

Central Concepts and Theoretical Debates in Social Science Approaches to Alcohol and Drug Research

PhD course (5 ECTS)

About the course

Drug and alcohol studies as a significant field of research does not constitute a discipline in its own right, but instead is constructed within a wide range of social science disciplines, including anthropology, criminology, history, political science, psychology and sociology as well as public health. Individual PhD projects are usually embedded within any one of these disciplines. However, in order to understand social science drug and alcohol studies as a *multi-disciplinary* field of research, it is important to investigate central concepts and theoretical debates not only from within one discipline, but across different disciplines. Thus, in order to contextualize and compare one's own individual discipline approach, this course sets out to introduce central concepts and theoretical debates from a *multi-disciplinary* approach, which adopts an inherent critical perspective.

Overall aim

The overall aim of this course is to give PhD students a general overview of how central concepts and theoretical debates have developed within the social science drug and alcohol research field from the perspectives of different social science disciplines. For example, the concept 'addiction' is defined and debated differently within different disciplines as are debates about 'consumption' of illegal substances. The course will include not only the most up to date definitions and understandings operating within the field but also the 'classic' approaches and research that have been produced.

The course will thus enable participants to understand how their own use of concepts in their individual research projects are situated within the overall multi-disciplinary field of drugs and alcohol research. This will enable students to trace concepts and debates used within their own individual projects in order to understand the origins and uses of these concepts within the wider environment of the multi-disciplinary field of research.

Course format

The course will run through two semesters. It will consist of 10 sessions, 5 each semester. Each session will run from 11- 14.30 and take place at CRF in Aarhus, approximately once a month. Each session will consist of: 1) a presentation/lecture by a senior researcher; 2) group

exercise where the concept or debate of that session is examined in more detail based on the assigned material/readings (about 60-100 pages per session). Exercises will vary depending on the topic of a session, but will be announced before the session in order for students to prepare themselves; 3) discussions in plenum based on the lecture and the group exercise. Each semester will also include a written assignment organized by the course organiser, each assignment will be approximately 5 pages. The course in general and the exercises in particular, will help improve students' abilities to use concepts and develop analytical approaches that are sensitive to the multi-disciplinary nature of the drug and alcohol research field.

It will be possible for PhD students to enroll in the course at any time, since each session does not build on the previous one. This means that PhD students enrolled in August or February can enter the course immediately after enrollment.

ECTS credits

The course yields 5 ECTS credits and participants will be granted a certificate by the end of the course.

Requirements

In order to obtain the 5 ECTS for participation in the course, participants are required to do the following:

- Each participant is expected to read all assigned materials before each session and to be prepared to participate actively in discussions of the materials.
- Each participant is expected to engage actively in sessions and participate in each of the exercises drawing on course material, but also knowledge from their own PhD projects.
- Hand in two written assignments (approximately 5 pages each) based on guidance from course leader.

We suggest that before this course is up and running more permanently, it will be possible for PhD students who have been enrolled as PhD students for a while to be able to gain ECTS credits for participating in some of the course. This might even be more important due to the COVID19 crisis. We suggest that participation in 2 sessions + one written assignment equals 1 ECTS credit. Participation in 4 sessions + one written assignment equals 2 ECTS credits.

Programme (10 sessions)

As course organiser Professor Vibeke A. Frank will be present at every session. The individual lectures and discussions will be led by different researchers, chosen on the basis of their relevant expertise. The exercises will be led by the lecturer in cooperation with course organiser. Each session will consist of 60 – 100 pages of readings. The readings will mirror the multi-disciplinary approach described above. The following concepts will be presented and discussed.

1. Addiction

This session will introduce and go into depth with the history and development of different understandings of the concept 'addiction'. In particular, we will critically look into the dominant discourses related to neuroscientific understandings of addiction and how diagnostic systems such as DSM V define 'addiction'. We will discuss what they can offer and where they miss out, and what other definitions of 'addiction' can offer. We will also discuss what almost any definition of 'addiction' include, namely 'craving' and 'loss of control', but also how different understandings of 'craving' and 'loss of control' are based on different understandings of individual's (possible or lack of) agency and autonomy.

Lecturer: Professor Vibeke Asmussen Frank, CRF, AU.

2. Drug policy

Drug policy implicates almost any study within the social science alcohol and drug research field. While drug policy often have been identical with drug control policy, we will in this session discuss how drug policy cuts across several other policy areas but control policy, including social and treatment policy. We will introduce local, national and international drug and alcohol policies, important policy bodies, as well as treaties and law complexes. We will bring different theoretical perspectives on how to study drug policy and discuss the rationale of different kinds of policies, including unintended consequences of these policies. Concepts like 'harm reduction' and 'diversion' will be brought into the debates.

