

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

SOC 1020 - 001

Spring/Summer 2020

**Instructor**: Abberley Sorg

**Email**: abberley.sorg@wayne.edu

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course will introduce students to the ways in which a sociological perspective can be utilized to analyze contemporary social problems. Sociology provides us with a vital set of theorical and methodological tools through which we can examine complex social problems, such as economic, gender and racial inequalities. In this class we will explore differing views on what constitutes a social problem, how social phenomena come to be defined as social problems, and how political, cultural and historical factors mediate our society’s attempts to address these problems. Over the course of the semester, students will be encouraged to think critically about the causes of social problems, such as crime, poverty and social inequality, and how these problems are framed by various actors within our society. Students will learn to exercise their sociological imaginations in order to both understand their own roles within the systems of power that create social problems and to envision ways in which we may bring about a more just and equitable society.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

* Describe the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social problems.
* Understand major sociological perspectives in order to analyze social interactions, structures and inequalities by applying these perspectives to “real world” social problems, including current events.
* Apply a sociological lens to critically examine the role systems of power, privilege, and deprivation play in creating, defining and perpetuating social problems.
* Reflect upon their own social location in relationship to others and recognize how they as individuals can play a role in confronting social problems, while also understanding the role structural systems play in perpetuating inequalities.
* Engage in intellectual discussions about social problems with their peers.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

This course utilizes the Sixth Edition of Anna Leon-Guerrero's Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action. This is a required text for the course.

All additional course materials will be available on canvas.

**TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS**

As this course is taught entirely online, students need to have access to a properly functioning computer throughout the semester. While it may be possible to access most course content via your phone, I cannot guarantee that vital components of the course will be accessible without a computer.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

In addition to academic tasks, you are expected to conduct yourself respectfully and responsibly toward myself and all members of the class. This means showing others the same respect that you would wish to receive in you were in their shoes. We will be discussing difficult topics in this class, and you are entitled to your own opinions on these issues but not to your own facts; the purpose of discussion assignments is to explore social issues from sociological point of view. The use of insults, demeaning language or slurs will *not* be tolerated. Hateful or disrespectful conduct on the discussion board will result in a zero for that week’s discussion, and repeated incidents of inappropriate behavior will have a severe impact on your grade.

You should check the gradebook on canvas frequently to assure that your grades have been posted accurately. Additionally, check your canvas messages and email regularly to ensure that you do not miss important information. I reserve the right to make adjustments to the syllabus, including adding, replacing or removing supplemental readings; if I do so, you will be informed of these changes via the canvas messaging system.

**COMMUNICATION POLICY**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the course, please feel free to communicate them to me via the canvas messaging system. **Please use the canvas messaging system rather than email.** I will always seek to reply to your messages within 48 hours; you don’t hear back from me by then, assume the server ate your message and please send it again.

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

Wayne State University is working to build a community that is inclusive and welcoming to all people, including those with disabilities. 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 meet with you privately during my office hours to discuss your special needs. Please do not request accommodations directly from me without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services, as I am not permitted to provide accommodations without documentation.  
  
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/ . Once you have documentation from SDS, contact me during office hours or via email and to put your accommodations into place.

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

“It is University policy to respect the faith and religious obligations of the individual. Students with classes or examinations that conflict with their religious observances are expected to notify their instructors well in advance so that mutually agreeable alternatives may be worked out.” If this is a concern for you, please get into contact with me and we will set up an alternate date for you to complete your assignment(s).

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Please review the student Code of Conduct, which is can be found here: <http://www.doso.wayne.edu/student-conduct-services.html> . You are expected to adhere to the Student Code of Conduct. Cheating other forms of unethical academic behavior will have an extremely negative impact on your final grade, as it will result in a zero on the assignment in question; a second violation will earn you an F in the course. Furthermore, I am required to report all instances of suspected academic dishonesty to university administrators, and repeated incidents of academic dishonesty may result in your expulsion from Wayne State.

