

Soc 4-01
Fall 2011
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Office Hours-
M,W,F: 12:40 – 1:40
or by appointment

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

(Soc: 4 - 02)

The Class

“Social Problems” are everywhere. From crime to the environment, poverty to racism, homelessness to homophobia; issues of social import fill our newspapers, evening news, political discourse and (hopefully) raucous informal discussions. As members of a democracy it is our obligation to have awareness of these issues. As educated members of society it is our obligation to have opinions about them. As members of humanity, it is hoped that we give a damn.

In this class we will look at both individual social problems (unfortunately there are so many, we can only address a few) and sociological approaches to understanding them. In Part I, we will start out by laying out at some basic sociological concepts and theories. These are not to be memorized and forgotten, but are tools to be used throughout the semester. In Part II, we will look at larger issues that must be faced when addressing social problems. In particular, we will look at defining social problems, the ideologies we have been given to address them, and structural problems within our economic and political systems that can make it difficult to solve them. In Part III, we will end up by looking at particular social problems, including the environment, crime, poverty and sexism. We will also take a more in-depth look at a social problem facing many during these economic times: What does “wealth” mean in the most affluent society in the world?

Learning outcomes: In completing this course, students should –

1. Become aware of the major social problems in the world around us and be able to apply the sociological imagination (i.e. understanding the nexus of personal biography, social structure and history) in making sense of their causes, how they relate to our own lives and what we might do alleviate them.
2. Learn foundational sociological theories and concepts and be able to use them effectively in making sense of contemporary social problems.
3. Be able to conduct original library research (particularly finding and understanding relevant articles in sociological journals).
4. Write a clear and well-organized research paper using proper American Sociological citation style.

Exams (45%)

There will be three (15% each) exams in the class. Each will be in-class, blue book exams. Each exam will be made up of one section of term identification and one section of open-ended essay questions. Because you will need to apply your knowledge in your own original way, it is important that you understand the concepts of the course well.

Exercises (20%)

There will be two take home exercises in this course. The assignments will be handed out in class. For each, you are to write 3 - 5 pages and will have one week to complete.

Research Project (20%)

By the end of the semester, you need to research and analyze a particular social problem. Your topic should be specific (e.g. "The Rise of Heroine among the Young", not "Drugs in America"; "Insider Trading", not "Corporate Crime"). You'll need to do outside research. During the first couple of weeks of class, we will go to the library and Librarian Patty Wade will explain what research tools are available here on campus. If you use the Web, make sure you cite your sites. Please feel free to contact me if you want help with your topic or your research. Your research paper is to be 8 - 12 pages and is to be handed in at the final exam. A more thorough description of the assignment will be handed out in class. Your research project must be uploaded onto turnitin.com before it will be graded.

Class Participation (15%)

The issues that we address in this class are basic to our lives. We all have experiences and opinions that relate to the topics at hand. You will be expected to share those experiences and understandings in class. This is a course in which we can learn as much from each other as we can from textbooks. After presenting material related to the topic, I will open up the class to general discussion to facilitate this process. Also, I will be presenting material in class that is not in the textbook and that you will be responsible to know. **Attendance is mandatory and role will be taken. Anything beyond three unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade.** Tardiness will also affect your grade. If you come to class after role is taken, it is your responsibility to make sure the instructor has recorded your attendance. Also, you must come prepared to discuss the reading material, so **do the reading**. If I feel that students are not doing the reading, I reserve the right to give pop quizzes. Also, at **least twice during the term students are expected to bring in a newspaper or magazine article** relating to a social problem and be prepared to give an opinion on it.

Department Grading Policies

The Department of Sociology has implemented the following policies that apply to all the courses offered by the department:

Grade Change Policy: If a student is dissatisfied with her or his grade on an exam, paper or other graded work; he or she needs to **write a one to two page argument for why he or she believes a better grade is called for**. The student should back up the argument for a better grade with class material that supports his or her argument that the grade does not reflect the quality of the work. The argument should only address

how the answer (for an exam) or essay (for a paper) did address the topic and showed an understanding of the material that was not reflected in the grade (that is, the grade change argument can only be based on what was handed in and not on “this is what I meant”). This policy is not meant in any way to discourage a student who feels that her or his work was misunderstood, misread or, in general, under-valued from seeking clarification or a grade change. It is meant to encourage the students to clarify their arguments for a grade change and for the professor to respond, in writing, on what basis the grade was made and why or why not the grade was changed.

