



Solving Social Problems

SOCIOLOGY 102-401

Online

Professor Cary Gabriel Costello

costello@uwm.edu

Pronouns: he/his/him or ze/zir/zim

T.A Vijaya Tamla Rai

tamlarai@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. Why is a test for Covid-19 free for one American, cost another person \$100—and cost a third \$2000? 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 unemployment and rising rates of substance abuse and addiction. We think about aging and feel uneasy about when and if we'll be able to retire. 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 directly, and sew masks or build wheelchair ramps 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 class are simple. Do your readings, participate in course intellectual community via the discussion exercises, and extend courtesy to your peers. 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. Please bear in mind that the coronavirus has made life stressful for many, and be kind to one another.

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.

Course Requirements

We will follow a regular weekly schedule in this course. Every full week we will cover two topics. Each topic will be covered in one reading (usually a textbook chapter) and one PowerPoint lecture. So in an ordinary week, you will read two chapters and two lectures. Each week you will also participate in an interactive discussion board exercise relating to the units covered. You will make two posts in our Canvas discussion boards: an original post of your own, and a reply post to a classmate. Read the Discussion Exercise Guidelines document for more information about discussion board posts. Each week you will also take a quiz on the two units covered. You may take the quiz twice if you wish; the higher of your two quiz grades will be the one that “counts” if you take it twice. Read the Quiz Guidelines document for more information about taking quizzes.

Your weekly schedule as it will appear on the Canvas course home page will look like this (in an ordinary full week):

- Monday: Read the chapter and lecture for the first unit of the week
- Tuesday: Read the chapter and lecture for the second unit of the week
- Wednesday: Your initial discussion board post will be due
- Thursday: You must complete the quiz on the two units before midnight
- Friday: Your discussion board reply post to a classmate is due

However, you do not need to follow this schedule for many assignments. You will be able to work ahead on all of the course requirements except the reply posts to classmates due on Fridays. This will give you schedule flexibility. If, for example, a student with a busy workweek coming up wished to do most of their coursework on Sunday, they could do both readings due during the coming week, read both lectures, post their initial discussion board post, and take the quiz on Sunday. All they’d have left to do is a reply post to a classmate in the week’s discussion board exercise. It’s possible another student working ahead would already have submitted their initial post, and if so, our student could reply to that classmate’s post, and be done with the week’s work before Monday even rolls around.

This is a 3 credit course, which means you should expect to spend a minimum of:

- 75 hours doing course readings and reading PowerPoint lectures
- 37.5 hours working on discussion board assignments
- 31.5 hours preparing for and taking quizzes

Course Readings

Most of the readings in this course will come from our textbook: Steven Barkan's *Social Problems: Continuity and Change*, edition 2.0 (2020). To get the textbook, please follow this link: <https://students.flatworldknowledge.com/course/2593824>. You can choose online access only for \$29.95. If you lack reliable wireless access or prefer to read a paper textbook to give your eyes a break from screens, you can get the physical textbook (which also entitles you to online access) for \$59.95.

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

Here is how your final grade will be calculated:

- 108 points for quizzes. There are a total of 12 available. Of these, you must complete 9, meaning that you can skip three with no penalty. Each quiz is worth 12 points. You can get extra credit for completing additional quizzes, up to a theoretical maximum of 144 points.
- 132 points for discussion exercise posts. There are a total of 14 (including the introductory discussion). You must complete 11 of them, meaning you can skip up to three with no penalty. Each is worth up to 12 points (6 for the Part A initial post and 6 for the Part B reply post). You can get extra credit for completing additional discussion exercises, up to a theoretical maximum of 168 points.
- 36 points for the Covid-19 Project. Instead of submitting a paper this semester, students will submit 3 posts as part of the Covid-19 Project, in which you will apply course ideas in analyzing social problems that have emerged with regard to the pandemic. Each of the three submissions will be worth 12 points.

The required work in this course and its point value is thus:

- 9 quizzes x 12 points = 108 points
- 11 discussions x 12 points = 132 points
- 3 Covid-19 Project posts x 12 points = 36 points
- Total: 276 points

We will use a standard grading scale by percentage:

A is 94-100% (260 points and up)
 A- is 90-93% (248-259 points)
 B+ is 87-89% (240-247 points)
 B is 83-86% (229-239 points)
 A- is 80-82% (221-228 points)
 C+ is 77-79% (213-220 points)
 C is 73-76% (202-212 points)
 B- is 70-72% (193-201 points)
 D+ is 67-69% (185-192 points)
 D is 63-66% (174-184 points)
 C- is 60-62% (166-173 points)
 Under 60% (165 and under)

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 that 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 participate in weekly interactive exercises via discussion boards during the course. Each of these will require students to display their ability to use different sociological theories to explain why social problems arise. For example, a discussion board exercise might ask students to discuss a school tracking program, first from a functionalist perspective, and then, in a response to a classmate's example, analyzing it from a conflict perspective.

Assessment Criteria

The discussion board exercise posts will be graded using a rubric assessing three criteria

- The extent to which the student's post answers the questions posed, displaying their capacity to employ sociological theories presented in the class in analyzing the hypothetical situations presented
- The deployment of a citation to a course reading or lecture that supports their argument, making the relationship between the citation and their position clear
- Writing quality

Social Problems: Readings and Assignments

2 September:

Read "Introduction to the Course" PowerPoint, the syllabus, and course guides

3 September:

Self-introduction discussion board post due

4 September:

Brief replies to at least 2 classmates due

A. Examining Inequality

7 September:

Introduction to Social Problems. Read textbook ch. 1 and Social Problems Theory lecture

8 September:

Social Privilege. Supplemental Readings: Allan G. Johnson. 2005. *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. pp. 12-24.

Also, John Macionis. 2020. *Social Problems*, 8th Ed. pp. 343-5.

Also, Eitzen, Baca Zinn and Smith. 2020. *Social Problems*. 2.2 "A Closer Look: Undemocratic Elections in a Democracy?"

Also, read Power and Privilege lecture.

9 September:

Discussion Exercise 1A initial post due

10 September:

Quiz 1

11 September:

Discussion Exercise 1B reply post due

14 September:

Poverty. Read Textbook ch. 2 and Poverty lecture

15 September:

- Race and Ethnicity*. Read Textbook ch. 3 and Race and Ethnicity lecture
- 16 September:
Discussion Exercise 2A initial post due
- 17 September:
Quiz 2
- 18 September:
Discussion Exercise 2B reply post due
- 21 September:
Gender Inequality. Read Textbook ch. 4 and Sex and Gender lecture
- 22 September:
LGBTQ+ Issues. Read Textbook ch. 5 and Sex/Gender/Sexual Minorities lecture
- 23 September:
Discussion Exercise 3A initial post due
- 24 September:
Quiz 3
- 25 September:
Discussion Exercise 3B reply post due
- 28 September:
Ability and Disability. Supplemental Reading: D. Stanley Eitzen et al. 2014.
Social Problems, 13th Ed. Boston: Pearson, pp. 264-283.
Also read Disabilities lecture.
- 29 September:
Age and Ageism. Read Textbook ch. 6 and Age and Ageism lecture
- 30 September:
Discussion Exercise 4A initial post due
- 1 October:
Quiz 4
- 2 October:
Discussion Exercise 4B reply post due

B. The Role of Institutions

5 October:

Social Organization and Bureaucracy. Supplemental Reading: George Ritzer. 2019. *The McDonaldization of Society*. LA: Sage, pp. 1-13, 36-42, 103-109. Also read Bureaucracy and McDonaldization lecture.

6 October:

Social Solidarity and Social Isolation: Supplemental Readings: Robert Putnam. 2001. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp. 15-27; 203; 246; 264-265; graphs. Also Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together*. 2011. New York: Basic Books, pp. 171-182. Also read lecture Bowling Alone: The Loss of Social Cohesion

7 October:

Discussion Exercise 5A initial post due

8 October:

Quiz 5

9 October:

Discussion Exercise 5B reply post due

12 October:

Work. Read Textbook ch. 12 and Work lecture

13 October:

The Family. Read Textbook ch. 10 and the Family lecture.

14 October

Discussion Exercise 6A initial post due

15 October

Quiz 6

16 October

Discussion Exercise 6B reply post due

19 October:

Work and Family Conflict. (a) Supplemental Reading: Arlie Hochschild. 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking Penguin, pp. 11-21. (b) Supplemental Reading Arlie Hochschild. 2003. *The Commercial Spirit of Intimate Life and Other Essays*. San Francisco and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 198-212. Also read the Work and Family lecture.

20 October:

Education. Read Textbook ch. 11 and the Education lecture

21 October:
Discussion Exercise 7A initial post due

22 October:
Quiz 7

23 October:
Discussion Exercise 7B reply post due

26 October
The Media. Supplemental readings: Douglas Kellner, “The Media and Social Problems,” pp. 1-11
Also Ronald Diebert, 2019. “The Road to Digital Unfreedom: Three Painful Truths about Social Media.” *Journal of Democracy* 30 (1): 25-39.
Also read the Media lecture.

27 October
Government and Political Polarization. Supplemental readings: Ezra Klein. 2020. *Why We’re Polarized*. Ch. 1.
Also Yuval Levin. 2020. *A Time to Build*. Introduction and excerpt from ch. 8.
Also read the Government and Political Polarization lecture

28 October:
Discussion Exercise 8A initial post due

29 October:
Quiz 8

30 October:
Discussion Exercise 8B reply post due

C. “Deviance”

2 November:
Criminal Justice. Textbook ch. 8 and the Crime and Punishment lecture

3 November:
Drugs. Textbook ch. 7; Supplemental Reading: excerpts from Mac Holt, ed. 2006.
Also read the Drugs lecture.

4 November:
Discussion Exercise 9A initial post due

5 November:

Quiz 9

6 November:

Discussion Exercise 9B reply post due

9 November

Alcohol. Supplemental reading: *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 77-86 and 145-155.

Also read the Alcohol lecture.

10 November

Bodily Regulation. Supplemental Reading: Joan Jacobs Brumberg. 1998. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Knopf, pp. xvii-xxi, 97-130.

Also read The “Deviant” Body lecture.

11 November:

Discussion Exercise 10A initial post due

12 November:

Quiz 10

13 November:

Discussion Exercise 10B reply post due

16 November

Food, Diet and Obesity. Supplemental Reading: J. Eric Oliver. 2005. *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America’s Obesity Epidemic*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 14-29, 60-77.

Also read the Fat as “Deviant” lecture

17 November

Health Care. Read Textbook ch. 13 and the Health Care lecture

18 November:

Discussion Exercise 11A initial post due

19 November:

Quiz 11

20 November:

Discussion Exercise 11B reply post due

23 November:

Urban and Rural Issues. Read Textbook ch. 14 and the Space and Place lecture

24 November:

Discussion Exercise 12A (only one post this week)

25-27 November:

Thanksgiving break

D. Global Problems

30 November:

Covid-19 Project. Articles 1 to be assigned

1 December:

Covid-19 Project. Articles 2 to be assigned

2 December:

Covid-19 Project. Part A due

3 December:

Covid-19 Project. Part B due

4 December

Covid-19 Project. Part C due

7 December:

Environmental Issues. Read Textbook ch.15 and the Environment lecture

8 December:

Security and Terror. Read Textbook ch. 16 and the Security and Terror lecture

9 December:

Discussion Exercise 13A initial post due

10 December:

Quiz 12

11 December:

Discussion Exercise 13B reply post due

14 December:

Conclusion. Read the conclusory lecture.

There is no final exam in this class so you are now done!

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

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>.

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:

<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.