**AVOIDING PLAGIARISM**

It is important that you familiarize yourself with what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Copying someone else’s writing without utilizing quotation marks and providing a citation is plagiarism, even if you only copied a few words. Taking someone else’s idea/argument and presenting it as your own is also plagiarism. The use of text generating programs is also unacceptable. Any work you turn in must be your own.

If you want to quote a news story, blog post or academic article during canvas discussions, you must make clear in the post when you are drawing upon other people’s works. Do this by enclosing any direction quotes within quotation marks and including the author’s name when you reference his/her/their claims. For example, if I wanted to draw on [this story](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/29/us/sports-coronavirus-return-spt-trnd/index.html) for a blog post, the correct formatting would be as follows:

According to CNN’s Allen Kim, it may be a year or longer until spectators

will be able to return to sport events. Kim writes that, “spectator-less sports

may become the new normal,” as the threat posed by COVID-19 makes mass

gatherings in stadiums or racetracks potentially dangerous.

At the end of your discussion post include a link or other citation (name of the movie, title of book author, etc). For discussion posts, you are not required to provide fully formatted academic citations, but make sure you provide enough information that other students and myself can locate your source. Academic citations will be required in your final paper, but we will discuss how to format a works cited page later in the course.

Please note that I do know how to use google, and have no difficulty recognizing when a student’s writing has been cobbled together from text found on various websites or lifted whole cloth from someone else’s work, and then finding the links necessary to prove it. I am also familiar with text generating programs and how to identify when students have used them rather than doing their own work. Additionally, all papers turned in to this class (as well as most other courses at Wayne State) are automatically scanned for plagiarism using a system that compares the paper to academic writings, materials found on the internet, and millions of other students’ papers. This is all to say that if you fail to do your own work you *will* be caught, you *will* receive a zero on the assignment, and if you do it a second time you *will* fail the class.

**DUE DATES**

For this class, the week begins on Monday at 12 am (midnight) and ends on the following Sunday at 11:59 pm. Assignments that are due “by the end of the week” are therefore due at 11:59pm Sunday night.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

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| **Assignment** | **Percentage of Total Grade** |
| Quizzes (10) | 20% (2% each) |
| Discussion Board Participation (10) | 20% (2% each) |
| Exam #1 | 20% |
| Exam #2 | 25% |
| Final Paper | 15% |
| Total | 100% |

**READING AND MEDIA ASSIGNMENTS**

Each week, you will be assigned readings from the textbook, supplemental readings in the form of news articles and academic articles, and the lecture slides. There will are also videos that you will be expected to view, most of which will be found on the lecture slides. Materials that will be vital to the quizzes and exams will be found on the lecture slides, so make certain that you don’t overlook them. All of the above materials may appear on discussion prompts, quizzes and exams.

**QUIZZES AND EXAMS**

You must complete 10 Chapter Quizzes and 2 exams. These assignments are *open book* and *open notes* and will draw upon the material covered in that week’s assigned chapters, the supplemental readings, and the slides*.* Each chapter quiz and exam will be available under the corresponding weekly module tab. You are NOT permitted to work with others on the exams and quizzes.

Quizzes will have 10 multiple choice questions each. Exam #1 will have 40 multiple choice questions, and Exam #2 will have 50 multiple choice questions. Exams and quizzes are not timed. With the exception of Exam #2, which is due by 11:59p on Thursday 07/30, all quizzes and Exam #1 are due by the end of the week (11:59pm on Sunday) that they are assigned.

**DISCUSSION BOARD**

Participation for this class takes place on the discussion board. Each week, you will be required to respond to a discussion prompt by 11:59p on Wednesday, and to reply to another student’s initial post by the following Sunday at 11:59pm. Your initial response should be at least two full paragraphs (four or more sentences each). The reply should be at least one complete paragraph (four or more sentences total). “Hello, fellow student!” and similar greetings do not count towards the total required post length.

