

**SOCIOLOGY 105:
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Fall 2008 (FC01)**

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Class Meetings: TuThr-6:00-7:15 pm
Class Location: Plant Science Building 1130
Office Hours: Tuesday 4-5 pm or by
appointment

Teaching Assistants: Christopher Roberts (croger13@umd.edu)
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Course Description

This course will take a critical approach to understanding the nature and consequences of contemporary social problems. We will examine different aspects of particular social problems such as those related to political power, health and education. Many of the topics covered are interconnected, thus you will find that throughout the semester we will return to themes and concepts already discussed.

Much of the material presented in this class will challenge the values and beliefs you have acquired throughout your lifetime. Given that we are using a critical sociological lens to examine social problems, this requires that you look at society from a vantage point other than the one you use everyday. Whether you ultimately change your beliefs or they remain the same, I hope this course encourages you to reflect upon why you believe what you believe, helps you to understand the implications of those beliefs and helps you to compare your perspectives with those of others and sociological research. We shall also cover the ways in which individuals and groups respond to social problems and encourage you to think of possible solutions.

Course Objectives

1. Understand how sociologists define social problems.
2. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of competing explanations of social problems.
3. Understand how sociologists research social problems.
4. Become familiar with the prevalence of major contemporary social problems.
5. Understand the consequences of social problems.
6. Analyze major contemporary social problems in class discussions, readings and writing assignments.
7. Think of possible alternatives to address social problems.

Required Texts

Chomsky, Norm. 2002. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda. Second Edition.* ISBN: 978-1583225363

Eitzen, D. Stanley. 2009. *Solutions to Social Problems: Lessons from State and Local Government.* Pearson Education, Inc. ISBN: 978-0-205-57873-3

Hedges, Chris. 2003. *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning.* Anchor Books. ISBN: 978-1400034635 (First year book of the year (2008-2009), pick up copy in 2130 Mitchell Building)

Additional Required Readings. (Posted on Blackboard www.elms.umd.edu)

Course Expectations

1. *Class Etiquette:* This class begins promptly at 6:00 pm. To avoid class disruptions please arrive on time and come ready to take notes, participate in class activities, and listen to lectures. Since one of the objectives of this course is to expose you to different perspectives of understanding social problems, primarily from a structural rather than from an individual perspective, some discussions will be very controversial. While you might disagree with information presented in the readings, with your classmates or with me, I ask that you remain respectful and open-minded and elect to use evidence and logic to support your views.
2. *Class Format:* I will use a combination of lecture, discussion and class exercises to teach this course. This format requires that you actively participate. In some class sessions I will ask you to meet in small groups to discuss a particular concept or topic.
3. *Films:* During the course of the semester we will watch several films. You are expected to participate in discussion regarding the content of the films. I will also include questions about the films on the exams.
4. *Religious Observances:* Students will not be penalized for attendance, or in any other way, due to participation in religious observances. If you need to miss classes due to religious observance please provide me with a note of the dates that you will be absent no later than the end of the second week of class.
5. *Absences:* Campus Senate policy requires students who are absent due to illness/injury to furnish documentary support to the instructor. I require students to contact me by email or by phone prior to class time in which you indicate that you have an illness or an injury. You must provide written documentation verifying your illness/injury immediately upon your return to class. You will not be allowed to turn in missed assignments or make up quizzes, tests, papers, etc. if you have not provided this documentation. Documentation not presented to me in a timely manner will not be accepted. In addition, if it is found that you have falsified the documentation provided, I will refer you to the University's Student Conduct Office.
6. *Disability Services:* The University of Maryland is legally required to provide the necessary facilities, services and programs to student with documented disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability and need accommodations to attend, participate or complete any course requirement, please register with the Office of Disability Support Service, 0126 Shoemaker Hall, and provide me with the required forms at the beginning of the semester. For more information please visit their website, <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/>.
7. *Honor Code:* You are required to follow the Code of Academic Integrity set in place by the University of Maryland Student Honor Council. The standards of this code hold you accountable for:
 - a. Cheating: intentional use of unauthorized information to aid you in class assignment or exam.
 - b. Fabrication: intentionally falsifying or inventing citations or other information.
 - c. Facilitating Academic Dishonesty: Knowingly assisting another student to engage in cheating, fabrication, or plagiarism.
 - d. Plagiarism: Knowingly using someone else's words as one's own without correct citation methods.

For more information visit <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>

Grading and Assignments

Grading Component	Percentage of Grade	Date
Class Participation & Attendance	10	
Reflection Assignment	20	See pages 5-7
Character Adaptation	10	November 13
Midterm Exam	30	October 14
Final Exam	30	December 16

Class Participation and Attendance:

Attendance to class is required. You are expected to be in class for lecture and be prepared to participate in class discussions. Your participation in this class is expected and is an important aspect of the class. As a component of the learning process, it is your responsibility to read assignments, attend class, ask questions, think critically and discuss your ideas with the class.

