



Durham
University

Department of Sociology

Department of Sociology

Module Handbook

2022-23

MODULES

Introduction

This handbook contains a brief outline of the undergraduate modules running in the Department of Sociology in 2021-22. The information here is not comprehensive but should give you an idea of what you can learn about through our programmes.

Modules at all levels of study are included, so that you can look ahead to things you may want to take in your second and final year.

However, please note that we review modules on a yearly basis and **sometimes make changes**, either to the content of individual modules or to the modules that are available. As such, the modules on offer in any given year may not fully resemble the information presented here.



What is a Module?

Durham degree programmes are based around modules. Each module focuses on a difficult topic, theme or issue, for example:

- Violence and abuse
- Education and social inequalities
- Race and racism
- Etc.

Each year, you will take 120 ‘credits’ worth of modules, which normally means **5-6 modules per year** depending on their credit ratings.

Some modules are **compulsory** but others **optional** and selected from a list of choices. The first year of study is largely defined by compulsory modules to make sure you have a strong foundation in your subject. But second and third year make extensive use of optional choices.

Up to 20 credits can be taken outside of Sociology / Criminology each year, e.g. to study a language module. Options are limited and not all subjects / modules are available however (notably Law and Politics)

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Teaching and Learning

Most modules are taught through a mix of lectures and seminars which support independent study. A typical teaching week comprises of **5-6 hours of lectures** and **2-4 hours of seminars**, with the rest of your time spent on reading, class preparation and assessment

Lectures are used to present an outline of the key concepts and ideas, as a starting place for independent study through related reading.

Smaller seminars then provide an opportunity to discuss and debate the ideas you have learned about through your reading, as well as to ask questions and receive guidance on complex topics you need help with.

Some modules include other kinds of classes / learning opportunities, e.g. **computer practical classes, field trips, etc.**

One-to-one support is also available from module tutors, to help with topics or ideas you are stuck on or to discuss things around assessment. Some assessed work, like your final-year dissertation study, will also be supported by one-to-one supervision.

Assessment

Assessment comprises primarily of **coursework** completed across the academic year. This coursework often takes the form of a written essay but we have a diverse range of assessment types including portfolios, research reports, wikis, oral presentations and so on.

Exams are also used for assessment but only to a limited extent: it is typical for students to have no more than two exams in any given year, accounting for roughly 1/6 of their final grade.

As a result of Covid-19, we have run our exams in an open-book 'take-home' format, where the exams can be completed at home at any point within a 24-hour time window. Student feedback on this format has been positive so we currently run all exams for modules in the Department in this manner.





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LEVEL 1 MODULE SYNOPSES

LEVEL 1 MODULES

Classical Sociological Theory (20 Credits)

This module illustrates changing understandings of the relationship between structure and agency in sociological thinking both across time and in relation to current sociological debates.

It first focuses on the 'classical' canon of sociological theory – Marx, Weber, Durkheim- as it was established between the late 1930s and the 1960s before moving to problematize the idea of a 'classical' canon, and expanding the range of theoretical positions that make up the sociological way of reasoning. The module gives you a strong theoretical foundation for sociological thinking, a broad knowledge of a range of theoretical positions and an ability to apply them to social issues.



Criminal Justice Landscape (20 Credits)

Corequisite: Introduction to Criminological Theory

This module is designed to provide you with knowledge of the criminal justice system in terms of its institutions, policies, processes and practices.

The module locates the criminal justice system as a dynamic enterprise that has, at times, competing demands and resources. It presents the opportunity to discuss and debate its core function and purpose.

The module creates space for a much wider critical engagement with the criminal justice system than is presented in academic literature. It



allows you to connect to the process of criminal justice through formal lectures and seminars, including talks from guest speakers within criminal justice institutions, and visits to core institutions within the criminal justice landscape.

LEVEL 1 MODULES

Critical Scholarship in the Social Sciences (20 Credits)

This module looks at the ways we develop and communicate arguments and ideas in the social sciences.

The aim is to develop your academic skills around critical analysis, personal reflection, group work, academic writing, referencing, and presenting ideas verbally to different audiences. These are all skills you will need throughout the rest of the degree and later in life.

