

SOCIOLOGY 105-401:
Introduction to Contemporary Social Problems
M W, 2:00-3:15 pm, Art-Socy 2309
Fall 2008

Instructor: Daniel Williams
Email: dwilliams@socy.umd.edu
Phone: 405-6040
Office: 3311C Art-Socy Building *
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:50-10:50, and by appt.

Course Description

What makes something a “social problem”? Why is it that today’s problems were not problems in the past? Is everyone equally affected to the same degree by the same problem? Why do problems persist despite attempts to solve them? What new problems are created by solutions to other problems? In this course we will look at several contemporary social problems in several areas of society, including inequalities of race, gender and social class; crime and criminal justice; health; education; the family; government and politics; work and occupations; consumerism and the media; and other problems in contemporary society. We will see how many social problems are the product not simply of individual choices and actions, but of larger social forces, structures and institutions. By taking this perspective we will develop what sociologist C. Wright Mills called the “Sociological Imagination”. While we will deal mainly with social problems in U.S. society, we will also consider select social problems in other countries, as well as global social problems such as the environment and technology and society .

Course Objectives

- Learn to think about social problems and society sociologically.
- Learn about particular social problems in contemporary American society.
- Learn to pose critical questions about any social problem.
- Learn to consider different political perspectives on various social problems.

Course Texts

- ❖ **Social Problems.** 3rd edition, by John J. Macionis.

Available at Campus Bookstores, also on Amazon and other booksellers.

- ❖ Articles posted on Blackboard

Course Blackboard

Blackboard will be used for 1) posting of lecture notes, and 2) to allow you to keep track of your grades and academic progress. As a registered student in the class, you will have automatic access to Blackboard

* My office is difficult to find. Directions: From the main (plaza) entrance of Art-Socy building, go up the stairs to the 3xxx classrooms, follow the hall around to the right, you will see another small set of stairs. Walk up these stairs, go through the doors to the right, pass the bathrooms on your left, and go into the first door on your left that says “Electronic Media Center”, in that hallway of offices is 3311C.

for this course. Lecture notes will be posted by the end of Friday afternoon each week. You can estimate your final grade over the course of the semester as grades are added.

Assignments

Reading the Syllabus. Know the information on this syllabus.

Quizzes. 10 over course of semester (20%). There will be **ten** quizzes over the course of the semester. The purpose of these is first, to help you keep up with the reading, and second, to give us a beginning point for lectures. Quizzes will always be on reading from the textbook. They will *usually* have two questions which will be multiple-choice or true-false. Each quiz is worth 2 percent of your final grade. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Attendance/Participation (5%). “90% of life is just showing up.” Going to class is a good habit. It will save you time and energy. You will spend less time cramming for the exams and catching up. In a large class, I do not expect you to speak in every class, but to be attentive and intellectually present. **Note on In-Class Conduct:** All cell phones must be silenced and “inactive” (i.e. no text messaging) during class. Laptops may only be used for taking notes in class, not for instant messaging, surfing the net, etc. The instructor reserves the right to ban laptops from the classroom at any time.

Response Papers (10%).

- Each student must write TWO response papers to two articles posted on Blackboard; **one prior to the Midterm (Oct. 20), and one after.**
- Each paper should be at least two, no more than four, full double-spaced pages, with 12-point font.
- Response papers are due on the date for which they are assigned reading in class. They drop one grade for each calendar day they are turned in late.
- Papers should have your *name, date, the course number and section number,* and the *article title* about which you are writing in the top right or left hand corner, as well as be *stapled* and *page numbered.* If they do not conform to these requirements, you will lose points.

Each paper should do the following:

1. **Summarize the article.** What social problem is addressed in the article? What are the objective facts and subjective values of the problem? What are the different perspectives on the problem—i.e. is the seriousness or existence of the problem debated?
2. **Connect the ideas in the article to the related chapter in the textbook.** What *sociological concepts* or *theories* from the textbook chapter are related to the article? Include page numbers for the specific text material to which you link material from the assigned reader article.
3. **Connect the ideas in the articles to your personal experience, or that of someone you know.** Can you or someone you know relate to the problem? If not, are there problems that are similar to it which you are familiar with?
4. **Give your personal opinion or assessment of the reading.** Do you find the arguments, evidence, and points persuasive?

Social Problem Paper (15%). Students will write a paper on a social problem of their choice to be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Each paper should be 6-8 pages in length. Social Problem papers must use THREE (3) *outside, academic* sources (books or articles). More specific guidelines TBA.

Midterm (25%). Both the midterm and the final will include multiple choice/T-F/fill in blank questions

as well as short answer questions.

Final (25%). The final will be the same format as the midterm. It is **NOT** cumulative.

