

Students in Public exemplar details

Faculty, School and Subject Area: Humanities/SoSS/Sociology

Course Unit/activity: SOCY10462 Global Social Challenges

Course Unit Director/activity leader: Kevin Gillan

What is the assignment/knowledge product?

2 non-assessed assignments writing blogs about lecture topics.

Why was it introduced?

1. Fits the course topics: they're all 'global challenges' that are frequently in the news and debated online. Want to encourage evidence-based debate.
2. Fits with an idea of 'public sociology' (Burawoy), that one purpose of the discipline is to feed into public debate on such issues
3. Employability benefit for students being able to demonstrate publication and ability to communicate complex ideas to a general audience.

Where is/could it be published?

Public blog: www.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges

What are the challenges (e.g. copyright)?

These are first year students so writing/intellectual quality can be an issue. But, we started from clear information that only a proportion would get published. I have a small fund (£450) to pay PGR students to copyedit and upload blog posts to aid professional appearance.

I tried a peer assessment approach to the first round of blogs, which was probably a useful experience for students, but not a useful way of selecting blogs for publication. So that meant a lot of reading and selection on my part. Second round were assessed by TAs so I just used a mark cut off – all blogs with 67 or above will be published.

Technical challenge – this is a WordPress blog hosted on a University server. Something about the server security settings (I think) means that the blog cannot utilise the core plugin functions provided by JetPack. There are alternatives for all of these functions, it just meant more work setting up.

What are the student perceptions/responses/attainment?

Generally very positive. Students like the idea that their opinions on matters may be worth sharing. The written work evidenced a lot of passion for the topics at hand and the real distinction between those that were published and those that weren't was whether that passion was informed by, and backed up with, sociological thinking and evidence.

If published, how do you monitor use of the resource/s?

It is a WordPress blog and using a plugin called 'Monster Insights' to connect to a Google Analytics account. Google Analytics produces comprehensive visitor statistics. However, this has only just been set up so no meaningful results at the moment.

Any other comments

Global Social Challenges

Unit code : SOCY10462

Credit rating : 20

Aims

This course will introduce students to a range of current social issues affecting human society on a large scale. Examples might include global inequality, climate change, conflict, migration, terrorism, economic crises, corporate crimes and so on. The range of substantive topics will vary year-on-year to reflect current developments and will be team-taught to reflect the range of research expertise available in sociology at Manchester. Students will discover a sociological approach to major social challenges through emphases on:

- Understanding and describing pressing social problems through reference to their social and cultural dimensions.
- Analysing competing explanations for contemporary global social issues with reference to core sociological themes such as inequality, globalisation and power.
- Assessing potential solutions to contemporary social challenges in relation to the ways in which they are embedded in society and culture.
- Recognising the potential implications and limitations of the notion of 'social responsibility' in relation to academic practices and economic behaviours.

As a result, students will be able to critically assess debate on key social challenges in a way that does not reduce them to purely technical-scientific, political or economic discourses and allows them to deconstruct popular accounts encountered through a variety of media sources.

Objectives (Learning outcomes)

By the end of the course, students will:

- Be able to describe and interpret a range of pressing social challenges existing in global society.
- Be able to contextualise social issues in relation to wider global trends and structures, including inequality and globalisation.
- Be able to critically assess debates on the explanations for, and potential solutions to, global social challenges through the application of core sociological concepts.

Assessment methods

Written exam:100%

Course unit overview

This course introduces students to a social scientific approach to a range of pressing global social challenges. It will be a team-taught course and the topics will vary from year to year. An indicative list of possible topics includes:

1. Introduction: Social Challenges and Public Sociology

Inequalities

2. Economic Inequalities in a Global Age

3. Health in a Global Context

Sustainability

4. Climate change and society

5. Women, environment and sustainable development

Identity & Conflict

6. Understanding Radicalisation

7. Race and the 'War on Terror'

Power and Resistance

8. Corporate Power & Responsibilities

9. Protest & Repression

10. A Summary Overview: A Sociological Perspective on Global Challenges (KG)

The course is theoretically framed by an appreciation of the ways that social challenges highlight issues of both global interconnection and global inequality. It also stresses the notion of 'social responsibility' as one that offers some promise in dealing with global challenges, but should be understood critically. For sociologists – both professions and students – one of our responsibilities is to communicate a social scientific understanding of global social challenges based on sound evidence and critical thinking. *Global Social Challenges* will use assignments and formative feedback designed to encourage public-focused communication on these issues.