



Module Specification

Contemporary Critiques of Modern Society

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Part 1: Information

Module title: Contemporary Critiques of Modern Society

Module code: UZSNPA-30-3

Level: Level 6

For implementation from: 2026-27

UWE credit rating: 30

ECTS credit rating: 15

College: College of Health, Science & Society

School: CHSS School of Social Sciences

Partner institutions: None

Field: Sociology and Criminology

Module type: Module

Pre-requisites: None

Excluded combinations: None

Co-requisites: None

Continuing professional development: No

Professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements: None

Part 2: Description

Overview: The unifying master-theme of this module is that of post-enlightenment society in crisis, which in the contemporary period is a genuinely international crisis.

This global crisis of modern (or perhaps postmodern) society is manifested at a number of different levels – including and especially at the levels of economics (including class stratification), culture and ecology.

Yet the promise of Enlightenment was that the modernisation process would usher in a genuinely rational society, which would be uniquely beneficial in terms of human betterment and cultural freedom.

This poses a number of interesting questions. These include, most obviously: How and why has modernity gone wrong? Is Enlightenment itself and the process of Western modernisation to blame for the failure of the “project of modernity”?

Features: Not applicable

Educational aims: The main aim of this module is to explore this multi-faceted crisis of modernity, to analyse the causes of system failure, and address the issue of the complicity or otherwise of Enlightenment in this crisis.

This is to be accomplished by focusing on the pioneering work of a range of contemporary critical social theorists of modernity and of postmodernity. In doing so, the module encompasses the intersection between contemporary sociological critiques of modern and postmodern society, continental philosophy, and commentaries on the meaning of globalisation and risk.

Students will be encouraged to explore selected sociological critiques of modern/postmodern society, and to assess research findings in this area of study, which should enable investigation into the nature and value and application of sociological knowledge itself.

Outline syllabus: The syllabus will typically include:

Disciplinary Society

Theorist: Michel Foucault

Issues: The growth of detailed, rationalised, regulation and normalisation of the whole social body; the creation of the modern subject.

Research: e.g. the nature and history of prisons, of the asylum, of schools and hospitals - and other disciplinary institutions; the nature of micro-power in such settings; and associated methodological issues.

Ethnic hatred and mass violence in the modern era

Theorists: Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Slavoj Zizek, Zygmunt Bauman

Issues: Scientific rationality, mass violence and domination; the persistence of ethnic identity and nationalisms; the role of collective affect in social relations, etc.

Research: e.g. total war, racism and genocidal killing; and associated methodological issues.

Mass society, the culture industry, mass consumption, and mass media.

Theorists: Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Jean Baudrillard.

Issues: mass consumption, mass media and the dangers of mindlessness; domination and control in a world of lost of subjectivity and self-reflection, etc.

Research: e.g. consumption, lifestyle and identity; mass politics and the mass media; fame and notoriety, etc; and associated methodological issues.

Jurgen Habermas's defence of Modernity and Enlightenment reason

Issues: Universal human interests; the rescue of substantive rationalisation; communicative action; system and lifeworld, etc.

Research: e.g. work on new forms of participatory democracy; and associated methodological issues

Globalisation and late capitalism

Theorists: Mike Featherstone, David Harvey, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash, Manuel Castells, Roland Robertson, Martin Albrow

Issues: Trans-national capitalism; mass consumption; the development and influence of communications technologies; the globalisation of culture; the globalization of everyday life; the mobility of capital and labour; the globalization of political practices; the global city, etc.

Research: e.g. (nation) state; everyday life of global cities; local-global businesses; and associated methodological issues.

Postmodernity and Postmodernism

Theorists Jean Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman.

Issues: The totalitarian threats of Modernity, Enlightenment, and grand theory; social and political difference and diversity; critique of late capitalism, etc.

Research: Work on social diversity, etc; and associated methodological issues.

Risk society

Theorists: Ulrich Beck, John Bellamy Foster, Anthony Giddens, Alberto Melucci, Scott Lash.

Issues: Environmental destruction; unsteerable political/social/economic processes; risk aspects of scientific research and development, Reflexive Modernity, New Social Movements, etc.

Research: e.g. networks of renewal, institutional and individual reflexivity; ecological crisis; and associated methodological issues.

