

Social Problems (Soci 201), Spring 2016

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“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

–Karl Marx

From *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)

Course Description

This course will cover a variety of current social problems in the United States and around the world, focusing on how a problem is defined, who defines it, and what implications this has for the treatment of the social problem in question. Social problems are real problems, often with life and death consequences for real people. Nevertheless, all problems exist within the contexts of their particular societies and cultures. What is a social problem and how we seek to solve social problems are influenced by governments, media, corporations, social movements, and individual actors, consciously or unconsciously. We will adopt a sociological perspective on various social problems in this course; meaning we will look at the problems from different vantage points, which may or may not challenge your existing values and beliefs. By the end of the course you should develop an understanding of some of the major social problems facing society, why we consider these social problems, and how the contestation over the definition of a social problem influences the flow of societal resources to help solve or ease these problems.

Course Objectives

This course seeks to establish what a social problem is, how they are defined by society, and some of the solutions sought to these problems. We will attempt to understand how the proponents and opponents of these social problems define the situation and seek resolutions. We will delve further into the nature of social problems, below the external structures and arguments presented by the interested parties, through insights from sociological theories. Basic goals:

- Understand how a social problem is constructed

- Understand the basic facts behind the major social problems facing the U.S. and the world
- Understand different sociological perspectives used to explain particular problems
- Develop the ability to evaluate arguments concerning the impact of social problems and solutions to social problems

Required Texts

- Charon, Joel M. and Lee Garth Vigilant. 2011. *Social Problems: Readings with Four Questions, Fourth Edition*. CA: Wadsworth.
- Additional readings posted on Blackboard

Grading (all grades posted on Blackboard)

Exam #1	85 points
Exam #2	85 points
Exam #3	85 points
Quizzes (lowest quiz grade dropped)	85 points (Total)
Paper	60 points

A+	388-400 points
A	376-387 points
A-	360-375 points
B+	348-359 points
B	336-347 points
B-	320-335 points
C+	308-319 points
C	296-307 points
C-	280-295 points
D+	268-279 points
D	256-267 points
D-	240-255 points
F	239 points and below

Achievement-Centered Education (ACE) Student Learning Outcomes

The University of Nebraska—Lincoln seeks to provide quality education to all of its students. To that end, it has designated certain classes as ACE certified. These classes provide and assess specific learning outcomes. As an ACE class, Social Problems will facilitate Learning Outcomes #6 (using knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives appropriate to the social sciences to understand and evaluate human behavior) and #9 (exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue). This class will:

- Provide opportunities to increase your knowledge of contemporary social problems, sociological perspectives on social problems, and prevalent patterns of inequality that affect and are affected by social problems.
- Examine social problems in Nebraska, the United States, and around the world.
- Focus on the relationship between social problems and gender, race, social class, religion, and family status.

- Facilitate these goals through lecture, readings, class discussion, in-class activities, and research on crime or drugs in the United States.

ACE learning outcomes in this class will be assessed by:

- Quizzes, three exams, and a research paper on crime or drugs in the United States.

Class Conduct

Discussion and class activities will be an integral part of this class. All students should feel free to express informed opinions at any time. Everyone is expected to respect others' opinions, whether we agree or not. All views are welcome. Personal attacks on other students will not be tolerated.

Students must TURN OFF CELL PHONES and other electronic devices before entering classroom (students text messaging or with ringing cell phones may be asked to leave). Students may NOT use laptops or other electronic devices without permission. Students who are found using cell phones or other electronic devices during exams automatically FAIL THE COURSE.

A Note on Email

I am regularly available to meet with students and I am happy to arrange meeting times other than during my office hours, but I do not always check/reply to my email on a daily basis. Please reserve email for serious problems and emergencies. See me before/after class or come to my office if you have questions (I have ample office hours). If you cannot make it to my office hours, see me before or after class to arrange an appointment. DO NOT email me about class times, dates, course content, or your grade.

Class Attendance and Assignments

Attending class is crucial to obtaining a high grade in the class. There is much material presented in class that is not contained in the assigned readings, and vice-versa. Additionally, there will be unannounced quizzes. There will be NO MAKE-UP QUIZZES. Your lowest quiz grade is dropped, so you can miss one quiz without penalty.

If you must miss class, make sure to get the notes from a classmate and then see me if you have further questions. My notes are not available to students who missed a class.

There is one assigned paper. The paper must be uploaded to Blackboard BEFORE THE START OF CLASS ON THE DAY IT IS DUE. See the instructor before the day the paper is due if this method of submitting your paper is a problem. As of the start of class, any paper not uploaded to Blackboard is late. Late assignments will receive reduced grades (10% off for each day late). Assignments will NOT be accepted more than one week after due date.

Exams

Exams will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and some short essays. The exams cover material from class and information from the assigned readings.

Describe a Social Problem Paper: Choose One Option

This is a short paper, about 2-4 double-spaced pages (plus bibliography). Your paper should be *uploaded to Blackboard before the start of class* on the day it is due. See instructor before the day the paper is due if this method of submitting your paper is a problem. While this is not an English class, your paper must be readable. Make sure to proofread your paper several times. Excessive misspellings, typos, or unclear sentences will result in a lower grade. Your paper must have SECTION HEADINGS/TITLES demarking the separate sections (see paper requirements below).

