

Sociology 105: Introduction to Contemporary Social Problems

Spring 2009

Department of Sociology

University of Maryland, College Park

Instructor: Mary Kniskern

Office: ASY 4103

Phone: 301-405-6423

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:45-2:30 PM, or by appointment (Mon/Tues/Thurs hours vary-send availability)

Email: mkniskern@socy.umd.edu

All emails should include the header: SOCY 105-(Your last name)-topic of email (assignment/illness/?, etc.)

Mailbox: Kniskern 2112 Art-Sociology Building

Lecture schedule and location	12:30-1:45 PM Tuesdays and Thursdays Art-Sociology 1213 (Section 0601)
Deadline for schedule adjustment	February 6, 2009
Deadline to Drop with W Mark	April 10, 2009
Final Exam	Date: Tuesday , May 19, 2008 Time: 1:30-3:30 PM Location: ASY 1213

Note: Students are not required to take more than three exams on one day. If your schedule is such that you have four or more exams scheduled on Tuesday, please let me know **prior to April 10th**, so that a make up can be scheduled for all students in this situation at one time. Travel plans do NOT justify a change in the exam schedule. The University Exam schedule for this time slot is late in the testing week. Please make your travel plans accordingly, or select another time slot with an earlier exam schedule.

Course Description and Objectives:

This introductory level sociology course fulfills the requirements for one of your CORE Distributive Studies Courses in Social and Behavioral Sciences. For many of you, this will be the only sociology course you ever take. As such it is intended to expose you to the basic tools used by sociologists, and to provide you with another perspective on the world in which you live. Through the readings and class discussions, you will develop your own awareness of what's going on around you, and increase your ability to be proactive in your life choices. For future sociology majors, this course provides foundational skills you will need in further studies in the field.

While developing a foundation in sociology, we will also work toward fulfilling the purposes of the CORE program, namely to provide you with the background and skills to be successful in your lifelong learning endeavors and professional life. In addition to the University CORE objectives found at: <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/core/LearningOutcome.htm>, this introductory course in sociology is specifically designed to allow you to understand and apply the sociological imagination in your own life, and to locate, analyze, and write about sociological research.

This course is divided into three primary sections:

- 1) Fundamentals of sociology: the sociological imagination, distinguishing between individual experience and social patterns, sociological theories & perspectives, and demographic factors that influence social outcomes.
- 2) Social Institutions and their influence on individual outcomes

3) Issues that are often framed as social problems

We will use a variety of readings, discussions, and exercises to develop sociological thinking and build your “sociological imagination” and understanding of society around you. Our focus will be primarily on the United States, but I invite and encourage you to share global perspectives and questions as we examine the issues of inequality, conflict, and power. I am open to modifications of topics, particularly later in the course, if students want to focus on other issues or pursue a particular topic in more depth.

This course provides an introduction to sociological concepts and a survey of contemporary social problems with a sociological perspective. Social problems can stem from a wide range of social issues for example, to name a few, education policy, taxes, gun, gay marriage, immigration, outsourcing etc. Sociological perspective implies analyzing such social issues and problems as being a part of the organization of society and understanding the intersections among the institutions such as economy, family, polity, community, and the various identities such as those related to one’s class, race, gender, ethnicity. Since this is only a one semester, introductory level course, it cannot do justice to the entire study of social problems - a complex and ever-growing field. The topics and required readings are an attempt to introduce you with the enduring and contemporary issues in the field, familiarize with seminal theoretical and empirical work, place the larger issues that Sociology is grappling with into context, and suggest fruitful areas for future research. Do not expect this course to cover the entire gamut of social problems that exist in society. However, given the level of the class and time limit, the class lectures, readings, discussions and screenings will certainly give you a broad idea of what constitutes a social problem, and your personal research will give you a deeper understanding of one particular issue.

Course Resources: Text, Reader, and Additional Readings:

Text: Leon-Guerrero, Anna. Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action (2nd Edition). Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications, Inc. Los Angeles, 2009. ISBN is 978-1-4129-5966-7. (Abbreviated “Text” on the course schedule.)

The text is available at the University Book Center in the Stamp Student Union and the Maryland Book Exchange on Route 1, or you may search online. If you do not already have a copy of the text, I recommend that you purchase it locally so that you don’t get behind on your reading. The student study site for this course is extremely useful, and I recommend that you use it to prepare for exams and extend your studies.

