

# Social Problems

Sociology (SOC) 201, Fall 2015  
Tuesday & Thursday (TR) 9:30-10:45am  
Burnett Hall (BURN) 115 - UNL City Campus

**Instructor:** Alexis Swendener, M.A.

**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday 12:30-1:45pm, and by appointment

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## Required Text:

Charon, Joel M. and Lee Garth Vigilant. 2012. *Social Problems: Readings with Four Questions, Fourth Edition*. CA: Wadsworth.

Additional readings will be provided via Blackboard.

## Course Description:

Within this class we will adopt a sociological perspective in studying various social problems within the United States. This means that we will be critically thinking about the problems our society faces, including how these problems came to be defined, who defines it, and what are the implications of this structure for our society. We will explore how governments, media, corporations, and both individual and collective actors contribute to social problems. By the end of this course you should develop an understanding of some of the major social problems facing society, including how the contestation over the definition of a social problem influences how societal resources are allocated to help solve or ease the effects of 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 for this course include:

- Understanding how a social problem is constructed
- Understanding the basic facts behind the major social problems facing the U.S. and the world
- Understanding different sociological perspectives used to explain particular problems
- Developing the ability to evaluate arguments concerning the impact of social problems and solutions to social problems

## **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, Sociology 201 - 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 researching social problems in the United States.

ACE learning outcomes in this class will be assessed by:

- Quizzes, exams, and papers (more information on graded assignments below).

### **Course Requirements:**

#### Course Conduct

Attendance, discussion, and engagement in class activities will be an integral part of this class. Class members are expected to foster an environment of mutual respect and understanding for others. Personal attacks on other students will not be tolerated.

In order to ensure a better learning environment for all, laptop computers and/or iPads/tablets may be used for course related purposes, but cell phones, MP3 players, or other personal communication devices should be turned off and put away at all times during class. Misuse of technology during class will result in lower class participation scores. Students may use laptops in the classroom for notes only. If you are caught using the laptop for other purposes, especially if it is causing other students to be distracted, you will be asked to leave. Students who are found using phones or other electronic devices during exams automatically fail the course.

#### Class Attendance and Assignments

Attending class is crucial to earning a high grade in the class. There will be much material presented in class that is not contained in the assigned readings. 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 class, as they are an incomplete synopsis of a class period's discussions, questions, activities, and other in-class dynamics.

Excused absences include University-related events or with a doctor's note. University-related, planned absences (e.g., athletics, fieldwork) require the student to notify the instructor in order to make up any missed in-class assignments or submit any papers due in advance of the absence, not after. Doctor's notes will be accepted to make up assignments within a week after a student's absence.

### In-class Assignments

In-class work will consist of prompted written assignments, reading reflections or short quizzes, or group activities or discussions. Each day's readings should be completed by the class period in which it is listed in order to fully participate in class and will be critical in successfully completing these in-class assignments. In-class assignments cannot be made up, unless for a University-approved absence.

### Papers

There will be 2 papers in this class. The first is worth 20 points and the second is worth 40 points. The first paper assignment will allow students to integrate and build upon their knowledge about a social problem via research on a topic of choice from the first part of the course. The second paper assignment will include a paper on a social problem, informational handout, and reflection on your peer's handouts as components of the 40 points to be earned. The due dates are listed below in the class schedule. All paper prompts will be available on Blackboard and will be announced in class.

Papers must be turned in on the day they are due in class. Assignments may not be emailed without prior instructor approval. Late assignments will receive reduced grades (5 points off for each day late). Assignments will not be accepted more than one week after the due date.

### Exams

There will be 3 exams worth 80 points each. Exams will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and short essays. The exams cover material from class and information from the assigned readings.

### Extra Credit

Students will be able to submit proposals for a maximum of 2 extra credit assignments, worth up to 5 points each. Students have the opportunity to propose an assignment/activity that is *extra/in addition* to any course assignment; a handout guiding students will be posted on Blackboard. This means that students can propose an idea for an assignment in which they will critically analyze the readings, carefully integrate the course material, and apply this material in some way, all of which will result in a written piece for evaluation. Extra credit assignments should display a willingness to submit thoughtful and extensive work to earn extra points. All proposals must be approved by the instructor in order for students to proceed with the extra credit assignment. I will use methods of evaluation dependent upon the assignment type to measure your careful analysis, integration, and application of the course material.

