

SOCIOLOGY 2240  
**DEVIANCE AND CONFORMITY**  
(Fall 2011)

Grande Prairie Regional College  
3 University Transfer Credits

**Course Prerequisite:** SO1000

**Course Description:** A study of the politics and social ramifications of conformity, deviance, and their relation to social change. The course examines how and why some behaviour patterns are defined as deviant or conformist.

**Mode of Delivery:** Class and Group Discussion, and Occasional Lectures

**Instructor:** Alan Segal [asegal@gprc.ab.ca](mailto:asegal@gprc.ab.ca)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays: 16.15 – 17.00 Thursdays: 16.30 – 16.50  
Or By Appointment

**Office:** C410, 539-2011

**Course Objectives:**

1. To learn how sociological concepts may help us analyze and explain our inclination to define and classify people and their behaviour.
2. To become aware of historical and contemporary attitudes, practices, and values relevant to concepts of deviance and conformity.

**Plagiarism:** In an academic setting , presenting others' work as your own is a serious violation. However, referencing articles and books and online academic products do not prevent you from building on their ideas and speculations. For a more precise definition of plagiarism and its consequences, consult Page 50 of Grande Prairie Regional College's Admissions Guide.

**Required Reading:**

*Deviance, Conformity, and Social Control in Canada, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* - Tami Bereska

## **Assignments:**

**Oral Presentations (3 in Total):** (F, D- to A+)

**In-Class presentations** will be based on the articles I hand out. You may select one of them but no article can be the subject of more than one presentation. Our strong inclination is to offer an opinion on whether some behaviour is or is not deviant. This course however will explore the logics, theories, and sociocultural experiences of conformity and deviance, and this approach should be evident in how you discuss with your peers the specific details and implications of the article you choose. Opinions about human experience are valuable in this case only if they can be incorporated into a rigorous discussion of ideas.

**Instructor-Student** conversation is the second of the 3 oral presentations required for this course. Either individually or in groups of two, we will discuss one of the articles not yet selected, or some logical or theoretical questions you have about the main text or course material. Per person, you should expect a 30-minute conversation that is casual but also substantive.

**Museum Presentations** can be individual or group presentations to the class, but groups cannot consist of more than 3 people. The mark will be assigned collectively for group presentations. You will consider yourselves curators of a new museum exhibition. The topic of the exhibition is entirely your choice, but you should think about the presentation and sequence(s) of the items included. A minimum of 5 items must be displayed if you are presenting individually, and 15 items if you are presenting as a group. You will explain to the class a synopsis of the 'exhibit'. What is your concept behind it? This course will emphasize the instability of our beliefs, morality, judgments, and practises. Therefore the significance and meaning(s) of your exhibit from a conformist and/or deviant perspective, and the logic of its display-sequence, must be openly addressed. You should not just persuade us of your interpretation, but acquaint us with the logic of both the items selected and its sequence.

**Presentation Dates:** To be decided.

## **Tabulating Grades:**

The total Grade Points available from your assignments is 12. All marks will be totalled and divided by this number. A percentage will be derived based on this tabulation, and the percentage will be reconverted to a final grade.

NOTE: No class averaging will be done.

## **Grade Equivalency:**

A+	95-100%
A	90-94%
A-	87-89%
B+	83-86%
B	80-82%
B-	77-79%
C+	73-76%
C	65-72%
C-	60-64%
D+	55-59%
D	50-54%
D-	45-49%

**NOTE:** On the College's marking grid there is no D-. Therefore no such final mark will be recorded. However, for the course assignments, I will use D- as an additional non-failing mark.

**NOTE:** Some postsecondary institutions may not accept a final grade of D and D+.

**Electronic Devices:** For those people who must have contact with people during class time, you may leave your cell phone on 'vibrate', and leave the room if a response from you is required. Otherwise, texting or use of phones will result in you having to miss that particular class. Please do not put me in a position of having to do this.

## DISCUSSION SEQUENCE

### 1. Introduction to course: General, Sociological, and Historical

Class Discussion: General perceptions of deviance and conformity

What behaviours do you consider deviant? Do you react to these similarly to how you respond to conforming behaviour? Do you rank deviant behaviours in a hierarchy of ascending 'transgressiveness', and if so, based on what criteria? Should sociologists contemplate such a hierarchy?

