

## SOC\*4300 Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Winter 2019

Lectures: Wednesday, 2:30-5:20 pm  
Instructor: Dr. Michael Follert  
Office Hour: Wednesday, 1:00-2:00 pm

email: [mfollert@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mfollert@uoguelph.ca)

### Course Description:

*Populism is a spectre haunting the Western world.* When the Ontario Progressive Conservatives won their majority back in June of 2018, they declared themselves the province's "first ever government for the People". It was a perplexing statement to see in the [official record](#) – an *après coup* casting every previous government as *not* 'for the People'. After all, a government not for the People must as a rule be illegitimate in a democracy; such is a corruption of its fundamental principle. That Doug Ford used this also as his campaign rhetoric and received the plurality of votes seems to reinforce his reputation as a successful populist figure. But is Ford a populist in the manner of Trump in the US, or Maduro in Venezuela? Moreover, who exactly are 'the People'? Are 'elites' part of the People, or are they its mortal enemies? What about refugees ("illegal border-crossers")? Or those who didn't vote? Or the 3/5ths of the electorate who voted *against* the winning party? This course treats as its core problem the gap between the symbolic, capital-p *People*, and the literal *people* living within democratic regimes.

*Populism is a spectre haunting academia.* What can sociology tell us about it? Populism, as a collective rejection of status quo politics, is typically seen as within the purview of political scientists, pundits, and public intellectuals alike. But like anything happening in the political sphere, there are underlying social processes and symbolic worlds that sociology is uniquely positioned to address. Indeed, political sociologists like Edward Shils and Seymour Lipset were grappling with this subject as far back as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Taking this as our starting point for this course, we will explore the canon of social and political theories of populism (Canovan, Taggart, Laclau, Müller, Lefort, Arato), populism on the right (Lasch, Goodheart), populism on the left (Mouffe, Žižek), as well as key recent sociological studies in the US (Arlie Hochschild), in Canada (Michael Adams), and in the UK (Will Davies). We will attend to timely methodological questions as well: What can shifting social values tell us about the likelihood of a populist wave sweeping Canada's federal political scene? Do we have the tools to understand these emergent realities? Practically speaking, how can we differentiate the misinformation campaigns run by online bots and the bad faith of internet trolls from the grievances of actual people on the internet? Or going back to Baudrillard's writing on the dawn of the 'silent majority', we may ask: are 'the people' even measurable anymore?

### Readings:

Required course readings will be available online through the library's ARES interface, so **no textbook or course kit purchase is required**. Weekly readings will average around 80 pages. A complete reading list will be posted shortly before the beginning of classes.

### Learning Objectives & Outcomes:

- Students will advance their theoretical and methodological tools for undertaking sociological research.
- Students will apply their conceptual understanding to contemporary issues in Canadian society.

- Students will consider their own location within structures of power and privilege.
- Students will exercise professionalism and ethics in their completion of assignments, with attention to guidelines on academic integrity.
- Students will demonstrate intellectual curiosity and develop their problem-solving, decision-making, listening, and communication skills.
- Students will show leadership, accountability, personal organization, teamwork, and strong time management.

### Grading:

#### 18% **Reading Responses**

A short response to a question on the readings is due before class each week – except for the week you have selected to be the discussant, the first week of classes, and the week we meet to discuss your final paper proposal. Late responses can be submitted but only for half-marks.

#### 22% **Seminar Participation**

Students will be graded on their contribution to seminar discussions. Weekly attendance is key to this component, but absence for medical reasons or other emergencies will be taken into account.

#### 25% **Seminar Leading**

Each student will lead a discussion of a set of short readings, or one longer reading from the syllabus. This can be treated as a presentation, with or without powerpoint, but it will be key to find ways to engage the class in thoughtful discussion.

#### 35% **Final Paper**

You will pick a research question situated within the themes of the course and produce a research paper due after classes end, on April 5<sup>th</sup>. Part of this mark (5%) will go toward a proposal (due March 6<sup>th</sup>), and the remainder (30%) will go to the paper, roughly 10 to 14 pages.

### General Expectations on Conduct

We collectively construct the culture of the classroom. Responsibility for a comfortable, respectful, and constructive learning environment is shared by all participants. Dialogue and debate are encouraged; disrespect and intentionally derailing discussion are not.

### E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <mail.uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

### When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for [Academic Consideration](#).

### Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the fortieth class day. The regulations and procedures for [Dropping Courses](#) are available in the Undergraduate Calendar.

### Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

### Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance, and not later than the 40th Class Day. More information: [www.uoguelph.ca/sas](http://www.uoguelph.ca/sas)

### Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.

### Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

### Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.