Lecturer: Associate Professor Esben Houborg, CRF

3. Recovery

This session will introduce and go into depth with the history and development of the concept 'recovery'. The session will include discussions about how different understandings of the concept 'recovery' provides different understandings of pathways out of problematic alcohol or drug use. The concept will primarily be introduced in relation

to processes out of problematic substance use without treatment, often called 'self-change', 'natural recovery' or 'maturing out'. This session will furthermore include the political debates about 'recovery', taking the UK and/or Australia as an example.

Lecturer: Associate Professor Maria D. Herold, CRF.

4. Drug market

In this session we will look into the production, trade and distribution of illegal substances and how these practices have been understood as 'drug markets'. We will discuss different kinds of drug market theories, for example a hierarchically structured organisation versus more network type of markets. We will discuss how the methods and data used to define and describe drug markets have an impact on the understanding of these practices. We will therefore also look into related concepts such as the 'drug dealer' and 'social supply'.

Lecturer: Associate Professor Thomas Friis Sjøgaard, CRF

5. Intoxication

This session will introduce and examine in depth the concept of intoxication and intoxicants and the extent to which altered states of consciousness activated by becoming intoxicated have been a universal social phenomenon. More specifically, the session will examine the different ways in which the concept of intoxication has been dealt with by different social science disciplines including sociology, anthropology, criminology, social geography and public health. In addition, the lecture will examine the extent to which views about "being intoxicated" have differed on the basis of other social identities, representations and positions including social class, gender and ethnicities.

Lecturer: Professor Geoffrey Hunt, CRF

6. Consumption

This session will in particular take different kinds of definitions of substance use under scrutiny, including 'problematic use', 'recreational use', 'use for enhancement', and 'medical use' of substances. We will look into both health authorities' and alcohol and drug users' own definitions and understandings of consumption patterns. We will discuss 'harm' and 'pleasure' of use, the difference between 'legal' and 'illegal' substances, and also introduce related concepts, such as the 'normalization' theory and 'political pharmacology'.

Lecturer: Professor Vibeke Asmussen Frank, CRF

7. The Nighttime Economy

This session will introduce and go into depth with the history and development of the concept 'Nighttime Economy' (NTE). The NTE is seen as critical important for economic development, and since the 1990s, an entire infrastructure of bars, clubs and restaurants has been constructed in cities across the whole of Europe backed by local authorities and encouraged by the State. Drugs and alcohol are central aspects of these nighttime activities, and are both controlled and encouraged in particular ways. This session will explore the understandings of NTE from a multi-disciplinary perspective, including the historical roots, the recent developments as well as examining the theoretical approaches that have been developed to understand the impact of these changes and the importance of the consumption of substances within these developments.

Lecturer: Professor Geoffrey Hunt, CRF

8. Treatment

This session will explore the concept 'substance use treatment'. We will examine and discuss how substance use treatment is organised in Denmark, the political institutions and rationales underpinning this organisation, and the different kinds of treatment offered. We will examine how 'substance use problems' are represented and constructed from different disciplinary approaches and how 'treatment' becomes the solution. This will include discussions of diagnostic manuals and other tools to measure the severity of 'problems'. Based on institutional sociology and anthropology, we will critically examine how treatment institutions constructs particular types of 'clients' or 'patients' as well as 'professionals'.

Lecturer: Professor Vibeke Asmussen Frank, CRF.

9. Harm reduction

Harm reduction is a concept that was introduced in the 1980s and since has been implemented in policies and as particular interventions. This session will examine the history and rationale behind this concept and how it is debated in relation to drug control policies and social and treatment policies. The session will include debates of how of harm reduction policies and interventions have been implemented, and the dilemmas and controversies that has developed in the wake of these initiatives. The session how harm reduction as an important concept and policy possibility operates (differently) on an international, national and local level. Lastly, the session will include how harm reduction requires particular understandings of 'substance use' and processes in and out of substance use.

Lecturer: Associate professor, Esben Houborg, CRF.

10. Evidence

'Evidence' has become an important concept in the construction of interventions aimed at preventing, reducing or stopping substance use. In this session we will examine 'evidence' in relation to 'evidence-based methods', 'evidence-based practice', and 'evidence making interventions'. These different kinds of 'evidence' are underpinned by particular theoretical understanding of both the individual and institutional practice. We will critically examine similarities and differences, including what kind of knowledge these different concepts produce. We will explore 'evidence' in relation to prevention, harm reduction, as well as treatment interventions.

Lecturer: Professor Vibeke Asmussen Frank, CRF.

Literature

Readings for each session will be available on Blackboard in mid-August. All participants accepted on the course will get access immediately after acceptance.

Dates and place

The course will run on Tuesdays on the following dates from 11 – 14.30 including lunch and tea breaks: 8/9, 6/10, 28/10, 17/11, 9/12 (2020), 9/2, 9/3, 13/4, 4/5, 2/6 (2021).

It will take place at Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research. Specific venue will be announced prior to the course.