

Carleton University
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
SOCI 3055A
Studies in Addictions
Fall 2026

Dr. Ariel Fuenzalida

Office Hours: Mondays 1:15 – 2:30 p.m.

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Method of Delivery: In Person

Class Time: Mondays 2:35 p.m. to 5:25 p.m.

Brightspace page link: <https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/452113>

Teaching Assistant: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

What is addiction? Why do people get high? Why are certain drugs outlawed? Is illicit drug use a form of deviance or defiant consumption? Is addiction a form of criminality or a disease or something else? This course will explore these and other questions concerning the patterns and practices of licit and illicit drug use in North America and abroad, with particular attention to how socio-cultural forces influence drug effects by using a wide array of sociological tools, concepts, and theories. Although research concerning drugs is widespread in the academic literature, it tends to focus either on the psychopharmacological properties and effects of psychoactive substances, or on the associated problems with the use of drugs, such as addiction, crime, risk and social disruption. Therefore, drugs are framed only in terms of a social problem. The aim of this course is to approach the topic of drugs, addiction, and the experience of intoxication from a critical evidence-based perspective in three ways. Firstly, we will consider drugs as symbolic objects. Secondly, we will consider the content and social factors involved in the construction of drug effects and drug users, across cultures and throughout time. Thirdly, we will approach intoxication as a normal social practice that is governed by norms and rules, just like any other human activity. In so doing, we will situate these topics within a larger sociological framework that cannot be reduced to the pharmacological properties of intoxicants alone but one that is instead equally shaped by culture, environment, and the individual characteristics and expectations of users. The first part of the course will develop these issues by focusing on the concept of addiction. We will explore various theories of addiction, such as neurological theories of addiction, learning theories of addiction, and sociological theories of addiction. The second part of the course will focus on the relationship between addiction, psychoactive drugs, and larger cultural, social, political, and historical forces. We will discuss the uses and merits of different forms of drug control by examining the history of prohibition, the social construction of the addict, and the socio-political implications of the War on Drugs. The overall intent of the course is to provide the student with a broad critical introduction to the main issues and current debates in the areas of addiction research and critical drug studies.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Enhance academic reading and writing skills, as well as skills in expressing ideas in other mediums, such as oral presentations.
2. Develop the ability to critically engage with a range of theoretical concepts, such as pharmacologicalism, drug discourses, pharmakon, differential prohibition, among many others.
3. Learn to connect and analyze issues in the study of addiction from a sociological perspective using the theoretical tools introduced in class.

PREREQUISITES:

One of the following: SOCI 1001 and SOCI 1002, or SOCI 1003 [1.0], or ANTH 1001, or ANTH 1002, or ANTH 1003 [1.0] AND third year standing.

CLASS POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to attend all virtual meetings and be prepared to actively engage with course material. **This means having read the required readings** for the week **before** the meeting begins. This point cannot be stressed enough: **you must read the required material!** If you do not read the required texts you will not do well in the course. You are also expected to **actively participate and contribute to group discussions** both in meetings and the online discussion forums that will take place on Brightspace. Should you need to miss a class then you should let me know by email of your absence and it will be up to you to catch up on any missed material that was covered.

Additionally, in this course, you are expected to learn from your texts, your teacher and from one another. This requires striving towards understanding each other, but it does not imply striving towards finding agreement. Our class will be racially, religiously, politically, culturally, generationally, and economically diverse. We will be of different gender identifications and sexual orientations and our lived experiences and reactions to the course material will reflect this diversity. Sharing our perspectives and interpretations on the course material will enhance everyone's learning experience and you are encouraged to openly express any disagreements with the authors you will read, with your fellow classmates, or with the Professor in the different participation fora that are available for this course. However, you are expected to conduct yourself in such a way that shows the utmost respect to others who may – or may not – share your views. Derogatory comments and hateful behavior towards others (and their views) will not be tolerated.

In this course the use of artificial intelligence (AI) programs, such as ChatGPT, for the purposes of handing in course work that is to be graded **is strictly forbidden**. This means that you should not be using AI programs to generate answers, essays, presentations, or any element of the course that will be graded by the professor or the teaching assistants. Any work that is found to be generated by AI will receive a zero.

Acknowledgement of Territory

We pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of this land. We acknowledge their long-standing relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. We pay respect to all Indigenous peoples in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home. We acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And we honour their courageous leaders: past, present, and future.

Carleton University acknowledges the location of its campus on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. In doing so, Carleton acknowledges it has a responsibility to the Algonquin people and a responsibility to adhere to Algonquin cultural protocols.

REQUIRED READINGS:

There is no required textbook for this class. All required readings will be made available through links found in this course outline hence there is no cost associated with the readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & METHODS OF EVALUATION:

Student assessment will be based on the following components:

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| 1. Online Discussion Forum (10%) | Weekly |
| 2. Short Reflections 20% | Weekly |
| 3. Two Quizzes (30%) | October 19 & November 23 |
| 4. Group Presentation (10%) | December 7 & 11 |
| 5. Essay (30%) | December 11 |

Online Discussion Forum: There will be an on-going general discussion forum on Brightspace for the duration of the semester. Since there is so much to talk about concerning drugs and addiction, **you are expected to contribute at least 10 posts** throughout the semester at your own leisure. You are free to start your own discussion threads or add to existing discussion threads that others have posted. Online discussion forum participation is worth an overall total of 10% so for every post you make you will receive 1%. The discussion forum will close at the end of the day on **December 11**.

Short Reflections: During the semester you will write **10 short reflection pieces** (at least 300 words) based on the required readings for the class. The idea for this element is for you **to engage the readings** and articulate your thoughts on the main issues brought up in the readings. You will submit your short reading reflection pieces through Brightspace. The short reflections are worth a total of 20% of the final grade (2% per reflection).

Quizzes: There will be 2 quizzes totaling 30% of the overall grade (**each quiz is worth 15%**). The quizzes will consist of multiple-choice questions and will be based on the main material covered in class and readings. Quizzes will be made available through Brightspace. **Quiz 1 is scheduled for October 19, and Quiz 2 is scheduled for November 23.**

Group Presentation: There is one group presentation worth 10% of the overall grade. Length of the presentation is 10 minutes maximum. **Your attendance is mandatory on November 23.** We will dedicate this class to organizing the groups and outlining the specific details for the assignment (guidelines and rubrics will also be posted on Brightspace). During our meeting you will have time to form groups of 4-5 people, brainstorm for a topic, and allocate different sections of the project to each member of the group who will in turn be responsible for that specific section of the presentation. If you cannot be present for our meeting, then you should arrange beforehand to be part of a group. If you do not contact me in advance of your absence, then you will carry out the presentation on your own. **Group presentations will take place in class on December 7 & 11.**

Essay: The final assignment is a research paper (10-12 double-spaced pages, excluding title page and bibliography) worth 30% of the overall grade based on a topic of your choosing related to addictions or drug studies. Detailed guidelines for the paper will be discussed in class and posted on Brightspace. **Papers are due on December 11, at 11:59 p.m. You should submit papers as a Word document through the drop box on Brightspace.** It is expected that your essay will be readable at a third-year level and hence **you will be penalized 1% for each spelling and grammar mistake** (up to a maximum of 10%). To be fair to those students who submit papers on time, **late papers will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day.** If you encounter extenuating circumstances that temporarily hinder your capacity to submit the final assignment by this date you may request academic consideration. See the following: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-consideration-coursework/>