

Dave:

Hi there and welcome to the Podmag. I'm Dave Middleton

Karen:

And I'm Karen Foley.

Dave:

You're looking really smart today Karen

Karen:

Ah, thanks Dave. So are you!

Dave:

Well done. You've made an effort

Karen:

Yeah, I thought I would... for the Video shoot. I had to leave my phone on because I've left a message for Liz to reschedule it. Yeah, I went down to East Campus yesterday. There was no one there. I don't know what happened. So anyway, I'm sure she will give me a call back, but I will leave it on.

Dave:

Are you talking about Liz, the producer of the video?

Karen:

Yes, Liz and Andrew

Dave:

They're very well by the way. I saw them yesterday.

Karen:

Oh!

Dave:

They were on West Campus...

Karen:

West Campus. Well you told me to go to East Campus. I was there for ages.

Dave:

Well I'm pretty sure I told you West Campus

Karen:

Nope it definitely says East Campus here....

Dave:

What on that piece of paper that you are waving in my face? Sorry.

Karen:

Well don't worry, we'll have to redo it. Anyway, what's on the show this week?

Dave:

We can't really redo it. We had to do it yesterday.

Karen:

Right

Dave:

Well when you weren't there, I just.. did it... I just.

Karen:

Just you? Right, well so.. anyway. Let's start with some mail, because we do have some people who like to get in touch with me. Would you like to start?

Dave:

I've got to do an apology now...

Karen:

Right – another one?

Dave:

Yes, I've got to do an apology. This is from Kathy Toff, and I think Andrew is another student who wrote in about this, and this is the activate workshops. Now last week I did announce that these were going to go ahead. It was Andrew Lockheart who wrote asking about them. Now they were going to go ahead but there was a technical issue to do with us changing our website location which meant that we couldn't have those activate sessions last week so we've had to delay them until March... the first one will be on Wednesday the 19th March. Those will definitely go ahead. I've also had an email from Harleyjack Murcell. Hi Harleyjack! And Harleyjack says I am really enjoying the podmag! Really pleased to hear that! I started with the OU when I was 16, and Harleyjack is thinking about making a video with us! And you've got some emails to read out also.

Karen:

Yes well one of our wonderful colleagues Martin Treacy has been sending in rather a few emails, and he has just found This student Life and he has listened to all of the back episodes now. He says that it sounds very professional and that the acting sounds excellent – quite surprised to hear that, but thank you Martin for your kind words. We've also had some mail from Richard West-Soley who also says that he loves the podmag, and he has a question for us. His question is "Do you think sociology is the poorer cousin of the social sciences lately?" and I sent Dave out to go and interview some people about that. How did you get on?

Dave:

The first person I interviewed was Elizabeth Silva who is from our sociology department.

Elizabeth:

I think that Richard has spotted the trend quite nicely. Because what sociology has done is to show the importance of being social. Of social life. Which has been taken up very strongly by all the other social sciences.

John Allen:

It's partly I suppose, when you are coming to the social sciences for the first time you are trying to put yourself, to locate yourself in the world, and that can take different ways, it can be about yourself as a person, you know why am I the kind of person I am. Or it could be, a question about why is it I face certain opportunities or constraints in the world? You're thinking about people in similar positions as you. So one line of thought could take you more towards the self, the psychology route. And other line could take you to the social sciences more generally, where you locate yourself in the world.

Matt Staples:

It's an interest in where the zeitgeist is at a particular moment, and I do wonder whether sociology is about to catch the zeitgeist again, because it has answers to some of the key questions that are now being asked.

Karen:

So you heard from Mat Staples there who is the current of DD101. And before that you heard from John Allen – He's one of our keynote speakers isn't he?

Dave:

He is

Karen:

Fantastic. OK

Dave:

And next we have some news...! We've been sent some press releases, and the first is about something the faculty does with the BBC – they've got a programme called Thinking Aloud, which is presented every Wednesday on BBC Radio 4 at 4 o'clock. It's presented by Laurie Taylor, it's co-produced by The Open University and the latest episode is called "Prostitution in the community".

Karen:

Yes very radio 4 I do say. OK, and for those of you who'd like a bit more of a light-hearted look at the social sciences I'd like to remind you about The Open University Social Sciences Facebook page. It's a great page and one of the regular features on this page is the Friday Thinker, and this week we have Louise Westmarland who is from the Criminology department so check out what she has to say on the Friday Thinker and ask her any questions and join in the debate if you'd like to. What's next?

Dave:

Ok so we're going to move on now to talk about This Student Life, This student life is now on episode, and rather than preview that because you can download it from the website, student connections, we thought we'd have a little chat with one of the stars, so Karen Foley went to interview Claire Evans who plays Katie.

