

# Youth

St. Francis Xavier University  
Fall Term 2021  
Wednesdays 9:45—11:00, Fridays 8:15—9:30  
Schwarz 290

Instructor: Peter Lenco  
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Office hours: Tuesdays 10:00—12:00, Wednesdays 11:00—13:00 and Thursdays 9:00—11:00

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## Course Description

Youth sociology seeks to move beyond studying young people, however defined, as purely individuals, towards understanding them in their larger social and cultural surroundings and circumstances. From such a perspective we see that all kinds of factors influence young people, including social expectations, cultural norms, economic imperatives and environmental factors. This influence is further differentiated based on things like a group or individual's ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender. What we have, then, is a set of expectations and factors that act on a rather arbitrary group called “youth”. What makes this group different from others is that its members have perhaps only recently gained legal rights and a level of independence from their guardians, and lack capital, especially the social and economic kind. In other words, young people, unlike other groups or populations, are “given” a special set of conditions over which they have little control. This course will engage with these issues and has three main objectives.

The first is to critically analyze the concept of youth in a historical and geographical context and to understand the role of this concept in (our) society. The second is to understand the specific social, cultural and economic contexts young people find themselves in today. These structural conditions have real-life consequences for young people, such as the centrality of individual responsibility, the stress on making oneself into an entrepreneur (*you* have to “invest” in *your* future), the pressure for seemingly endless specialized education leading to high debt, and higher professional expectations. These new developments are as arbitrary as they are inequitable and this course aims to illuminate them.

The third objective is to develop the critical tools to do this. Most of the knowledge and skills young people are given these days pertains to succeeding in the the current system. In other words, young people are trained to swim in the stream. The goal of this course is to understand (and derive meaning from) the stream itself. By the end of the course students will understand the concept “youth” as a created and contextual one. They will have thorough knowledge of the the conditions and challenges (e.g. NEET, transnational mobility) facing young people today, as well as valuable insight into culture, identity and crime. Finally, and no less importantly, students will develop their ability to discuss complex topics, improve their group work skills, and some time will be spent on developing students' ability to read and to write effectively in an academic setting.

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## Course Form

The sessions will consist of informal introductory lectures with room for questions and open discussion. Note that the lectures will not be summaries of the texts, but are rather meant to supplement the texts and initiate analysis.

Indeed, the goal of the classes will be to critically analyse the texts considerably. We will also make use of group discussions and problem-based learning. Please note that all aspects of this course adhere to the principle of equitable learning. Therefore I invite each member of the class to strive to promote a respectful, safe and equitable learning environment, free from discrimination and harassment, both in person and online. Feel free to discuss any questions or concerns regarding our learning environment with me, either in or before/after class or during office hours.

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## Texts

There is one textbook available for purchase through the Campus Store:

France, Alan, Julia Coffey, Steven Roberts and Catherine Waite. 2020. *Youth Sociology*. London: Red Globe Press.

All other materials will be available via Moodle.

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## Evaluation

Attendance/Participation—10%

Midterm (due 15 October)—20%

Article analysis (due 5 November)—10%

Term paper (due 26 November)—30%

Final Exam—30%

Attendance for the course is mandatory. Be sure to contact me in advance if you are going to be absent for any length of time (see Accommodation below). Participation is an important element of the course (not just for your participation mark), and students should make every effort to ask questions and to engage in discussions and group work.

For the article analysis, students must analyze an article (posted on Moodle on 3 November) using the concepts and approaches developed in the course. The analysis should be approximately three pages long.

The term paper should address in detail one of the issues covered in the course. There is considerable leeway here and students are encouraged to develop their own topics. Feel free to consult with me about this. In all cases be sure to have a clear thesis statement and do not forget that papers that argue or try to establish a point are easier to write and easier to read. I am looking more for quality rather than quantity (of pages, of material covered). The paper should be approximately 2000 words in length.

The midterm will consist of short answers and one longer essay question. A closed-book, essay-style exam will be scheduled during the regular examination period. In the case of pandemic restrictions, these will be take-home assignments.

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## Guidelines for Submission

The article analysis and term paper must be submitted in electronic copy via Moodle 15 minutes before class on the due date. Late assignments will be penalized five percentage points per business day. If your circumstances warrant an extension without penalty, you must contact me (not via email) in a timely manner to make a formal request. Follow the layout guidelines on the department website (under “Current Students”) and as per department guidelines, I urge you to use the American Sociological Association's citation and referencing system. Otherwise use one clear referencing system consistently, but I insist that you include page numbers when citing sources. It is up to you to track your own grades; they will not be posted electronically nor will I respond to email queries regarding them.

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## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of *any* source without acknowledging its author/creator and will not be tolerated in this course. Not only is it a serious breach of academic integrity, but it undermines the efforts of other course participants. Cases of plagiarism will be dealt with in the strictest possible manner and the instructor reserves the right to use all available technical assistance to discover plagiarists. You can read more about academic integrity in the current academic calendar in section 3.8. If you are unsure of anything, please ask see me about it. Remember: there is no justification for plagiarism.

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## Contact

Please only email me (with "SOCl 298" in the subject line) if I can quickly read your email and then answer with a word or two. For any communication more complex, students are welcome to visit, phone or MS Teams during office hours. Generally no appointment is necessary. If you have difficulty with these times, simply contact me to set up an alternative arrangement.

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## Accommodation

Any student that requires accommodation of any kind should contact me at the earliest opportunity so that the appropriate arrangements can be made. Also, please contact me at the outset of any prolonged illness or personal matter that might detract from your performance in the course. My goal is to help students navigate this course to a successful conclusion but you are responsible for communicating any potential challenges to me. I am here to support you but I cannot advocate for you if I do not have all the information in a timely manner. Note that students may drop this course, online in Banner, on or before 3 November.

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## Copyright

There is the possibility of considerable online content for this course. I remind you that course materials are designed exclusively for use in SOCl 298 at StFX University only and are the property of the instructor, unless otherwise stated by the instructor. Copying any material for distribution, online posting, or selling of this material to third parties without permission is strictly prohibited subject to Canadian copyright law.

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## Outline

- Week One (8, 10 September) – **Introduction; Are young people really incapable of handling COVID-19?**  
Steinberg, Laurence. "Expecting students to play it safe if colleges reopen is a fantasy." *New York Times*,  
16 June 2020.
- Week Two (15, 17 September) – **What is youth?**  
France et al., Chapter 1.
- Week Three (22, 24 September) – **Dimensions of difference**  
France et al., Chapter 2.
- Week Four: (29 September, 1 October) – **Education and imagined futures**  
France et al., Chapter 3.
- Week Five (6, 8 October) – **Youth, work and un(der)employment**  
France et al., Chapter 4.
- Week Six (13, 15 October) – **Youth cultures and identities**  
France et al., Chapter 5.  
▶ Attention: Midterm 15 October
- Week Seven (20, 22 October) – **Youth, social media and digital lives**  
France et al., Chapter 6.
- Week Eight (27, 29 October) – **Youth, space and place**  
France et al., Chapter 7.
- Week Nine (3, 5 November) – **Youth, risk and risk-taking**  
France et al., Chapter 8.  
▶ Attention: Article analysis due 5 November
- Week Ten (17, 19 November) – **Youth and crime**  
France et al., Chapter 9.
- Week Eleven (24, 26 November) – **Youth, health and wellbeing**  
France et al., Chapter 10.  
▶ Attention: Term Paper due on 26 November
- Week Twelve (1, 3 December) – **Youth, citizenship, belonging and mobilities; Conclusion**  
France et al., Chapter 11.