Solving Social Problems

SOCIOLOGY 102-401
Bolton B46
Lecture TR 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 the U.S. has the highest infant mortality rate of all the 27 richest industrialized nations? 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 anxiety in us. We worry about rising rates of narcotics addiction. We think about growing old and worry about social isolation and the costs of health care. At other times we feel 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. We decide to get involved in changing society to make it a better place, and help set up a food bank 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 help solve social problems 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, and attendance at section is a substantial part of your course grade. Please follow the golden rule and treat other section members 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 Solving Social Problems interesting to people is that they can relate it to their own lives. This is a resource. 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 felt disrespected due to their religion, 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 painful and challenging subjects intellectually is one of the cornerstones of collegiate experience. However, if a topic being addressed in class or discussion section proves very upsetting to you, so that you feel unable to engage intellectually, you may step out of class. Leaving a class meeting in the middle to protect your mental health is just as reasonable as leaving early because you become physically ill—it’s not expected that this will happen often, but students are expected to care for their health if it does. If you do leave class due to distress, please contact your T.A. to explain why you left, and get the notes from a classmate, just as you would if you left because you suddenly became ill. (No student in this class has ever tried to abuse this courtesy, but 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 6 December 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 and Accessing the Textbook**

The main readings in this course will be in an online textbook that you can access on your computer via the Pearson website, or on your phone or a tablet using the Pearson Revel app, which you can download for free from the Apple or Google Play app stores. You will be able to highlight key passages and take notes online or in the app. You will also have the option to listen to the chapters instead of reading them if you wish. If you prefer to receive a hardcopy version of the textbook, that option will be available to you at the time you purchase online access for an additional fee. A hardcopy textbook is also available on reserve at the library.


To purchase and access your online textbook, go to [https://console.pearson.com/enrollment/osyq7o](https://console.pearson.com/enrollment/osyq7o). You will need to create a Pearson user account name and password, and then will be able to purchase textbook access. Once you have purchased access, download the Pearson Revel app if you wish to access the textbook on your phone or tablet and sign in with the Pearson account name and password you created. A guide to using Pearson Revel is here: [https://cloud.contentraven.com/pearson/content-viewer/85337/1/12/0](https://cloud.contentraven.com/pearson/content-viewer/85337/1/12/0).

Supplemental readings will be found on the course D2L site. The first two course readings will be supplemental readings on D2L, to provide some leeway for students awaiting financial aid payments before they can purchase the textbook.
**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. Half of the section grade will be based on attendance and half on participation in exercises.

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 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 five 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

4 September: Introduction to the Course

A. Examining Inequality

6 September

11 September

13 September
Poverty. Textbook ch. 7

18 September
Race and Ethnicity. Textbook ch. 8

20 September
Exam #1

25 September
Gender Inequality. Textbook ch. 9

27 September

2 October
Ability and Disability. Textbook ch. 10

4 October

9 October

**Exam #2**

**B. The Role of Institutions**

11 October


**Paper assignment handed out**

16 October


18 October

*Work.* Textbook ch. 13

23 October

*The Family.* Textbook ch. 14

25 October


30 October

**Exam 3**

1 November

*Education.* Textbook ch. 15

6 November


**C. “Deviance”**

8 November

*Crime and Punishment.* Textbook ch. 11
13 November

*Drugs.* Textbook ch. 12

15 November


20 November

**Exam #4**

22 November

**Enjoy your break!**

27 November


29 November

*Health Care.* Textbook ch. 16

**D. World Issues**

4 December

*Environmental Issues.* Textbook ch. 6

6 December

*Security and Terror.* Textbook ch. 17

**Papers Due**

11 December

Conclusion and course evaluations

13 December

**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 page is: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf)
**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities.** In the pursuit of equal access and in compliance with state and federal laws, the University is required to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is expected that a statement be placed on your syllabus informing students to contact you to arrange needed accommodations. A sample syllabus statement can be found here: [https://uwm.edu/arc/wpcontent/uploads/sites/97/2015/08/Recommended-Syllabus-Statement.pdf](https://uwm.edu/arc/wpcontent/uploads/sites/97/2015/08/Recommended-Syllabus-Statement.pdf).

**Religious Observances.** Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/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: [https://uwm.edu/active-duty-military/](https://uwm.edu/active-duty-military/)

**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: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.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: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.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: [https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/](https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/)

**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: [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf)

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the sociology department.
chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College of Letters & Science. Procedures for undergraduate student grade appeal can be found at: https://uwm.edu/letters-science/advising/answers-forms/policies/appeal-procedure-for-grades
Procedures for graduate student grade appeal can be found at https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/appealing-academic-decisions/

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:
http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/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.