SOCIOL 3SS3 – Sociology of Judgement

Term: Winter

**Instructor:** Kim de Laat

**Email:** delaatk@mcmaster.ca

**Lecture:** Mondays, 1:30-2:20; Wednesdays, 12:30-2:20   
**Room:** Online

**Office:** N/A (online)

**Office Hours:** Group office hours are Wednesdays, at the end of class on zoom (30 min); Individual office hours can be scheduled here via the following link. If the times for individual office hours conflict with your schedule, email me and we will find a time that works: <https://calendly.com/kim-delaat/officehours>

# Course Description

The ability to *judge* someone or something is the ability to make considered decisions or come to “sensible” conclusions. In this course, we are studying the decision-making behind economic relationships, and the consequences of such decision-making.

We are focusing on economic relationships to study judgement because the role of the economy in contemporary society is paramount. Try and think of a day in recent memory when you *didn’t* hear any mention of recessions, national debt, or on a more personal level, when money issues, job prospects, and tuition was not a concern for either you, or your friends and family.

I bet it’s difficult.

The role of the economy in our everyday social lives is incredibly important and influential. Indeed, the discipline of Economics is founded on this very principle. But what about the influence of our social lives on the economy? Historically from an academic perspective, it has been uncommon to explore how the social realm affects economic transactions, and more importantly, how these two realms intersect. It will be our mission to do so in this course.

**Course Objectives**

Our goal in this class is to examine various perspectives on the role of markets and the economy in society, as well as to apply the theories covered in class through assignments, tests, and discussion. More specifically, we will analyze and assess the many ways that the economic and social realms intersect by examining the following questions:

* How does economic activity influence our social relations?
* How do social relations influence economic activity?
* Is it possible for rational decision-making to always guide our actions?
* How do we draw the boundaries between what is okay to sell for money (e.g. sex, human organs) and what is not?
* How do industrial forms of production and manufacturing influence our social lives?
* How do we put a dollar figure on human lives?
* What is the “business case” for diversity?
* What are alternative ways of judging markets and engaging in economic exchange?

# Required Materials and Texts

There is no text book for this class. Assigned chapters and articles will be uploaded to the course page on Avenue to Learn

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# Class Format

Each class will consist of lecture, with time built in for group discussion

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# Course Evaluation – Overview

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Description** | **Date(s) Due** | **Weight** |
| Participation | Discussion forum  5 reaction posts about course readings | **Ongoing** (due at 5 p.m. on Sundays OR Tuesdays, the day before lecture) | (5 posts x 3%) 15% |
| Take home midterm | Multiple Choice | You will be given the test on Monday, Feb.22nd at the beginning of class, and you will have approx. 48 hours to complete it online via Avenue to Learn. It is due on **Wednesday, Feb.24th at 12:30 p.m.** | 30% |
| Short quiz | Multiple Choice | In class via Avenue to Learn, on **Wednesday, March 31st** | 20% |
| Group presentations | Groups of 3 will present a powerpoint deck (approx..15 minutes long). Details below. | **April 5th-14th (in-class)** | 35% |

# Course Evaluation – Details

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## Participation (15%), ongoing deadline

## Throughout the course, you will be required to write five brief reaction posts to a given week’s reading(s) on the discussion board in Avenue to Learn. We will discuss in class in more detail exactly what these posts should look like. You have until 5 p.m. on Sundays (the day before lecture) to post about the reading(s) that we are scheduled to cover in Monday’s and Wednesday’s classes.

## You get to decide which five readings you post about. However, you cannot post on a given reading after it has been covered in lecture.

## So, for example, if you wanted to write a reaction post to the material covered on Rational Choice Theory, you have until 5 p.m. on Sunday January 17th to write your post and submit it on Avenue to Learn. If you write a post about Rational Choice Theory on Sunday, January 24th, I will not read it, and you will not receive a grade for it. Your posts will be graded on a pass/fail basis. More details will be available on Avenue to Learn.

