Solving Social Problems

SOCIOLOGY 102-001
Bolton B52
Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45

Professor Cary Gabriel Costello
Office hours Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3:00
738 Bolton Hall, costello@uwm.edu
Pronouns: he/his/him or ze/zir/zim

T.A Shiv Issar
Office Hours
776 Bolton Hall, sissar@uwm.edu
Pronouns: he/his/him

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 advocate to shift a governmental policy.

This class will address social problems from the sociological perspective. This 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 class, 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. This means that your preparation, participation, and demonstration of respect for your classmates will contribute to a positive learning experience for all. Please follow the golden rule and treat other class 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.

In cases of illness or emergency, absences will be excused, but you must contact your T.A. as soon as you are aware you will miss a class meeting to explain the nature of your situation. Documentation may be required. In addition, students arriving more than five minutes late to class, or leaving early, will lose half credit for the day’s attendance, unless excused by the T.A.

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.

**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. 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 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 policy, but such abuse would not be permitted.)
Course Requirements

Your grade will be calculated based on examinations, attendance, 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. If you miss a second exam, a make-up for the second exam will be offered if you provide documentation of an illness or emergency. The paper will be due on April 30th 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

Most of the readings in this course will come from our textbook: Anna Leon-Guerrero. 2019. Social Problems: Community, Policy and Social Action, 6th Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. You may buy or rent the book through the vendor of your choice (rental being substantially cheaper). Both paperback and digital versions are available. A copy of the paperback textbook is also available on 2-hour reserve at the UWM Library. The Leon-Guerrero book will be listed as “textbook” in this syllabus.

You will also be assigned some readings from other authors. You will access these readings via our course Canvas site without charge.

Point Values of Requirements

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

4 highest exam grades (out of 5): 4 exams x 25 points each = 100 points
Paper grade: 50 points
Attendance: 50 points

Total maximum = 200 points

The final course grade will be curved on a B, meaning that the average student point score will be set as the dividing line between a B and B+ grade. Please note that your grade on any given test should be compared to the average grade to determine how well you performed.

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 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 five points, and will call for students to present different theoretical points in discussing the hypothetical situation presented. For example, students would be asked to make 2-3 functionalist arguments about the purpose of school tracking, and 2-3 conflict perspective arguments about the disparate impact of the programs by race and class. Students will be given one point for each appropriate response, with the possibility of a point of extra credit.

Social Problems: Readings and Assignments

21 January: Introduction to the Course

A. Examining Inequality
23 January

*Introduction to Social Problems.* Textbook ch. 1. (This chapter is made available on Canvas to ensure those awaiting delivery of the paperback version of the book do not fall behind.)

28 January


30 January

*Poverty.* Textbook ch. 2

4 February

*Race and Ethnicity.* Textbook ch. 3

6 February

**Exam #1**

11 February

*Gender Inequality.* Textbook ch. 4

13 February

*LGBTQ+ Issues.* Textbook ch. 5

18 February


20 February

*Age and Ageism.* Textbook ch. 6

25 February

**Exam #2**

---

**B. The Role of Institutions**

27 February


**Paper assignment handed out**

3 March


5 March  
*Work.* Textbook ch. 9

10 March  
*The Family.* Textbook ch. 7

12 March  

24 March  
Exam 3

26 March  
*Education.* Textbook ch. 8

31 March  
*The Media.* Textbook ch. 11

C. “Deviance”

2 April  
*Criminal Justice.* Textbook ch. 13

7 April  
*Drugs.* Textbook ch. 12; Supplemental Reading: excerpts from Mac Holt, ed. 2006.

9 April  

14 April  
Exam #4

16 April
(Students wishing to turn in a draft term paper for TA feedback must do so by today.)

21 April

23 April
Health Care. Textbook ch. 10

D. Global Problems

28 April
Environmental Issues. Textbook ch. 15. (TA lecture)

30 April
Security and Terror. Textbook ch. 16
Papers due on Canvas by the start of class

5 May
Conclusion and time for course evaluations

7 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 page is:

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:
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

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/

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

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_Discrimina_duct_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/

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_Discrimina_duct_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:
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.