Regardless of which paper option you choose, you are expected to provide supporting citations for the factual information in your paper. This includes both citing source material in the text of the paper and a reference or bibliography section at the end of the paper. All sources must be from books (preferably non-partisan), academic journal articles, or government websites (must end in .gov).

- In the text of the paper, put the name and date of the source in parentheses at the end of any relevant sentences. For example: “Marijuana use has been shown to increase the likelihood of ...(Schwadel 2005).”
- At the end of the paper, have the full reference including author(s) name, date, title, where it was published, etc. Use either APA or MLA formats. For example:
 - Schwadel, Philip 2005. “Individual, Congregational, and Denominational Effects on Church Members’ Civic Participation.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44:159-171.
 - Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Paper Option #1: Marijuana in the United States

Due 3/1 (upload to Blackboard before start of class)

This paper addresses the legality of marijuana, the social impact of marijuana use, the prevalence of marijuana use, and variation in marijuana use. Your paper must include the following sections:

1. Legality. Describe the legality of marijuana in the United States. Be sure to address each of the following: a) historical changes, b) current U.S. law, c) variations in state laws, and d) laws regarding possession and sale of marijuana in Nebraska.
2. Impact. What are the problems associated with marijuana? Are there any potential benefits?
3. Use. How prevalent is the use of marijuana? Does it vary across relevant social groups in the United States?
4. Reference/Bibliography section.

Paper Option #2: Violent Crime in the United States

Due 3/8 (upload to Blackboard before start of class)

This paper addresses prevalence, impact, and variation in violent crime. Your paper must include the following sections:

1. What is violent crime? What crimes are considered violent crimes in the United States? Who decides which crimes count as violent crimes?
2. Prevalence. What is the violent crime rate in the U.S.? How has this changed from the 1970s to the 2000s? What are some of the proposed reasons for these changes?
3. Criminals and victims. Who is most likely to commit violent crime? Who is most likely to be the victim of violent crime? Do these patterns differ across types of violent crime?
4. Reference/Bibliography section.

Extra Credit

Extra credit will be awarded for participation in certain class activities throughout the semester. The ONLY way to get extra credit is to be in class on the days when we have extra credit activities. No extra credit or rounding up of grades will occur at the end of the semester.

Academic Honesty

There will be no leniency for any form of academic dishonesty. Cheating on exams and plagiarizing written assignments will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty will result in failing the course and referral the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.

Student with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodations due to disabilities should contact the Service for Students Disabilities (SSD) office as soon as possible to have them advance the paperwork to the instructor in a timely manner.

Tentative Class Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading (chapter)</u>	<u>Exam/Assignment Due</u>
T 1/12	Introduction		
R 1/14	Social Problems and Sociology	“What is a Social Problem?”*	
T 1/19	Social Problems and Sociology	C&V reading 1 & 2	
R 1/21	Poverty and Affluence	C&V reading 6 & 8	
T 1/26	Poverty and Affluence	C&V reading 7 & 9	
R 1/28	Education	C&V reading 37 & 38	
T 2/2	Education	C&V reading 36	
R 2/4	Race and Ethnicity	C&V reading 15	
T 2/9	Race and Ethnicity	C&V reading 13 & 16	
R 2/11	Review		
T 2/16	<i>Exam #1</i>		<i>Exam #1</i>
R 2/18	Sex Roles/Sex-Related Social Problems	C&V reading 22 & 23	
T 2/23	Sex Roles/Sex-Related Social Problems	C&V reading 25	
R 2/25	Family-Related Problems	C&V reading 32 & 33	
T 3/1	Alcohol and Drugs	“The Ice Age”*	<i>Paper Option #1</i>
R 3/3	Alcohol and Drugs	C&V reading 29	
T 3/8	Crime and Violence	C&V reading 28	<i>Paper Option #2</i>
R 3/10	Crime and Violence	C&V reading 27 & 30	
T 3/15	Crime and Violence/Review		
R 3/17	<i>Exam #2</i>		<i>Exam #2</i>
T 3/22	<i>No Class—Spring Break</i>		
R 3/24	<i>No Class—Spring Break</i>		
T 3/29	Problems of Health	C&V reading 42 & 43	
R 3/31	Problems of Health	C&V reading 41	
T 4/5	Work and Economy	C&V reading 10 & 11	
R 4/7	Work and Economy	C&V reading 4 & 12	
T 4/12	Population Growth and Immigration	C&V reading 17 & 55	
R 4/14	Technology and Environment	C&V reading 51 & 52	
T 4/19	Politics	C&V reading 44 & 46	
R 4/21	War and Terrorism	C&V reading 45 & 48	
T 4/26	Religion	C&V reading 47	
R 4/28	Wrap up/Review		
R 5/5	<i>Exam #3 (10:00-12:00)</i>		<i>Exam #3 (10:00-12:00)</i>

Everyone is expected to have done the reading BEFORE class (be prepared for quizzes)

C&V = Charon and Vigilant reader.

* Reading available on Blackboard