

SOC 2020: Social Problems

Section 005

CRN: 10089

Fall 2017

129 Old Main

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00 to 2:15

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Hours: Wednesdays 10:00-11:00, 3:00-4:00 by appointment

What do we mean by social problems? Are they a reflection of the way we interact as individuals, are they structural constraints the privilege some people and disadvantage others?

This course deals with a broad array of social problems, where they come from, how we define them, and the degree to which programs and policies are designed to alleviate them. At times, the solution to one set of problems may well create another set of problems. Everyone is opposed to all sorts of inequality, so in this course we will discuss how, to solve our social problems. More specifically, you will get a chance to propose ways to make the world you will be inheriting a better place to live in. This is not a difficult course, unless you fall behind. Course expectations are straightforward and it is easy to do well.

Goals and objectives for the course: This course has two goals. The first is to help you know more about the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality. You will be able to: (a) describe how sociology differs from, and is like, other social sciences and to give examples of these differences; (b) describe how sociology contributes to a liberal art understanding of social reality; and (c) apply the sociological imagination, sociological principles, and concepts to her/his own life. You will be introduced to basic concepts in sociology and fundamental theoretical perspectives to be able to demonstrate the relevance of culture; social change; socialization; stratification; social structure; institutions; and differentiations by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and class.

The second goal of this course is to examine how people deal with the social problems they experience, and what sort of organization occurs to both alleviate the immediate negative impact of each problem, and in the end help develop the kind of society that does not routinely create these sorts of problem. In other words, even as we explore social problems, we will also examine social solutions: how do we create the world we want to live in, not just accept the world as we find it.

At the end of this course, you should be able to see how culture and social structures operate in the way institutions affect each other and impact on individuals. You will be able to demonstrate how factors such as population or urbanization affect social structures and individuals, and how culture and social structure vary across time and place. Finally, you will be able to understand

the significance of race, class, gender, and age in the way we frame, and then deal with, problems in society.

Consultation: The best way to communicate your questions about the course is via email or bring them up at the beginning of each class period. Please note that I usually reply to email within 24 hours and most often sooner. If you do not get a response from me, perhaps your email did not arrive, so please resend your question.

Required Course Materials:

There is no course textbook to purchase. All course material will appear on Blackboard, in the Contents section, dated for the week's topic. These include weekly lecture notes, articles and other printed material, and links to websites for additional information

ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE

Blackboard: This course will be organized via Blackboard, which can be accessed at (<http://computing.wayne.edu/blackboard/>). You are required to learn how to use Blackboard; there are good tutorials on the website. The syllabus, and any subsequent readings will be posted there. Blackboard provides a Discussion Board area we will use throughout the class, as well as an on-line grade book which will permit you to monitor your own performance. Note, however, that I am not able to help with technical issues related to your access to Blackboard. You **MUST** contact the C&IT Help Desk to figure out what is wrong, and how to get access to the course. Any appeal because of technical issues should be accompanied by your communication from C&IT that they were resolving your issue.

Communication: All course information will be broadcast via the Internet, posted through Blackboard. Each of you have been assigned an email account by WSU, and if you decide to use a different email address be sure you figure out how to forward any email on your own. I will send any notices, revisions of this syllabus, and other information on or through Blackboard. Blackboard uses your WSU account and I cannot change that. Not checking or not getting your WSU email is no excuse for missing assignments or other information relevant to this course. Do not ask me to use an alternative address to communicate with you.

Course material: For each topic indicated in the schedule below I will post comments and additional material on Blackboard at **8AM Thursday morning for the week that follows.** The material will relate to the main points of that week's topic. You will also find additional material on the topic you should read and on which you should base your discussions and posts on Blackboard for that week.

Preliminary Discussion Period: Starting Thursday, August 31st at 8AM until midnight Friday September 5th, there will be a non-graded Discussion Board available **on Blackboard**, in which you will be asked to introduce yourselves, let us know something about what you are studying, or any other information you wish to share (see my introductory comments for suggestions). **IMPORTANT:** You must clearly state **you have read the syllabus and understand all of the course's requirements.**

Weekly Discussion: Beginning with the third week of class, you will be expected to post comments on what you read and what we discussed in class. Discussion boards will become available on Tuesday morning beginning September 12th at 8am, and remain open until Sunday 11:59pm of that week (details on topics and dates follow below). Requests from students to allow a late post will not be accepted.

Disability: If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations, you will need to register with Student Disability Services for coordination of your academic accommodations. The Student Disability Services (SDS) office is located at 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library in the Student Academic Success Services department. SDS telephone number is 313-577-1851 or 313-577-3365 (TDD only). Once you have your accommodations in place, I will be glad to discuss your special needs. Student Disability Services' mission is to assist the university in creating an accessible community where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in their educational experience at Wayne State University.