Grades

94 - 100%	A
90 - 93%	A-
87 - 89%	B+
84 - 86%	B
80 - 83%	B-
77 - 79%	C+
74 - 76%	C
70 - 73%	C-
60 - 69%	D+/D

CORE Course

You may have chosen this course as part of your CORE Liberal Arts and Sciences Program, the general education portion of your degree program. CORE Distributive Studies courses are designed to ensure that you will take a look at several different academic disciplines and the way they create and analyze knowledge about the world. A faculty and student committee approved this CORE Distributive Studies course because it will introduce you to ideas and issues that are central to a major intellectual discipline and because it promises to involve you actively in the learning process. These objectives will be achieved through a program of text and article readings, lectures, discussions, films, short writing assignments and examinations.

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, and 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.

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).

Religious Observance Holidays

Students with religious holidays that conflict with the course calendar should inform the instructor of those dates by e-mail at least two weeks prior to the holiday.

Make-Up Work/Exams

Make-ups for exams or quizzes must be arranged before you miss them. Email as soon as possible if you must miss without prior arrangements. No make-ups on quizzes will be given, except in extraordinary circumstances such as documented illness.

Incompletes

Incompletes will only be given when you are otherwise passing the course, but cannot complete it due to some unforeseen circumstances beyond your control.

Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments*

*Readings and schedule may change.

SOCIOLOGY and SOCIAL PROBLEMS

- 9/3 Introduction to Course
Handout: "The Culture of Fear" (Glassner)
Handout: "Damned Lies and Statistics" (Best)
- 9/8 Ch. 1: Sociology: Studying Social Problems, pp. 1-27

PROBLEMS of SOCIAL INEQUALITY

- 9/10 Ch. 2: Poverty and Wealth, pp. 28-57
Quiz 1
- 9/15 Article: "Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America", (19 pgs.)
Article: "Has Welfare Reform Benefited the Poor?", (14 pgs.)
Film: *Wage Slaves*
- 9/17 Ch. 3: Racial and Ethnic Inequality, pp. 58-92
Quiz 2

Article: "Wealth Matters" (5 pgs.)
Film: *Race: Power of an Illusion: Part 3 The House We Live In*
- 9/22 Ch. 4: Gender Inequality, pp. 92-121
Quiz 3
- 9/24 Article: "Detours on the Road to Equality" (7 pgs.)
Film: *Tough Guise*

PROBLEMS of DEVIANCE, CONFORMITY and WELL-BEING

- 9/29 Ch. 6: Crime and Criminal Justice, pp. 148-179
Quiz 4

- 10/1 Article: “When Kids Become Victims of Violence”, (10 pgs.)
Film: TBA
- 10/6 Ch. 9: Alcohol and Other Drugs, pp. 236-265
Quiz 5
- 10/8 Article: “Should Drug Use Be Decriminalized?”, (15 pgs.)
Special Topic: Lowering the Drinking Age on College Campuses
- 10/13 Ch. 10: Physical and Mental Health, pp. 266-295
Quiz 6
- 10/15 Article: “Viewing Bodily Imperfection as a Health Problem” (9 pgs.)
Midterm Review
Film: *Sicko*
- 10/20 ***** MIDTERM EXAM*****

PROBLEMS of SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- 10/22 Ch. 11: Economy and Politics, pp. 296-321
- 10/27 Article: “The Service Society and the Changing Experience of Work”, pp. 305-311
Ch. 13: Family Life, pp. 350-375
Quiz 7
- 10/29 Article: “The Nanny Chain”, p. 162-170
Film: *In the Name of Love*
- 11/3 Ch. 14: Education, pp. 376-403
Quiz 8
- 11/5 Article: “English Only Triumphs, but the Costs are High” (6 pgs.)
Article: “Situational Ethics and College Student Cheating” (5 pgs.)
News Story: *Pay for Grades*

CONSUMERISM and CULTURE

- 11/10 Excerpts from Born to Buy
Quiz 9
Film: *No Logo*
- 11/12 Excerpts from Born to Buy
- 11/17 Excerpts from Fast Food Nation
Quiz 10
Film: *Super Size Me*
- 11/19 Excerpts from Fast Food Nation

GLOBAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS

- 11/24** Ch. 16: Population and Global Inequality, pp. 430-457
- 11/26** **No Class – Thanksgiving Break**
- 12/1** Ch. 15: Urban Life, pp. 404-429
Quiz 11
- 12/3** Article: “The Rise and Fall of Mass Transit”, (6 pgs.)
Film: TBA
- 12/8** War and Violence.
Readings TBA.
Film: *Obedience*
- 12/10** Article: “Making Sense of the Senseless: Understanding Genocide”, (6 pgs.)
Article: “The War on Terror and a Terrified Public” (13 pgs.)

PAPER DUE at Beginning of Class

Course Summary and Evaluation

Exam 2 Review

***** THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1:30-3:30 pm: EXAM 2 (Non-Cumulative) *****