Lessons of Community and Compassion:  
Overcoming Social Isolation and Building Social Connectedness through Policy  
and Program Development

Professor Kim Samuel  
Fall 2017  
INTD 497

Mondays, 8:30-11:30 A.M.  
Arts Building, 853 Rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Room 230
COURSE OUTLINE

LESSONS OF COMMUNITY AND COMPASSION:

OVERCOMING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND BUILDING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS THROUGH POLICY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Instructor

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Office Hours: Mondays 1 p.m. – 3 p.m; Tuesdays, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Class Times & Location
Mondays 8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
September 11 – December 4, 2017
Arts Building, 853 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Room 230
NOTE: In lieu of class on October 9th (Thanksgiving Monday), a make-up class will be scheduled on December 7th in accordance with McGill policies.

Official Disclaimers:

1. Language
In accordance with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

2. Academic Integrity statement [approved by Senate on 29 January 2003]:
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/ for more information).
Course Description

Now if you listen closely
I’ll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
‘Cause nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

— Maya Angelou

Social isolation—the deprivation of social connectedness—can be formally defined as “the inadequate quality and quantity of social relations with other people at the different levels where human interaction takes place (individual, group, community, and the larger social environment).”

Yet, around this technical definition lies a range of interconnected issues. Issues of identity, dignity, and belonging. Issues of agency and voice. Issues that affect people’s experience of life and their ability to reach their true potential.

Why do isolation and social connectedness matter at a community, national, and global level? How does the isolation of vulnerable groups hinder progress and development? What is the impact of considering—or neglecting—these issues when developing and implementing policies and programs? What is their relevance to key Sustainable Development Goals such as ending poverty, ensuring healthy lives, and making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable? And, finally, what role can each of us play in promoting community and compassion?

Through real-life examples, we will examine the causes and consequences of social isolation for vulnerable populations such as refugees, people living in poverty, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, youth and older persons. We also will explore results through cross-cutting themes including education, food policy, architecture, community planning and intergenerational solutions that can be achieved when the voices of vulnerable populations are included as policy and programming decisions are made.

Along the way, we’ll hear from experts who are incorporating a commitment to connectedness into their work on behalf of social progress and human rights, and we’ll learn about varied platforms and professions for influencing change.

The class will be an interdisciplinary seminar; student attendance and participation in classroom discussions and interactive exercises will be essential.
**Learning Goals and Outcomes**

- Understand what social isolation means, how it manifests itself, and why it can be so detrimental—for individuals, for communities, and ultimately for society as a whole;

- Increase understanding of communities and groups historically facing barriers to development, informed directly by the experience of leading thinkers and organizations that work with these communities;

- Examine the impact of social isolation within international development and identify and evaluate programs and policies designed to foster connectedness;

- Build awareness of the contribution of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives in building social connectedness;

- Deepen skills for raising awareness of social isolation and influencing positive change.

- Apply the lens of social connectedness through practical writing assignments.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

- **Participation** – 10%
  - This will include attendance and participation in course-related discussions (both in class and online).

- **Reading Reflections** – 10%
  - Students are required to share short responses to the weekly readings and videos as part of the MyCourses class discussions section, to be posted by 8.30am each Monday before class. These comments and reflections can be a short paragraph and should not exceed 250 words; the aim is to show thoughtful engagement with each forthcoming week’s background materials.

- **Narrative assignment** (750-1000 words), due 8:30 AM on October 10 – 20%
  - The goal of this exercise is to identify and effectively communicate a specific experience. Students are invited to describe a time that they themselves felt either isolated or alternatively, deeply connected and had a sense of belonging. Through this exercise, students will reflect upon and assess an event, situation or circumstance and suggest a cause and effect narrative related to this experience.