Additional readings: Required articles and handouts will be posted on the course site on Blackboard (www.elms.umd.edu) in advance of when they are scheduled to be discussed. See me immediately if you are unable to access this site!

Course Format

The course will meet twice each week for 1 hour and 15 minutes each session. Class meetings will consist of a combination of lecture, discussion, and group activities. Students are expected to come to class prepared to contribute to our discussions. We will often have Reading quizzes on the upcoming week’s readings on Tuesdays, and most assignments will be due on Thursdays.

As a college class, you can expect to spend two-three hours out of class for each hour in class. If you want to earn an A in this course, plan to spend 5-6 focused hours/week outside of class studying and preparing for class. If you are spending this amount of time and not getting the grades you want, meet with me during office hours or by appointment! If you request an appointment, include your availability on Mon, Tues & Thurs.

Course Expectations

Attendance:

A significant portion of the learning for this course comes through interaction with others, and attendance is crucial to your success. As part of this course’s learning team, your attendance and attitude affect not only your learning, but also that of your classmates. Attendance is a component of your participation grade, because you cannot participate in class activities if you are not present.

University policy requires documentation for an absence to be excused, and I will expect to receive that documentation along with any missed assignments upon your return from an *unanticipated* absence. See or email me if you have any questions about what constitutes appropriate documentation. You may not turn in late assignments without documenting the absence in a timely fashion. I will turn over any cases of falsification of documentation to the University as an Honor Code violation.

Anticipated absence: If you are aware that you will be absent on the day of an exam or assignment due date (such as for religious observance, team travel, or other bonafide reason), you are expected to turn in the assignment or take the test *prior* to your departure. If you need to reschedule an exam, arrangements will need to be made at least the class before, preferably the week before so that we can coordinate schedules.

Responsibility:

Welcome to the University of Maryland, a community of adult scholars! In joining this community . . .

You are responsible for the materials and information provided in class, and on the course site on Blackboard. You are responsible for tracking your assignments and due dates.

You are responsible for contributing to the course in meaningful and positive ways. Part of this is completing the week’s readings in a timely fashion (by our Tuesday class meeting unless otherwise indicated).

You are responsible for providing me with documentation of anticipated absences due to team travel, religious observance, etc. by **February 12th**.

You are responsible for getting your questions answered. (Email me, or include them in a check-out memo.)

Respect:

A significant portion of this class will develop through our class discussions. We will be discussing issues with great potential for difference of opinion, and you should not be surprised to feel uncomfortable with *at least* one topic at some point in the semester. However, that does not mean that you need to shift that discomfort to your classmates!

Discussion Guidelines will be refined in our first class meeting, but we’ll start with these:

YES:

Think before you speak

Respect others

Consider other opinions

(This does not mean you give up yours.)

NO:

Make it personal

Roll eyes

Derisive comments

Dismissive or aggressive behavior

Electronic communication (facebook, email,

texting, etc.)

As the Instructor, it is my responsibility to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning. In order to fulfill that responsibility, I reserve the right to interrupt the discussions if I feel that they are not following the expected norms of conduct. I also expect you to maintain this level of respect towards each other outside of the class.

Punctuality:

Part of respect is not disrupting our class by arriving late. I plan to begin the class promptly. To avoid distracting your fellow students, please avoid coming in late. Most

course announcements will be made at the beginning of class. It is your responsibility to make sure you get the information. Talk to a classmate AFTER class to get those announcements if you can't avoid being late. If you must leave early for an unavoidable reason, please sit close to the door and leave quietly.

Your questions are important, however when I am presenting the overview for the day's discussion, it may interrupt the organization to pause and take questions. If you raise your hand and I do not call on you quickly, it is because I need to keep the concepts in a particular order. Please write down your question, listen to see if I answer it, and ask at the end of my presentation if I do not.

Electronic Etiquette:

Cell phones, pagers, Palms, Blackberrys, iPods, and other electronic communication devices can distract your classmates, and almost certainly will distract me. Please turn them off or put them in silent mode.

I understand that some students take notes more efficiently on their laptops. However, **checking email, playing electronic games, or doing other work not relevant to the course content is not appropriate during class time.**

GRADING:

I recognize that part of the student role is a concern for how you will be evaluated, and how that evaluation will affect your future opportunities via your GPA.

I will compute your grades based on a possible points total of 750. A grade sheet will be posted on Blackboard to help you track your grade throughout the semester.