## Take-home midterm (30%), due Wednesday, Feb.24th via Avenue to Learn

# The midterm format is multiple choice. It will cover readings from Weeks 1-5. The midterm will be available on Avenue to Learn. You will have approximately 48 hours to complete it. *Midterms received after Wednesday, Feb.24th at 12:30 will be considered late.*

**Short quiz (20%), Wednesday, March 31st, via Avenue to Learn**

The quiz will be multiple choice and will be completed during class time. It will cover readings from Weeks 8-12

# Group presentations, Monday, April 5th – Wednesday, April 14th

You will be assigned to groups of 3 (randomly). As a group you will create a presentation that responds to **one** of the following two questions:

* In what ways does the valuation of human lives, relationships, and/or ways of ‘pricing people,’ pose a challenge to the assumptions of the classical economic theory of rational choice?

OR

* In what ways is the valuation of human lives, relationships, and/or ways of ‘pricing people’ complementary to rational choice theory?

In this assignment, you can choose which readings from the following weeks to draw on, in order to answer your question:

* Week 5 - Markets and Morals
* Week 8 - Pricing People
* Week 9 - Household Labour + Intimacy
* Week 11 - The Business Case for Diversity

You need not incorporate *all* the readings from these weeks into your presentation. Include as many as is necessary to construct your position. This could be one reading, or it could be four.

In your presentation, you will use the course reading(s) to explain why the valuation of human lives, relationships, and/or ways of ‘pricing people,’ either complements or contradicts rational choice theory. Your presentation can be further enhanced through the use of examples or case studies. You will have 15 minutes to present your answer to this question.

Groups will be assigned randomly one month in advance of the due date. It will be up to you and your group members to schedule time together to work on your presentation and divide the workload. You will each be expected to speak for 5 minutes (though accommodations can be made if this is not possible for you – we can speak about this privately).

# Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

**Week 1 - Introduction + Foundations**

Monday, January 11th

Wednesday, January 13th

Readings:

* Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg. 2005. "Introducing Economic Sociology," in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, second edition, edited by Neil Smelser and Richard Swedberg. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press.
* The syllabus

Notes: Please come to class prepared to ask any questions you have about the syllabus.

**Week 2 - Rational Choice Theory**

Monday, January 18th

Wednesday, January 20th

Readings:

* Scott, John. 2000. “Rational Choice Theory,” in *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*, edited by G. Browning, A. Halcli, and F. Webster. Sage Publications
* Graeber, David. 2012. “The Myth of Barter,” in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. London: Melville House

**Week 3 - Enter the Social …**

Monday, January 25th

Wednesday, January 27th

Readings:

* Zelizer, Viviana. 2011. "The Social Meaning of Money," in *Economic Lives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Hirsch, Paul, Stuart Michaels, and Ray Friedman. 1990. “Clean Models Versus Dirty Hands: Why Economics Is Different from Sociology,” pp. 39-56 in Sharon Zukin and Paul DiMaggio (Eds.), *Structures of Capital: The Social Organization of the Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 4 - Consumption**

Monday, February 1st -

Wednesday, February 3rd

Readings:

* Ritzer, George. 2013. “An Introduction to McDonaldization,” and “The Irrationality of Rationality,” in *The McDonaldization of Society*. Washington, DC: Sage Publications.

**Week 5 - Markets and Morals**

Monday, February 8th

Wednesday, February 10th

Readings:

* Zelizer, Viviana. 2011. “Money, Power, and Sex,” in *Economic Lives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Healy, Kieran. 2006. “Making a Gift,” in *Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Notes:

We will extend group office hours this week to address questions about the midterm. I will also talk about the midterm in class and provide some sample MC questions.

**Week 6 – Reading Week**

Monday, February 15th

Wednesday, February 17th

Readings: No assigned readings.

Notes: Have a restful week. I’ll be available via email this week to answer any questions you have about the upcoming midterm.

