Social Problems in American Society

SOCIOLOGY 102-401  
Mitchell 195  
Lecture Mon, Wed 12-12:50

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About the Course  
Everyone is concerned about social problems. Often we find ourselves debating them with others and even with ourselves. What can be done about the fact that 22% of American children live in poverty? How should we balance concern about terrorism with the value we place on American ideals of liberty and privacy? Why are 41% of the unarmed individuals shot by police African American, when only 13% of the American population is black? Sometimes social problems instill fear in us. We worry about the high rate of sexual assault on college campuses and the definition of consent. We think about growing old and worry about social isolation and the costs of health care. At other times we feel greatly empowered and hopeful, because we see ourselves addressing and reducing social problems. We get involved in ways large and small. We decide to use our talents to help others, and build wheelchair ramps in our garage, or tutor kids with learning disabilities, or track eagles for a conservation program. We decide to get involved in changing society to make it a better place, and volunteer with a political campaign or circulate a petition.

This class will address social problems from the sociological perspective. The will allow us to see how issues we experience as personal troubles, such as feeling unable to balance work and family, are in fact socially produced. In this class, you will be introduced to sociological theory and social science methods, and will see how these can be used to address issues that concern us all. This should help empower you to help give back to your communities in the future, which is one of the most admirable aims of a college education.

Ground Rules  
The rules for this course are simple: attend lecture and section, do your readings, and extend common courtesy to your peers. Don’t become a social pariah by talking in class, crunching carrots, or distracting others by watching videos on your laptop.

In order to facilitate the creation of academic community in the classroom, you will have opportunities to participate in group exercises and discussions in section. This means that the success of the course is dependent upon your presence, preparation, participation, and demonstration of respect for your classmates. Section attendance is mandatory. Please follow the golden rule and treat others as you would like to be treated. You will find that not everyone will
agree with you on principles you consider important—this provides an excellent opportunity for learning if you engage with classmates respectfully.

Many people learn best when they learn together—this is intellectual symbiosis, and will be encouraged. You are encouraged to discuss the readings, concepts and assignments with other class members. Plagiarism and cheating, however, constitute intellectual parasitism. They damage the academic community and will result in penalties that can include failing the class.

Finally, please complete your work in a timely manner. In cases of illness or emergency, lateness will be excused, but you must contact your T.A. as soon as you are aware you will miss section, a second hour exam, or the paper deadline to explain the nature of your situation. Documentation may be required.

Personal Engagement and Concerns
One of the things that makes a course like Social Problems interesting to people is that they can relate it to their own lives. This is a resource for us. All of us are concerned about physical, economic and emotional security for ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities. And in a class of this size, there are sure to be students with experiences with physical disability and mental illness, students who were born into poverty, students who have experienced racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, students who have been victims of crimes, and students who have received unwarranted police attention, so even if these matters are purely academic to you, there are others with personal experiences of them who can enrich discussions in section meetings. It also means that some of you may find some of the topics we cover particularly difficult. Engaging with difficult subjects intellectually is one of the cornerstones of collegiate experience. However, if a topic being addressed in class or discussion section proves upsetting to you, so that you are unable to engage intellectually, you may step out of class. If this does occur, please contact your T.A. to explain why you left, and get the notes from a classmate. (No student has ever tried to abuse this courtesy, but I will note that such abuse would not be permitted.)

Course Requirements
Your grade will be calculated based on examinations, completing groupwork and other exercises in section meetings, and on the completion of a paper. There will be five multiformat exams given, each including multiple choice and short answer questions and an essay. The lowest test score will be dropped from your final grade. (This means that you can miss one exam without penalty, or can take all 5 exams and maximize your chances for your best grade. No make-ups will be given in the case of a single missed exam.) The paper will be due on 2 May and will be 5-7 pages in length. It is described in the paper handout.

In the event of disruption of normal classroom activities due to national emergency or pandemic, the format for this course may be modified to enable completion of the course. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to this syllabus that will supersede this version.

This is a 3 credit course, which means you should expect to spend a minimum of:
* 37.5 hours in the classroom
* 75 hours preparing for class, which may include reading, note taking, completing minor exercises and assignments, and discussing course topics with classmates and the instructor in structured settings
* 31.5 hours preparing for and writing major papers and/or exams.

