

## **Free University Brighton's free, degree-level course**

Free University Brighton offers a free, higher education course in Social Science and Humanities.

Here are some frequently asked questions and answers about the course. At the end you will find the course schedule for the current year to give you an idea of the subjects on offer and what the current students have said about the course.

We hope this answers some of your questions but if not, please get in touch. You can email us at [contact@freeuniversitybrighton.org](mailto:contact@freeuniversitybrighton.org)

### **Who can do the course?**

Anyone can study this course, you don't need any previous qualifications just an open mind and a willingness to learn and to share your own ideas and experiences.

We've designed the course so that people who work, care for others or have other commitments can participate. There will be one study session per week lasting around 2-3 hours.

### **How does it work?**

The course is taught by volunteer teachers, typically university lecturers and professors, and we run classes in public spaces around the city that we can use for free. Because we rely on volunteer teachers, who are often working full time, the course is made up of modules of different subjects. Each volunteer teaches their subject over a period of weeks which is more manageable for them, but it also means students get to learn a variety of subjects. In the first year, students typically will study 6-8 subject areas. Read on to see this year's course schedule. Most of the subjects will be repeated.

### **How is the course assessed?**

There are no exams. We think exams are stressful and not the best way of assessing people's abilities. We will be awarding certificates on two bases, 1) by attendance without assessment; or 2) by assessment of essays on a pass or fail basis.

### **When and where will the courses take place?**

The courses will take place in various venues around the City. We will ensure venues are wheelchair accessible and are easy to get to by public transport. If you know of space that we can use for free that meets these requirements, please let us know.

### **What are the commitments in terms of course work, amount of reading etc?**

The courses have been designed so that people who work, care for others or have other commitments can still do them. Therefore, there will be one study session per week of around 2 - 3 hours and reading / coursework will be minimal. However we will be glad to recommend more reading and coursework for those who want it

### **I find reading and writing difficult, will there be any help or support?**

Yes. The courses have been designed so that learning is mainly done through group talks and discussion. Teachers do provide reading resources but we also try and supplement these with alternative resources such as video and sound clips where possible.

Course assignments can be done in a number of ways: some prefer to submit written essays but you can also do a poster presentation, make a film or sound recording, have a face to face discussion (like a viva) or another method. We are open to creative and new ideas but essentially, we will be assessing your understanding of the subject and whether you have successfully answered the assignment's question.

We will provide help and support to those who need it. It is best to contact us and let us know your needs so we can work out how best to support you.

### **How many years will it take to complete the degree-level course?**

Three to four. After year one you will receive a certificate. Year two will be equivalent to a diploma and we envisage it will take 3-4 years to complete the degree. Four is more realistic for a part-time degree.

Please note that this higher education course has been designed to be part time to ensure it is accessible to those who work, have caring responsibilities or other commitments. Therefore, the amount of study time/material covered will be less than a conventional degree.

### **Can I just attend some of the modules?**

Yes. If you don't wish to work towards a degree, you can just choose the subjects you like. We aim to give people a university or higher education experience. Some people are interested in learning for the fun of it and others want the achievement of working for and gaining a degree. Both are welcome and valid.

### **Are you offering the same degrees as other universities?**

No. Our aim is to establish a higher education course that is a genuine alternative to the ones offered by British universities.

We began this project by listing all the things we consider to be bad about conventional universities and throwing them into the bin! For example competition, stratifying students by grading, education that is oriented to what achieves the most income for a university rather than what is educationally or socially good.

We then designed this course on what we believe education should be about. For example, educational curiosity, discovery, self development, building intellectual self-confidence, learning for pleasure and, of course, education that is accessible to all.

In many ways what we are offering is comparable to a conventional university degree. But we are confident we can offer people a better educational experience, one that is free and open to all, is collaborative rather than competitive and is jointly directed by teachers and students.

### **Will this degree be recognised by employers?**

That really depends on the employer and how much emphasis they put on conventional education institutions.

Our course will be taught by the same professors and lecturers working at conventional universities, such as the University of Sussex, and our educational content and outcomes will be validated by independent academics as meeting a certain standard. Conventional universities also self-validate using external assessors, so we are confident that our course is as good as any other higher education course.

### **Can I do a degree with you in a subject of my choice?**

No. We don't have the resources for this. Our volunteer teachers have other academic or teaching jobs. What we can offer is a mixed subject course based on what is offered by our volunteer teachers.

However, as a group, our students do get to select subjects they wish to study from the ones offered. If students wish to learn other subjects, then we try to find people who can teach them.

