

SYG 2010 Social Problems

Spring 2009

Monday and Wednesday 2:00 – 3:15

HCB 214

Instructor Information

Joanna Stansfield Hunter

Office: 514 Bellamy

Phone: 644 – 4267

Office Hours: MW 12:00 – 2:00 or by appointment

Email: jshunter@fsu.edu

Course Description

This class is designed to introduce you to the sociology of social problems in the United States. We will explore such social problems as inequality between demographic categories, deviance and social control, and economic and political issues. To do this, we will study a diverse range of topics ranging from poverty, to sexual violence, to drug abuse. We will also consider the sociological methodology and theoretical perspectives that sociologists use to study social problems.

Course Goals and Objectives

The learning objectives of this class are simultaneously simple and complex. As a discipline, sociology looks for patterns in behavior and outcomes, and focuses on the probability of those outcomes. Therefore, this class will teach you how to understand statistics as they are presented in the social sciences and as they are constructed through sociological research. On the other hand, sociology is the study of human social behavior, which is idiosyncratic and individual on many levels. This course will develop your intellect and your use of the sociological imagination to see social problems not just as individual characteristics but as logical outcomes given cultural knowledge and background.

Specifically, by the end of this class you should be able to:

- 1) Describe the three “mother” theories in sociology and the different ways that sociologists use them to study social problems.
- 2) Critically appraise media evaluation and presentation of social problems and explain core concepts of the sociological imagination.
- 3) Synthesize core concepts in sociology and use them to analyze several specific social problems.

Textbooks and Readings

There are two required books for this course, both of which are available at Bill’s and the FSU Bookstore. Please purchase them as soon as possible.

Social Problems by Joel Best. ISBN: 0-393-92877-2

The McDonaldization of Society. By George Ritzer. 5th Edition. ISBN: 978-1-4129-5430-3.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. **Quizzes:** There are six scheduled quizzes this semester, every other Wednesday save for the first week, the week of the midterm exam, and the last week of classes. One of these quiz grades will be dropped. These quizzes will serve as a reading check, as well as a tool to provide me with almost constant feedback as to how you are understanding the material presented in the readings and in lecture. These quizzes are designed to take less than 30 minutes of class time. Each of the five best quiz scores will count towards 8% of your final grade in this course. (40% total)

2. **Midterm Exam:** There will be a midterm exam on **Wednesday March 4**. This exam will consist of multiple choice questions, true/false questions, and an essay question that I will provide for you prior to the exam. This exam will consist of 20% of your final grade in this course.

3. **Analysis Paper:** You will be responsible for a short paper in this course. In this paper, you will pick a social problem that is interesting to you and analyze it using the theories we have discussed in this course. This paper should be 5 to 7 pages long, double spaced and will be due **April 8**. More instructions will be given later. This paper will be worth 15% of your final grade in this course.

3. **Final Exam:** The final exam for this course is scheduled for **Friday May 1 at 12:30 – 2:30 PM**. This exam will consist of multiple choice questions, true/false questions, and an essay question that I will provide for you prior to the exam. This exam will consist of 20% of your final grade in this course.

4. **Attendance and Participation:** I will pass an attendance sheet around the class each time we meet. Missing more than three classes will be considered grounds for downgrading; missing more than five classes will be considered grounds for dismissal from the course. Additionally, arriving to class more than five minutes late will be considered an absence. I will not tolerate chronic lateness. If you cannot be here on time, you should not be enrolled in this course. Please let me know if you know you will be missing class ahead of time. Attendance and Participation are worth the final 5% of your final grade in this course.

Religious Holidays and Other Excused Absences

If you will be missing class for religious reasons or for religious reasons or University-sponsored functions, you must contact me *in advance* of missing class and you are still responsible for any material covered.

5. **Course Structure and Communication:** Most days of this class will be divided into two parts. The first part will consist of a short mini-lecture that should help you better understand the readings assigned for that day. The second half of class will consist of small discussion groups, larger class activities, or films. I will use a lot of clips from the media in this class, because I think it is important to see how social problems are viewed in our larger culture. Sometimes, of course, this structure will be slightly different and I will make every attempt to alert you when this is happening.

This course is Blackboard supported. I will do my best to keep the Blackboard site up to date with any handouts I pass out, assignments, study guides, and the like. You can also email me through the Blackboard site. A note about email: I will do my best to respond to your email within twelve hours of receiving it, Monday through Friday. I will check my email for the last time each day around 8 PM. If you want me to respond to you in the same day, you should email me before 8 PM. As a general rule, I will not respond to emails over the weekend, although if you email me over the weekend I will respond first thing Monday morning.

