

“Another world is not only possible; she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”
Arundhati Roy

Social Problems

SOC 2020

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Fall 2017

3 Credit Hours

Mon/Wed 2:30pm – 3:45pm

Old Main, Room 0106

Instructor: Michael Sabbagh

mike.sabbagh@wayne.edu

Kik: MichaelSabbaghWSU

Campus Office Hours:

Monday 12pm – 2pm & by appointment

Office Location: 2264 Faculty Administration Building

Office Phone: 313-577-2930

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

Social Problems: Continuity and Change

Free online textbook found at <http://open.lib.umn.edu/socialproblems/>

NOTE: Students that prefer a physical book are welcome to purchase any addition of any reasonably similar *Social Problems* textbook, but be advised that the course will be following the online text book listed above. As long as it was published in the last 10 years or so the material should be reasonably similar.

Additional readings to be passed out in class or available on Blackboard.

GOALS

Students who successfully complete this course will develop a rich framework for a sociological understanding of social problems. This course is not focused on purely “factual” learning, or learning facts for the sake of facts. Rather, the focus will be on “conceptual” learning. It is more important that you walk away from this class understanding the complex relation of concepts than being able to recite the facts (see additional note regarding facts vs. opinions below). This course takes a neutral position towards the various social problems discussed (or tries to at least). Instead, we will focus on *why* they are considered social problems, competing theories on how to address them and those theories’ strengths and weaknesses.

There are many times that we will problematize the definitions that we are learning to understand the concepts for their strengths and some of their weaknesses. How have these concepts changed through the years in different places?

Learning outcomes for this course

1. Understand what sociologists mean by “social problems,” how they emerge and how they are understood
2. State and illustrate how the sociological imagination can assist in understanding social problems
3. Articulate the usefulness of sociological theory and research in the explanation and amelioration of social problems
4. Analyze how social structure operates, intensifies and impacts social problems, and what role individual choices play as well
5. Understand the consequences of proposed “solutions” to social problems, historically and contemporarily
6. Recognize the importance that racial, ethnic, class and gender diversity play in our society and globally; and the way certain groups are impacted by social problems more so than others
7. The capacity to evaluate the dynamics between cultures, the economy, politics and marginalization
8. Proficiency in reading and comprehending scholarly texts
9. Hone research techniques and presentation skills
10. Develop internet and computer skills needed for college-level work
11. Ability to construct complex ideas and to “connect the dots” of concepts
12. Develop critical thinking skills and be able to think deeply about our social lives
13. And, above all, enjoy yourself while accomplishing the above tasks

EXPECTATIONS

Overview of Student Expectations:

1. The core of all expectations for this course is **respect**. I expect that you will respect yourself, your fellow classmates, ideas presented in the classroom, diversity, the instructor and any guests to the classroom. Likewise, I pledge to respect you, your ideas and beliefs.
2. I consider this classroom to be a safe space free of any types of hate. Any form of racism, sexism, misogyny, classism, ableism, fat/homo/transphobia or other kind of bigotry will NOT be tolerated.
3. You are expected **to actively attend each scheduled class**. This means that you are to prepare thoroughly for each class, participate in the class discussion, actively listen and take notes.
4. **You will write your own assignments and cite all external sources.**
5. **All assignments will be completed with care and scholarly diligence.** Please use complete sentences, and run spelling/grammar check before turning in any assignments.

Note on Opinions vs. Facts

There may be times in class where it seems like we are having simple political conversations, just like one might have with their friends at the bar or while casually hanging out. In this class, you *are not* entitled to opinions; you *are* entitled to empirical facts with evidence. Often our common-sense understandings of various social problems are, in fact, misaligned with reality; the point of a class like this is to look at issues from other perspectives. It is natural to have blinders towards others’ struggles, which is something we all have to work to actively dismantle. I ask that you always stay open-minded and to look at the issues discussed from different angles than you may be used to.

Instructor Expectations:

I pledge to:

1. Be respectful of myself, students, ideas and beliefs presented in class and by classroom guests
2. Always be prepared for every class
3. Offer a wide array of opportunities for students to be successful in this course
4. Exude excitement for topics presented in the course
5. Present, and be respectful of, differing viewpoints that I may disagree with
6. Offer my support
7. Be fair and reasonable
8. Be flexible when needed
9. Give plenty of feedback on your performance in the class

Attendance Policy

According to the Norwegian pop band D'Sound, "Bein' there is half the walk." Class discussion in this course is just as important as the readings and assignments, and, alas, if you are not in class, you cannot participate in class discussions. Students are expected to be in class on each day, on time. Keep in mind that each week of this course costs you around \$100 – \$200 in tuition, depending on your fee schedule. I do not take that responsibility lightly and have planned each class session to compliment the readings and work towards the learning outcomes mentioned earlier. An attendance sheet will be passed out in the beginning of class, which is your responsibility to sign. You will be allowed to miss four class sessions throughout the semester without excuse; any further will result in five points taken off your overall grade for each class missed. If you will be regularly missing class, you will need to consult with Student Disability Services (see below) or I would suggest registering for an online section instead.