Course Assignments

All assignments completed outside of class must be submitted in a professional format, ie. typed in a standard 12-point font (Times New Roman or Ariel, for example), double-spaced (1.5 spacing is acceptable), with maximum one-inch margins (except the bottom margin).

Handwritten assignments will **not** be accepted. Use campus print services if your printer malfunctions. I recommend getting yourself a print card now, so that you are prepared for a printer emergency. I encourage printing assignments front and back of the same sheet of paper. No title pages except for final research paper. (Save a tree!) Multiple pages must be stapled PRIOR to class. No paper clips or folded corners. Essay structure will be discussed in class and provided on Blackboard for your reference. In general, you are expected to answer the question, build an argument with evidence to support your thesis, and close with a strong conclusion.

Exams	= (300 points, best 3 of 4, 100 points each)
Reading Quizzes	= (100 points- best 5 scores, 20 points each)
Class participation class learning)	= (100 points-30 pts attendance, 70 pts contributions to
Research project	= (150 points cumulative, points given at various stages)
Other class activities	= (100 points total, various points each)

Exams

(300 points total)

Four 100-point exams will be given. The three midterm exams will NOT be cumulative. The final exam WILL be cumulative. All will follow a format similar to the reading quizzes: 2/3 multiple-choice and short answer questions, and 1/3 one long essay. The response for the essay question will be expected to be longer than a quiz essay, with more supporting evidence. Your

grade will be calculated on the three highest exam scores, thus it will be your decision whether or not you take the final exam.

Reading Quizzes

(100 points total)

There will be approximately 7 quizzes administered through out the course. The purpose of these is to provide incentive to keep up with the readings, as well as to check understanding of recent class lectures & discussions. The format of most 20-point quizzes will consist of 2/3 multiple – choice and/or short answer questions and a brief essay. After the second quiz, all the quizzes will be **unannounced**. Most quizzes will take place on Tuesdays, will emphasize the current week’s readings, and will touch lightly on previous materials. Only your highest five scores will count, thus there will be **no** make-up quizzes. If you know you will be absent, you may complete a 1-2 page essay synthesizing the week’s readings and submitting it before 5 PM Tuesday. Questions will be posted on Blackboard and your essay must follow the essay structure provided in class and on Blackboard. The second reading quiz will follow this format for all students, to provide opportunity for essay feedback prior to the first exam.

Because learning is enhanced by discussing the material with someone who already understands it, you may earn 2 points/10% bonus on each quiz grade if you bring that quiz in to discuss your results with me (limit two quizzes per meeting) prior to the relevant midterm. If you request an appointment, include your availability on Mon, Tues & Thurs. Bring your class & reading notes, as well as the assignments you want to discuss.

Class participation

(100 points)

The participation grade will be compiled from scores based on:

Attendance (approximately 1/3 of this grade)

Contributions to discussions-in class and online, check-out memos, other graded class activities (approximately 2/3 of this grade)

Attendance: Attendance will be assessed by a combination of presence for quizzes, assignments turned in during class, check-out memos, group activity reports, and occasional sign in sheets. Because late arrivals distract the instructor and other students, you will forfeit the attendance point for that day if you arrive after the lecture/class activity has begun.

Contributions to class: Students will be graded based on informed and analytical participation. Good quality discussions help to creatively and critically analyze the issues apart from helping to make the class interesting. I therefore highly recommend that the students read the material the day before when its discussion is due. I will be watching for comments that synthesize readings or otherwise demonstrate your understanding and help your classmates make connections with the course material.

Recognizing that not all students are comfortable speaking in a group as large as our class, you will also have the opportunity to contribute to our community learning experience through participation in an online discussion format where *meaningful* posts will earn participation points. These posts can synthesize class readings, connect readings to previous readings or class discussions, raise topics for discussion, relate course materials to real world situations, or otherwise demonstrate and encourage development of the sociological imagination.

Check-out memos: I will frequently collect check-out memos to check for understanding and identify pending questions. You are welcome to hand me a similar note at the end of any class, even if I do not collect one that day.

Research Project

(150 points total)

Points for this project will accumulate across the semester. Deadlines for component parts are intended to support you in organizing your time to complete the project successfully. Details of

the component parts will be provided in class and standards posted on Blackboard. Alternatives for the final presentation will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard the second week of class.