This module aims to ensure that all students receive the same introductory training in these skills regardless of their educational background. The module uses provocative questions such as 'is graffiti art?' to support you to gather and synthesise academic evidence and craft a convincing academic argument.



Introduction to Criminological Theory (20 Credits)

The module explores key questions relating to what causes crime, why society and the state responds to crime in the way it does, and whether such responses are likely to be effective. We question what is 'crime', why is it defined in the way that it is and whose interests does this serve.

The module explores debates concerning whether offenders are rational actors or are compelled to engage in crime by forces (especially biological or socio-economic forces) beyond their control. Additionally, drawing on theory, you will engage with criminological disputes concerning whether the criminal justice system serves the interests of society as a whole or a privileged minority.

The module addresses contemporary political and criminal justice policy debates, including the relationship between crime and inequality, whether 'prison works', punishment versus rehabilitation, and whether criminal justice interventions may (counterintuitively) worsen offending behaviour.

LEVEL 1 MODULES

Social Research Methods (20 Credits)

This module aims to explain: 1) the role of research in social science; 2) the ways in which we can do social research; and finally 3) the key concepts and criteria that underpin good research.

Addressing these aims implies engagement methodological debates and issues such as: how we conceptualise the nature of social phenomena and action; how is best go about producing and analysing data; how can we conduct research in a manner which is simultaneously rigorous, relevant and ethically sound; and what roles should social research play in wider society?

Through all this, the module will train you in various methods and concepts that underpin social research, as preparation for your second and final years of study when you will carry out research of your own. The module will also equip you with the conceptual tools needed to make sense of and evaluate social science research publications, so you can make more informed use of academic research in other parts of your degree.

Societies in Transition (40 Credits)

This module addresses questions of how societies are changing and what is contributing to these social changes.

Different dimensions of change are considered, including those associated with gender, families, place, sexuality, race, religion, work, technology, migration, etc. The module asks to what extent societies shape the people within them and/or people can shape and change the societies in which they live.

In doing this, the module introduces a range of wider sociological, policy and practice debates over inequalities and responses to them, as well as more theoretical debates such as those concerning the relationship between structure and agency. These are set within a critical consideration of broader debates about globalisation and collective forms of action for social change.





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LEVEL 2 MODULE SYNOPSES

LEVEL 2 MODULES

Communities & Social Justice (20 Credits)

This module critically engages with the contested notions of 'community' and 'social justice' in sociology.

We look at the roles of voluntary and public sector institutions, community organisations, coalitions and social movements, in deploying community-based policies, practice and actions for social control, transformation and liberation in the UK and internationally.

The module is comprised of weekly two-hour workshops, based around community-oriented and collaborative learning, including dialogues, skills development and (virtual) field visit.



Contemporary Criminological Theory (20 Credits)

Prerequisite: Introduction to Criminological Theory

Drawing upon contemporary criminological theory, this module explores late modern socio-economic, political and technological change and asks what the impact of this is on the nature of crime and crime control.

We question the relationship between gender, class and ethnicity and experiences of crime and victimisation through empirical examples (e.g. football hooliganism, human trafficking, cybercrime, environmental crime, racial profiling and stop-and-search).

The module also explores debates concerning whether contemporary forms of crime control are socially just, respect citizens' rights and are sophisticated enough to address the complex socio-economic, cultural and technological drivers of crime within our contemporary era.

Students are encouraged to reflect upon the relevance of contemporary criminological theory for explaining these empirical phenomena.

LEVEL 2 MODULES

Crime, Power and Social Inequalities (20 Credits)

Prerequisite: Classical Sociological Theory OR Introduction to Criminological Theory

This module explores the significance of power differences and social inequalities- such as gender, age, ethnicity and social class- to definitions of crime, and processes of criminalisation (becoming criminal) and victimisation (becoming a victim).

We consider how 'crime' is defined by the criminal justice system. We study who is understood by the police, the courts and society more broadly to be a perpetrator or a victim of crime. We also consider how different groups are affected by social harms. These may sometimes be harms we understand as crimes, but will also include things that are not conventionally thought of as criminal.

Rather than seeking individual explanations, the module aims to show how people are positioned as members of different groups and how this structures their experiences of the criminal justice system.