Karen:

Can you tell me a bit about the challenges of playing Katie for you as an actress?

Claire:

I think that Katie is in a very tricky place in her life, hormonally and confidence wise, she's in a difficult headspace, so as an actress I really needed to think about mood swings, and solving why she could be so low at some points and then you know find some positivity, and then at other times she can't find that positivity. And the relationships as always were very important in trying to understand the character, so those are the things that I mainly had to concentrate on I think.

Karen:

Can you tell me a bit about what you admire about her story as she is persisting with this?

Claire:

I think that it would be very easy for Katie, or someone in Katie's position to become a victim. She's not got a lot of support from her family, she's not got any money, she's got this baby that is really taking a lot of her emotional energy. She's got friends living the life she wishes perhaps that she could still live, she's got all of that going on and yet she manages to find a focus that lifts her out of all of that.

Karen:

Do you think she'll still be friends with Cheryl and Sylvie?

Claire:

Maybe not Sylvie... (laughs) I think she'll stay friends with Cheryl because she came good for her in the end really. Just like when people offer to buy her a cup of tea or coffee – she really appreciates that and doesn't take it for granted. So I think they'll be alright.

Karen:

And what about Cheryl – do you think she'll meet Mr Right?

Claire:

Um, not yet... I think there will be some more fun times. Maybe settle down in a few years time.

Dave:

Well that was a really good interview Karen

Karen:

Thanks!

Dave:

I just wondered, you asked her at the end there about what's going to happen to Cheryl. Have you got some sort of vested interest in that..

Karen:

No, I just really hope that Cheryl gets a part in the next series.... Anyway, Dave I see that behind the A4 paper there is a pair of wellington boots.

Dave:

I thought that if you are going to Geography you need your wellies.

Dave:

OK so I've come up to the Geography department and I've got my wellies on, and I find that they're all in really nice offices here. John! John Allen.

John:

Its really nice to see you

Dave:

How are you?

John:

Very well thank you.

Dave:

So you're going to be a keynote speaker at our conference, Student Connections. Can I ask you what you're going to actually talk about?

John:

Well I'm going to talk about why our water bills, well in particular my water bills, and that's Thames Water, have gone up.

Dave:

Do you want to give us a flavour of what that's going to be about?

John:

Well I'm trying to understand why. And Thames Water is a particular example. I didn't think much about it to be honest until I checked back on my water bills because I had a feeling that they were going up way above inflation. So I started as a good social scientist, to look into it – I was curious, and I that's where questions often start, you're curious about something and think "why did that happen, why did my water bills go up? And I had one fact that had already enticed me, because I knew that Thames Water had been bought by an Australian bank called Macquarie. So I was trying to work out what Macquarie were doing, so why were they interested in my water here. And in fact the main interest for them is because it is a monopoly provider, the fact that I have no choice but to pay my bills. And because Macquarie is a bank, what they have done is financially engineer my water bills, and that's what I'm going to talk about.

Dave:

Well that sounds absolutely fantastic, and that obviously connects to your wider interests in power and geography that you've a lot of research on over the years. How do you get interested in something like power and geography?

John:

Well my background before I was in geography, I was as a cartographer, and that just fascinated me as a young man trying to work out the connections between places. And it was very evident to me as a young man was that there power relationships here, there was the old empire and those kinds of things, and I was particularly interested in multinational corporations and those kinds of things, and how is it that big companies, American, whatever, can have such an impact at a distance? Because the power that they have isn't a big brashy noisy power. It's not that kind of power, not like military power, it's a what I call kind of quiet power, and by that I mean manipulation, inducement, seduction, persuasion, all those things that you can often miss but they shape your everyday.

Dave:

Well thanks John, it's been brilliant. Its been a great pleasure talking to you and I'm going to go home now and check my water bills.

Karen:

Great and if you'd like to hear more from John Allen don't forget that he is one of our keynote speakers at the conference. And Dave, I was looking through these delivery notes, do you know we are charged an astronomical amount on some of the deliveries, did you know that staples for example are £2.40.. I'm going to get him to have a look at this.

Dave:

Well I think that John would be the sort of person who would not only look into that but would do it very well.

Karen:

Indeed, Indeed.

Dave:

Well don't forget listeners that the student connections website is now up and running – easy links there to the podmag and This student Life. I think that's all for this week!

Karen:

Yes I think we're out of time. We hope you've enjoyed the show

Dave:

And I do hope you enjoy my new video.

Karen:

Mmmmm

Dave:

See you next time!

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