Early Academic Assessment (EAA)

As this course is lower than 4000 level, I am required to enter your grade during week seven of the semester by the date listed below. You will receive an email notification if the grade entered is a C- or lower. I will not enter your grade if you have a C or better since you are able to track your grade easily as we are going along through the semester through Blackboard's *My Grades* function.

WSU Course Participation Confirmation

Starting in Fall 2016, WSU requires instructors to report student attendance during the first two weeks of class. If a student's attendance is not confirmed, the registrar will administratively remove the student from the class and their financial aid will be adjusted accordingly. Since this class has a maximum of 75 students, the instructor will be handling the confirmation requirements. For more information, please visit <http://reg.wayne.edu/gotoclass.php>.

Number of Preparation Hours

As with any undergraduate course you will take, the calculation to determine the amount of time you need to spend on a course to be successful is to spend two hours outside of class for every hour in class. This is a three credit hour class, which means students should expect to spend around six hours per week outside of class on readings, studying, assignments and journals.

TECHNOLOGY

Blackboard and Email

The use of Blackboard and email is mandatory for this course. Using Blackboard, students can watch videos, read articles, listen to podcasts, post on the discussion board and check for notices from the instructor. Likewise, WSU email is the primary way I will communicate with you between class sessions. Please let me know if you have trouble with any of these platforms.

Cell Phones

Don't be annoying. Put your phone on vibrate or turn it off during class. Don't even think about FaceTiming during class, though I may allow a stray selfie here and there. It is obvious when you're texting or looking at cat photos online with your phone in your lap. Please don't. It is annoying and disruptive. Please leave the classroom if you need to make or receive a call.

Laptops and Tablets

I do not encourage students to bring laptops or tablets to class. This is not because I am opposed to technology in general, but computers can be flirtatious monsters, inviting students to engage in non-class activities such as visiting other websites or checking e-mail, which can distract you and the people around you from what's going on in the classroom. Plan on bringing a pen or pencil and paper to class to take notes, just as students have done for hundreds of years. I will ask students to put away laptops and tablets at the beginning of class out of respect to me, the class and fellow classmates.

Voice Recorders

Personally I do not mind lectures being recorded, but you will need to notify me before class starts if you'll be recording. This way, I can check with the other students in attendance that day to ensure they are comfortable being recorded. This is because class discussions can get personal in nature, and some students may not feel comfortable being recorded.

OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS

If you are having difficulty in any stage of writing an essays, it is highly suggested that you use the resources the WSU campus has to offer. Please visit the Writing Center in the David Adamany Undergrad Library for assistance with your research assignment.

Writing Center

David Adamany Undergrad Library
Second Floor, Room 2310

Website (hours and scheduling info): <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/writing>

Reflection Essays

Students are expected to write four, one – two page reflective essays throughout the class, due on the dates indicated in the course schedule below. You can either submit the essays in class or via Blackboard (no emails please). It can be about anything relating to the readings, lectures, personal anecdotes, what you liked or didn't like and so on. I will accept these essays late with a two point per day penalty. The essays are worth 20 points each, so it is in your best interest to get them in on

time. Think of these essays as a journal tracking your progress through the course, or as a space to develop ideas for your final paper.

Midterm Exam

Around the middle of the class, there will be a 40 question, multiple choice midterm exam based on the material covered in class up to that point. The exam will cover, material from the book, in-class lectures and discussions, and broad topics of the films shown in class. The midterm will be taken online through Blackboard, allowing open notes/internet, and I do not mind if you take it together with other classmates. There will be a one-hour time limit on the exam to discourage extensive googling of every question. More details will follow as we progress through the class.

Plagiarism Assignment

Students must complete the plagiarism test on Indiana University and send the certificate showing they passed the test. Students who have already taken the certification may forward along previously obtained certificates. Do not wait until the last minute to complete this assignment. Information and tutorials for the certification can be found here:

<https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

Final Exam

There will be one exam-of-sorts during the semester. The exam will be cumulative, meaning that it will require you to be able to refer to any information discussed throughout the entire term prior to that exam.

The final exam will be an in-class group project and will be graded by other members in class during the last week of class. Further details on the final exam will be provided later in the semester.