Modern & Contemporary Sociological Theory (20 Credits)

Prerequisite: Classical Sociological Theory

This module engages with sociological theories from the end of the Second World War to the present. The module is split into two parts, each representing a distinct approach to theorizing.

In term one, we address questions such as: What is theory for? What makes a society and what makes societies change? How free are we to act and can we all do so with equal freedom? How should the reproduction of power, oppression and privilege be understood? And is it only humans that act? These questions are situated in the context of social processes like neoliberalism, decolonization, climate change, etc.

In term two, we engage with ideas of structure, action and interaction, and the shift in sociological thinking from systems to networks, asking if 'the social' is best described as integration or disintegration at a global level today. We begin with the structural dispute between functionalist accounts of development and dependency/world systems accounts of underdevelopment, followed by challenges from micro perspectives, leading to current disputes over postmodernity, risk and so on.

LEVEL 2 MODULES

Policing & Police (20 Credits)

This module focuses on the key issues and developments in British policing from its inception up until the present day. It analyses key policing issues within the context of social, political, ideological and economic change. It covers themes as diverse as preventative policing and police professionalisation.

This module outlines key theoretical approaches in both historical and contemporary police studies and enables you to apply them to the operational challenges faced in police practice. The dynamic nature of policing means its structures and processes are continually under review and changing. The changing role, function, practices and representations of the police can only be understood within the broader criminological and societal context.



Research Methods in Action (40 Credits)

Prerequisite: Social Research Methods

Following on from Social Research Methods, this module is focused on developing practical research skills and helping you to learn how to do social research.

There are three main areas the module focuses on: 1) how to design a research study, from research question, to methodological framework, to sampling and ethics; 2) how to work with and analyse quantitative data; and 3) how to work with and analyse qualitative data.

The core of your work for the module will be a small, group-based research project which you will design and carry out with peers with supervision from an academic researcher. You will also spend time working with quantitative datasets and developing a dissertation research plan for assessment.

In all these ways, the module aims to prepare you for the final-year dissertation module. Beyond your degree, it will also offer you a solid foundation for a career or further study in research or data analysis.

LEVEL 2 MODULES

Self, Identity & Society (20 Credits)

This module asks big questions related to structure and agency; do we have free will to shape our identities, are we authors of our own biographies or is society so structured our identities are shaped before we were born?

It does this by looking at how power works in society, how social space shapes who we are through our personal life (in our families and then wider as a community, or a citizen).

The module encourages you to think critically about the social world but from the initial starting point of the self. By asking you to understand and think critically about your own particular lens on the world, the module opens up a broader debate about citizenship, solidarity, and division.



Sociology of Education (20 Credits)

This module looks at how and why education creates inequality and what we can do about it. It explores educational inequality in schools and universities and how it links to broader social inequalities of race, class, gender and disability.

We do this through examining key contemporary sociological and policy debates around selection for education, the creation of comprehensive schooling, critical pedagogies and alternative models of education, sexism, racism and classism in the education system. We also discuss contemporary questions like the decolonization of the curriculum in higher education and who should pay for higher education?

The module allows you to understand your own experience of education and the experiences of others around you by asking you to think critically about your education and whether it could be different. The aim of the module is to understand and critique how our education system currently works and to understand the possibilities for transformation.

LEVEL 2 MODULES

Sociology of Health & Medicine (20 Credits)

This introductory module addresses many of the major themes in health sociology research today, from the experiences of patients and those with chronic illness, to how healthcare systems and medical technologies work in the UK and throughout the world, to health inequalities and how the places we live impact the health we, as a society or a community do or do not have.

Drawing on medical sociology theory and research, we will ask questions like: what are people's rights around health? Do people deserve access to healthcare, and to what extent? What impact do the radical developments in health technologies and biomedical research have on people and the environment and how do we regulate or address the ethical, environmental, political, economic and social implications of this work?



Violence and Abuse in Society (20 Credits)

This module explores criminological and sociological research and perspectives on different forms of violence and abuse in society.

Particularly, the module engages with common forms of violence and abuse that take place within everyday contexts such as the family, intimate relationships and public spaces - such as domestic and sexual violence, child abuse and street harassment.

