



## Sociology 105 Social Problems

Spring 2008

Classroom: WDS 1127

Class Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 11am-12:15pm

Instructor: Jonathon E. Mote

Office: ASY 3105

Office Hours: 9-11am TTH, and by appointment.

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Class Website: [elms.umd.edu](http://elms.umd.edu)

Course Prerequisites: Interest and Enthusiasm

### Course Overview and Objectives

This course will introduce you to the sociological study of social problems. The goal of the course is to learn how sociology analyzes social problems and to understand how they are socially constructed. We will explore such general questions as: How is an issue socially constructed into a social problem? How does the use of statistics and numbers affect how some issues become constructed into social problems while others do not? This approach is intended to reveal the *social* rather than *individual* roots of such problems. The goal is to foster a more objective understanding of how to develop solutions and policies to social problems.

In this course, you will be challenged to go beyond your own closely held beliefs to look at social issues through the perspective of sociology. However, this course recognizes that persuasion is a critical tool in what gets labeled a “social problem.” And with every social problem, there are opposing positions. Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to make informed arguments either for or against particular issues. Remember: intellectual argument hinges on facts and analysis, not volume.

### Rules of the Game

1. Be respectful
2. Be responsible
3. Class starts and ends on time
4. Turn off cellphones, beepers, pagers, etc.
5. No laptops unless medically required.

### Attendance

Since class participation is an important part of your final grade, ***you can't miss classes and expect to do well in this course.*** If you know you'll be out of town for whatever reason (holiday, religious observance, etc.) or a family emergency comes up and you have to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time if at all possible. If an absence occurs when an exam or assignment is due, students must give ample warning and submit written documentation about the nature of the absence.

### Academic Integrity Expectations

Students and instructors in this course are both responsible for upholding academic integrity and are expected to adhere to the University Honor Code. Violations such as cheating, plagiarism, forged documents, forged signatures, submission of the same documents to different courses are all serious violations and will be reported to the Student Honor Council and the Office of Judicial Programs. For more information on such violations, reporting procedures, and attached penalties, students are strongly encouraged to review the relevant sections in the “Schedule of Classes.”

### Student Honor Pledge

Maryland has an Honor Pledge, approved by the University Senate and the Student Government Association. The Pledge statement should be handwritten and signed on the front of all papers, projects, or other assignments submitted for evaluation in the course. Please see the Schedule of Classes for details. The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads: *"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."*

### Inclement Weather or Emergencies

If the University is closed for inclement weather or emergencies, class will be rescheduled if the calendar permits.

### Succeeding in the Class

You will be expected to actively participate in an effort to ensure your own and your colleagues' understanding of the ideas presented in class. We need your commitment to demonstrate a willingness to contribute ideas, to listen to others, and to be a constructive force in the learning process. For every hour that we spend in class, I recommend you set aside two hours for careful reading of the texts, preparation for each class session, and reviewing your notes. I recommend that you do the reading as soon as you can ***before the day it is assigned***, and then skim it once more before class. You will also find class discussions much more meaningful if you spend some time before class, writing out two or three questions that the assigned readings address. When doing the readings, try to construct and tentatively answer some questions about the reading. Finally, if you find an article in a current newspaper or magazine that is relevant to this course, please bring it to class.

### Contacts

For simple questions, the easiest way to reach me is by email at [jmote@socy.umd.edu](mailto:jmote@socy.umd.edu). You can also always catch me before and after class. For more difficult questions, please come see me during office hours. My office hours are on Tuesday and Thursday, from 9:30-11am. Given the nature of my research, I may have to cancel office hours and/or class, and I will let the class know when that is the case. If you can't make these hours, please let me know and we can arrange another time. When you visit during office hours, come prepared with some fairly specific questions.

### About Me

Currently, I am an assistant research scientist in the Center for Innovation, a research center of the sociology department. I was born and raised in Iowa, which means I'm wholesome, earnest and a tad boring. I am also a proud new owner of a Schnoodle.