Decorum: You are expected to comply with all University regulations and requirements concerning proper behavior, plagiarism and any form of cheating. That extends to the way you communicate in discussions in class and on-line. If you do not comply with norms of respectful communication you may be blocked from participation. Excessive abuse may result in dismissal from the class, and should you violate those norms, you can be sanctioned and otherwise punished pursuant to University policy. I will not tolerate "flames" or personal attacks for views posted by classmates. Persistent abusive is unacceptable and can lead to your failing the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion Posts (40%): You are welcome to make as many comments as you want, and in my experience many students end up engaging in lots of interactions with each other through the semester. I will monitor the discussions, making comments as I feel appropriate, and in general look to see that a proper level of communication is established for the course. These comments should also reflect discussions we have in-class. Think of this as a course-long writing journal. Each discussion board will be worth 5 points (2 points for the first post, 3 points for the second). The discussion topics and dates the boards will be available are as follows: **Economy** (9/12-17); **Race and Ethnicity** (9/19-24); **Gender and Sexuality** (9/26-10/1); **Education** (10/3-8); **Age and Health** (10/17-22); **Urbanization** (10/24-29); **Globalization** (10/31-11/5); and the **Environment** (11/7-12).

Examinations (50%): There will be two online exams as noted below in the syllabus. The first one (October 11th) is worth 20 points, the second (December 4th) is worth 30 points towards your final grade.

Group Presentations (10%): The class will be divided into 8 groups corresponding to the 8 discussion board topics above. Each group will make a presentation on either November 27th or 29th, which detail how community groups and/or individuals deal with the nature of the problem topic. That is, each presentation will be a summary of possible social solutions to the problems faced by members of society, with a focus on the Detroit region. Each group gets to decide on how the work will be distributed among members of the group, and will submit a 3 to 5-page

summary of the presentation and findings by midnight November 26th for posting on Blackboard. Students should read and be prepared to discuss the nature of the solutions proposed. Everyone in the group will receive full credit unless the group indicates someone did not contribute.

COURSE GRADE

Your grade for the course will be a composite of your percentage performance on the four main portions of this course: 8 Discussion Posts for 40 points, 2 Examinations for 50 points and the Group Presentation for 10 points.

Your final grade will be calculated on your overall points, as follows:

<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
94 – 100	A	74 – 76	C+
90 – 93	A-	70 – 73	C
86 – 89	B+	66 – 70	C-
81 – 85	B	50 – 65	D
77 – 80	B-	Less than 50	F

Additional Comments:

1. To anticipate a common question: no, I do not curve the final course grades. My philosophy is that you all should be able to get an A, but if no one does the work you all can get a D. Curving is a process where grades are distributed by percentages—for example assigning the top and bottom 5% an A and F, etc. -- but then only 3 out of a class of 60 people can get an A and at least 3 people will have to fail. That seems too arbitrary to me.
2. The best way to contact me during the semester is by email (including requests to meet in office hours). Any message not getting a response should be resent (I can't control technology). Calling my office number will get you to the Department, where you can leave a message.

IMPORTANT DATES

September 13:	Last Day to Drop with Full Tuition Refund
September 17:	Last Day to Drop without Permission, Tuition Charged
September 29:	Degree Applications Due if Graduating this Semester
October 11:	First Exam
November 12:	Last Day to Withdraw from Course with Permission
November 27, 29:	Group Presentations in Class
December 4:	Second Exam

**DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT ME IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE COURSE OR THE INFORMATION IN THIS SYLLABUS**

I DO NOT REPLY TO QUESTIONS IF THE ANSWERS ARE IN THIS SYLLABUS

FALL 2017 COURSE OUTLINE

<i>Class</i>	<i>TOPIC</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>
Aug 30	INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE Blackboard Introductions	
Sept 6	1. Social problems	How do we define a “social problem” and when does a solution to one problem generate a new problem?
Sept 11, 13	2. Economic inequality	They say money can’t buy happiness, but it goes a long way, and without it you get lots of pain.
Sept 18, 20	3. Race and Ethnicity	What is race, really, but a system of division that rarely takes into account cultural differences.
Sept 25, 27	4. Gender and Sexuality	Does one’s sex determine our roles in society, can a male “mother” a child, a female be the “breadwinner”?
Oct 2, 4	5. Education	Do we really learn new things, or are we taught what to believe? What is the real purpose of an education?
Oct 9, Oct 11	REVIEW OCT 9, ONLINE EXAM #1 OCT 11	
Oct 16, 18	6. Aging and Health	As societies grow older, it is obvious that there will be health effects...but do we really deal with that?
Oct 23, 25	7. Urbanization	Cities are complex organizations functioning in society—but what happens if we all live in cities?
Oct 30, Nov 1	8. Globalization	The world is ever smaller; we get to destinations faster and we share values and tastes—is that a good thing?
Nov 6, 8	9. Environment	We worry about smoking even when we don’t smoke because it’s in the air we breathe—what else matters?
Nov 13, 15	GROUP MEETINGS	A chance to get together in groups to discuss the group projects and plan on the group presentations
Nov 20	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Nov 27, 29	COURSE WRAP-UP and PRESENTATIONS	
Dec 4	ONLINE EXAM #2	