- **Course-related op-ed column** (650-800 words), due 8:30 AM on November 13 – 25%
  - Each student will write an op-ed-length column inspired by the themes and topics, individually or combined, covered throughout the course. Students are welcome to go beyond the weekly content included in the course and to identify cross-cutting issues and possible new dimensions and aspects that emerge through their own research and reflection.
• “Research to Practice” Final paper (2,000 - 2,500 words), due 8:30 AM December 7 – 35%
  o Students will write a final paper advocating for new evidence-based policies and programs that can reduce social isolation and increase connectedness. Successful papers will combine ideas derived from class readings and students’ own research to make arguments for the policies or programs they recommend.

Core Texts

For Purchase:


Additional Texts

To be provided on loan by Professor Samuel:


**For free download:**

Course Content

Week 1 – Respect, Recognition and Reciprocity: Introduction to Social Isolation and Social Connectedness
September 11, 2017

What is social isolation? Why does it matter, and why should we care—as individuals, as communities and as global citizens? How can policy help promote inclusion and belonging? In this overview, we’ll explore the key themes of the course.

Required readings:


Want to know more?:


Week 2 – The Human Right to Belong
September 18, 2017

*** Please note the following change to Professor Samuel’s regular office hours. This week they will be held on Monday, Sept 18 only from 12-4pm.

Do human rights offer protection from isolation? This week we will investigate the connection between the two with a focus on refugees. Last year, the global population of the forcibly displaced reached an all-time high. Roughly one in every 113 people on Earth has been forced from their home by crises such as conflict and natural disasters, millions of them seeking sanctuary in foreign lands. In this lesson, we’ll explore how isolation manifests within the refugee experience. We’ll also learn how organizations like Human Rights Watch help safeguard rights.

Guest speaker:

Emina Ćerimović, Researcher, Disability Rights Division, Human Rights Watch

Required readings:


Want to know more?:


Week 3 – Sharing Stories of Social Isolation: The Journalists’ Perspective
September 25, 2017

Media plays an increasingly complex, scrutinized and important role in international development and bridging understanding of challenges facing individuals and communities. This week, with a special focus on the compounding challenges confronting women across the globe, we will critically assess the role of the media. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists will join the class, sharing diverse experience and first hand perspectives. We’ll explore how social isolation manifests within different contexts and consider the media’s role in raising awareness and building connection “eye to eye”.

Guest speakers:

Mary Jordan, Senior Correspondent, The Washington Post

Kevin Sullivan, Senior Correspondent, The Washington Post
Required readings:


Want to know more?:


- Samuel, Kim. ‘One of Us’ Has to Be All of Us.” The Huffington Post, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-of-us-has-to-be-all-of-us_us_59408711e4b04c03fa261690

Week 4 – Youth Empowerment: Contemporary Challenges, Creative Solutions
October 2, 2017

Young people are masters of new technologies that are connecting the world as never before. But just how deep are those connections, and how can we make them more meaningful? This week, we will consider the positive and negative uses of digital technology, and explore the ways that a wired generation can lead in building belonging.

Guest speakers:

Jennifer Corriero, Co-Founder and Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

Kluane Adamek, Co-founder, Our Voices – Yukon First Nation Emerging Leaders

Required readings:

- Cacioppo, John. “Loneliness and Technology.” Big Think, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aDZx5Us5kQ (5 minutes)

  https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233020765_Youth_Participation_and_Community_Change


  http://www.most.ie/webreports/appendix/12.%20CriticalSocialTheoryYouthEmpowerment[1].pdf

• Kross, Ethan et al. “Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults,” *PLOS One*, 2013. 
  http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0069841#s2

  http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/#article-comments

• Noseworthy, Kelly. “Cyberbullying victim speaks out: 'It was the darkest time of my life','” *CBC News*, 2016. 

  Chapter 8: “Capabilities and Contemporary Issues.”


Want to know more?:


***Thanksgiving Holiday – No Class
Oct 9, 2017

(*Note: The narrative essay assignment is due this week, 8:30am on Oct 10)

Week 5 – Building for Belonging: Turning Our Cities into Communities
October 16, 2017

Architecture and design can either bring people together or drive them apart. This week, we will explore the connection between the built environment and social connectedness, and identify best practices for promoting communities of connectedness in an era of urbanization. We will be considering specific case studies at the forefront of human-centered architecture that can pave the way for people to design their lives around belonging.