No extra credit or artificial rounding up of grades will occur at the end of the semester.

### **Submitted Work:**

Please submit all work to me in class via hard copy. Your work must be double-spaced, in Times New Roman, 12-point font with 1-inch margins all around. If you do not follow the formatting guidelines you will lose points on your assignments. I am most concerned with the quality of content in your work; however, your grade will suffer if I am unable to read your work and understand your ideas and analyses.

A great resource for students to improve their writing is the Writing Assistance Center found in 129 Andrew Hall, <http://www.unl.edu/writing/home>, phone: (402) 472-8803.

**Grading:**

You will earn your final grade in this course based on your total weighted performance on each of the course requirements described above. Course grades will be calculated as follows:

Exam 1	80
Exam 2	80
Exam 3	80
In-class assignments	100
Paper 1	20
Paper 2 (with handout)	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>

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

**Academic Integrity:**

“The maintenance of academic honesty and integrity is a vital concern of the University community. Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty shall be subject to both academic and disciplinary sanctions. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: . . . Cheating; Fabrication or Falsification; Plagiarism; Abuse of Academic Materials; Complicity in Academic Dishonesty; Falsifying Grade Reports; [and] Misrepresentation to Avoid Academic Work.” (from the UNL Student Code of Conduct, <http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml>).

All work that you turn in must be your own. Cheating and plagiarizing are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Those caught cheating will receive a failing grade for the course and will be reported to both the Chair of the Sociology Department and the University of Judicial Officer. Students are encouraged to review and become familiar with the University’s Academic Integrity policy (<http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml>), section 4.2.

**Students with Disabilities:**

It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate fully in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor via email to set up an appointment for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation.

**Right of Revision:**

I reserve the right to modify any aspect of this syllabus at any time as need be. All changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

**Course Schedule:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments</b>
1	August 25	Welcome and Introduction	
	August 27	Sociology & Studying Social Problems	C&V Chapters 1 & 2
2	September 1	Poverty	C&V Chs. 6&8
	September 3	Poverty	C&V Chs. 7&9
3	September 8	Racial and Ethnic Inequality	C&V 15
	September 10	Racial and Ethnic Inequality	BB
4	September 15	Gender Inequality	C&V 23
	September 17	Gender Inequality	BB
5	September 22	Wrap-up/Review	
	September 24	<b>Exam 1</b>	
6	September 29	Sexuality	C&V 26 and BB
	October 1	Sexuality	BB
7	October 6	Crime and Violence	C&V 28
	October 8	Alcohol and Drugs	C&V 29
8	October 13	Crime and Drugs Wrap-up	BB
	October 15	Family	C&V 32 & 33 Social Problem paper 1 due
9	October 20	<b>Fall Break—No Class</b>	
	October 22	Family	BB
10	October 27	Health	BB
	October 29	Wrap-up/Review	
11	November 3	<b>Exam 2</b>	
	November 5	Politics and Work	C&V 10 & BB
12	November 10	Economy and Work	C&V 11&12
	November 12	Education	C&V 36&38
13	November 17	Population growth and aging	C&V 55 & BB
	November 19	Environment	C&V 51&52 Soc Problem Handout & Paper 2 due
14	November 24	Social Problems Workshop	Check BB
	November 26	<b>Thanksgiving Break—No Class</b>	
15	December 1	Science & Technology	BB
	December 3	S&T; Conflict/War/Terrorism	BB
16	December 8	Conflict/War/Terrorism	C&V 45
	December 10	Review and Wrap-up	
17	Wednesday, December 16	<b>Final Exam time: 10am-12pm</b> (Exam 3)	

*Legend:* BB=Reading found on Blackboard; C&V=Charon & Vigilant textbook/reader chapter(s)