### Readings

The course does not utilize a textbook, but will focus on several high-profile (and hopefully interesting) recent texts, as well as a few additional articles. The books will be available at the college bookstore, but they can probably be bought much cheaper online at Half.com or Powells.com. I will make the other articles available to you.

### ***Required Books***

Best, Joel. *Damned Lies and Statistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2001. **ISBN:** 0520219783

DeSipio, Louis and Rodolfo O. de la Garza. *Making Americans, Remaking America*. Boulder: Westview Press. 1998. **ISBN:** 0813319447

Dessler, Andrew and Edward Parson. *The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change: A Guide to the Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN-10: 0521539412

Giddens, Anthony. *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives*. 2002. London: Routledge. ISBN-10: 0415944872

Massey, Doug and Nancy Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1998. ISBN: 0674018214

***Required Articles (see Blackboard site)***

Bell, Derrick Bell. 1992. "Divining Our Racial Themes," in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well, The Permanence of Racism* (Basic Books 1992)

Blumer, Hans. 1971. Social Problems as Collective Behavior. *Social Problems* 18(3): 298-306.

Brimelow, Peter. 1992. "Time to Rethink Immigration." *National Review*, June 22, 1992.

Capps, Randy. 2007. *Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children*. Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza.

Cole, David. 1994. The New Know Nothingism: Five Myths About Immigration. *The Nation* (October 17, 1994)

Collins, Harry. "A Personal Introduction to the Sociology of Science for Non-Sociologists." (available online at <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/schoolsanddivisions/academicschools/socsi/staff/acad/collins/gravwave/personal.html>)

D'Souza, Dinesh. 1995. "The End of Racism," *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (Free Press 1995)

Hart-Landsberg, Martin. 2006. Neoliberalism: Myths and Reality. *Monthly Review*.

Hilgartner, Stephen and Charles L. Bosk. 1998. The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model, *American Journal of Sociology* 94(1):53-78.

Marburger, John H. 2004. "Statement on Scientific Integrity in the Bush Administration"

Massey, Douglas and Garvey Lundy. 2001. Use of Black English and Racial Discrimination in Urban Housing Markets. *Urban Affairs Review* 36: 452-469.

Mills, C. Wright. (1959) "The Promise of Sociology" from *The Sociological Imagination*. (available online at <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/sapp/Mills.html>)

Norberg, Johan. 2004. Three Cheers for Global Capitalism. *The American Enterprise* 15(4): 20-27.

Ritzer, George. 2006. The Globalization of Nothing. *SAIS Review*: 189-200.

Schneider, Joseph W. 1985. Social Problems Theory: The Constructionist View. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 11: 209-229.

Union of Concerned Scientists. 2004. *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science*

Wilkes, Rima and John Iceland. 2004. "Hypersegregation in the Twenty-First Century." *Demography* 41(1): 23-36.

## Course Requirements

- 1. Class Participation.** To get the most out of the class, students need to carefully read and review assigned readings, and participate in *weekly* discussions. Your class participation grade will be based on being present for and participating in class discussions and activities. It is absolutely crucial that the readings be done on time; please make sure that you read it before we discuss it in class. You are *strongly encouraged* to read the **New York Times Online** (or any paper of your choice) and to discuss relevant articles in class. **PLEASE NOTE:** Class participation accounts for one-fifth of your grade, and mere attendance will not guarantee you full credit for this part.
- 2. Position Papers.** With each social “problem” covered in the course, there are a multitude of perspectives, positions and opinions. For each topical area, students will write a five page, double-spaced, (one inch margins, Time New Roman pt. 11) position paper making an argument for or against the particular topic. Each paper is worth 25 points. Grammar, spelling and proper citing are all important!!
- 3. Tests.** There will be two tests, a mid-term and final, comprised of short answer and two to three paragraph essay questions. The only aspect of the material that is cumulative across the exams is the first two units on the syllabus ("the sociological perspective" and "defining social problems"), which will be integrated into the material throughout the course. The mid-term will be held in class on March 6 and the final exam will be held on May 15.

