

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**Selected Social Problems: Corporate Power and Social Change  
077.231 L01  
3 Credit Hours  
Fall 2004**

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**Class Location:** 214 Tier  
**Class Times:** Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 1:30-2:20pm  
**Office Hours:** Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 2:30-3:30pm

**REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS**

- Dobbin, Murray. 2003. *The Myth of the Good Corporate Citizen: Canada and Democracy in the Age of Globalization* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Toronto: James Lorimer & Company.
- Korten, David. 2001. *When Corporations Rule the World* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Toronto: Berrett-Koehler.
- McNally, David. 2002. *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- *Other Readings:* Additional readings will be placed on reserve at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

Over the past 150 years, the corporation has become the world's most dominant economic institution. In Canada, and to varying degrees in nations throughout the world, the economy, state and political system have been largely influenced – and in some cases taken over – by these vast institutions. Today, corporations exercise strong control over the production process, the distribution of resources, the nature of public policy, levels of environmental destruction, and the content of media and communication systems. Increasingly, corporations dictate the decisions of their supposed overseers in the state and preside over many aspects of life once firmly embedded in the public sphere.

Informed by a variety of sociological theories and perspectives, this course provides a broad understanding of the origin, nature and consequences of corporate power in contemporary society. A key focus of the course is how the modern, for-profit

corporation functions as a social institution, one whose existence and capacity to operate depend upon the law. Throughout the course, we will look at how the corporation's distinct mandate to pursue its own self-interest (defined by power, profit and market share) often has harmful consequences for people and communities. We will also examine the diversity of recent social movements that have challenged corporate power and the capitalist economic system.

The course centres around four themes or areas of interest:

(1) ***The rise of corporate power.*** How did the corporation become what it is today? What historical/legal factors contributed to this rise? How have “globalization” and the emergence of transnational corporations enhanced the power of capital in relation to nation states, organized labour and civil society?

(2) ***The nature and structure of corporate power.*** How do corporations and corporate elites solidify and exercise power? How do they exert control over state policy and the political process? How are corporations able to both disguise and legitimate their power and influence among the general population? Issues to be discussed with focus largely on the Canadian context and include:

- linkages between corporate interests and public policy
- the concentration of economic ownership and control
- the role of the corporate mass media and advertising in shaping public opinion and “manufacturing consent”
- the political unity of corporate elites and class consciousness
- political party financing and business lobbying
- the influence of corporate-funded think-tanks, policy-planning organizations and foundations on policy formation
- the role of global institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO)
- the significance of international trade agreements such as NAFTA

(3) ***The consequences of the exercise of corporate power.*** How do some corporations use power in ways that are detrimental to people, communities, animals and the larger ecosystem in which they exist? Issues to be discussed include:

- the threat to democracy
- growing inequality and poverty
- the exploitation of labour
- capital flight and unemployment
- welfare state retrenchment
- links to human rights abuses and oppressive military regimes
- homogenization of global (consumer) culture
- corporate crime
- environmental destruction, threats to biodiversity and animal welfare

(4) ***Resistance movements and the prospects for social change.*** Throughout the last decade, mass social movements from around the world have challenged the unethical practices and abuses of corporations. Yet, when today's activists target particular corporations, they do not limit their critiques to the harm that corporations do – they are targeting “the corporation” itself and the larger structure of global capitalism. Drawing on examples like the “battle in Seattle” during the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings and the construction of the World Social Forum in Brazil, we will talk about the nature and efficacy of resistance activities, and the possibilities for moving beyond a system based on inequality, oppression and privilege for the few.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. In-class Assignments **10%**  
Throughout the course, students will be given time in class to prepare short responses to topics covered in readings/lectures.
2. Short Research Piece **15%** Due in-class October 1<sup>st</sup>  
Using the internet and other sources, this assignment will involve writing a short (no more than 5 pages) history of a corporation. Details to follow in class.
3. In-class Test **25%** October 18<sup>th</sup>  
The in-class test will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.
4. Final Paper **30%** Due in-class December 8<sup>th</sup>  
Using course readings, films, the content of class discussions and other sources of information, students will write a paper (approximately 15 pages) on a topic stemming from the course. Details to follow in class.
5. Take Home Exam **20%** Due December 20<sup>th</sup>  
The take home exam will consist of essay questions.

Note: the last date for **voluntary withdrawal** from the course without penalty is November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

## **POLICY ON GRADES AND TESTS**

The following percentage/letter grade scale will be used for the course:

A+	90-100%	Exceptional
A	80-89%	Excellent
B+	75-79%	Very Good
B	70-74%	Good
C+	65-69%	Satisfactory
C	60-64%	Adequate
D	50-59%	Marginal
F	49% or less	Failure

Make up tests are permitted for health-related or for other exceptional circumstances, with a medical certificate or other appropriate documentation. Please inform me and obtain the documentation as soon as possible, so that we can arrange a make-up test or modify due-dates accordingly.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Collaborative and cooperative work ethics are encouraged. Feel free to discuss your thoughts and ideas with other members of the class. However, when it is time to submit papers and assignments, do your own work. The printed work of other scholars also must be properly recognized. Please be aware that acts of academic dishonesty or plagiarism are serious offences and are subject to academic discipline. Students should acquaint themselves with University policies on “plagiarism and cheating” found in the *University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar*.