We explore these topics from a feminist perspective, focussing on key theories such as gender, power, intersectionality and the continuum of sexual violence, to develop a critical sociological understanding of the causes, nature, extent and consequences of different forms of violence and abuse.





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LEVEL 3 MODULE SYNOPSES

LEVEL 3 MODULES

Crime, Justice & the Sex Industry (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: At least 20 credits Sociology/Criminology at level 2

This module assesses the current politics of prostitution reform, at both local and global levels. It considers historical and contemporary criminal justice debates on managing prostitution / sex work.

Issues engaged with include: should the selling or purchase of sex be criminalised or should the selling and purchase of sex be decriminalised altogether? To what extent is violence against sex workers sufficiently addressed by current policy and legislation in the UK, and globally? Can sex work be considered a job like any other? Who is most likely to be involved in commercial sex work and how does this differ by gender, age, ethnicity, etc. What is trafficking, and how does this relate to the selling of sex and to migration and national borders more broadly?

The module examines research that focus on the lived experience of people working in the sex industry and considers how this evidence can be used to critically engage with criminal justice policy and practice.

Cyberculture & Cybercrime (10 Credits)

This module examines the relationship between crime and culture. The module asks questions like: when does information become criminal? Have digital networks increased or reduced the risk of criminal victimisation? When are virtual crimes 'real'? Is cybercrime just old wine in new bottles? Does the term 'cyberterrorism' confuse more than inform us? The same question can be asked of 'cyber' fraud, pornography, child-pornography, stalking, bullying, grooming, hate-crime, and piracy. Does the digital make a difference?

The foundational question in sociology is the 'problem of order'. In a global network world, the regulative capacity of nation-states is weakened. The study of cybercrime then becomes central to addressing whether society can be maintained in an age of distributed networks. Have new regulative frames arisen or is the world becoming a free for all?



LEVEL 3 MODULES

Digital Health & Other Devices (10 Credits)

This module provides you with the conceptual and methodological tools to think sociologically about the development and use of technologies in lay and professional management of health and illness.

We explore how health technologies have changed over time looking at specific case examples of digital health, artificial intelligence, telemedicine, personalised medicine, health data, and apps for health and illness. We will look at the ways these kinds of technologies are changing our relationships with our bodies, health and practitioners.



Drugs and Society (10 Credits)

This module will introduce students to the sociological study of drug use and drug policy, focusing on the complex politics (of race, class, and more) that run through them.

We will explore how drugs have been socially and politically regulated, paying particular attention to contemporary drug prohibition and the 'war on drugs'. We will examine the effects of drugs in the brain, the history of human efforts to alter consciousness through psychoactive substances, and the question of drug 'addiction', critically examining different moral and medical models of addiction. We will assess the success of criminal justice approaches to drug use, the challenge represented by public health-informed 'harm reduction' approaches, and consider how questions of social justice play out in the regulation of substances.



LEVEL 3 MODULES

Feminist Anti-Violence Activism (10 Credits)

Pre-/Co-requisite: Violence and Abuse in Society

This module explores the history of feminist activism on violence and abuse and its connections with key developments and debates in feminist sociology and criminology.

Orientating around the concept of ‘useful knowledge’, we draw on case studies from the UK and globally to develop understandings of how theory and research can be applied to generate social change.

We look at activism across three historical contexts: the 1970s-80s; the 1990s-00s; and from 2010-modern day. These periods are compared, considering the ways feminist activism can be seen as both a product of and producing some of the key social issues of the time. In doing so, this module provides an in-depth example of how sociological and criminological theory has been applied to real world problems.

Health & Place (10 Credits)

Where you live matters in terms of how long you live and your quality of life. Connections between health and place, however, are complex and varied. This module will explore how places shape our health through forces ranging from political economy and structural violence, to identity and embodiment.

We’ll develop a critical analysis of both ‘health’ and ‘place’, exploring how places can be understood not simply as locations on a map but as networks of social relations, and similarly, how health can be understood not simply as the absence of illness but as a relational outcome between the biological, social, and psychical.

