) excellent
- **B+** (6.6 - 8.2) very good
- **B** (5.3 - 6.5) good
- **C+** (3.6 - 5.2) satisfactory
- **C** (2.3 - 3.5) adequate
- **D** (0.5 - 2.2) marginal
- **F** (0.0 - 0.4) failure

This grading scheme gives you the benefit of the buoyancy of the minus grade. If you fail to make it over a threshold, even by a fraction, it is unlikely that I will raise your grade unless you have shown significant improvement over the term; have submitted an exceptional piece of work, or have made positive contributions to class discussion. Otherwise, an 8.24 will remain a B+ and not an A.

Students should acquaint themselves with the University’s policy on plagiarism, cheating, exam personation, (‘Personation at Examinations’ (Section 5.2.9) and ‘Plagiarism and cheating’ (Section 8.1)) and duplicate submission by reading documentation provided at the Arts Student Resources web site at [http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/student/index.html](http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/student/index.html). Ignorance of the regulations and policies regarding academic integrity is not a valid excuse for violating them.

Please turn off your cell phones during class and use personal computers for note taking only. Disruptions due to excessive talking or early departures from the classroom are distracting. Please be considerate and respectful of the needs and rights of others in the class. Students should be aware that persistent disruption may result in debarment from the course. Any student who has a legitimate reason for leaving class early should inform the instructor at the beginning of class.

Any term work that has not been claimed by students will be held for four (4) months from the end of the final examination period for the term in which the work was assigned. At the conclusion of this time, all unclaimed term work will become property of the Faculty of Arts and be destroyed according to FIPPA guidelines and using confidential measures for disposal.