**Week 7 – Take home midterm and movie**

Monday, February 22nd - midterm

Wednesday, February 24th – movie - TBA

**Week 8 - Pricing People**

Monday, March 1st

Wednesday, March 3rd

Readings:

* Mears, Ashley. 2011. “Economics of the Catwalk,” in *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
* Zelizer, Viviana. 2011. “The Price and Value of Children,” in *Economic Lives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Notes: This week, I will assign you to a group of 3 for your powerpoint presentation

**Week 9 - Household Labour + Intimacy**

Monday, March 8th

Wednesday, March 10th

Readings:

* Zelizer, Viviana. 2011. “Do Markets Poison Intimacy?” in *Economic Lives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
* Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2003. “The Economy of Gratitude,” in *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**Week 10 - Culture and Markets**

Monday, March 15th

Wednesday, March 17th

Readings:

* Spillman, Lynette. 1999. “Enriching Exchange: Cultural Dimensions of Markets” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 58: 1041-1071.
* Wherry, Frederick. 2006. “The Social Sources of Authenticity in Global Handicraft Markets: Evidence from northern Thailand,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6 (1): 5-32.

**Week 11 - The Business Case for Diversity**

Monday, March 22nd

Wednesday, March 24th

Readings:

* Newkirk, Pamela. 2019. *Diversity, Inc.: The failed promise of a billion-dollar business*. Hachette UK. Chapters 2 and 9

**Week 12 – The Informal Economy**

Monday, March 29th

Wednesday, March 31st

Readings:

* Portes, Alejandro and William Haller. 2005. “The Informal Economy,” in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, second edition, edited by Neil Smelser and Richard Swedberg. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press.

Notes: You will have an in-class quiz on Wednesday, March 31st

**Week 13 – Group Presentations**

Monday, April 5th

Wednesday, April 7th

Readings: N/A

Notes: This week will be dedicated to your group presentations

**Week 14 – Group Presentations + Alternative Economies**

Monday, April 12th

Wednesday, April 14th

Readings:

* Hossein, Caroline Shenaz. 2016. “Money pools in the Americas: The African diaspora’s legacy in the social economy." In *Forum for Social Economics*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 309-328. Routledge.
* “Potlatch” (no date), online: Living Tradition: The Kwakwaka’wakw Potlatch of the Northwest Coast <[umistapotlatch.ca/potlatch-eng.php](https://umistapotlatch.ca/potlatch-eng.php)>.

### Colonialism and the Potlatch Ban: https://ualbertalaw.typepad.com/faculty/2018/11/colonialism-and-the-potlatch-ban.html

Notes: This week, we will continue with group presentations. We will also talk about alternative ways of organizing economic life. And, we will have a year-end wrap-up/review.

# Course Policies

## Submission of Assignments

Details on assignment submissions are provided above in the section on Course Evaluation Details (pgs.2-3).

## Late Assignments

Please try and hand in your assignments and midterm on time. You will be penalized 5% per day past deadlines (excluding weekends). Of course, this year is unprecedented so while I do not want you to submit your work late (for your own sake), exceptions to the late penalty will be made if the reason for submitting late has to do with illness/caregiving responsibilities/work schedules.

## Absences, Missed Work, Illness

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

## Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

# University Policies

## Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academiccredentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academiccredit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)**.**

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

* Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
* Improper collaboration in group work.
* Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](https://sas.mcmaster.ca/) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca%20) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [*Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities*](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf)policy.

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## Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a [RISO](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/02/Academic-Accommodation-for-Religious-Indigenous-and-Spiritual-Observances-Policy-on.pdf) accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Code-of-Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities.pdf) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

## Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

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## Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

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## Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

| **MARK** | **GRADE** |
| --- | --- |
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-90 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 67-69 | C+ |
| 63-66 | C |
| 60-62 | C- |
| 57-59 | D+ |
| 53-56 | D |
| 50-52 | D- |
| 0-49 | F |