Drawing on understandings of place from human geography, sociological research on health inequalities, and ethnographic explorations of health and illness, we will examine the reciprocal relationship between health and place, in which places shape health and—perhaps less intuitively—health produces place.

LEVEL 3 MODULES

Inside Out (20 Credits; capped)

This module critically engages with the criminal justice system in terms of its institutions, policies and practices.

You will debate issues relating to crime, criminal justice processes, and institutions. We will draw on theory to think about what causes crime and how crime should be dealt with in society. You will engage in debates and discussions around current issues in gender, ethnicity, the regulation of drugs and the role of prisons in the criminal justice system.

This module is taught as a collaboration between Durham University (what we call 'outside') students and people currently incarcerated in prison (what we call 'inside' students), where 'outside' students are taken into local prisons to engage in these debates with 'inside' students who have personal and intimate knowledge of these issues.

Note that recruitment for Inside Out starts in the second year of study and there is a robust application process, including a short interview, to make sure the module is a good fit for you. Students will also need to solicit security clearance to enter the prison. There will be guidance and support with this throughout the process however.



LEVEL 3 MODULES

Justice, Violence & Abuse (10 Credits)

Pre-/Co-requisite: Violence and Abuse in Society

This module engages with the concept of justice (broadly conceived) in the context of responding to sexual and domestic violence in society.

In doing so, we explore different theories and research that engages with the topic of justice, and other forms of redress and intervention, from a feminist perspective. We will cover a number of key arenas and models of responding to violence and abuse, such as: victim-survivor perspectives on justice, the criminal justice system, restorative justice, domestic abuse perpetrator programmes, emerging responses, in addition to working with men, employers, and universities to tackle violence and abuse.

In examining these topics, this module explores compelling questions such as 'what does justice look like for victim-survivors of sexual and domestic violence?' and 'What are some of the problems and possibilities that arise with responses to violence and abuse.'

Race, Racism & Social Justice in Britain (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: At least 20 credits Sociology/Criminology at level 2

This module explores the impact of race and racism within British society, situated in both an historical and global context. The main debates within this module engage with institutional racism in the British context and how this has impacted on people of colour throughout the last 30 years.

It considers the intersectional nature of race and racism, the role of culture and politics in shaping racism in the UK, and critical perspectives and responses through examples of anti-racist activism.



LEVEL 3 MODULES

Social Policy: Principles & Current Issues (20 Credits)

This module looks at how social policy has been influenced by contemporary social and political change. It challenges conventional debates and wisdom in social policy that tend to provide generally consensual and technocratic solutions to social problems without (necessarily) questioning the wider social, political and economic forces shaping societies.

We focus on the welfare state in the UK and how it is changing but we also bring in examples of social policy from across the world. We ask questions like: what were the impacts of social policy responses to COVID-19? What does austerity mean? What does it mean to claim benefits? Is the discourse of “strivers” and “skivers” really true? How do marginalised and minoritised groups experience social policies?

The module explores the ideologies and policies underpinning current debates about the welfare state, giving you the theoretical and conceptual tools to understand models of social policy.

Social Theory & the Politics of Knowledge (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: Modern and Contemporary Sociological Theory OR Contemporary Criminological Theory

How does sociology act in the world? This module explores the social and political effects of sociological and criminological knowledge, focusing on contributions related to justice and recognition, inequality and oppression, the status of a person and so on. It asks: what does sociological knowledge do? What is the relationship between theory and politics? What does it mean to say that sociology is critical? And does knowledge automatically lead to emancipation?

Building on the theories taught in previous years, the module aims to provide a critical understanding of how theory relates to and the social, political and economic elements of its production. Thematic sessions and self-directed study emphasize 'working-with' rather than 'learning-about' theory. Through this, you will have the space to reflect on the relationship between arguments in sociology and their social and historical contexts, and to critically assess and evaluate the political and social implications of different theories.

LEVEL 3 MODULES

Sociology of Forensic Science (10 Credits)

This module looks at how forensic evidence is produced across the criminal justice system, from crime scene to court and beyond. This involves the work of scientists, but also police, lawyers, suspects, victims, publics and the media. We also focus on the social impact of emerging biometric technology such as DNA and facial recognition, and the implications for social justice globally.