## Grading Standards for Papers

Grading criteria varies by subfield, type of assignment, and course. In general, however, I would expect that "A" position papers would exhibit the following qualities:

- Well-supported
- Sophisticated and important argument
- Organizational structure that facilitates the development of the argument
- Mechanical soundness (consistent citation style, few or no grammatical errors, etc.)
- Evidence of research or good use of sources
- Creative in topic or approach.

A "B" paper lacks one or two of these qualities (e.g., a well-supported, sophisticated argument that is not well presented or somewhat mechanically unsound; or a well-written and organized paper that lacks depth, sophistication, or creativity in the argument). A "C" paper tends to lack several of these qualities, particularly a thesis, and is often poorly written. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, please visit the following: [http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/plag\\_stud\\_what.html](http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/plag_stud_what.html).

## Grading Scale

The course is graded on a scale, and the total points that determine your final grade are based on the following criteria:

Mid-term Exam	50 points
Final Exam	50 points
Position Papers	100 points
Class Participation	50 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>250 points</b>

I will use the following scale to determine grades:

POINTS	GRADE	POINTS	GRADE
235-250	A	175-189	C
220-234	A-	170-174	C-
215-219	B+	165-169	D+
200-214	B	150-164	D
195-199	B-	126-149	D-
190-194	C+	0-125	F

***No "extra credit" work is given. I do not grant extensions or give makeup tests except in what I consider very extreme circumstances, i.e. medical or family emergencies with documentation.***

#### Students With Disabilities

If you have a documented physical or learning disability, necessary accommodations will be made. A written request should be made one week prior to each exam for which accommodation is appropriate. University of Maryland documentation of disability needs to be obtained from Disability Support Services (301--314-7682).

Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Major Topics	Required Reading Assignments
1	1/29-1/31	<b>Introduction to the Sociological Perspective</b>	Mills article; Collins article; Blumer article; Best, 1-29.
2	2/5-2/7	<b>The Construction of Social Problems</b>	Schneider article; Hilgartner and Bosk article; Best, Chapters 2, 5, 6.
		<b>Race and Inequality</b>	
3	2/12-2/14	Positions and Background	Bell article; D'Souza article; Massey and Denton, 1-82
4	2/19-2/21	Causes and Perpetuation	Massey and Denton, 83-149; Massey and Lundy article.
5	2/26-2/28	Public Policy	Massey and Denton, 186-238; Wilkes and Iceland article. <i>1<sup>st</sup> Position paper due on 2/28</i>
6	3/4-3/6	Review and In-class Mid-term	
		<b>Immigration</b>	
7	3/11-3/13	Positions and Background	Cole article, Brimelow article; Capps (Paying the Price), 1-7.
<i>Spring Break!!</i>			
8	3/25-3/27	History of U.S. Policy	DeSipio, 1-92.
9	4/1-4/3	Problems with the Melting Pot	DeSipio, 95-134 <i>2<sup>nd</sup> Position paper due on 4/3</i>
		<b>Globalization</b>	
10	4/8-4/10	Positions and Background	Norberg article; Hart-Landsberg article; Ritzer article.
11	4/15-4/17	Globalization and Risk	Giddens, 1-35.
12	4/22-4/24	Worlds Colliding	Giddens, 36-82. <i>3<sup>rd</sup> Position paper due on 4/24</i>
		<b>Climate Change</b>	
13	4/29-5/1	Positions and Background	UCS article; Marburger article; Gore, An Inconvenient Truth (in class); Inconvenient Truths for Al Gore (in class); Dessler and Parson, 1-16.
14	5/6-5/8	The Science	Dessler and Parson, 18-88.
15	5/13	Social Impact and Politics	Dessler and Parson, 90-177. <i>Final Position paper due on 5/13</i>
	5/15	Final Exam 8:00am-10:00pm	

**Sociology 105**  
**Social Problems**

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Course Contract

I have read and understand the format of this course and the requirements and policies described in the syllabus. I acknowledge that failure to comply with the terms of the syllabus will affect my success in this class. Students and instructors in this course are both responsible for upholding academic integrity and are expected to adhere to the University Honor Code.

Student's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_