

SOCI 520 – Issues in Contemporary Sociology

Corporate power, fossil capital, climate crisis: the search for solutions

INSTRUCTOR: Bill Carroll

Course Description and Objectives

This graduate seminar combines the sociology of corporate power with the political economy of fossil capital, the political ecology of climate crisis, and critical policy analysis of climate-justice initiatives. The course does not require a specialized academic background in these areas, and is open to graduate students in sociology and related fields. Topics will include

- a) the sociology, political economy and political ecology of fossil capitalism and carbon democracy as a distinct way of life reliant upon colonial and extractivist relations, and now in global crisis;
- b) modalities of corporate power in this field, including control over labour processes of extraction, transport and refining; networks of capital ownership and governance; practices and discourses of corporate hegemony in civil society, media and state; carbon commodity chains and popular resistance at flashpoints along them; and
- c) a survey of sociopolitical developments that could prefigure or forestall what John Urry has termed societies beyond oil, and what others have called a just transition to energy democracy, promoting climate justice.

Our work in the course will centre to some extent upon the case of Canada, but will extend to other national cases and to the transnational level.

Course Format and Delivery

The course will be delivered in a novel way, within the third Summer Institute of the Corporate Mapping Project (CMP), a SSHRC Partnership based in the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria (<https://www.corporatemapping.ca/>). Most of our face-time will be concentrated within three and a half weeks, between 10 May to 2 June, 2021. Some sessions will be led by course director and CMP co-director Bill Carroll; some may be facilitated by CMP team members and/or by students in the course, presenting group projects. *Note that the Institute will be delivered either entirely online or, in a hybrid mode with some students participating in person and others online. Students not physically present in Victoria will be able to take the course.*

In the weeks leading up to the Institute we will hold one or more videoconference sessions, to orient and focus our studies. Once the Institute is underway, on May 10, the program will consist of daily sessions (Monday-Friday), from 10 am to noon, Pacific Daylight Time.

In the weeks following the Institute, students will complete term papers, which are due by 2 July 2021. This course will help students already participating in the CMP (e.g., as research assistants) to deepen their knowledge of the issues at the heart of the Project. For students not already participating in the CMP the course will provide an opportunity to become involved, particularly through publishing their term papers on the CMP website (see for instance <https://www.corporatemapping.ca/student-papers/>), which is the Project's online venue for knowledge mobilization.

Assignments and evaluation of student achievement

Students will write a reflective journal based on their Summer Institute experience, due one week after the Institute adjourns. The assessed quality of student participation in SOCI 520 sessions, including one group presentation, will form part of the final grade. The term paper will complete the required assignments.

Textbook

William K. Carroll (ed.). 2020. *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*. Edmonton: AU Press

* A more detailed course outline will be distributed to students by April 2021.