

Emerging Questions in Sociology and Anthropology

Course Manual

Faculty Responsible: Prof. John Clammer

Three Hours Per Week (4 Credits) Spring Semester

Introduction to the Course

The subjects of anthropology and sociology have evolved over time as the larger social context has also changed, as the economy and political structures have transformed, as cultural norms (in relation to such issues as sex and fashion) have shifted, as secularization appeared to happen and has since been widely seen to have reversed course, and as the subjects themselves have engaged in self-criticism and reflection on their own history, including their possible implication in colonialism, racism and other now unacceptable practices. In the last two decades some scholars have identified what has been called “the great acceleration” in which huge and in the past almost unimaginable technological advances have been made, new ethical issues in such areas as medicine and the environment have emerged, continuing underdevelopment and poverty continues to plague much of the world, and levels of violence, human displacement and environmental destruction have reached unprecedented levels. Clearly academic analysis cannot just stand still in the face of such challenges and the question of what they can contribute to understanding and possibly solving some of these planet-wide problems. This course will address exactly these issues, or as many of them as can be reasonably covered in a single semester. The course is intended not only to give participants a wide grasp of contemporary problems, but also of analytical tools and methodological insights through which sociology and anthropology can be usefully applied to real world issues.

Course Organization and Assessment

One three hour class will be held weekly. Substantial class participation and engagement with the issues will be expected. Assessment will comprise two short papers (15% each), a substantial mid-term paper (30%) and a final paper (30%). Class participation and attendance (10%) will bring the total to 100%.

Reading

In light of the extraordinary circumstances which surround classes this semester, readings will be assigned from internet accessible sources and will be notified to you as we proceed through the course. You are also encouraged to find additional sources of your own, to draw on your own experiences and material learnt in other courses, and from engagement with the media and emerging social issues.

Syllabus

1. Looking Outwards.

- a. Globalization – still a reality? Was it ever really a reality? Social change or Metamorphosis?
- b. A new “Risk Society”? – issues of health, food, climate, violence and human well-being.
- c. Climate change: future life/changed society. Is Sustainability any longer a possibility?
- d. New Technologies: Cyborgs? New Economies? AI in charge?
- e. Conflict, Fundamentalism, Populism: A New Political Sociology?
- f. Beyond “Religion”? The end of secularism or a new spiritual renaissance?

2. Looking Inwards:

- a. Identity and identity politics: new nativisms or cosmopolitanisms?
- b. Alternative sexualities and Queer Anthropology.
- c. Nature and Us: the world, zoos, animals, “species loneliness”.
- d. Digital worlds and virtual “reality”: the end of experience?

3. Thinking the World Anthropologically and Sociologically

- a. Urban Ethnography: Life in the crowd/life on a crowded planet.
- b. Visual Cultures and media
- c. Literary Anthropology and auto-ethnography. How do we write about the world?
- d. Big Data and social analysis: Are there patterns beyond what we can see?

4. Engaging the World.

- a. “Applied” sociology and anthropology: addressing identity, policy, change, disruption.
- b. The world after Covid 19: a sustainable future? What did we learn from the pandemic (if anything?)

Learning Outcomes

The course is expected to equip participants with a broad range of knowledge about social developments in the contemporary world, to be able to think through the applications and possible weaknesses of their discipline, to analyze creatively a wide range of cases, and to present such analyses in cogent papers. They should take away a deepened knowledge of the content and research procedures of anthropology and sociology, and of their potential and actual applications to real world problems. While the course is not about “futurology”, it should nevertheless equip students with the tools for thinking about the future and anticipating developments that are likely to have significant impact on human life in the coming decades.

Disability Support and Accommodation Requirements

JGU endeavours to make all its courses accessible to all students. All students with a known disability needing academic accommodations are required to register with the Disability Support Committee at dsc@jgu.edu.in. The committee has so far identified the following conditions that could possibly hinder a student's overall well-being. These include physical mobility related difficulties; visual impairment; hearing impairment; medical conditions; specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia; mental health. The Disability Support Committee maintains strict confidentiality in its discussions.

End Notes

The usual standards of intellectual honesty and the normal operating procedures of all JSLH courses will apply. The representation of the work of others as one's own is not acceptable under any conditions, and all sources used must be fully cited, including internet sources. If in any doubt about this policy or what it means in practice, please consult your course leader.

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