

# **Sociology 004: Social Problems**

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## **Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce students to the sociological perspective and to demonstrate how it can be used to analyze contemporary social problems in the United States. In the course, we will examine economic, gender, and racial inequality in some depth and will examine how these problems intersect within the upcoming American election, the division of household labor, the American public education system, and the industrialized food system. Throughout the course, we will discuss the concept of individualism in American society and its potential link to social problems. As we examine these social problems, it will become apparent that there are many different perspectives on what can be defined as a social problem and on the causes of and solutions to any given problem. Therefore differing viewpoints will be welcomed in class and they will enrich both our class discussions and our overall understanding of the complexity of contemporary social problems.

## **Course-Level Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students will be able to.....

1. Understand the sociological perspective and use it to analyze contemporary social problems in the United States.
2. Analyze contemporary social problems related to economic, gender, and racial inequalities, and ways in which these inequalities create systems of power, privilege, and deprivation based on a person's social location (their place in the social structure based on their configuration of race/class/gender/sexuality/religion, etc.).
3. Apply sociological theories to contemporary social problems as a way to understand various problems and their causes.
4. Identify political ideologies (conservative/liberal/radical) in the arguments of others, including those asserted in the media.
5. Employ in-depth interview methods to collect and interpret data related to a selected social problem (either the gendered division of labor or difficulties related to social class).
6. Reflect and write on ways in which human beings find fulfillment in community through interventions for counteracting social problems (e.g. eating locally to counteract the industrialized food system).
7. Exercise their sociological imagination in order to reflect upon

questions of personal and social responsibility in a complex and changing society.

### **Required Course Materials**

Hochschild, Arlie with Anne Machung, 2003. The Second Shift. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Kozol, Jonathan. 2006. The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America . New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

McKibben, Bill. 2007. Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future. New York, NY: Times Books.

Shipler, David K. 2005. The Working Poor: Invisible in America. New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Group.

EReserves:

Besides these books, other required readings are available on EReserves. The link for ERes is on our course's Blackboard site. (Note: These readings would normally be in class pak form, so they are fairly numerous.)

### **Course Format**

I will use a variety of formats to enhance your learning, including discussions, mini-lectures, guest speakers, group exercises, and films. Generally speaking, the topics addressed in this course will be examined through active learning. At the beginning of the class each day, I will signal you as to which format we will be using for the day: either some form of structured dialogue (for example, think/pair/share) or free-form dialogue; group work; film watching then response to writing prompt; etc.

### **Course Requirements**

Reading assignments must be read **before** the class for which they are assigned. The course will rely heavily on class discussion, and this will only be possible if students have completed the required readings and are prepared to talk about them in class. You will get much more out of class time as well after doing this preparation.

Course grades will be based on two exams (one midterm and one final), one original research paper, short writing assignments/homeworks/pop quizzes, and class participation/attendance. Each of these elements is explained further below:

1. Two examinations (one midterm and one final) will be given in this course. These exams will contain multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions, and they may cover class readings, lectures, discussions, small group exercises, guest speakers, and films. I will give a study guide before each exam, which students are welcome to (but not required to) use for exam preparation. No make-up exams will be given except in the case of an extreme circumstance, and arrangements must be made with me PRIOR to the regularly scheduled exam unless this is absolutely impossible. Warning: An unexcused absence for an examination will cause a "0" to be recorded for that exam grade.

The final exam will be cumulative (actually, a portion of the exam will be cumulative and the rest will be new material - a ratio will be given near the time of the exam) and will also contain some longer essay questions that pull together the themes of the course. The final will only be given once, and it will be during the regularly scheduled exam time. No alternate final will be given, except in the case that the student cannot take the exam on the scheduled day because of extenuating circumstances. In that case, inform me ASAP that you will need to take the final at another time. A last-minute arrangement of an alternate final time will only be acceptable if there is a medical emergency that you could not foresee (which of course we hope will not happen!).

2. A 10-12 page original research paper is required for this course. The paper will be based on an interview that you choose to conduct with one or two research subjects, either on the topic of economic or gender inequality. More information will be given shortly regarding this assignment. Note: I would be glad to accept rough drafts up until a week before the paper is due in order to offer feedback, although a draft is not required. The papers must be handed in on time, except again in case of an extreme circumstance, in which case I should be contacted prior to the due date.

