

**University of Toronto | Department of Sociology**  
**Summer 2022**  
**SOC495H1F LEC0101- New Topics: Sociology of Boredom**

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:10 am – 12:00pm

Location: Quercus & Zoom

<https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/87879983325>

Passcode: Boring

**Instructor:** Gordon Brett

**Email:** [gordon.brett@utoronto.ca](mailto:gordon.brett@utoronto.ca)

**Online Office Hours:** By request, via Zoom

*Statement of Acknowledgement*

We acknowledge this sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. It has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. This land is the territory of the HuronWendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory. [Council of Aboriginal Initiatives, 2014]

*Course Description*

---

This seminar introduces students to a wide variety of literature on boredom and social life. Beginning with classical readings in philosophy, students will move on to review a wide range of contemporary sociological and socio-psychological perspectives on the interplay between emotions, like boredom, social structures, and cultural belief systems. Specifically, as we uncover the emergence of this common emotion, we explore the changes in society that facilitate and make difficult one's ability to make meaning and find purpose for their life. We also question what function boredom serves for both the individual psyche and society more broadly, and whether it can serve both creative and destructive purposes.

This seminar introduces students to a wide variety of perspectives on boredom as an integral part of our everyday lives. Together, we will discuss the interplay between structural contexts and boredom. Students will read both classic contributions from the humanities and contemporary applications. The seminar will specifically seek to consider: (a) societal changes impacting our emotional states; (b) the functions of boredom; (c) the emergent contexts leading to diverse experiences; and (d) opposing views on outcomes.

*Course Objectives*

---

The course is organized in a way that encourages students to build and develop skills focused on collaborative learning, critical reading, writing, and the formation of arguments. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate and discuss a number of approaches related to sociology of emotions.
- Identify and assess key classical theoretical concepts and arguments.
- Write analytically and critically about topics related to emotional states.
- Make and support an academic argument through use of evidence.

*Prerequisite*

The prerequisite for this course is 1.0 SOC FCE at the 300+level. Students who do not meet this requirement will be removed without notice.

*Accessibility needs*

If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit: <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>

*Description of Evaluation of Components*

<b>Evaluation Component</b>	<b>Grade Weight</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Critical Reading Responses	45%	May 12; May 26; June 7
Research Paper	25%	June 16
Research Paper Presentation	10%	June 14 & 16
Group Presentation and Facilitation of Class Discussion	10%	Selected Date
Participation in Class Seminar	10%	Ongoing

**Critical Reading Responses and Questions (3 x through the term)**

*Worth 45% (15% each)*

Students are to submit 3 critical reading responses throughout the term on the set dates listed in the syllabus. Each response should be followed by 2 critical questions, which will be used as discussion points in our class seminar, and 1 real-life example that reflects the themes of the readings and represent these issues. You can pull from articles on boredom (in magazines, newspaper) or from movies, television, or music.

More information will be provided on Quercus.

**Research Paper**

*Worth 25%*

Students are to submit a final research paper that takes the lessons from the course and applies it to a case study of their choice. Alternatively, students can put the readings in dialogue with one another in a compare or contrast format.

More information will be provided on Quercus.

## **Research Paper Presentations**

*Worth 10%*

Students are asked to sign up to present their final papers on either June 14 or June 16. They are asked to prepare 10–15-minute conference style presentations. Discussion will follow.

More information will be provided on Quercus.

## **Group Presentation and Facilitation of Class Discussion**

*Worth 10%*

Each student will sign-up for a discussion facilitation group for one of the lectures between May 10 – June 14. For each bi-weekly topic, depending on course enrollment, there will be 2-3 students maximum. Students should sign-up for a presentation date no later than May 5 to ensure ample time for preparation with group members. Please refer to the sign-up sheet posted on Quercus.

More information will be provided on Quercus.