### 2. Chapter 1

Class Discussion: Objective and Subjective ideas and theories of deviance (and conformity).

What do sociologists mean by social processes? For many non-sociologists such language is vague and meaningless. Is this a worthwhile judgment? Can processes offer enough insight into human experience to justify the language? Be ready to discuss the theories introduced here, and what you think are their strong and vulnerable assumptions. Sociologists may mention deconstructing patterns of behaviour or belief. What are they trying to say? Professional disciplines may adopt the same terminology but argue over their meanings. Does this occur in chapter 1? If not, keep this question in mind as you read through the rest of the book. Begin a semester-long consideration in your minds of the validity of concepts of pathology, harm, rights, etc. Does our society have dominant moral codes? What persuades they are dominant? Do they prevail in some contexts but not others? The 'Ask Yourself' section on page 26 addresses moral codes. Prepare a response that we can look into during class time.

### 3. Chapter 2

Class Discussion:

Prepare to discuss the theories of deviance outlined in this chapter. The same approach will be used in the next chapter. Does our constant effort to control deviance suggest rationality or irrationality in our understanding of human experience? Does any theory strike you as being more explanatory than the others? What accounts for this – quality of reasoning, more encompassing, more politically astute, etc.?

### 4. Chapter 3

Class Discussion:

What differentiates positivist from non-positivist theorizing? Theorists mentioned in Chapter 3 differ from those cited in chapter 2. How do you explain the differences? Of what value to sociology is the idea of a master status? Can you also explain poststructuralism and its conceptual contribution to theory? Why distinguish among Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Deviance? Could we use the same categories for conformity?

## 5. Lecture on Ian Hacking's Views of Constructing Social Categories of People; Chapter 4

### Class Discussion:

What is a paradigm? How does it apply to culture and norms, and what is its relevance to a discussion of deviance or conformity? Do these concepts coincide well with Foucault's analyses as presented in this chapter? ON page 104 there are two quotes that we will discuss. Think about varied questions you might ask of both. Are you intellectually satisfied with the cross-cultural approach utilized by Bereska? Do the examples possess the persuasive power she believes they have? One of them is sexuality, within which she introduces assumptions of consent. Be ready to offer a critical analysis of consent. In conjunction with this, we will look at who, what, and why of victims.

## 6. Chapter 5

### Class Discussion:

Would you depict youth as troubling or troubled? Bereska refers to aversive education, in which dangers of life are instilled in children. Does she overdo this? If not, might a sociological link exist between such education and the moral panics she addresses? Identify in class some of the moral panics you perceive in contemporary Canadian life, assuming you think we have some. On page 166 Bereska asserts that Canadian society identifies youth as threats to themselves. Is this a viable interpretation and are youth self-threatening?

## 7. Chapter 6

### Class Discussion:

Were you in a Psychology course you would be presented with that discipline's outlooks on body modification. How do sociologists respond to it?

## 8. Chapter 7

### Class Discussion:

What is stigma? Is what we term mental illness a good illustration of this? Of the theories you have been using in this course, which of them aptly apply to stigmatization? In sociology we usually deal with micro and macro manifestations of social experience. How do these different planes work with regard to people with some type of mental distress? If the allegedly mentally ill were 'ill' but completely unobtrusive in society, would anybody care? If not, does this suggest the stigma operates through interpersonal functions, not really at a group level? Does this chapter support or not, how we characterize mental illness? When and why do we differentiate between physical and mental illness?

## 9. Chapters 8 & 9

### Class Discussion:

Presumably, you have been raised to consider religion an important aspect of personal and social life, even if you or your family follow no religion and may not believe in any god. How, then, does a chapter appear that asks you to look at

religion as a form of deviance? What concepts does Bereska marshal together in her analysis? She writes of truth and also of religion. Is this a reasonable tie-in? Is the inclusion of religion as a system of truth-creation treated similarly to her treatment of science as a truth-creation system? Be prepared to elaborate on your response(s). Are Foucault's ideas relevant to these 2 chapters?

## 10. Chapter 10

Class Discussion:

Explain the Deviance Dance. Does this terminology blunt the impact of sometimes-severely brutalizing discrimination? Who or what are moral entrepreneurs? Do they establish or counter the Deviance Dance? Is there also a Conformity Dance?