Topic & Presentation Format Contract (5 pts)	due Feb 26 (earlier if presenting chapter)
Newspaper articles related to your topic	Feb 19 (10 points)
Peer-reviewed journal article analysis	April 9 (20 points)
Presentation Outline including bibliography (25 pts)	April 23 (earlier if presenting chapter)
Final presentation	varies (60 points)
Feedback forms on other students' presentations	May 5-12 (due daily-10 points each)

Other class activities	(100 points total)
Norm Activity	(due Feb 5)
Budget Activity	(Preparation Sheet due March 5)
Photo Essay	(due March 26)
Others	

These activities will be explained in class and posted on Blackboard as they are assigned.

Extra credit-Must be turned in prior to April 30th. There are NO last minute extra credit opportunities.

At this point I have identified two extra credit opportunities.

- 1) Attend a lecture relevant to the theme of this course and approved in advance by the instructor, write a well structured essay summarizing the lecture and clearly describing the relationship to the course and what you gained by attending the lecture. Up to 5 points.
- 2) Analyze a movie (approved in advance by the instructor) from a sociological perspective and suggest a 3-5 minute clip that would be contribute to a future presentation of this course. Up to 5 points, due between April 1st and April 30th. Further details will be provided in class.

Grading System

A+ = 728-750	B+ = 653-667	C+ = 578-592	D+ = 503-517	
A = 690-727	B = 615-652	C = 540-577	D = 465-502	F = 442 and below
A- = 668-689	B- = 593-614	C- = 518-539	D- = 443-464	

Excused Absence and Excused Late Work Policy

Make-up exams and quizzes will not be given, nor will late homework be accepted, without penalization, except under University-approved circumstances. For the list of University approved circumstances, please consult the Undergraduate Catalog. If you are going to miss an exam because of a previously known cause (religious prohibition, University sports team travel, etc.) you need to inform the instructor at least two weeks prior to the exam. If you miss an assignment or an exam due to an illness, you must give me a note from a doctor *that specifically indicates that you were unable to sit for an exam on that date.* You must give me this note at the first class after you return from your illness. If you do not have documentation that excuses your

absence on first day back, you have one additional day to produce it. If you need additional time, please explain why. All other excused absences must have physical substantiation, such as a written letter, bulletin, newspaper, bill, receipt, ticket, etc. I will be happy to talk to you if you are unable to find a way to physically document the situation and it is not your fault for failure to document. Please contact me as soon as possible regarding absences or late work. I will not accept assignments over email unless there is a case of an extreme emergency that does not allow you to physically hand it over and is backed by valid documentation. Scores on unexcused late assignments will be deducted by **10%** of their grade value for each day late and will not be accepted after 7 days of when they were due, with noon determining the end of the next day. For example, assignments are due at the beginning of class on Thursday. An assignment turned in to me Thursday afternoon or Friday morning counts as one day late, for a loss of 10% of the possible points. One turned in Friday after noon is two days late. The Sociology office is open 8 AM to 5 PM Monday through Friday to accept assignments to be placed in my box. Please write the time turned in on your paper.

You must hand in all work in the course prior to the final exam. Any work not handed in by the final exam will receive a grade of zero. There will be no make-up quizzes, except as indicated above. Make-up exams will be administered only under situations that fall under university approved circumstances and have valid documentation. Note that all make-up exams must be taken within one week of the original testing date so that assessments can be returned to the other students in a timely fashion.

Academic Integrity Expectations

There are specific university guidelines to be followed to maintain academic integrity and a healthy learning environment. Students may not cheat on exams, plagiarize papers or material from the internet, buy papers, submit fraudulent documents or forge signatures. For more information please see “Academic Integrity, Resolution On” and the “Code of Student Conduct” in the current edition of the *Undergraduate Catalog*. Plagiarism will result in penalties ranging from receiving a grade of zero on the assignment, referral to the Honor Council, or failure of the course, depending on the severity of the case. See me if you have any questions about what is considered plagiarism!

You will be expected to copy *and sign* the Honor Code statement on each exam. Exams without a *signed* Honor Statement will receive a grade of zero.

Incomplete Grade Policy for the Course

The University recognizes that there are instances in which course-work may not be completed before the end of the semester. In these rare instances, I can issue a grade of “I” (Incomplete), indicating that a major portion, but not all of the course-work has been successfully completed. If circumstances (such as illness, employment changes, family emergency and so forth) prevent you from completing your course-work, contact the instructor to discuss the possibility of developing a contract for an Incomplete. Our contract will clearly describe the work that must be completed and state the deadline for its completion. Please note that the instructor is under no obligation to accept a contract for an Incomplete. In addition, please note that only under rare and extraordinary circumstances will I agree to issue an Incomplete. Do not plan on getting an Incomplete and please let me know as soon as you believe an Incomplete will be necessary so we can discuss whether this will be feasible.