5. General Courtesy and Professionalism: Please arrive on time to class, arriving late is a distraction both to me as the instructor and to your fellow classmates. If you know in advance that you will have to be leaving class early, let me know and take a seat near the door so your leaving is as un-disruptive as possible. Please turn your cell phones off during class as they are disruptive.

The study and discussion of social problems is potentially emotionally charged. I am not asking you to remove yourself from discussions about which you feel strongly about, but I am asking you to think before you speak. We will be talking about issues we all hold very close, and generally we make smarter, better thought out, more *academically useful* comments when we think before speaking. Please do not disrespect your classmates, me, or yourself by speaking without thinking or reverting to personal attacks. Inflammatory or derogatory language will *not* be tolerated in this class, and using such language will result in you receiving NO participation points for this course. Diversity of experience and opinion adds depth to this course, and I expect you to respect that.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	Quizzes	5@ 8%	each	40%
A-	90-92	Midterm Exam			20%
B+	87-89	Analysis Paper			15%
B	83-86	Final Exam			20%
B-	80-82	Participation and Attendance			5%
C+	77-79				
C	73-76			Total	100%
C-	70-72				
D+	67-69				
D	63-66				
D-	60-62				
F	59 and Below				

Other Important Information

INCOMPLETES: Except in extreme circumstances, I will not give incompletes for this course. Missing work is not sufficient reason for an incomplete.

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UPS: NO MAKE-UP QUIZES WILL BE GIVEN. This is why the lowest scores are dropped, to allow you a bit of “slippage.” Please do not ask to make-up a quiz. Additionally, the midterm cannot be made up unless of extreme circumstances and must be brought to my attention BEFORE the day of the test.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE: The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm>.)

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the Student Disability Resource Center; 97 Woodward Avenue, South; Florida State University; Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167; (850) 644-9566 (voice); (850) 644-8504 (TDD); sdrc@admin.fsu.edu; <http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

This Schedule is Subject to Change

Topic	Date	Reading Assignments and Class Activities
	January 7	Introduction to the Course. Syllabus Questions, Assignments, etc.
<i>Introduction to Study of Social Problems; The Social Problems Process</i>	January 12	“The Sociological Imagination” by C. Wright Mills. Available on Blackboard.
	January 14	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 1 Quiz #1
	January 19	Martin Luther King Jr. Day: No Class
<i>Claimsmaking</i>	January 21	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 2 Ritzer, <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> : Chapters 1 and 2
<i>Activism and Social Movements</i>	January 26	
	January 28	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 3 Quiz #2
<i>Problem Focus: Discrimination</i>	February 2	“Inequalities” by Robert Max Jackson. Available on Blackboard “From Traditional to Liberal Racism” by Zamudio and Rios. Available on Blackboard
<i>Experts</i>	February 4	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 4
<i>The War on Drugs</i>	February 9	“Drug Prohibition: American Style” from <i>Drug War Heresies</i> . Available on Blackboard.
	February 11	Ritzer: <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> : Chapters 3 and 4 Quiz #3
<i>Problem Focus: The Economy</i>	February 16	“What’s Wrong with the American Dream?” By Jennifer Hochschild. Available on Blackboard.

<i>The Media</i>	February 18	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 5
<i>Public Reaction</i>	February 23	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 6
<i>Problem Focus: Health Care</i>	February 25	“Health Care Costs and Cost Containment” by Grace Budrys. Available on Blackboard.
<i>Policymaking</i>	March 2	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 7
	March 4	*Midterm Exam*
	March 9 -11	No Class: Spring Break
	March 16	Ritzer: <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> : Chapters 5 and 6
<i>Problem Focus: Globalization</i>	March 18	Quiz #4
<i>Microinteraction and Social Problems Work</i>	March 23	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 8
<i>Problem Focus: Education</i>	March 25	Kozol, “Savage Inequalities” Available on Blackboard Quiz #5
<i>Rationalization: Pitfalls and Shortcomings</i>	March 30	Ritzer: <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> : Chapters 7 and 8
	April 1	
<i>Policy Outcomes</i>	April 6	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 9
	April 8	*Analysis Paper Due*
<i>Claims Across Space and Time</i>	April 13	Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 10
<i>Problem Focus: Crime and the Criminal Justice System</i>	April 15	“Beyond Crime and Punishment” by Western and Pettit Available on Blackboard. Quiz #6
<i>Solutions to Social Problems: Course Wrap-up</i>	April 20	Ritzer: <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> : Chapter 9 Best, <i>Social Problems</i> : Chapter 11
	April 22	
	May 1	Final Exam 12:30 – 2:30 PM

