I'm writing to you about your application to study the BA Sociology (L300) in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. As you know, the University will be adjusting how it delivers its courses in the autumn to accommodate the social distancing measures required to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The current plans involve a blend of face-to-face teaching in small groups in Sheffield, where social distancing can be maintained, supported by digital delivery. In this email, I'll explain what this will mean for your studies on the BA Sociology.

Course content

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of your course, or to the core modules you will study in Level 1 (your first year). You'll still obtain a strong understanding of the fundamentals of sociological analysis, cover a wide range of sociological topics, and develop skills in research techniques and study skills. During your first year, you'll still acquire the knowledge, understanding and academic skills you'll need for Levels 2 and 3.

However, to accommodate the new protocols for the 2020-21 academic year, and the extra demands on resources that this will bring, we have made some adjustments to the range of optional modules we'll be offering. Unfortunately, the following modules won't be running this year:

SCS1013 - Globalisation and World Cultures
SCS11002 - Living With Science and Technology

Because of the challenges of managing module selection during the pandemic, the University has suspended unrestricted credits for 2020-21. This means that we've had to remove the 40 'unrestricted' credits available at Level 1, where students could study any modules, not just the options listed in the BA Sociology regulations. You will still be able to choose modules from a wide range of departments and disciplines, however, including popular options in Arts, Social Sciences, and foreign languages. Here is an indicative list of module choices from outside of our department:

AAP118 Human origins, migrations and identities
HST117 The Making of the Twentieth Century
HST122 Land of Liberty: Rights in the USA, 1776-2016
GEO114 Exploring Human Geographies
GEO115 Environmental Change and Society
SMI110 Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics
TRP105 The Environmental Challenge
TRP130 Housing, Home and Neighbourhood
REL1001 LGBT* studies
REL1013 Religion in Britain
MLTC Any Modern Languages modules: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/mltc/courses

Teaching
As you know, the majority of our teaching comprises lectures, seminars and workshops, and we'll still be using these formats in 2020-21. Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters and will start the week commencing Monday 28 September.

It's not possible to socially distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we'll be delivering all our lectures online. Lectures are primarily presentations by one of our subject experts, and online delivery suits the format well. Indeed, you will be able to watch lectures repeatedly, should you wish to. We've made recorded lectures available online for several years, but in 2020-21 we'll be delivering some of these live as well, with an opportunity for students to submit comments and questions in real time.

For our interactive classes, we'll be using a combination of face-to-face and digital teaching, and you'll likely have regular, timetabled sessions of each form. The face-to-face sessions will take place in small groups, so that we can use our larger teaching rooms and still maintain social distancing. Our face-to-face teaching has always taken place across the University's campus, and this won't change in 2020-21. The digital sessions will be live and fully interactive, for example, through group video calls. We are very confident in our use of such modes of teaching. The move to online learning during 'lockdown' has enabled us to develop and evaluate a range of approaches. Indeed, many of your teachers have used digitally enhanced teaching methods for several years.

Our academic staff will be also available as usual for tutorials and other one-to-one meetings, and will still hold their regular office hours. It may not be possible for these sessions to always take place in person, but if not you'll be able to make a video or audio call.

**Learning resources**

Most of our learning resources are already available online, and this will include sufficient reading for our Level 1 modules. Our physical libraries will be open as soon as it's safe to do so, and our librarians are committed to providing as full a service as possible, taking into account social distancing requirements and all the latest government advice.

**Assessment**

Coursework assignments are already completed electronically, and submitted and marked online.

We're still finalising our plans for exams, but we won't be holding formal, invigilated exams in the Semester 1 exam period in January/February. It's likely we'll use an 'open book' format instead, where exam questions are made available online and you have a certain amount of time, for example two days, to answer them. You'd complete your answers electronically at home, and you'd be able to consult your books and notes. Some other universities use open book exams as a matter of course. We'll confirm the arrangements for Semester 1 exams in the individual module handbooks you'll receive when you join us.
Support and guidance for all aspects of assessment will be provided by the Department and by support services across the University, for example the 301: Academic Skills Centre.

**Costs**

The tuition fee for the course will stay the same, and we don't expect students will incur additional costs as a result of the changes we're making. You'll be able to participate in all the online activities using a regular laptop or tablet connected to the internet, although you will need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions. If you are concerned that you might not be able to afford equipment or have a broadband connection to study remotely, please contact the University's Financial Support Team (financialhelp@sheffield.ac.uk). The University can provide laptops on loan or a grant depending on your circumstances.

I hope this email has given you an idea of what to expect when you join us in the autumn. As you'll be aware, this pandemic is a fast-moving and unpredictable phenomenon, and we might need to make further changes as the situation develops and the University responds to updates in public health guidance. Please be assured that we'll be approaching the next year as a single departmental community of staff and students together, and we're committed to ensuring that you're supported, and that you still receive a world-class university education here at Sheffield.

If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with Ruth Sullivan, your Programmes Officer, at sociological.studies@sheffield.ac.uk.

**Further information**

Please keep looking out for emails from the University and checking our frequently asked questions, which are updated regularly with all the latest developments. We also have some on demand content from our online applicant Open Days which you might find useful.

I hope you enjoy what's left of the summer and stay safe.

Best wishes

Professor Nathan Hughes
Head of Department
Department of Sociological Studies