

TO: Students in “Fantasyland & the University”
Sociology 3113 SB – 2018 Spring Session
(May 28 – June 15)

DATE: May 2018

FROM: R.W. Nelsen, Professor
Department of Sociology

**SUBJECT: COURSE TEXTS, COURSE DESCRIPTION, A NOTE ON COURSE CONTENT,
COURSE OBJECTIVES, AND EVALUATION (GRADING)**

Textbooks (Available at Lakehead University Bookstore)

Required Textbook

1. Randle W. Nelsen. Degrees of Failure: University Education in Decline. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2017.
2. In addition, I will provide reading material for you at no expense to you. These readings include excerpts from the recent work of four authors:
 - Michael Adams. Could It Happen Here?: Canada in the Age of Trump and Brexit (2017)
 - Kurt Andersen. Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire (2017)
 - Amy Goldstein. Janesville: An American Story (2017)
 - Sherry Turkle. Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age (2015)

Course Description

The history of popular culture and politics in the United States is firmly enmeshed in fantasy. Reality television, talk radio, internet websites, and an “alternate facts” American administration in Washington, D.C. are merely the present-day extension of this history. Canada has been affected, arguably to a lesser extent, by this American residence in fantasyland. This course will focus on connecting fantasyland to one of our basic institutions, the university. Attention will be paid to higher education, colleges and universities, in both Canada and the United States, with special emphasis upon drawing out and analyzing the disparate connections between fantasy and reality in the daily operations of the modern university.

Some Suggested Topics for our Learning Agenda

- United States & Canada gone “Haywire”
- American Exceptionalism
- The Politics of Fantasy and the University
- Training & Retraining of Laid-off Workers
- Reestablishing Conversation in the Classroom
- Trumpocracy
- Could an Authoritarian Trumpocracy Happen Here?

- Education/School as an Institution and a System
- Education as Training and vice-versa
- Connections Between University Schooling and Work as Paid Labour
- Scholarship: What Is It and How Is It Fostered?
- Professors as Role Models
- Professors as “Experts”
- Is There a Connection Between Research and Teaching?
- The Political Orientation of Professors
- Academic Freedom and “Political Correctness”
- The Community (?) of Scholars
- Racialization and Ethnicity at the University
- Indigenous Learning at the University
- Gender and Higher Education
- Sessional Lecturers and Their Concerns
- University Support Staff and Their Concerns
- Student and Parent Concerns and Considerations
- Plagiarism/Cheating: Gaming the System
- “Helicopter” Parents
- The Commuter University, Public Transportation, Parking and the Role of the Automobile in University Life
- Organization of Knowledge at the University: The Academic Disciplines and Beyond
- Professionalism and the University
- History of Development of the University in Canada and the United States
- University as an Agent of Social Change
- Growth of the Corporate University Alongside Fun (Entertainment) Culture: Edubusiness Meets Edutainment
- Branding and Marketing the University
- The Role of Intercollegiate Sports in University Life
- Technological Development, the Mass Media and the University
- Distance Education or Education at a Distance, Distributed Learning: The High-Tech Classroom and the New Mediated Learning
- Some Student-Friendly Suggestions for Professors as Classroom Teachers
- Student-Centered Versus Teacher-Centered Classrooms and Programs
- Consideration of “Town” and “Gown”: The Community and the University
- Alternatives to the Present University System

General Statement Regarding Course Topics and Organization

Most of the topics listed above will be discussed, some in greater detail than others. Also, together we can modify this list with deletions and additions. We shall begin the course with me sharing my particular views and biases and some discussion of your interests. After we agree on our shared interests regarding topics then together we shall work out a flexible organization that brings order to the subject matter under discussion. This course is an ongoing and collaborative process.

Course Objective:

The sole purpose and objective of this course is to make students more aware of how sociological perspectives can help them become critical social analysts of the university as an institution.

Evaluation (Grading):

Students will be evaluated according to how well they achieve the above course objective. Specifics regarding course requirements, student-initiated assignments, evaluation procedures, and any other relevant information we shall discuss as a group on the first day of class, Tuesday, May 28, 2018.

On Plagiarism:

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to the University regulations (see Lakehead University Calendar).