“Incomplete” Grades: Before a student will be considered for an “Incomplete” grade, she/he needs to fulfill the following requirements–

- They must have completed over half the course’s assigned work with a passing grade.
- They must have regularly attended class.
- At least one week before the final or the last course assignment is due, the student must submit a written request for an “incomplete” grade that explains the reasons for the incomplete.
- The student must complete the work needed to take care of the incomplete by the designated date set by the registrar (seventh week of the following term).

Attendance: Attendance is required for all courses in the department. Missing more than one week of attendance can adversely affect the student’s grade.

Turnitin.com: For any assignment that requires submission to turnitin.com, papers will not be considered for grading until the assignment has been posted on the website.

Students with Disabilities: Reasonable and appropriate accommodations, that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities, are extended through the office of Student Disability Services. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Coordinator at (925) 631-4164 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint Mary’s website: <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/student-disability-services.html>

A TENTATIVE, CHANGEABLE COURSE/ READING OUTLINE

Texts (available at Saint Mary's Bookstore):

1. David R. Simon & Joel H. Henderson, *Private Troubles and Public Issues: Social Problems in the Postmodern Era*. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers. 1997.
2. Robert & Jeanette Lauer (editors), *Troubled Times: Readings in Social Problems*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. 2000.
3. Schor, Juliet. *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*. New York: The Penguin Press. 2010.
4. Subscription to a daily newspaper (recommended).
5. Xeroxed handouts.

PART I: Tools, Paradigms and Backdrops

A. Sociology & Social Problems [Class #1 (8/29/11) through Class #5 (9/9/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter One: "Social Problems and the Postmodern Era"

Class #6 (9/12/11): Introduction to Library Research with Patty Wade

B. Structure & Contradiction [Class #7 (9/14/11) – Class #8 (9/16/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Two: "Social Structure & Contradiction"

Class #9 (9/19/11): In-Class Exam

PART II: How do we know, what can we do and why don't we do it?

A. Mediated Society/ Mediated Self [Class #10 (9/21/11) through Class #12 (9/26/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Three: "The Mass Media, Alienation, and Micro Social Problems"

B. The Right is Wrong/ The Left is Whacked [Class #13 (9/28/11) & Class #14 (9/30/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Four: “The Sociological Imagination and the Analysis of Social Problems”

C. Corporate Control and Contradictions [Class #15 (10/3/11) through Class #17 (10/7/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Five: “The Problems of American Political Economy”

Lauer & Lauer-
Articles #1 & #6B

F. Scandal, Secrets & Politics [Class # 18(10/10/11) & Class #19(10/12/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Six: “The Politics of Postmodern Crises”

Lauer & Lauer-
Article #2

10/14/11: Midterm Break

Class #20 (10/17/11): In-Class Exam

PART III: Growing Social Problems

A. The Biggest Backdrop: The Environment[Class #21 (10/19/11) through Class #23 (10/24/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Seven: “Postmodern Environmental Crises”

Lauer & Lauer-
Articles # 17 & #18

B. Breaking the Law: Criminal Justice [Class #24 (10/26/11) through Class #26 (10/31/11)]:

Class Handouts

Lauer & Lauer-
Article # 35

C. “And Equality for.....”: Poverty & Classism [Class #27 (11/2/11) & Class #28 (11/4/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Ten: "Poverty and the Underclass"

Lauer & Lauer-
Articles #5, #27, & #28

D. What is "Wealth"? [Class #29 (11/7/11) through Class #34 (11/18/11)]

1. Schor, Juliet. *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*. New York: The Penguin Press. 2010.

E. Him, Her, Love, Sex [Class #35 (11/21/11) & Class #36 (11/28/11)]:

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Twelve: "The Sociology of Oppression, Gender, and Orientation"

Lauer & Lauer-
Article #11, #21, & #22

11/23/11-11/27/11: Thanksgiving Break

F. Post-Modern Alienation: [Class #37 (11/30/11) through Class #40 (12/7/11)]

Simon & Henderson-
Chapter Fourteen: "The Nature of Post-Modern Alienation"

PART IV: Summations and Conclusions

Summations and Conclusions [Class #41 (12/9/11)]

**Monday, December 12th, 2011: 11:30 to 1:30
FINAL EXAM & RESEARCH PAPER HANDED IN**