3. Throughout the course, I will give short writing assignments, homeworks, or pop quizzes. All of these assignments will be unannounced. Pop quizzes will be given during class, homework will be due in the next class period, and short assignments will be due at the end of class or at the beginning of the next class period. If you miss a class, you miss that assignment unless you have an excused absence for that class period. If you have an excused absence, it is your responsibility to ask me within 24 hours of the missed class if we had an assignment, homework, or pop quiz in that class period. Beyond that 24 hour period, your window to inquire about and make up the assignment has passed.

4. Class participation and attendance is required for this course. Participation in discussions, group exercises, and films is essential for your understanding of the material. For that reason, your class participation will make up 5 percent of your grade, which is enough to bring it up or down a notch. Your class attendance can only help your participation grade, and class absence can only hurt it (beyond 1 or 2 excused absences). If you hit 5 absences, your grade starts to lower by one grade, which can be devastating. In addition, some material on the exams will be drawn from items covered in class that are not in the assigned readings. Finally, if any changes are made to the syllabus throughout the course, those will be announced in class and it will be important for you to find them out. For all of these reasons, if you have to miss class, please alert me to this fact and get the notes from a classmate. It is your responsibility to keep up with any changes in the schedule or missed assignments.

**Evaluation**

Course Requirements will be weighted as follows:

Midterm Exam	25%
Paper	25%
Short Assignments/ Homework/Pop Quizzes	20%
Class Participation/ Attendance	5%
Final Exam	<u>25%</u>
	100%

Grades will be allocated as follows:

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A+	98-100
A	93-97
A-	90-92
B+	88-89
B	83-87
B-	80-82
C+	78-79
C	73-77

C-	70-72
D+	68-69
D	63-67
D-	60-62
F	59 & below

## **Honor Code**

All work in this course is governed by the Saint Mary's Honor Code. Information for Saint Mary's students on the Honor Code can be found at the following url:

<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/honor-council/information-for-students.html>

If you have questions about how the honor code applies to a specific assignment, please ask me. ALL of the work in this course must be your own work, unless it is specifically designated as a group assignment.

## **Student Disability Services**

Student Disability Services extends reasonable and appropriate accommodations that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Director 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>

## **Classroom Etiquette**

### *Respect and Dignity*

We will discuss some controversial issues this semester. You may, and are certainly encouraged to, disagree with other students or your texts. When you do disagree, I ask that you do so in a respectful and open-minded fashion. This does not mean you have to employ "political correctness" in speech, but it does mean that all points of view must be expressed with due respect for the differing perspectives of others. For example, it is very important that when you disagree with someone, you make it clear that you have a different idea or analysis, but that you are not attacking anyone personally. (Of course, this means that name-calling and/or accusations are never, ever appropriate.) In turn, if someone disagrees with your ideas and/or analyses, please do not take it personally and remember that we are here

to expand our own perspectives on contemporary social problems and our potential responses to them. Our differing ideas will allow us to clarify our own analyses, strengthen our understanding of the multiple perspectives on any issue, and build a greater store of knowledge that we all can access.

Inherent in the building of a vibrant learning community is the need for all students to listen to the ideas and analyses of their classmates. If you are talking while a classmate is speaking in class, I will address that violation immediately. In addition, I do not expect you to talk, write notes, or send text messages while I am teaching or at any point during class. I find these sorts of displays to be near the top of the list of disrespectful behaviors! (Name-calling and personal accusations are at the top of that list.)

Finally, because we will be creating a vibrant learning community together, it is important that everyone in the class has the space to air their ideas and analyses. What this means is that if you would like to speak, I want you to notice whether or not others in the class would also like to speak, and make community space for everyone to share their ideas. I want who wants to speak to be able to do so in turn. Sometimes you will have a burning point to make, but you will have to wait your turn. Sometimes your classmates will be reluctant to start a controversial discussion, and you may have to be the brave person who starts that dialogue. Every person's perspective will play an important role in all of our learning processes, so sometimes I will stop the class and facilitate a meta-discussion on how we might enhance the participation of all class members. Please have the entire learning community in mind when you make an argument in class, and make sure that others have a safe space in which to share their ideas in turn. These structures, I find, allow us to create a safe, vibrant learning environment that helps everyone to achieve, succeed, and participate in shared inquiry.