Guest speaker:

Dominic Richards, Place Maker, Our Place, UK. Trustee, Prince’s Trust Australia, former Vice Chairman and Director of The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community.
Required readings:


Want to know more?:


(*Note: Professor Samuel will loan copies of The Death and Life of Great American Cities and Millennium, Volumes 1 & 2, to interested students)

Week 6 – Truth and Reconciliation: Building Community from Indigenous Perspectives
October 23, 2017

*** Please note the following change to Professor Samuel’s regular office hours. This week they will be held on Monday, Oct 23 only from 12-4pm.

What has been the result of Canada’s Indigenous policy of the past, and what is being done today to remedy that disastrous legacy? This week, we will explore how Indigenous communities themselves are reclaiming their voice, dignity, and strength and learn about the role of culture and identity in deepening the bonds of belonging.

Guest speakers:

Becky Cook, Misipawistik Cree Nation, Youth Land-Based Learning Education Coordinator

Gabrielle Hughes, DPhil Candidate, Wadham College, University of Oxford
Required readings:


Want to know more?:


**Week 7 – Secure, Sustainable Food Systems as a Cornerstone of Community**

October 30, 2017

*How does food impact community? This week, we will learn about the intersection of agriculture, ecology, food and community wellness. We will consider how we can work to bridge health, food insecurity, poverty and sustainability in order to foster greater understanding of holistic solutions and belonging. Most importantly, we will identify ways to think and act beyond food banks in order to shift toward truly sustainable food systems and the policies that support them.*

Guest Speakers:

Rachel Gray, Executive Director, The Stop Community Food Centre, Toronto.

Patrick Holden, Founding Director and Chief Executive, The Sustainable Food Trust, UK.

**Required Readings:**


  - p. ix-xvi: “Introduction by Michael Pollan”
  - p. 57-65: “Energy in Agriculture”
  o p. 195-204: “Conservation and the Local Economy”  


  [https://www.youtube.com/goggle talks with Michael Pollan](https://www.youtube.com/goggle talks with Michael Pollan)


  [http://thestop.org/predictableemergency/](http://thestop.org/predictableemergency/)

Want to Learn More?:

  [https://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.org/download](https://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.org/download)
Week 8 – Multidimensional Poverty, the SDGs and Social Connectedness
November 6, 2017

While countries across the globe typically define poverty as a lack of money, people living in poverty consider the experience of poverty far more broadly. How do we bring local knowledge into policy and program development, and why is it so important to do so? This week, we will examine multidimensional poverty in relation to the critical dimension of social connectedness. We will examine the Global MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index) in relation to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We also will explore a multi-year case study of social isolation and social connectedness from the Southern African perspective, focusing on community-built, community-driven endeavours to identify, measure and combat social isolation with indigenous models of care.

Guest speakers:

Dr. Sabina Alkire, Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford

Marlene Ogawa, Program Manager, Synergos Institute (South Africa)

Required readings:


- Alkire, Sabina and Foster, James. “Counting and Multi-Dimensional Poverty” from an upcoming publication, “The Poorest and the Hungry”. *


(*Note: copies of this publication will be made available to students to download on MyCourses)
Want to know more?:


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**Week 9 – Learning to See, Value and Respect our Elders as Individuals in Community**  
November 13, 2017

*The world is ageing: By 2050, almost 17 percent of the global population will be aged 65 or older. And yet, as Grey Panther activist Frances Zainoeddin has observed, “While we celebrate longevity as one of humanity’s greatest achievements, how many countries have effective policies and programmes that address the concerns of people who have actually made it beyond the age of 60?” This week, we will explore the looming risk of an isolation epidemic among older people. We’ll see how the challenge differs across countries and cultures and explore innovative, intergenerational pathways to social connectedness.*

*Guest speaker:*

Bethany Brown, Researcher, Older People’s Rights, Health and Human Rights Division, Human Rights Watch
Required readings:


Want to know more?:


(*Note: Professor Samuel will loan copies of The Social World of Older People and Triumphs of Experience to interested students)

**Week 10 – Through the Lens of Mother Earth: Measurement, Governance and What We Value**
November 20, 2017

By 2050, over 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. Cities have intense problems but at the same time they can be engines for innovation and community. Meanwhile, climate change—the greatest global challenge humanity faces—threatens to undermine the way people live in communities around the world. In this class, we will explore why and how climate change and its various effects—from food shortages and water security to infrastructural damage—could exacerbate social isolation, especially among the growing populations residing within vulnerable urban centers. We’ll also explore the promise and shortcomings of a data-driven approach to policy change, and the lessons that environmental performance measurement could hold.

Guest speaker:

Dr. Angel Hsu, Assistant Professor, Yale-NUS College and Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies; Director of the Yale Data-Driven Environmental Solutions Group; and Principal Investigator of the Urban Environment and Social Isolation Index (UESI).

Required readings:


• Hsu, Angel. Track climate pledges of cities and companies. *Nature*, 2016. 532(7599), 303-307.**


(**Note: copies of these articles will be made available to students to download on MyCourses)**
Want to know more?


### Week 11 – Holistic Education: Learning Approaches that Build Social Connectedness
November 27, 2017

*Education is a key sector of social policy in driving social and community change. This week, we will examine approaches to learning grounded in holistic understandings of the natural world. Often only considered in programming for younger children, if at all, we will challenge conventional wisdom and consider opportunities at every stage of formal education and in every aspect of life-long learning to nurture and create a sense of belonging for all members of society. In addition, we will focus a sharp lens on how holistic education could be incorporated into post-secondary institutions and what the outcomes could be.*

Guest speaker:

Richard Dunne, Head Teacher, Ashley Primary School, Walton on the Thames, UK.
Required readings:


Want to know more?:


**Week 12 – Agents and Activists: Mobilizing a Movement for Social Change**

December 4, 2017

*Building on theories of social change and the teachings of social and emotional learning, in this class we will examine the role of movement building to bring about social connectedness. We will examine the case study of Special Olympics International as a global movement for inclusion and mobilization. This class will be designed as a Town Hall to encourage a lively dialogue and interaction exploring how we can all be agents and activists for social change. In particular, we will reflect on the ways that youth can be designers, architects and builders of a global movement to combat social isolation.*
Guest speakers:

Loretta Claiborne, Leader; World-renowned Special Olympics Athlete; Chief Inspirational Officer, Special Olympics International (SOI); Member of the SOI Board of Directors

Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, Chair, Special Olympics International, Chairman; Co-Founder of CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning); and Co-Chairman of The Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

Required readings:


Want to know more?:


Week 13 – Development and Disability: From Case Study to Culminating Activity
Dec 7, 2017 (Thanksgiving Week make-up class)

For the first half of the class, our two leading experts will set the stage through the lens of development and disability. They will start at a conceptual level, by examining Princeton philosopher Peter Singer’s highly influential, if controversial, views on development and on disability as a way to surface key issues. Next, they will look at multilateral efforts to bring these two concerns together, examining the evolving treatment of disability first in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and then in the more recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). For the second half of the class, we will further examine the intersection of program and policy development through a culminating activity where each student will present three key learnings from their final paper, including connections with the SDGs where applicable. This will be followed by a roundtable discussion to bring the seminar to a close.

Guest speakers:

Dr. William Alford, Chair, Harvard Law School Project on Disability, Vice Dean for the Graduate Program and International Legal Studies
Dr. Michael Stein, Executive Director, Harvard Law School Project on Disability, Extraordinary Professor, University of Pretoria Faculty of Law.

Required readings:

- Alford, William. “Dissonance in Peter Singer’s Treatment of Development and of Disability” (work-in-progress), 2017*


(* **Note: copies of these articles will be made available to students to download on MyCourses)

Want to know more?:


