

**SOCIOLOGY 105:
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Spring 2009**

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Class Meetings: T/TH 2-3:15pm
Class Location: Art-Soc'y 1213
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:15-5:00pm
or by appointment.

Course Description:

The goal of the course is to learn how social problems are *socially constructed* with the intent of revealing (1) the process by which a phenomenon is transformed into a pressing issue worthy of our attention, (2) why some issues are conceived as problems while others are not, (3) the uneven consequences of social problems across different groups both within and between societies, and (4) understand how to develop policies/solutions to alleviate some of them. We will study how this process develops from structural and social forces (unpacking the multiple layers of the "social") as opposed to the influence of separate individuals.

This course will deal with a number of controversial issues which may challenge your closely held beliefs. Although the perspectives and opinions of the readings, myself and the other students in the course may conflict with your own, I ask that you give each of them proper respect, consideration and attention. Those issues that are coined as "social problems" are often elevated to such stature because they are so complex and uneasily reduced to a simple black-white solution. Therefore I hope that you will learn over this semester to think critically, capable of appreciating the logic and value of both sides of the issue without dismissing entirely either side because it conflicts with your own opinions.

Course Objectives:

1. Understand the process by which a phenomenon becomes a social problem
2. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of competing explanations of social problems.
3. Develop conceptual tools to identify patterns and forces that cut across multiple social problems.
4. Learn to explain a social problem to someone else by providing evidence for why we should be concerned and suggestions for what we can do to create social change.

Required Texts:

Chomsky, Noam. 2002. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Davis, Angela. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Additional Required Readings will be posted on ELMS/Blackboard Course Site available at:

<https://elms.umd.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>
(your login and password is the same as those you use for Testudo)

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation (13%)

Attendance does not mean simply occupying a seat in the classroom: you are expected to keep up with readings and to participate in class discussions, presentations and debates when appropriate. Although it should go without saying, you are expected to come on time, listen and respect your fellow classmates, and present yourself in a professional manner. In order to help you process the readings, you are required to hand in a daily assignment for **one of the readings assigned for each week (if one is a very short piece and the other is more substantial, if you opt for that session you must write it based on the lengthier of the two)**. The purpose of this is not to give you busy work, but rather to help you (a) be prepared for class, (b) understand the material, and (c) serve as self-crafted study guides for the mid-term and final exams. The form is available on

Blackboard and you may fill it out on a computer or print it out and fill it in by hand. These will be due at the end of each class session. I will not excuse absences or give make-up exams, class exercises or assignments without a doctor's note or advance notification of some outstanding need to miss class, such as religious observances.

Analytic Reports (17%)

Class participants will each complete 2 short (3 pages double spaced) analytic reports during the course. Each report is to address either one reading in its entirety, or the connections across readings for any given class session. Analytic reports must be submitted to **Blackboard** by 1pm the day of class or they will not be graded for credit. You have some flexibility about when you decide to write your 2 reports, but you can only turn in one per class session. The goal of these analytic reports is to give you practice at articulating and developing your understanding of sociological theories and applying them to social problems. Also, these will give me a chance to provide you feedback on your writing skills, ideas, and intellectual development regarding the material. Components of analytic reports should include (see handout also):

- a) a brief summary and discussion of the main features of the social problem(s)
- b) a brief discussion of how each reading/argument fits into understanding the nature of a social problem and or possible solutions
- c) at least two questions for class discussion (please bring these with you to class)
- d) personal reactions/reflection of the arguments and or substantive topic of the reading
- e) personal reflection regarding one's own role in contributing to the particular social problem

ONE OF YOUR ANALYTIC REPORTS WILL BE ON YOUR ASSIGNED DEBATE TOPIC

Assignments (30%)

Assignments will vary in level of difficulty. Some will be done in-class, but most will be take-home activities that will require you to do something, (see a film, collect your garbage, interview a family member, observe a social world, etc.) and then write a 2-3 page reflection. When possible, these reflections should incorporate class readings and discussions as well as the specifics of the assignment and your "reflection" to all of this. All assignments are due in class in hard copy (no emails, if you must submit electronically, you must do it via **Blackboard**). No late assignments will be accepted. No make-up assignments will be given.

TWO OF YOUR ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE TO "DEBATE" ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE IN CLASS

Midterm (20%) and Final Exam (20%)

The midterm and final exam will each consist of multiple choice, true/false and short answer questions. **If you do not have formal documentation for missing an exam, you will not be given a make-up.**

Grades:

Attendance & Participation	130 points	13 @ 10 pts each
Analytic Reports	200 points	2 @ 100 pts each
Assignments	300 points	6 @ 50 pts each
Midterm Exam	170 points	1 @ 170 points
Final Exam	200 points	1 @ 200 points

Total 1000 points

		<u>Final Grade</u>
A-, A, A+	90% and above	900 points and above
B-, B, B+	80-89%	800-899 points
C-, C, C+	70-79%	700-799 points
D-, D, D+	60-69%	600-699 points
F	59% and below	599 points and below
XF	Academic Dishonesty	0-1000 points

Rules of the Game:

1. *Respect:* The material that we will be covering in this class will be controversial and some perspectives expressed by the readings, me or your fellow classmates may conflict with your own. Despite the differences of opinions, I would hope that you give them the same respect that you would expect in return.
2. *Technology:* All **cellphones must be OFF** (otherwise you may be subjected to berating about your vibrator or asked to leave) and **laptops are not permitted** unless you have proof of medical necessity.
3. *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.
4. *Absences:* Campus Senate policy requires students who are absent due to illness/injury to furnish formal documentary support to the instructor. I require students to contact me by email 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 Student Conduct Office.
5. *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/>.
6. *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>
7. *Writing Center:* For free assistance with any undergraduate writing assignment, go to the Writing Center where trained consultants offer suggestions to help you improve your writing. Consultants see students on a walk-in basis only; no appointment is necessary. 0125 Taliaferro Hall, Hours: Monday through Thursday, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM and Friday, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM. Learn more @ <http://www.english.umd.edu/writing-center/twc-undergraduates/>

Course Schedule

The following assignments are subject to change over the course of the semester. I will announce in class/post on Blackboard if such changes occur.

I. Introduction to Social Problems

- January 29 Syllabus Overview & Social Problems Trivia
- February 3 Your Learning Style Quiz (link)
Using the Sociological Imagination to Understand Social Problems
C. Wright Mills. 1959. Chpt 1 “The Promise” in *The Sociological Imagination* (PDF)
Miner, Horace. 1956. “Body Ritual Among the Nacimera” (DOC)
- February 5 Investigating Levels of the Social & Social Theory
Best, Joel. *Social Problems*, pp. 3-40.

**Assignment 1:* Developing your sociological imagination – Write a 2 page reflection on your social standpoint. How as your biography and the social worlds/cultures your family and you are a part of shaped who you are and how you see the world? Assignment due February 10.

- February 10 Pincus, Fred L. Discrimination Comes in Many Forms, pp. 31-35 (PDF)
Barak, Leighton & Flavin 2007. Class, Race and Gender pp. 80-93(PDF)
- February 12 Levels of Social Change
Eitzen and Sage. Introduction: States and Cities Solving Social Problems pp. 1-8 (PDF)
Laszewski. the sociologists’ take on the environment. (PDF)

Film: Fast Food Nation

**Assignment 2,*

- Part A: Record all consumption of food (what food), water, electricity, all materials (plastics, etc).
Part B: Collect all of your Trash for 24 hours—haul it around in a bag with you (to the extent possible, but make sure you have a way to save or collect your waste wherever you go. **Take photos of your trash collection and get them printed out and use for a cover sheet for this assignment project. If possible, take photos of the contents of your bag of garbage (24 hour waste production).** Don’t just take a photo of a bag of trash or you will not get anything out of this assignment.
Part C: Write **1 page reflection** of your consumption experiences and impact.
Part D: What Can I do to help the environment and live more sustainably?
<http://earthtrends.wri.org/updates/node/111> Develop a **1 page detailed personal plan** to reduce your ecological footprint. *Assignment due February 17th.*

II. Global Warming and Environmental Abuse

- February 17 Government and State Initiatives to Solve Environmental Abuse
Pulido, Linda. 2000. Rethinking Environmental Racism, pp. 12-34 (PDF)
Film: Too Hot Not to Handle

Assignment 3:* **A. After Watching film “*Too Hot Not to Handle*”
B. Go Online to the Global Footprint Network and take their footprint quiz.
http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=calculator

C. Write a 1-2 page reflection on what you learned from in class films, readings, discussion and from doing your ecological footprint. **Assignment due February 24th (March 3rd for those of you assigned to debate Feb 24th).**

- February 19 Technology, Sustainability and What You Eat (Part I)
Robbins, John. “All things are Connected” from *Diet for a New America*.
Bittman, Mark “Rethinking the Meat-Guzzler” in *New York Times*
- February 24 Globalization
Scheper-Hughes. The Last Commodity, pp. 145-164 **(PDF)**
Social Issues: Is Globalization good for mankind? **(PDF)**
Assignment X “debate”
- Film: Food for Thought*