There are a few rules for discussions. First, be respectful. We tend to forget in the online environment that we are talking to another human being. It is okay to disagree with someone as long as you do it in the spirit of respectful debate. There will be zero tolerance for the use of hate speech, slurs, or otherwise bullying or abusive behavior. Failure to engage respectively with other students will result in a zero for that week’s assignment. Further incidents will dramatically impact your final grade.

Posts that demonstrate a failure to engage with the assigned materials will not receive full credit. Your engagement with other students’ posts must be thoughtful and well developed. If you want a good score, don’t be this person:



[IMAGE CAPTION: Tweet by Liv Howard that reads: \*discussion board posts\* student: I love bread. Me: Joe, I agree with you! I love bread too. I like the part where you said you loved bread. Great point!”]

**FINAL PAPER**

The purpose of this paper is to allow you to apply one of the theories that we have learned over the course of this semester to a social problem that is important to you. This will help you to apply the skills that you learned in this course to real world social issues. By understanding how sociologists apply theory to understanding social problems, you will better be able to understand your role social order and social dysfunction and will be able to engage critically with the way our society is constructed.

For this assignment, you will write a short paper in which you will apply one of the sociological theories we have learned this semester to a social issue. To support your analysis, you will use two academic sources. The paper is to be between 2 - 3 pages long, double spaced, with 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. It is worth 15 points.

There are many ways in which you can approach this assignment, but one effective way to do so is by selecting your topic and the sociological theory through which you wish to explore it first. The topic can be anything that interests you. You can apply any of the sociological theories that we covered over the course of the semester.

Next, you should select two academic sources to use in your paper. Academic sources are articles published by reputable academic journals. You can locate academic sources through the Wayne libraries page, at this link: https://library.wayne.edu/. Google Scholar is another good place to find academic articles. You may use news articles or other non-academic sources in your paper as well, but these do not count towards the two required academic sources.

When you write your paper, you should either use your sources to support your own argument, or critique why you think the authors are incorrect. You do not have to agree with the author(s) but you must engage honestly with what they have to say.

Your final paper should cover the following:

1.) Explain your topic. What social problem is your paper addressing?

2.) Apply the theory that you chose to the topic.

3.) Summarize what your sources have to say about the topic and explain why you agree or disagree.

4.) Suggest some ways in which the situation surrounding your topic might be improved. What kinds of policy or social changes might be applied to address the problems you have explored?

Make sure that you include a thesis statement in your opening paragraph and a closing paragraph explaining the significance of your overall argument. Additionally, bear in mind that this assignment is NOT asking you to simply express your personal opinions, but rather to engage with theory and social issues through an academic perspective. All direct quotes taken from sources must be enclosed in quotation marks and sourced, as failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and will have a significantly negative impact on your grade.

**GRADE SCALE**

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following scale:

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| --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **Percentage** |
| A | 93 - 100 |
| A- | 90 - 92 |
| B+ | 87 - 89 |
| B | 83 - 86 |
| B- | 80 - 82 |
| C+ | 77 - 79 |
| C | 73 - 76 |
| C- | 70 - 72 |
| D+ | 67 - 69 |
| D | 63 - 66 |
| D- | 60 - 62 |
| F | 59 or lower |