Course Readings
The textbook for this course is D. Stanley Eitzen, Maxine Baca Zin, and Kelly Eitzen Smith. 2014. Social Problems, 13th Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. In the syllabus it will be listed as “Textbook,” and you can purchase it through the UWM Bookstore or from the online vendor you prefer. You may choose to purchase a used version of an earlier edition to save money, but be aware that the page numbers in the syllabus refer to pages in the 13th edition. The
additional readings listed in the syllabus are to be found on the course D2L site. In total, you will be reading approximately 50 pages per week for this class.

**Point Values of Requirements**
Your final grade will include four exams, worth 25 points each, out of a total of five administered (with the lowest grade being dropped). Thus the total exam grade is a maximum of 4 x 25 = 100 points.
Your section grade will be worth a maximum of 75 points.
The paper is worth 50 points.
Thus, the maximum possible score is 225 points.
The final course grade will be curved on a B, meaning that the average student point score will correspond to a B grade. Please note that your grade on any given test should be compared to the average grade to determine how well you performed. This method of grading ensures that students will not be advantaged or disadvantaged by their work being graded by a particular T.A..

**GER Credit**
This course meets the UWM General Education Requirements (GER). This is explained in detail below.

*Why Social Problems carries GER credit:*
This course addresses how many problems individuals experience in their personal lives are produced by social, cultural, and material forces. It will help students to understand how the personal privilege and stigma they themselves experience are related to social forces, structures, and institutions—for example, corporate interests, or how families are organized today. The course will address how we are socialized in ways the both give us powerfully important identities, and reinscribe patterns of power along dimensions such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. It will give students basic foundational skills in using sociological methods to address and research social problems, and introduce them to central sorts of sociological theory, such as functionalist and conflict perspectives.

**One Learning Goal**
One thing that students will learn is to apply different sociological theories to explain patterns of social conformity, diversity and deviance. Such theories include functionalist, conflict, and social interactionist perspectives.

**Specific Student Work that will Address this Learning Goal**
Students will be given six multiformat hour examinations during the course. Each of these will include an essay question that will present a hypothetical situation in which social problems arise. Students will display their ability to use different sociological theories to explain why those social problems arise. For example, an essay question might ask for students to discuss a school tracking program from functionalist and conflict perspectives.

**Assessment Criteria**
Each essay question will be worth four points, and will call for students to make four different theoretical points in discussing the hypothetical situation presented. For example, students would be asked to make two functionalist arguments about the purpose of school tracking, and
two conflict perspective arguments about the disparate impact of the programs by race and class. Students will be given one point for each appropriate response.

**Social Problems : Readings and Assignments**

27 January:  Introduction to the Course

**A. Examining Inequality**

1 February

3 February

8 February
*Poverty*. Textbook ch. 7

10 February
*Race and Ethnicity*. Textbook ch. 8

15 February
**Exam #1**

17 February
*Gender Inequality*. Textbook ch. 9

22 February
*Sexual and Gender Minorities*. Textbook ch. 10

24 February
*Ability and Disability*. Textbook ch. 11

29 February

**B. The Role of Institutions**

2 March
**Exam #2**

7 March

9 March

Paper assignment handed out

21 March
Work. Textbook ch. 14

23 March
The Family. Textbook ch. 15

28 March

30 March
Exam 3

4 April
Education. Textbook ch. 16

6 April

11 April
Crime and Punishment. Textbook ch. 12

C. “Deviance”

13 April
Drugs. Textbook ch. 13

18 April

20 April
Exam #4

25 April

27 April

2 May

Environmental Issues. Textbook ch. 4

Papers Due

D. World Issues

4 May

Security and Terror. Textbook ch. 18

9 May

Exam # 5

UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that web page is: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf

Students with Disabilities. Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate material and test accommodations can be found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf

Religious Observances. Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm

Students called to active Military Duty. Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: http://www3.uwm.edu/des/web/registration/militarycallup.cfm

Incompletes. You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above.

The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S31.pdf

Discriminatory Conduct (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S47.pdf
**Academic Misconduct.** Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html)

**Complaint Procedures.** Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S49.7.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S49.7.htm)

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** Procedures for student grade appeal can be found at the following: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S28.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S28.htm)

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S22.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S22.htm)

**Book Royalties.** In accord with Department of Sociology policy, the royalties from the sale of faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation/Sociology Account to support future awards and activities for UWM students in Sociology.