III. The United States Health and Health Care System

- February 26 State of US Health Care System
Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 8: Health Care for All, 139-151 **(PDF)**
Scott, Janny “Life at the top in America isn’t just better, it’s longer” pp. 27-50 **(PDF)**
- Film: Sicko (Part I)*
- March 3 Pharmaceutical Companies Influences on U.S. Health Care Industry
Jung, Paul “No Free Lunch” pp. 226-231. **(PDF)**
Wilkes et al. 2000. Direct to Consumer Prescription Drugs Advertising **(PDF)**
- Film: Sicko (Part II)*
- March 5 Biotechnology and Health
Evans, John “A brave new world? How Genetic Technology Could Change Us” **(PDF)**
Taking Sides Issue 15 (Debate Reading & Assignment): Should Biotechnology be used to alter and enhance humans? *Assignment X debate*
- March 10 **Midterm**

IV. Institutions: Hospitals & Prisons

- March 12 Rosenhan, David L. “On Being Sane in Insane Places” Reading 10, pp. 110-119. **(PDF)**
Or Something Else, TBD
- March 24 Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, pp. 9-40.
- March 26 Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, pp. 84-115.
Assignment X Debate: Should Prisons be eliminated?

V. Democracy & the Media

- March 31 The State of Democracy

Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 2: Democracy and Campaign Reform, pp. 9-33 **(Text)**
Burstein, Paul “Is congress really for sale?” *Contexts*, 19-25 **(PDF)**
Pinderhughes, Dianne M. “Intersectionality: Race and Gender in the 2008 Presidential Nomination Campaign” pp. 47-53. **(PDF)**

**Assignment 4 “I can become President of the United States”*

Part A: In-class activity

Part B: Reflection Essays on in-class activity and who can become president in the US

April 2 Chomsky, Noam. 1991. Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda
Read pp. 9-65

Film: Stuart Hall or clip on/of Noam Chomsky

April 7 Intimate Terrorism and the Patriot Act
Chomsky, Noam 1991. Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda
Read pp. 69-100.

Taking Sides Debate: Does the threat of terrorism warrant the curtailment of our civil Liberties? **(PDF)** *Assignment X debate*

VI. Socioeconomic Conditions: Stratification of Wealth and Privilege

April 9 History of US Policies on Poverty
Block, Fred et al. “The Compassion Gap in American Poverty Policy” pp.14-20 **(PDF)**
Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 6: Poverty, Homelessness, & Affordable Housing pp.101-122

April 14 The Working Poor
Moore and Collins. 2008. Why Can’t People Feed Themselves? **(PDF)**
Ehrenreich, Barbara *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Chapter 2) **(PDF)**

Film: Class Dismissed

April 16 TBD
Debate Assignment X: Is increasing economic inequality a serious problem?

April 21 Immigration and Poverty
Levitt, Peggy “salsa and ketchup: transnational migrants straddle two worlds” pp. 20-26
Fujiwara, Lynn H. “Immigrant rights are human rights” pp. 79-99 **(PDF)**
Debate Assignment X: Is Third World Immigration a threat to America’s way of life?

VII. Education Inequalities

April 23 Kozol, Jonathan 1991. Savage Inequalities Chapter 3, pp. 83-132. **(PDF)**
Kozol, Jonathan. 2005. The Shame of the Nation pp. 460-69 **(PDF)**

April 28 Eitzen and Sage. Chapter 5: Improving Education pp. 72-97 **(Text)**
Portes, Alejandro “English-Only Triumphs, But the Costs are High” **(PDF)**
Leonardt, David. The College Dropout Boom **(PDF)**
Farkas, George. “The Black-White Test Score Gap” **(PDF)**

Debate Assignment X: Is competition the reform that will fix education?

VIII. Family Forms

- April 30 Gender
West & Zimmerman “Doing Gender” (**PDF**)
Borenstein, Kate. “Naming All the Parts” (**PDF**)
- May 5 Same-Sex Marriage
Beck, Gernsheim, Elisabeth. “On the Way to a Post-Familial Family” (**PDF**)
Rochlin, M. The Heterosexual Questionnaire (**PDF**)
Haggard, Ted. “Can Therapy Turn Gays Straight?” (**PDF**)
Ryan, Michael J. “Questions on the Issue of Gay Marriage in the United States. (**PDF**)
- Guest Lecturer: Michael J. Ryan*
- Gay Marriage: The arguments and Motives. <http://www.bidstrup.com/marriage.htm>
Top 10 Reasons for marriage equality <http://www.hrc.org/issues/5491.htm>
<http://community.pflag.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=194&srcid=-2>
12 Reasons why Gay Marriage Will Ruin Society:
http://grove.ufl.edu/~ggsa/pdf_docs/gaymarriage.pdf
- May 7 Cherlin, Andrew J. 2003 “Should the Government Promote Marriage?” (**PDF**)
Qian, Zhenchao 2005 “Breaking the Last Taboo: interracial marriage in America”
Debate Assignment X: Is the decline of the traditional family a national crisis?
- May 12 Wrap-up, and **Final Exam review**

Final Exam: Monday, May 18 10:30am-12:30pm