The module asks just how 'scientific' is forensic science, and why should we be concerned? How far should we trust the law in understanding forensic science? How does society know itself through forensic and biometric technology, and should we really be so reliant on these technologies? How can and should these technologies be governed?

To address these questions, the module takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on sociology and philosophy of science, criminology and socio-legal studies. The module considers the possibility that forensic science 'co-produces' and is 'co-produced' by science and wider society.

Sociology of Mental Health (10 Credits)

Unlike physical health, mental health remains a highly problematic topic, as it is difficult for people to talk about, acknowledge, and address.

Sociology offers a way to make sense of mental disorders that goes beyond (but also helps to make better) the approach offered by psychology, psychiatry and medicine by focusing on the wider social context in which mental disorders take place.

This module will explore controversies and debates around mental health definitions, treatments and societal acceptance to show how mental disorders are a window into a society. It will also, in turn, explore what it is like to live with a mental disorder, particularly for those with chronic conditions, and how people navigate their personal lives, work, public interactions, etc.

LEVEL 3 MODULES

Sociology of Reproduction & Parenthood (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: At least 20 credits Sociology/Criminology at level 2

This module critically examines some of the normative, taken-for-granted concepts, assumptions and discourses around contemporary reproduction and parenthood such as what makes a 'good' parent and why people have children in the first place.

The module links these normative constructions of parenthood and reproduction to wider social, cultural, and political changes, highlighting the ways in which ideas about reproduction and parenthood are culturally-located.

Taking a feminist stance and using examples such as conception, abortion, and infant feeding, we demonstrate the ways in which 'the personal is political' and women's bodies in particular are subject to surveillance and scrutiny as 'vessels' for future citizens.



Sociology of Work & Professions (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: At least 20 credits Sociology/Criminology at level 2

This module looks at the modern world of work and asks why it looks the way it does and where the future of work is heading. We question what is work, why do we work, who benefits from work, is work inherently exploitative under capitalism, and, if so, how might we change that.

The module combines theories of work with empirical examples of work practices (professional football, sex work, hairdressing) to think through some of these thorny issues. The module also tasks students to reflect on their own place within the labour market, past, present and future.

The module addresses some important political and policy debates in work, such as discrimination and inequality, zero-hours contracts and deindustrialisation, as well as important contemporary sociological research about the changing nature of work and the relationship between work and identity.

LEVEL 3 MODULES

The Body as Data: Technology, Power & Human Rights (10 Credits)

The module aims to apply theoretical resources from sociology and science and technology studies to the analysis of the production and use of bodily data in a variety of social contexts.

It examines how biometric technology, governmentalities, agencies and both individual and collective identities are co-produced, showing how social theory can critique and challenge the claims and uses of biometric data.

The module goes on to situate the social impact of biometric technology in national, international, transnational and postcolonial contexts. In doing so, it aims to understand and anticipate the human rights and social justice impacts of emerging biometric technologies.

Youth in Crisis (10 Credits)

Prerequisites: At least 20 credits Sociology/Criminology at level 2

The module introduces some important questions about how we think about young people and how they live their lives; it also explores the subject of youth crime and how society deals with it.

It explores some of the major changes in young people's lives, and it asks why we see youth as a distinct life stage, and why young people are often seen as problematic or troublesome.

To do this, the module introduces and critically analyses some of the major theories of youth and adolescence. It explores the changing patterns of young people's lives, acknowledging the influence of diversity and discrimination on their experiences. It considers some of the problems young people might face, and it considers patterns of youth crime and the treatment of young people in the justice system.

LEVEL 3 MODULES

Community Placement (20 Credits - Capped)

Requirements: Only open to CHSS students studying Sociology or Criminology as a significant part of their degree

This module is focused on the lived reality of sociology – how we live and work together.

For this module students undertake a period of work in a community practice environment (previously students have worked at organisations supporting families affected by incarceration, at charities working with women trying to exit sex work, at food banks, at Durham Sport, at organisations supporting people with mental health issues through art, and many more!).

Through this work experience, students are able to connect the practical and lived lives of the everyday with the sociological imagination. The module tasks you with critically thinking about how communities work and how to bring together Sociology as theory and as practice.

