Solving Social Problems

SOCIOLOGY 102
Bolton B46, Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45

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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 have we come to lack a national consensus on basic facts that are politically charged? Why have there been such pronounced racial disparities in death rates during the pandemic? Sometimes social problems instill anxiety in us. We worry about inflation 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—or if we’ll lose our jobs and be unable to find another to sustain us in old age. We feel anxious about how climate change will affect our futures.

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 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, or volunteer as a poll worker.

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.

**Course Modality and the Pandemic**

This course has been planned to operate flexibly in a time of uncertainty! While lectures will be presented in person, enhanced PowerPoint presentations posted on the course Canvas site allow for the course to operate virtually. For example, if you test positive for Covid, even if you feel fine, you are required by the university to isolate for ten days. A student with an asymptomatic case of Covid should continue to do their coursework from home (or UWM quarantine dorm space), and the class is designed so that you can do that easily.

Any student who has a positive test result, develops symptoms that may be Covid, or is a close contact of a person who tests positive, is required to report that at [https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofWisconsinMilwaukee&layout_id=4](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofWisconsinMilwaukee&layout_id=4). Your health information will be kept private, and you will be offered resources by the university.

Of course, if you have a symptomatic Covid case, or become substantially ill with anything else, you should rest and take care of your health! The course is designed to accommodate this as well. Students may skip up to three quizzes and up to two writing assignments without penalty. It’s suggested that you turn in more for extra credit, to boost your grade, but the course is designed so that a student who becomes ill for a week or two can avoid the burden of having to make up missed work. (Should you become very ill and are unable to complete work for multiple weeks, it’s suggested you seek a medical withdrawal from the semester.)

Should the professor or TA become ill or test positive for Covid, the entire class will pivot to online-only until they are able to return to teaching on campus.

Life in the era of the pandemic can be unpredictable! But we can all do our part to limit the disruption by limiting the spread of Covid. We should be diligent about wearing our masks, testing appropriately, washing our hands regularly, and taking the other commonsensical steps to protect one another’s health.

**Ground Rules**

The rules for this class are simple. Do your readings, participate in the class’ intellectual community, 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 pandemic and political strife have 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 lecture. So in an ordinary week, you will read two chapters and attend two lectures. The PowerPoints for the lectures will be available on the course Canvas site, for your convenience in studying, and to ensure that any students who are required to isolate are able to complete their work.

Your knowledge of the course materials will be evaluated via a weekly quiz, which must be completed by Friday at 11:59 PM. The quizzes will be administered through the course Canvas site. 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.

Understanding course materials is of course important, but it is vital that students also have opportunities to apply course ideas to real-life situations, so that students gain proficiency in proposing solutions to social problems. Every other week there will be a writing assignment giving you an opportunity to do this. Written essay assignments are due on Sunday by 11:59 PM. Read the Writing Assignment Guidelines document for more information about the biweekly essays.

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.

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

- 37.5 hours attending course lectures
- 45 hours doing course readings
- 30 hours engaging in course writing exercises
- 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/2598877](https://students.flatworldknowledge.com/course/2598877). You can choose online access only for $29.95. If you lack reliable wireless access or are concerned about data caps, I suggest that instead you pay $49.95 to purchase a downloadable copy that is yours to keep. Or, if you 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 just $5 more: $54.95.

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.
- 72 points points for biweekly course essays applying course ideas. There are a total of 6 available. Of these, you can skip two with no penalty. Each essay is worth 18 points. You can get extra credit for completing additional writing assignments, up to a theoretical maximum of 108 points points.
- 36 points for the Covid-19 Project. Instead of submitting a term 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. These cannot be skipped.

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

- 9 quizzes x 12 points = 108 points
- 4 essays x 18 points = 72 points
- 3 Covid-19 Project posts x 12 points = 36 points
- Total: 216 points

We will use a standard grading scale by percentage:

A is 94-100% (203 points and up)
A- is 90-93% (194-202 points)
B+ is 87-89% (188-193 points)
B is 83-86% (179-187 points)
B- is 80-82% (173-178 points)
C+ is 77-79% (166-172 points)
C is 73-76% (158-165 points)
C- is 70-72% (151-157 points)
D+ is 67-69% (145-150 points)
D is 63-66% (136-144 points)
D-is 60-62% (130-135 points)
F is Under 60% (129 and under)

Land Acknowledgement
UWM resides on traditional Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk, and Menominee homelands along the southwest shores of Michigami, North America’s largest system of freshwater lakes, where the Milwaukee, Menominee, and Kinnickinnic rivers meet and the people of
Wisconsin’s sovereign Anishinaabe, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Oneida, and Mohican nations remain present.

**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 write biweekly essays in which they apply course ideas to real-life situations. Each of these essay exercises will require students to display their ability to use different sociological theories to explain why social problems arise. For example, an essay exercise might ask students to discuss a school tracking program, first from a functionalist perspective, and then from a conflict perspective.

*Assessment Criteria*

The essays will be graded using a rubric assessing three criteria

- The extent to which the student’s essay answers the questions posed, displaying their capacity to employ sociological theories presented in the class in analyzing the hypothetical situations presented
- The deployment of citations to course readings or lectures that supports their argument, making the relationship between a given citation and their position clear
- Writing quality
Social Problems: Readings and Assignments

**Introductory Week**
(Note: this week has been designed for the class to take place online except for the initial lecture, in case of a late online “pivot” of UWM teaching for the semester’s start. We will meet in-person as scheduled on Tuesday 25 January for the introductory lecture if this is permitted; the rest of the week’s work will take place online. We will resume a biweekly class meeting schedule in Week 2 presuming no “pivot” online.)

25 January:
- Attend the Introduction to the Course lecture.
- Read the syllabus, and course guides.
- Order/purchase the textbook at https://students.flatworldknowledge.com/course/2598877.

26 January:
- Self-introduction discussion board post due. (All course assignment due dates end at 11:59 PM on the stated date.)

27 January:
- Brief replies to at least 2 classmates due.
- Introductory quiz (to familiarize you with the quiz format, and ensure you have read the introduction and course guides—only 6 questions!).

28 January:
- Class survey due (taken in Canvas Quizzes, but it is anonymous and nongraded).

**A. Examining Inequality**

1 February:
- Before the class meets for lecture, you should read chapter 1 in our Barkan textbook. All reading assignments are due by the time class meets on the date listed.
- *Introduction to Social Problems* lecture.

3 February:
- Also, Eitzen, Baca Zinn and Smith. 2020. Social Problems. 2.2 “A Closer Look: Undemocratic Elections in a Democracy?”
- Attend Power and Privilege lecture.

4 February:
- Quiz 1
6 February:
   Complete Writing Assignment 1

8 February:
   Poverty. Read Textbook ch. 2
   Attend Poverty lecture

10 February:
   Race and Ethnicity. Read Textbook ch. 3
   Attend Race and Ethnicity lecture

11 February:
   Quiz 2

15 February:
   Gender Inequality. Read Textbook ch. 4
   Attend Sex and Gender lecture

17 February:
   LGBTQ+ Issues. Read Textbook ch. 5
   Attend Sex/Gender/Sexual Minorities lecture

18 February:
   Quiz 3

20 February
   Complete Writing Assignment 2

22 February:
   Ability and Disability. Supplemental Reading: D. Stanley Eitzen et al. 2014.
   Attend Disabilities lecture.

24 February:
   Age and Ageism. Read Textbook ch. 6
   Attend Age and Ageism lecture

25 February:
   Quiz 4

B. The Role of Institutions

1 March:

3 March:

4 March:
Quiz 5

6 March:
Complete writing assignment 3

8 March:
Work. Read Textbook ch. 12
Attend Work lecture

10 March:
The Family. Read Textbook ch. 10
Attend The Family lecture.

11 March:
Quiz 6

15 March:

17 March:
Education. Read Textbook ch. 11
Attend the Education lecture

18 March:
Quiz 7

20 March:
Complete writing assignment 4
29 March:
Attend the Media lecture.

31 March:
Also Yuval Levin. 2020. *A Time to Build.* Ch. 1 excerpt  
Attend the Government and Political Polarization lecture

1 April:  
Quiz 8

C. “Deviance”

5 April:  
*Criminal Justice.* Textbook ch. 8  
Attend the Crime and Punishment lecture

7 April:  
*Drugs.* Textbook ch. 7  
Attend the Drugs lecture.

8 April:  
Quiz 9

10 April:  
Complete writing assignment 5

12 April:  
Attend the Alcohol lecture.

14 April:  
Attend The “Deviant” Body lecture.

15 April:  
Quiz 10
19 April:
Attend the Fat as “Deviant” lecture.

21 April:
Health Care. Read Textbook ch. 13
Attend the Health Care lecture

22 April:
Quiz 11

24 April:
Complete writing assignment 6

26 April:
Environmental Issues. Read Textbook ch.15
Attend the Environment lecture

28 April:
Security and Terror. Read Textbook ch. 16 and the Security and Terror lecture

29 April:
Quiz 12

D. Global Problems

2 May
Covid-19 Project. Read Articles Set 1

3 May:
Covid-19 Project. Read Articles Set 2

4 May:
Covid-19 Project. Part A due

5 May:
Covid-19 Project. Part B due

6 May:
Covid-19 Project. Part C due

10 May:
Urban and Rural Issues. Read Textbook ch. 14
Attend the Space and Place lecture

12 May:

Conclusion.
Attend the conclusory lecture.
Say goodbye on the farewell discussion board.

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:

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
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.