Final Paper

This assignment will be a research paper about a social problem that you want to explore further. You will write a 1,000 – 1,200-word essay (four – five pages, double spaced) with four to seven sources. Four of the sources must come from scholarly articles, preferably sociological journals. I expect about one citation per page. Use block quotes sparingly. My general rule is one block quote for every four pages of text.

Format: APA is my preferred formatting but MLA or others are fine as long as you're consistent. If in doubt, stick with APA. Reference the Purdue OWL (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) or visit the writing center to get help with formatting citations. Bibme.org is a quality, free resource to use when making reference pages.

The final paper will be turned in on the date noted below, through Blackboard using Safe Assign. Further instructions will be given in class later in the semester.

Extra Credit

Students have several options for earning extra credit in this course. Please note that no extra credit is accepted the final week of class, and I typically do not accept essays for extra credit without prior consultation.

1. Students may bring in a newspaper or journal article related to the topic of the day with a short (1-2 paragraph) explanation of how it is relevant to that day's discussion.
 2. Attend an activity, presentation or exhibition on a class topic. Then, write up a short review on this activity, that must be submitted soon after the event.
- Note: other forms of extra credit may be offered throughout the semester. Students can submit a maximum of two extra credit assignments, worth up to 10 points each. I will accept extra credit up to day the final reflective essay is due (see below).

EVALUATIONS

Your performance in this course will be evaluated in the following manner:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Reflection Essays: 20 points each * 4 essay | 80 points |
| Plagiarism Assignment | 20 points |
| Midterm Exam | 100 points |
| Final Exam | 100 points |
| Final Paper | 100 points |
| Total | 400 points |

Grading Scale

| | | | |
|------------|----|-----------|----|
| 100% - 90% | A | 72% - 70% | C |
| 89% - 86% | A- | 69% - 66% | C- |
| 85% - 83% | B+ | 65% - 63% | D+ |
| 82% - 80% | B | 62% - 60% | D |
| 79% - 76% | B- | 59% - 51% | D- |
| 75% - 73% | C+ | | |

Anything below this threshold will receive a failure for the course.

I will be diligent about getting grades up on Blackboard in as timely of a fashion as possible. It is up to each student to keep track of her or his marks as the semester goes on. Please contact me if you have concerns about your point total or if you are having problems in the course. Do not wait until the last minute to inquire about your grade.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Accommodation Statement

If you have a 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 meet with you privately during my office hours 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." Please refer to the SDS website for further information about students with disabilities and the services we provide for faculty and students: <http://studentdisability.wayne.edu/>

Note on Pronouns, Gender ID and Preferred Names

In line with the mutual respect ethos stated earlier in this document, this class will respect all persons' preferred pronouns and gender IDs. Please contact me if you have a preferred pronoun or chosen name other than what the class roster tells me.

Plagiarism Statement

Assignments that have been copied from another student or another source will not be scored. All final papers will be run through the SafeAssign plagiarism system which detects attempts at copying text. "Academic misbehavior means any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the institution or subvert the education process. All forms of academic misbehavior are prohibited at Wayne State University, as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct." (*WSU Dean of Students Office Statement, 2014*). The following website gives the university's full policy on academic integrity: <https://dosu.wayne.edu/conduct/academic-misconduct>.

I understand there are many gray areas when it comes to plagiarism. Don't hesitate to contact me or stop by during office hours if you have questions or need guidance.

A Final Note:

Due to the nature of the topics in this course, some points discussed in class may be controversial, uncomfortable or lead to heated debates. Learning something new isn't always comfortable and often our personal judgments cloud our ability to learn to the fullest. Please try to keep those judgments outside of the 'classroom' and focus on obtaining new knowledge and perspectives while in class or reading the assigned texts. If you have strong feelings about anything brought up in class by either your fellow classmates or me, please feel free to make an appointment to come speak with me or stop by during office hours. I'm always available and committed to listening to your concerns.

The instructor may make changes to this course outline as needed during the course. Please be attentive for modifications and regularly check your Wayne State email.

