

SSI1004 Social Problems

Prof Alexey Bessudnov

September 2023

1 Practical arrangements

Lectures:

- Tuesday, 12.30am – 2.30pm, Forum Seminar room 8

Office hours:

- Wednesday, 11am-12pm, Clayden 1.05 (please email me in advance to make an appointment).
- Alternatively please send me an email to arrange a meeting either in person or online.

Email:

`A.Bessudnov@exeter.ac.uk`

2 Aims of the module

This is a Year 1 module that will introduce you to the empirical study of some contemporary social problems. A distinctive feature of this module is its empirical focus: you will learn how to use quantitative data and social science methods to study social processes. The module is core for BSc Social Data Science and BSc Sociology and open as an option for students on all other programmes. It complements the modules on data analysis and statistics showing how they can be used to study social issues.

3 Assessment and marking criteria

- 30%: recorded presentation with slides (about 5 minutes long, with Powerpoint slides). Deadline: **Thursday 9 November** (week 7), 2pm. In the presentation you will need to discuss the work you will have conducted in your groups to prepare for the essay (please see below). Students will be split into groups (3 to 4 people in each group) and expected to meet several times (in person on campus) to discuss their ideas. The presentation should reflect on the experience of group work. Details about the presentation and how to submit it will be uploaded on ELE separately.
- Formative assignment: essay plan. Deadline: **Thursday 16 November** (week 8), 2pm. This is a formative assignment which means that it will be marked and you will receive feedback, but it will not count towards your grade. This is an opportunity for you to submit an essay plan (about 250 words) and receive feedback on it.
- 70%: essay (2,000 words). Deadline: **Thursday 14 December** (week 12), 2pm. Details about the essay topics will be communicated to you and uploaded on ELE separately.

Submissions that are late for up to two weeks after the deadline will be capped at 40%. Assignments that are late for longer than two weeks will be marked zero.

You must be the sole author of the work you submit. Please refer to the ELE module on academic honesty and plagiarism: <https://vle.exeter.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1977>.

4 ChatGPT policy

ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>) is a large language model (LLM) that can automatically produce high-quality text in response to user's prompts. Other similar models include Claude (<https://claude.ai>) and Bard (<https://bard.google.com>). These tools are capable of writing prose that reads like it was written by an educated human. It is difficult to detect the LLM input and it won't be flagged by anti-plagiarism software.

LLMs are a great technological tool that can be used as a personal writing assistant. You can use it to produce prose from your notes, to explore new ideas,

to summarise text, to improve quality of your writing (which is particularly useful for students with English as a second language) and to receive automatic feedback on your essay and suggestions for improvement. I encourage you to try LLMs and use them for these purposes. This will not be considered as plagiarism and academic misconduct. The university policy is that you must explicitly acknowledge the use of LLM. Please do not hesitate doing this; you will not be marked down.

However, I do not want you to simply copy and paste a complete essay (or significant parts of it) produced by LLMs in response to your prompt. This would constitute academic malpractice. I intentionally formulate the essays topics in such a way so that automatic text generation is difficult. If you just submit a generic text produced by ChatGPT I will likely notice it and mark the essay accordingly.

LLMs are a new tool and we are still working on the best code of practice for using it. A rule of thumb is the following: you can use LLMs as a writing tool to help framing your ideas, but you cannot mechanically produce text without making any substantial contribution.

5 Textbooks

There are two textbooks that **partially** cover the contents of this module.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads. Routledge.
- F.van Tubergen. (2020). Introduction to Sociology. Routledge.

For some topics, I rely on the books from the Oxford University Press “A Very Short Introduction” and Sage’s “What Do We Know and What Should We Do...” series.

6 Weekly content and readings

Week 1. Economic inequality.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.7 (“Economic inequality”).

- M.Brewer. (2019). What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Inequality? Sage.

Week 2. Population growth and ageing.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.5 (“Population growth when fertility drops”).
- D.Dorling, S.Gietel-Basten. (2017). Why Demography Matters? Polity. Ch.4-6.

Week 3. Migration and ethnicity.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.6 (“Migration and the multicultural society”).
- F.van Tubergen. (2020). Introduction to Sociology, ch. 11 (“Immigration and integration”).

Week 4. Welfare state.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.4 (“Welfare states: Affordability and perverse incentives”).
- D.Garland. (2016). The Welfare State: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press.

Week 5. Gender.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.8 (“Gender inequalities”).
- F.van Tubergen. (2020). Introduction to Sociology, ch. 10.5 (“Gender inequality”).

Week 6. Reading week (no classes).

Week 7. Education.

- G.Thomas. (2021). Education: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press.
- D.Palfreyman, P.Temple. (2017). Universities and Colleges: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press.

Week 8. Social mobility.

- F.van Tubergen. (2020). Introduction to Sociology, ch. 9 (“Stratification and mobility”).
- L.Elliot Major, S.Machin. (2020). What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Social Mobility? Sage.

Week 9. Climate change.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.12 (“Global warming and climate change”).
- M.Maslin. (2021). Climate Change: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press. 4th ed.

Week 10. Crime and violence.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.9 (“Crime”).
- T.Newburn. (2018). Criminology: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press. Ch.5-6.

Week 11. Substance abuse and suicide.

- R.Detels (ed.) et al. (2021). Oxford Textbook of Global Public Health. 7th ed. Ch.8.7 (“Public mental health and suicide”), 9.2 (“Substance use and misuse”), 9.3 (“Alcohol”).

Week 12. Religion and secularisation.

- N.de Graaf, D.Wiertz. (2019). Societal Problems as Public Bads, ch.13 (“Secularization, religious fundamentalism, and religious extremism”).
- F.van Tubergen. (2020). Introduction to Sociology, ch. 13 (“Religion”).