## **Participation in Class Seminar**

*Worth 10%*

Participation grades will be based on two weighted components: attendance and active participation in class discussions. Students are expected to participate regularly and demonstrate an active and critical engagement of course materials.

Class attendance is mandatory. An absence declaration is required to justify an absence. Since this is a seminar course, students are expected to attend the two classes each week and participate in class discussions. No exceptions will be made.

### *Late Policies*

---

*Accessibility:* If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

*Handing in assignments:* All assignments must be handed to the instructor electronically via Quercus. The instructor will NOT accept electronic copies of assignments via email.

*Deadlines:* The assignments are due by class time. Please refer to the Due Date stated on the Syllabus. Late work will not be accepted without proper documentation (the Declaration of Absence on ACORN).

In case of illness, you must supply a completed the Declaration of Absence on ACORN. If you are registered with Accessibility Services, your counselor will need to send an email message on your behalf.

*Absence Declaration:* The University is temporarily suspending the need for a doctor's note or medical certificate for any absence from academic participation. Please use the Absence Declaration tool on

ACORN found in the Profile and Settings menu to formally declare an absence from academic participation in the University. The tool is to be used if you require consideration for missed academic work based on the procedures specific to your faculty or campus. In addition to this declaration, you are responsible for contacting me to request the academic consideration you are seeking. You will be notified by the University if this policy changes.

*Late Assignments:* Late term papers without a valid excuse will be deducted 5% per day, including weekends and holidays. We will not be accepting work submitted over a week late. Late discussion posts will not be accepted.

*Grade Appeals:* The instructor takes the marking of assignments very seriously, and will work diligently to be fair, consistent, and accurate. Nonetheless, mistakes and oversights occasionally happen. If you believe that to be the case, you must adhere to the following rules: If it is a mathematical error simply alert the instructor of the error.

In the case of more substantive appeals, you must:

---

1. Wait at least 24 hours after receiving your mark.
  2. Carefully re-read your assignment, all assignment guidelines and marking schemes and the grader's comments.
  3. If you still feel the grade you received is not an accurate reflection of the work that you produced, you must discuss your grade within 3 days of the grade being returned to you, addressing the comments they provided to you.
  4. If you are unable to come to an agreement, you may request a regrade from the instructor. In your request, you must address your comments and explain why you feel they do not adequately reflect your assignment. Keep in mind that upon regrading, your mark may go up or down or stay the same.
- 

***Original:*** Students will be required to submit their assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

For some of your assignments, we will be using the software Ouriginal. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. Ouriginal is integrated into Quercus. For the assignments set up to use Ouriginal, the software will review your paper when you upload it to Quercus. To learn more about Ouriginal's privacy policy please review its [Privacy Policy](#).

Assignments not submitted through Ouriginal will receive a grade of zero (0%) unless a student instead provides, along with their assignment, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submitted was truly their own.

*Academic Integrity:* Academic integrity is fundamental to scholarship at the University of Toronto and beyond. Academic offenses include, but are not limited to, using someone else's ideas in a paper or exam without proper citations, submitting your own work for credit in multiple courses, obtaining assistance from others during exams (including having someone edit your work or looking at a classmate's work), and falsifying illness on the Absence Declaration tool. Please familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/codebehaviour-academicmatters-july-1-2019>

Writing Support Each college has a writing centre with instructors who can assist you at various stages of writing projects. I highly recommend seeking help from your college writing centre for your reading responses. Find your writing centre here: <https://writing.utoronto.ca/writingcentres/>

Note that writing support is available through phone appointments through the COVID19 crisis.

### *Student Responsibilities and Expectations*

---

This class is completely online. All lectures and office hours will be provided to students via Zoom synchronously.

*Participation:* Students are expected to participate actively by 1) completing assigned readings, 2) writing the assigned discussion posts, and 3) keeping up to date on course information posted on Quercus. In all activities, students are to be respectful of fellow classmates and teaching staff.