Exams: Each exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. These questions will be taken from your readings, lectures, films and other materials discussed in class.

Reflection Assignments: To help you process the major concepts, themes, and issues discussed in class you are asked to craft and present a piece of work that showcases your reaction and thoughts to a particular issue or topic. There are **5** reflection assignments listed in the course outline (pages 5-7), you are to choose **3** of the **5** reflection assignments. These reflections should be no more than 2 pages long (12 point font, double spaced). Each reflection assignment will be graded out of 3 points.

Three Points: means you have provided an exceptional response which clearly

- Addresses one key concept/theme from the reading, for example “culture of poverty”
- Discusses how you understood the particular social problem before it was introduced in class and,
- Discusses how you view this social problem after it has been covered
 - Exceptional reflections should indicate that you carefully read the assigned text. Show your ability to go beyond ideas covered in class discussion and lecture. Demonstrate your capacity to draw connections to points that are not obviously or directly discussed in the reading.

Two Points: means you have provided satisfactory response that

- Indicates that you read the assignment and have addressed one key concept or theme discussed in the reading.
- While the reflection covered how you came to view the issue before and after its introduction in class, this is not clearly or effectively stated.
 - A satisfactory reflection shows your capacity to convey important concepts covered in class but does not stand out from the crowd in the way that an exceptional reflection does.

One Point: means you have provide unsatisfactory response which

- Did not engage class readings
- Did not address how you reviewed the social problem before or after its introduction.
- Writing is unclear and confusing
- Did not follow instructions

Medium for Your Reflection Assignments: Given the diverse ways in which people are able to process ideas, you are asked to select from 6 mediums below to engage a contemporary social issue covered in class.

1. *Short Essay*
2. *Poetry or Spoken Word*

3. *Photograph* (with explanation of how this image engages a key concept/theme in reading)
4. *Drawing* (with explanation of how this image engages a key concept/theme in reading)
5. *Rap* (written but also to perform in class)
6. *Song* (written but also to perform in class)

You have the option to select a different medium each time you do your reflection. For example, you can choose to do health (essay), poverty (poetry), family (Photograph) and political power (rap). A sign up sheet will be passed around after the second week of class. If you fail to turn in your reflection assignment on the day you signed up you, will not receive credit for that assignment and there are no make ups.

All work must be original. Images can be altered to be your own.

Character Adaptation: You will be given a brief sketch of a specific character to engage using the knowledge you have acquired in class and through research. Upon receiving the character sketch you will attempt to understand their character's worldview and life experiences by obtaining information about the character using a variety of sources (such as books, professional journal articles, movies, newspaper articles; interviews, poetry, music, websites etc.).

Part 1 Personal Character Reflection Paper: From the information obtained about the character, please submit a paper no longer than 3 pages. The paper should be written from the "first person" perspective as if you are the person, and should highlight the main events that have formed the person's worldview, perspective on life and its challenges. A comprehensive reference list should be provided that includes at least 6 references from written materials (no more than 2 of these references should be from websites). Do not rely solely on personal stories, interviews, and ethnographic data.

Part 2 Class Presentation: Students volunteers will have the opportunity to showcase their findings/character to the class. On the last day of class you will present your character reflection to the class. The class will participate in this project by you asking questions. Remember you are to answer questions in first person and they class should assume that you are that person.

General Grading Guidelines: What Constitutes an "A," "B," or "C" Grade for a Paper:

In order to obtain an "A" or "A-" in any given written assignment it is not enough to merely complete the stated assignment. Rather your paper must be clear and exhibit superior form and content.

In reference to form, each written assignment should:

- Contain virtually no typographical and grammatical errors;
- Exhibit clarity as well as elegance in flow;
- Provide adequate citations for all quotations;
- And be well organized, with a coherent introduction as well as a conclusion that does more than merely summarize what has already been said.

In reference to content, each written assignment should:

- Indicate that you have carefully read the assigned texts;
- Show your ability to go beyond what ideas covered in class discussion and lecture;
- Demonstrate your capacity to draw connections points that are not obvious directly discussed in the reading;

Some form of "B" will be given to assignments that:

- Indicate a good grasp of the text in question, show that you can develop a coherent argument and display that you have capacity to write decent prose. Such assignments are average in the sense that they do not stand out from the crowd in the way "A" assignments do.

- Some form of “B” will also be given to assignments that are either unusually strong in content, but somewhat weaker in form, or vice versa. Obviously, a “B+” will go to assignments that are better than the majority and that demonstrate at least the potential to be truly excellent.
- A “B-“ will be given to assignments which, although coherently argued and decently composed, do not go much beyond a solid understanding of the text under consideration. Grades in the “B+” to “B-“ range should be read as expressions of my sense that you are doing an acceptable job of engaging the assigned material.