**COURSE SCHEDULE - note that the schedule and readings may be subject to change.**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date/Week** | **Topics and Readings** | **Assignments** |
| **WEEK #1**  **(05/04 – 05/10)** | ***Sociology and the Study of Social Problems***  1.) Chapter One.  2.) Lecture Slides #1.  3.) Excerpt from The Sociological Imagination, By C. Wright Mills (“The Promise”).  ***Social Class***  1.) Chapter Two.  2.) Lecture Slides #2. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #1. |
| **WEEK #2**  **(05/11-05/17)** | ***Race and Ethnicity***  1.) Chapter Three.  2.) Lecture Slides #3.  3.) “Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post Race America” by Charles A. Gallagher.  4.) “Teaching Race as a Social Construction: Two Interactive Class Exercises” by Nikki Khanna and Cherise A. Harris. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #2. |
| **WEEK #3**  **(05/18-05/24)** | ***Gender***  1.) Chapter Four.  2.) Lecture Slides #4.  3.) "Gender as Structure" by Barbara Risman.  4.) “Why Race, Class, and Gender Still Matter” by Andersen, Margaret L., and Patricia Hill Collins. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #3. |
| **WEEK #4**  **(05/25-05/31)** | ***Sexual Orientation***  1.) Chapter Five.  2.) Lecture Slides #5.  3.) “Naming Our Reality: Low-income LGBT People Documenting Violence, Discrimination and Assertions of Justice” by Michelle Billies et. al.  ***Families***  1.) Chapter Seven.  2.) Lecture Slides #7.  3.) “Reframing the Dialogue on Female-Headed Single-Parent Families” by  Cathryne L. Schmitz. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #4. |
| **WEEK #5**  **(06/01-06/07)** | ***Education***  1.) Chapter Eight.  2.) Lecture Slides #6.  3.) Excerpt from “How to Blame the Victim” by William Ryan.  4.) “Who’s at Risk in School and What’s Race Got to Do With It?” by Carla O’Connor, Lori Diane Hill, and Shanta R. Robinson. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #5. |
| **WEEK #6**  **(06/08-06/14)** | 1.) Exam #1 Review Slides. | Exam #1.  No other assignments. |
| **WEEK #7**  **(06/15-06/21)** | ***Work and the Economy***  1.) Chapter Nine.  2.) Lecture Slides #9.  3.) “Can We Finish the Revolution? Gender, Work-Family Ideals, and Institutional Constraint” by David S. Pedulla and Sarah Thébaud.  ***Health and Medicine***  1.) Chapter Ten.  2.) Lecture Slides #10.  3.) “Anchors on the Ship of Progress and Weeds in the Human Garden: Objectivist Rhetoric in American Eugenic Writings” by  Gerald (Jerry) O'Brien. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #6. |
| **WEEK #8**  **(06/22-06/28)** | ***The Media***  1.) Chapter Eleven.  2.) Lecture Slides #11.  3.) Excerpt from “It's Not the Media:’ The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children” by Karen Sternheimer.  ***Alcohol and Drug Abuse***  1.) Chapter Twelve.  2.) Lecture Slides #12.  3.) “Should Mary and Jane Be Legal? Americans’ Attitudes toward Marijuana and Same-Sex Marriage Legalization, 1988–2014” by Landon Schnabel and Eric Sevell. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #7. |
| **WEEK #9**  **(06/29-07/05)** | ***Crime and Criminal Justice***  1.) Chapter Thirteen.  2.) Lecture Slides #13.  3.) Excerpt from “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #8. |
| **WEEK #10**  **(07/06-07/12)** | ***Urbanization and Population Growth***  1.) Chapter Fourteen.  2.) Lecture Slides #14.  3.) “Population and Capitalism” by Martha E. Gimenez.  ***The Environment***  1.) Chapter Fifteen.  2.) Lecture Slides #15.  3.) Excerpt from “Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States” by Steve Lerner. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #9. |
| **WEEK #11**  **(07/13-07/19)** | ***War and Terrorism***  1.) Chapter Sixteen.  2.) Lecture Slides #16.  3.) “Terrorism” by Ziad Munson.  ***Social Problems and Social Action***  1.) Chapter Seventeen.  2.) Lecture Slides #17.  3.) “Student Activism 2.0” by Zachary Jason. | Class Participation on Discussion Board.  Quiz #10. |
| **WEEK #12**  **(07/20-07/26)** | ***No reading assignments.*** | Final Paper Due by 11:59pm on 07/26. |
| **FINALS WEEK**  **(07/27-07/30)** | ***No reading assignments.*** | Exam #2 Due by 11:59p on Thursday 07/30.  No other assignments due. |