*Email Policy:* I will respond to your email within two business days (48 hours, except weekends and holidays). Emails that do not follow these guidelines will not receive a response: Your use of an official U of T address is required. Please include the course code (e.g. SOC201) in the subject line and your full name and student number in your message. Please do not send a repeat email (e.g., "did you get my email?").

In general, please treat emails as you would any other professional communication. Email is most suitable for questions that are clear, concise, and easily answerable; if you are confused about the course material or need to discuss a concept, I strongly encourage you to instead attend office hours or make an appointment. Please read the syllabus carefully before asking a general question about the course.

Please be judicious in your use of email. Use it only for questions that are brief and specific. Before sending a question by email, be sure to check the course outline to see if an answer is already available. Emails should not be seen as an alternative to doing the assigned reading or attending lectures.

### *Required Readings & Course Schedule*

---

Readings will be added to Quercus.

*Course Schedule:* Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to each online lecture.

*Note:* every attempt will be made to follow this schedule, but it is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

---

i) The Rise of a Cultural Phenomenon

**May 10: The Emergence of a Mood**

**Readings:**

*Elizabeth Goodstein*: Chapter 1. Ennui in Western Literature: Boredom as Existential Malaise.

**Activity:**

Students must write a brief bio about themselves on the discussion board (100 words).

**May 12: Discourse on Boredom**

**Readings:**

*Elizabeth Goodstein* (2005): Chapter 3. Boredom and the Modernization of Subjectivity

**Assignment:**

Critical Reading Reflection 1 Due (15%)

ii) Boredom as an Emotion

**May 17: The Utility of Emotion**

**Readings:**

Darden (1999). Boredom: A Socially Devalued Emotion

Anderson (2004). Time-stilled space-slowed: how boredom matters

**May 19: The Good**

**Readings:**

Elpidorou (2020). Excerpt from *Propelled*. Chapter 1: The secret to happiness is maybe unhappiness

Elpidorou (2018). *The Good of Boredom*

**May 24: The Bad**

**Readings:**

Eastwood et al (2012). *The Unengaged Mind: Defining Boredom in Terms of Attention*

Brissett and Snow (1993). *Boredom. Where the Future isn't.*

**May 26: The Ugly**

**Readings:**

Bengtsson (2012). *Boredom and Action— Experiences from Youth Confinement*

O'Neil (2014). *CAST ASIDE: Boredom, Downward Mobility, and Homelessness in Post-Communist Bucharest*

**Assignment:**

Critical Reading Reflection 2 Due (15%)

iii) Boredom as Self-Regulation

### **May 31: Sensory Overload**

#### **Readings:**

Klapp (1986). Excerpts from Overload and Boredom. Chapters 2- 3: “The Appetite for Information” and “Where is Boredom?”

Finkelstein (2003). The Taste of Boredom. McDonaldization and Australian Food Culture

### **June 2: Creativity**

#### **Readings:**

Bench and Lench (2018). Boredom as a seeking state: Boredom prompts the pursuit of novel (even negative) experiences

Danckert et al (2018). Boredom: What is it Good For?

### **June 7: Mean-Making**

#### **Readings:**

Barbalet (1999). Boredom and Social Meaning

Van Tilburg et al (2013). In Search of Meaningfulness: Nostalgia as an Antidote to Boredom.

#### **Assignment:**

Critical Reading Reflection 3 Due (15%)

iv) The Sociology of Boredom

### **June 9: Towards a Sociology of Boredom**

#### **Readings:**

Ohlmeier et al (2020). Why we are bored: towards a sociological approach to boredom.

Gardiner (2012). Henri Lefebvre and the ‘Sociology of Boredom’

### **June 14: Towards a Sociology of Boredom Presentation day 1**

**Assignment: Presentation day (10%)**

### **June 16: Towards a Sociology of Boredom Presentation day 2**

#### **Assignment:**

**Presentation day (10%)**

Final Paper Due (25%)