If you do not complete the course-work by the contract deadline, you will receive a grade based upon the completed course work. For example, if you completed 75% of the course-work, the maximum grade you could receive is a ‘C’. Students may not re-register or repeat a course in which they received an Incomplete. While ‘Incomplete’ grades are not used to compute student

GPA, students must remove all Incompletes from their transcript before they are eligible to graduate.

How are Grade Complaints Handled?

Students are encouraged to resolve informally grade disputes by discussing the situation with the instructor. At this informal meeting, the student's arguments will be carefully considered and, hopefully, a resolution attained that meets with mutual satisfaction. If you are not satisfied with the informal resolution, you may file a written appeal under procedures which are outlined in the *Undergraduate Catalog*.

Parental Involvement

The University of Maryland complies with the regulations set forth in the Buckley Amendment which is part of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The Buckley Amendment protects students from having personal and academic information disclosed to anyone other than the student. This information includes (but is not limited to) grades, special requests, current and past course registrations, financial aid disbursements, billing history and disciplinary action. These restrictions often apply to the disclosure of the information to parents though there are instances when parents may have access to your personal and academic information. I will never discuss confidential information with anyone except with you, the student unless a) you submit a signed written waiver or b) you are present when the discussion occurs.

Students with Disabilities

I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form which has been updated for the Fall 2008 semester. This form must be presented to me no later than February 12th, 2009 in order to provide accommodations for our first exam. I am not able to accommodate students who are not registered with DSS or who do not provide me with documentation that has been reviewed by DSS by March 1, 2009. Disability Support Services (DSS) is located in Shoemaker Hall, (301) 314-7682 or you can visit the website www.counseling.umd.edu/dss for more information.

Religious Observances

If you will miss class or especially examinations due to religious observance, accommodations will be made if you provide me with written notification by February 12th, 2009. Provide your name, the date and explanation of any religious observances that will affect your attendance or participation. Please refer to the Online Undergraduate Catalog Policy on Religious Observance.

Team Travel

I recognize that managing your time as a student athlete can be a challenge, and team travel may conflict with your attendance at our class. Please provide me with the official team travel letter when you receive it, as well as any updates that affect your participation in our class. I expect to receive that letter no later than February 12th, but recognize that schedules may shift after that date. I will accommodate to athletic absences only if I am provided that notification. Stay in communication with me!

NOTE: The schedule on the following pages is subject to change as the course develops. All changes will be posted on Blackboard and announced in class. The course is intended

to cover a basic set of skills and information, but will also be responsive to your interests and participation.

Week	Readings due Tuesday	Tues topic	Thurs topic	Assignment due Thursday
1-Jan 26-28	Syllabus Text xviii-29 CW Mills (BlkBd)	Intro to course What is Sociology?	Sociological Imag. & Ch 1-Foundation	
2-Feb 3-5	Text pp 30-62	Reading Quiz #1 Social Class & Poverty	Social Class & Poverty (cont'd)	Norm Activity
3-Feb 10-12	Text pp 63-86	RQ #2-essay Race & Ethnicity	cont'd	
4-Feb 17-19	Text pp 87-122	Gender &	Sexual Orientation	Newspaper Article
5-Feb 24-26	Text pp 123-143	Age & Aging Review for Exam #1	Exam #1	Topic form
6-March 3-5	Text pp 144-174	Families	Budget Activity	Budget Act. Prep sheet
7-Mar 10-12	Text pp 175-202	Education		
SPRING	BREAK	MARCH 16-20		
8-Mar 24-26	Text pp 203-256	Work & Economy	Health & Medicine	Photo Essay
9-Mar31 & 2-Apr	Text pp 257-281	Media Review for Exam #2	Exam #2	
10-Apr 7-9	Text pp 282-344	Alcohol & Drugs	Crime & Criminal Justice	Professional Journal Article
11-Apr 14-16	Text pp 345-398	Cities & Suburbs	Environment	
12-Apr 21-23	Text pp 399-423	Physical Spaces (cont'd)	War & Terrorism	Outline due
13-Apr 28-30		Exam Review Presentations	Exam #3	

14-May 5-7 Text pp 424-443 Social Activism Presentations
Presentations

15- May12 only Wrap up course

FINAL EXAM **TUESDAY 5/19** **1:30 PM ASY 1213**