### Cell Phones

Please turn off your cell phones when you come into class. If you have a personal or work emergency for which you need to keep your phone on, please turn it to vibrate or speak to me before class starts to notify me that you will need to keep your ringer on.

### Tardiness

Please make every effort to be on time for class. I find it very disruptive to have students walking in late after class has started, so if you foresee difficulty in getting to class promptly, notify me ahead of time.

## **Reading Schedule for Sociology 004 - Social Problems**

Tentative Schedule of Readings\*

### ***I. Introduction to Sociology and the Study of Social Problems***

#### Week 1

T Introduction to the course - no readings

Th Handouts:  
Mills - "The Promise"  
Williamson, Evans, and Rustard - "Social Problems: A Matter for Debate"

#### Week 2

T Handout:  
Williamson, Evans, and Rustard - "Social Problems: A Matter for Debate", continued

ERes:  
Lakoff - "Reframing Is Social Change"  
Lakoff - "Introduction: In the Name of Freedom"

### ***II. American Politics: Election 2010***

Th ERes:  
Lakoff - "The Logic of Simple Freedom"  
- Lakoff - "What the Right Wants"  
- Lakoff - "What Unites Progressives"

#### Week 3

T **Short Assignment DUE TODAY:** Bring in a short article (from the web, most likely), with copies for 4 other people to read, that provides evidence for or against the characterizations of the two political parties (the Right = the Republican Party and Progressives = the Democratic Party) in articles related to Election 2010. I will explain this assignment further in class.

### ***III. Economic Inequality***

Th            ERes:  
Lewis - "The Culture of Poverty"  
Wilson - "Work"  
Domhoff - "The American Upper Class"

Week 4

T            Continued:  
Wilson - "Work"  
Domhoff - "The American Upper Class"

In Shipler, The Working Poor:  
Introduction

Th            In Shipler, The Working Poor:  
Introduction, Ch. 1

Week 5

T            In Shipler, The Working Poor:  
Chs. 2 & 3

Th            In Shipler, The Working Poor:  
Chs. 8 & 11

***IV. Gender Inequality***

Week 6

T            In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Introduction, Chs. 1 & 2

Th            In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Chs. 3 & 4

***MIDTERM EXAM STUDY GUIDE WILL BE POSTED TODAY  
ON BLACKBOARD***

Week 7

T            In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Chs. 5 & 9

***REVIEW FOR MIDTERM EXAM***

Th            \*\*\*\*\*MIDTERM EXAM\*\*\*\*\*

### Week 8

T In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Chs. 12, 13

Th In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Ch. 15

### Week 9

T In Hochschild, The Second Shift:  
Chs. 16, 17, & Afterword

## ***IV. Racial Inequality***

Th ERes:  
  
Russell - "Growing Up with Privilege and Prejudice"

### Week 10

T ERes:  
McIntosh - "White Privilege and Male Privilege"  
hooks - "Overcoming White Supremacy: A Comment"

Th Attachments Prof. Ganote sent to class:  
Tatum - "Embracing a Cross-Racial Dialogue"  
Lorde - "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining  
Difference"

**EXTRA CREDIT HOMEWORK DUE [optional]:** Web research on election results + written response, applying Lakoff's concepts. This homework will serve as the basis for a student-led discussion of the Election 2010 results.

## ***V. Problems in Education***

### Week 11

T In Kozol, The Shame of the Nation:  
Introduction

Th In Kozol, The Shame of the Nation:  
Chs. 1 & 2

### Week 12

T In Kozol, The Shame of the Nation:

Chs. 3 & 9

Th \*\*\*\*\***PAPER DUE**\*\*\*\*\*

In Kozol, The Shame of the Nation:  
Ch. 12, Epilogue

**FINAL EXAM STUDY GUIDE WILL BE POSTED TODAY ON  
BLACKBOARD**

***VII. Problems in the American Food System***

Week 13

T In McKibben, Deep Economy:  
Introduction & Ch. 1

Th THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!

Week 14

T In McKibben, Deep Economy:  
Chs. 2, 5, & Afterword

***VIII. Individualism and Community in America***

Th ERes:  
Bellah et. al - "Transforming American Culture"

**REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAM**

Week 15

\*\*\*\*\***FINAL EXAM WEEK**\*\*\*\*\*

\*I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus whenever necessary to meet learning objectives or to compensate for unforeseen circumstances.