We do our best to offer learner-centred education where students are involved in the design of the course and determine what they study and how.

## **AUTUMN TERM**

### **Inequalities in Education**

Thurs 22 September 7-9.30pm

We will start the term with an exploration of inequalities in education, including class, race, gender. The course will introduce theoretical perspectives for making sense of these inequalities including Althusser's theory of education as Ideological State Apparatus, Bourdieu's notions of capitals and Ranciere's critique.

### **Crime, Inequalities and Justice**

Tuesday evenings 7-9.30pm on 4, 11, 18 & 25 October 2016

OR

Saturday mornings 10.30am-1pm on 8, 15, 22 & 29 October 2016

This course will provide students with the opportunity to discuss what it means to live in a society in which a range of social inequalities are prevalent. We will explore what inequality means, and the ways social inequalities are visible to us in contemporary British society.

We will go on to explore how inequalities are expressed in patterns of crime, offending and criminal victimisation. We will discuss the impact of these inequalities on different social groups, and how they are connected to bigger questions of social class, 'race' and ethnicity.

## **Equality and Human Rights**

7-9.30pm Wednesday 2 November, 2016

This session will summarise the law of human rights within England and Wales, enshrined in the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998, bringing 'convention rights' (from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)) into our domestic legislation. The relationship between the ECHR and HRA will be discussed, as well as summarising the relevant rights protected, the practical enforcement of the HRA within our law and the resultant protection of rights, as well as the debates surrounding repealing the HRA 1998.

Furthermore, equality and anti-discrimination legislation will be summarised, with specific reference to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, and some of the discussions around formal and substantive models of equality and how these are expressed (or otherwise) through law.

## **Changes in Legal Aid**

7-9.30pm Wednesday 9 November, 2016

This session will summarise the situation regarding state funded legal aid since the cuts brought in through the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) 2012, which came into force in 2013. The impact that these cuts have had on those in need of free legal advice, as well as the legal profession and legal education, will be discussed. The sessions will cover the philosophy of legal aid and free legal advice, the limited areas aid is now available in England and Wales, what was available previously, and some of the responses and critiques from the justice system, in turn. The impact of LASPO on obligations under national, regional and international human rights law and equality legislation regarding rights to a fair trial and access to justice will also be covered.

## **Alternative Economics: A Critique of Political Economy**

Tuesday evenings 7-9.30pm on 1, 8, 15 & 22 November 2016

OR

Thursday evenings 7-9.30pm on 3, 10, 17 & 24 November 2016

Participants will explore the question of value, its forms, production, circulation and consumption arising out of familiar and immediate experience. For example, investigating the expressions of credit through reference to Wonga, home loans and the Greek crisis. Or expressions of money through specie, LETS currencies and derivatives. The critique of political economy is Marxist and Ecological.

## **SPRING TERM**

### **Feminism & Gender**

10.30-1pm on Saturday 21 January 2017

This workshop explores issues of contemporary feminisms, gender and sexuality themes, in an inclusive and holistic context where diversity of social experiences are respected and understood. The workshop is an opportunity to learn about the fundamental importance of gender and sexuality as analytic categories but also to understand instances of oppression and exclusion. The latter is particularly important as gendered identities, norms, structures and institutions impact and shape our lives. Such experiences also intersect in complex ways with other aspects of our identities and social experiences such as ethnicity/race, class, sexual orientation, age and disability. This workshop will focus on essential critical perspectives emerging in contemporary social and cultural contexts on a local and global scale. A critical perspective will provide diverse knowledge on gender related themes as affecting both women and men in contemporary society and will strive for independent and collective discussions in an encouraging and supportive environment.

### **Women: The Greatest Story Never Told**

10.30-1pm on Saturday 28 January 2017

It is the past which holds the clues to the subordinate position of women. The earlier age of industrial society, for example, can help us understand why women's work has been evaluated as worth less than men's. More importantly, as Sheila Rowbotham asserts, "if a woman's role can be shown to be socially constructed within a specific historical context, rather than natural and universal, it can be challenged and open to change."

In this one-off workshop you'll learn about extraordinary women who are 'hidden from history'. From the earliest humans to modern day, you'll get a glimpse into cultural practices from the past that have shaped how women behave, how they regard themselves and how they are perceived by others.