Some form of “C” will go to assignments that I find seriously flawed for one reason or another. I will give you some form of a “C”:

- If the quality of your writing is impeding your ability to express your thoughts clearly;
- If when I complete your assignment, I still cannot identify your central argument;
- If your assignment fails to go beyond a simple summary of the assigned reading;
- If your assignment fails to provide the evidence or support necessary to articulate and defend your basic claims;
- If it appears to jump from topic to topic without rhyme or reason

Course Outline and Readings

I. Introduction to Social Problems

September 2	Introduction, Overview of Syllabus & Goals of Course
September 4	Using the Sociological Imagination to Understand Social Problems bell hooks. 1994. Theory as Liberatory Practice (PDF) Charles Lemert. 1999. Social Theory: It’s Uses and Pleasures (PDF)
September 9	Investigating the Levels of the Social Pincus, Fred L. Discrimination Comes in Many Forms (PDF) Barak, Leighton & Flavin. 2007. Class, Race, and Gender (PDF)
September 11	Social Solutions: The Role of Social Movements Eitzen and Sage. Introduction: States and Cities Solving Social Problems McAdam and Snow. 1997. Social Movements: Introduction (PDF)

II. Environmental Abuse

September 16	NO CLASS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Trash Assignment Due: Post assignment on blackboard (instructions on blackboard) Diamond, Jared. The End of Easter (PDF) View Film in Hornbake (Too Hot Not To Handle)
September 18	State Initiatives to Solve Environmental Abuse Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 3: Initiatives to Reduce Global Warming Go over trash assignment
September 23-25	Environmental Racism Pulido, Linda. 2000. Rethinking Environmental Racism (PDF)

September 30 People Making Change (TA Presentations)
Reading (TBA)

III. The United States Health and Health Care System

October 2 State of US Health Care System
Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 8: Health Care for All
Janny Scott. Life at the Top in America Isn't Just Better, It's Longer. [\(PDF\)](#)
Reflection Assignment Due (Environment)
Sicko **(Film)**

October 7 Health and the Third World
Scheper-Hughes. The Last Commodity [\(PDF\)](#) pp. 153-end
Silverstein, Ken. Viewing Bodily Imperfection as a Health Problem [\(PDF\)](#)

October 9 Pharmaceutical Companies Influences on U.S. Health Care Industry
Wilkes et al. 2000. Direct to Consumer Prescription Drugs Advertising [\(PDF\)](#)
Big Bucks, Big Pharma: Marketing Disease & Pushing Drug **(Film)**

October 14 **Midterm**

IV. War, Media and Democracy

October 16 Chomsky, Noam. 1991. Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of
Propaganda (pp. 9-65)

October 21 The State of Democracy
Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 2: Democracy and Campaign Reform
Reflection Assignment Due (Health)

October 23 Hedges, Chris. War is the Force that Gives Meaning (pp. 1-82)

October 28 Hedges, Chris. War is the Force that Gives Meaning (pp. 83-185)
Chris Hedges on Campus: October 29, 4pm. Colony Ballroom STAMP UNION
Mark you calendars to go see/hear Chris Hedges Speak.

October 30 Chomsky, Noam. 1991. Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of
Propaganda (pp. 69-100)
Taking Sides Debate: Does the threat of terrorism warrant the curtailment of our
civil liberties? [\(PDF\)](#)

V. Poverty

November 4 History of US Policies on Poverty
Iceland. Poverty and Policy [\(PDF\)](#)
Reflection Paper Due (Democracy media war)

November 6 Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 6: Poverty, Homelessness, & Affordable Housing
Moore and Collins. 2008. Why Can't People Feed Themselves? [\(PDF\)](#)

November 11 Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 7: Improving Wages

November 13 **Character Adaptation Due**
Student Volunteers for Presentations

VI. Education Inequality

November 18 Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. Savage Inequalities (PDF)
Kozol, Jonathan. 2005. The Shame of the Nation (PDF)

November 20 Leonardt, David. The College Dropout Boom (PDF)
Farkas. The Black-White Test Score Gap (PDF)
Reflection Paper Due (Poverty)

November 25 Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 5: Improving Education
Schwartz, Barry. The Debasing of Education (PDF)

November 27 **Thanksgiving: No Class!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

VII. Families

December 2 Meadow and Stacey. Keyword: Family (PDF)
Meezan. 2005. Gay Marriage, Same Sex Parenting, & America's Children (PDF)
Daddy and Papa (film)

December 4 Cherlin. Should the Government Promote Marriage (PDF)
Quian. Breaking the Last Taboo (PDF)

December 9 Wrap up, Evaluation, Exam Review
Reflection Assignment Due (Families)

Final Exam Tuesday December 16, 6:00pm

**The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus and structure of this course when she sees fit.

**No make up or late assignments will be accepted unless there is an excused absence or emergency.

**No Extra Credit!!!