COURSE TIMELINE

| DATE | TOPIC | READING/ASSIGNMENT |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Wed Aug 30 | Syllabus Review & Introductions | <NONE> |
| Mon Sept 4 | NO CLASS / LABOR DAY HOLIDAY | <NONE> |
| Wed Sept 6 | Understanding & Studying Social Problems | Chapter 1 |
| Mon Sept 11 | Poverty | Chapter 2 |
| Wed Sept 13 | Race and Ethnic Inequality | Chapter 3 |
| Fri Sept 15 | | 1st Essay Due |
| Mon Sept 18 | Gender Inequality | Chapter 4 |
| Wed Sept 20 | Sexual Orientation & Inequality | Chapter 5 |
| Mon Sept 25 | Sexual Behavior | Chapter 9 |
| Wed Sept 27 | Guest Lecturer – Planned Parenthood of SE MI | Readings on Blackboard |
| Mon Oct 2 | Drugs & Alcohol | Chapter 7 |
| Wed Oct 4 | Film and Discussion: <i>TBD</i> | |
| Fri Oct 6 | | 2nd Essay Due |
| Mon Oct 9 | Crime & Criminal Justice | Chapter 8 |
| Wed Oct 11 | Know Your Rights training | <NONE> |
| Mon Oct 16 | Schools & Education | Chapter 11 |
| Wed Oct 18 | Film and Discussion: <i>TBD</i> | |
| Mon Oct 23 | Work, Capitalism & The Economy | Chapter 12 |
| Wed Oct 25 | Film and Discussion: <i>Generation Like</i> | |
| Fri Oct 27 | | 3rd Essay Due |
| Mon Oct 30 | Health & Health Care | Chapter 13 |
| Wed Nov 1 | NO CLASS: Midterm Exam | <NONE> |
| Mon Nov 6 | Population and the Environment | Chapter 15 |
| Wed Nov 8 | Final paper brainstorm/sharpening research skills | Readings on Blackboard |
| Mon Nov 13 | Urban & Rural Problems | Chapter 14 |
| Wed Nov 15 | Detroit's Urban Crisis | Readings on Blackboard |
| Fri Nov 17 | | 4th Essay Due |
| Mon Nov 20 | Guest Lecture: Rose Hackman (The Guardian US) | Readings on Blackboard |
| Wed Nov 22 | NO CLASS / UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY | <NONE> |

| | | |
|------------|---|------------------------|
| Mon Nov 27 | War and Terrorism | Chapter 16 |
| Wed Nov 29 | Special topics: Students choice | Readings on Blackboard |
| Mon Dec 4 | Final Exam | |
| Wed Dec 6 | Group Final Marking | |
| Mon Dec 11 | NO CLASS / FLEX DAY FOR WORKING ON PAPERS | |
| Wed Dec 13 | Final Paper Due via Blackboard by midnight | |

IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY DATES

| | |
|--|---|
| September 4 th | University closed: Labor Day |
| September 13 th | Last day to drop course without tuition penalty |
| September 27 th | Last day to drop course without instructor approval |
| October 17 th | Early Academic Assessment (EAA) grades due |
| November 12 th | Last day to drop course with instructor approval |
| November 22 nd – 25 th | University closed: Thanksgiving holiday |

ASSIGNMENT DATES

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| September 15 th | First essay due |
| October 6 th | Second essay due |
| October 27 th | Third essay due |
| November 17 th | Fourth essay due/last day to submit extra credit |
| December 13 th | Final paper due |

Two Truths and a BIG FAT LIE

(Or, how to make friends in a huge class)

Instructions: Get into groups of four – five. Each person prepares three statements, two of which are true and one of which is a lie. In any order, a person shares their three statements to the group. The object of the game is to figure out which statement a lie. The rest of the group votes on each statement, and the person reveals which one is the lie. Afterwards, decide as a group which one was the best lie, and you will share that back to the rest of the class.

| |
|--|
| Name: |
| Best Contact (phone#, email, social media etc): |
| Statement 1: |
| Statement 2: |
| Statement 3: |

| |
|--|
| Name: |
| Best Contact (phone#, email, social media etc): |
| Statement 1: |
| Statement 2: |
| Statement 3: |

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| Name: |
| Best Contact (phone#, email, social media etc): |
| Statement 1: |
| Statement 2: |
| Statement 3: |

| |
|--|
| Name: |
| Best Contact (phone#, email, social media etc): |
| Statement 1: |
| Statement 2: |
| Statement 3: |

Beginning of class questionnaire

Instructions: Briefly fill in the following information so I can have idea of the class composition.

DO NOT put your name or any identifying information!! This helps me as the instructor shape future lessons and see where everyone is at. You can make responses as short or long as you'd like, or ignore questions you don't feel like answering.

What year student are you? Have you decided on a major and/or minor? What is it?

How do you identify your gender (man, woman, trans, non-binary, genderqueer etc)?

How do you identify your race or ethnicity?

How do you identify politically (liberal, conservative, progressive, socialist, libertarian, etc)?

Do you live in the cities of Detroit, Hamtramck or Highland Park?

What is a social problem you feel most passionate about?

What is a social problem you wish you had better understanding of?

What do you hope to gain from this class, besides 3 credit hours and a social science credit?