## **Introduction to Philosophy: Knowing and doing, problems and possibilities**

Tuesday evenings 7-9.30pm on 7, 14, 21 & 28 February 2017

This module aims to introduce the student to some of the central difficulties in 'epistemology' (knowing) and 'ethics' (doing) and presents a range of ways that philosophers have suggested such problems might be addressed. We will look at what a 'knowledge claim' is, ask what the difference is between 'knowledge' and 'opinion', investigate how we might decide what the right thing to do is and ask why people seem to act against their own interests. Why is it that knowing what is right often doesn't make people actually behave any differently? Where and how does knowledge make any difference to the actions we perform?

Students will learn basic tools for the critical analysis of epistemic and ethical claims. They will have a basic overview of key philosophical approaches to problems of knowledge and action and will have a basic understanding of the practices of rational argument.

## **The International Relations of the Middle East**

Tuesday evenings 7-9.30pm on 7, 14, 21 & 28 March 2017

Participants will be introduced to non-standard narratives and critical histories of Israel, Palestine, Turkey and the mandate and postmandate Middle East to the present. Includes ethnographies and military and strategic histories.

## **Contemporary Theory in the Political Economy of Africa Development**

Thursday evenings 7-9.30pm on 6, 13 & 20 April 2017

This course will ask what are the forms of damage that a single story has done to the political economy of Africa development? Firstly we will explore 'whiteness' as a hegemonic\* power structure that constrains equal and even redistribution of wealth, that should have offered people in the global south better life chances.

We will look at how racism functions as a controlling mechanism which maintains colonial relations as 'natural' occurrences: the colonizer internalises colonialism and its attendant ideologies, and colonized peoples in turn internalise the idea of their own inferiority and ultimately come to emulate their oppressors. Finally we will look at identity and power as shifting, temporary constructions.

\*hegemonic - ruling or dominant in a political or social context

## SUMMER TERM

### **Thinking Sociologically and the Sociology of Thinking**

Monday evenings 7-9.30pm 22 & 29 May 2017

What does 'thinking sociologically' mean, how is it done, and how does it differ from other ways or modes of thinking? Is it useful, meaningful and possible even? If so, how so? If not, why not? Also, is there such a thing as 'a' or 'the' Sociology of Thinking? What does it entail, who does it include, and what is its purpose, aim, or audience? Intrigued by those questions, these two sessions on 'Thinking Sociologically and the Sociology of Thinking' examine the usefulness, relevance, merits, and shortcomings of sociological thought by defending it as a uniquely imaginative, playful, challenging, and pluralistic endeavour, rather than a simple perspective from which to view the social world around us. Both sessions are designed to join the dots, make links, but also highlight differences between Sociology and the other disciplines that feature in the FUB degree (Criminology, Philosophy, Economics, Politics, Psychology).

### **Alternative Societies**

Monday evenings 7-9.30pm 5, 12, 19 & 26 June 2017

People often criticise the way society is, but that leads to the question 'what's the alternative?' This module will provide an introduction to sociology as a critical way of thinking about the world and go on to explore alternatives to current types of society. It will look at utopianism, communism, alternative economies and co-ops, communes or intentional communities, counter-cultures, alternative education, green society, societies with less work and global society without borders. The module will discuss alternatives that students themselves raise for discussion. Are societies that are alternatives to ours desirable and viable?

### **The Students Views**

Here's what this year's students have said about the course...

"It has been my life long dream to study at university level but finances prevented that. FUB has given me this opportunity. It has broadened my thinking and opened up my mind to other views and possibilities. Thank you!"

"It's given me a much deeper understanding of what's going on around me and how my life is connected with all these broader movements".

"It's turned my world upside down and has given me some hope for the future to know there are others who are as passionate about equality and justice".

"I feel I have been able to explore subjects in a non-exam environment, which is great".

"I've loved learning such a variety of subjects and it has really improved my confidence in my own educational abilities"

"The tutors knowledge and enthusiasm has been brilliant."

"I'm enjoying the student experience for the first time, and have made friends whom I meet outside of the classes".

"I'm much more open to ideas and critically looking at information that conflicts with my 'world view'".

"I am less anxious in groups and at the thought of being with a group of people I don't know well - this is massive for me". "It is challenging on so many levels, and an absolutely wonderful experience!"

"It's given me the confidence to state my opinions and inform others. I've also started getting involved with a homeless activist group. I'm likely to go on my first ever protest march this summer."

"This has reminded me of the joy of studying". "It's been amazing, really good to get me through the winter when I would normally get a bit mopey".

"The re-introduction to some quality and focused learning, from lecturers and students, has been more than I could have hoped for. Great to meet more likeminded people but from different walks of life, after seven years living in Brighton".

"FUB is a great project and it's very exciting to be part of it."