Part 3: Teaching and learning methods

Teaching and learning methods: Generic Graduate Skill: Communication

Specific Strand: Seminar discussions/Group work

Practiced, evidenced

Generic Graduate Skill: Professionalism

Specific Strand: Following collegiate norms/working to deadlines

Practiced, evidenced

Generic Graduate Skill: Critical Thinking

Specific Strand: Assessment aims and outcomes

Practiced, evidenced

Generic Graduate Skill: Digital Fluency

Specific Strand: n/a

Generic Graduate Skill: Innovative and Enterprising

Specific Strand: Students exercise judgement in selecting texts to review

Practiced, evidenced

Generic Graduate Skill: Forward Looking

Specific Strand: n/a

Generic Graduate Skill: Emotional Intelligence

Specific Strand: n/a

Evidenced

Generic Graduate Skill: Globally Engaged

Specific Strand: Module content and assessments focussed on local-global interlinkages

Practiced, evidenced

Module Learning outcomes: On successful completion of this module students will achieve the following learning outcomes.

MO1 Demonstrate knowledge of selected sociological critiques of modern society.

MO2 Demonstrate ability to apply and analyse sociological research findings relating to selected critiques of modern society.

MO3 Demonstrate awareness of the nature, value and limitations of sociological knowledge itself.

MO4 Demonstrate ability to undertake and present scholarly sociological work exploring key antinomies of late modern/postmodern societies

Hours to be allocated: 300

Contact hours:

Independent study/self-guided study = 228 hours

Face-to-face learning = 72 hours

Reading list: The reading list for this module can be accessed at [readinglists.uwe.ac.uk](https://uwe.rl.talis.com/modules/uzsnpa-30-3.html) via the following link <https://uwe.rl.talis.com/modules/uzsnpa-30-3.html>

Part 4: Assessment

Assessment strategy: Summative Assessments:

Assessment Task 1: Book Review (2000 words maximum)

Assessment Task 2: Essay (1500 words maximum)

The assessment strategy has been designed to enable students to meet the learning outcomes of the module, which include both subject-specific knowledge and skills and also transferable skills directly aligned to UWE strategy on producing Ready and Able Graduates. This is because both assignments are designed specifically to link cutting-edge social theory to substantive real-world issues and problems (e.g. economic and ecological sustainability).

The module's learning outcomes and assessment strategy support the Sociology programme's fulfilment of the relevant QAA benchmarks and have been designed to take account of the level descriptors pertinent to a third year optional module.

Coursework (Book Review and Essay) assessments are utilised on this module because coursework is a suitable medium for testing a range of aptitudes required of the learner – referencing and bibliographical skills, preparatory reading and research skills, working to deadlines, synthesising summarisation and evaluation skills, selfreflection, organising academic work, ICT competencies, etc.

Study Skills deficits (including plagiarism) are addressed at the preparatory stages of the assignments. Students are advance-prepared for the demands of the assignments, including by receiving detailed guidance on how to avoid inadvertent plagiarism.

Opportunities for formative assessment will be given during the module, such as in class discussion and feedback.

Assessment tasks:

Set Exercise (First Sit)

Description: Book Review (2000 words maximum)

Weighting: 50 %

Final assessment: No

Group work: No

Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO2, MO3, MO4

Written Assignment (First Sit)

Description: Essay (1500 words maximum)

Weighting: 50 %

Final assessment: Yes

Group work: No

Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO2, MO3, MO4

Written Assignment (Resit)

Description: Essay (1500 words maximum)

Weighting: 50 %

Final assessment: Yes

Group work: No

Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO2, MO3, MO4

Set Exercise (Resit)

Description: Book Review (2000 words maximum)

Weighting: 50 %

Final assessment: No

Group work: No

Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO2, MO3, MO4

Part 5: Contributes towards

This module contributes towards the following programmes of study:

Sociology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Sep][PT][Frenchay][6yrs] BA (Hons) 2021-22

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Criminology and Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2024-25

Criminology and Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BSc (Hons) 2020-21

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BA (Hons) 2019-20

Sociology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BA (Hons) 2020-21

Sociology [Sep][PT][Frenchay][6yrs] BA (Hons) 2021-22

Sociology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2024-25

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2023-24

Criminology and Sociology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BA (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BA (Hons) 2019-20

Sociology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BA (Hons) 2020-21

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Sep][PT][Frenchay][8yrs] BSc (Hons) 2020-21

Sociology with Psychology [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23

Sociology with Psychology {Foundation} [Frenchay] BSc (Hons) 2022-23