

SOCY 2 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

WINTER TERM 2015

Course meets in XX XX 10A, T/TH 10-11:50AM X-period: W 3-3:50

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Office hours: T/TH 12-1:15PM
Or by appointment

Course description:

Daily news reports direct much of our attention to social problems such as crime, inequality, and poverty. Yet rarely are these reports accompanied by a discussion of the systematic causes of these problems. More often we become witness to an endless stream of media coverage reporting seemingly isolated incidents and events, in a sensationalized manner. Seldom are we informed of the process by which some events or behaviors come to be defined as social problems, or the decision-making process by which some social problems are selected for coverage, while others are ignored. The purpose of this course is to subject a selection of social problems, as well as the coverage of those problems, to a sociological analysis. We will attempt to answer questions such as, "How does a social problem become defined as such?" "What are the causes of various social problems?" Throughout the course we will explore solutions to these social problems and ask, "What can be done?" directing some of our attention to those organizations, individuals, programs and policies that have implemented constructive responses to issues of public concern.

The active participation of all members of the class is essential to the course's success. It is essential that students read all the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss and debate the issues raised in them. Students are expected to not only read, but also reflect upon the assigned readings before coming to class. To facilitate discussion, I will post reflection questions for students to consider as they read the course material. All students will be expected to understand key concepts from all reading materials. As part of student engagement in the class, it is expected that all outside distractions are turned off prior to coming to class (this includes cell phones and other electronic devices).

Each week a sub-set of students will serve as discussion leaders. Discussion leaders will write a **5-6 page paper** (typed, double spaced) analyzing that week's readings (see the attached assignment description for the paper and the policy on late papers). There will also be a **group project** (details to be distributed at a later date). Students will also be graded on **class participation** overall. Class attendance, contributions to in-class discussions, and participation in group activities all contribute to your class participation grade. Because it is necessary to be in class to participate, **missing more than four class periods without a valid excuse, approved by me, means you cannot receive any better than a C for your class participation part of the grade.**

The final grade will be determined based on the following weighting scheme:

- Class participation: 10%
- Discussion paper: 20%
- Group project: 20%
- Mid-term exam: 25%
- Take home final exam: 25%

There will also be opportunities for extra credit. See attached.

***** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, by the end of the second week of classes (January 12, 2009).** All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Disability Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested. Also, stop by the Academic Skills Center in 301 Collis Center to register for support services.

******* For individual peer tutorial assistance with papers, research, and new media projects, students may use RWIT, the Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology. Make appointments online at www.dartmouth.edu/~rwit, or drop by the Center at Baker-Berry Library, Level One, from 4 to 6PM and 7 to 10PM, S-Th.

Honor principle and work in this course:

(1) **Papers:** You are encouraged to discuss your papers with other students in the class, however the writing of your paper is independent work. You should cite concepts and materials from class and readings appropriately in your papers. At a minimum, papers should have at least two references (the book you are analyzing and one other book or reference material, may be another book from the course).

(2) **Exams:** Exams are independent work ONLY. You are encouraged to study for the in-class mid-term with other students from class, but the exam is completely independent. The take-home final exam is also completely independent—you should not discuss the exam with any other students from the course.

Classroom discussion: Focused class discussion is possible only if people are willing to abide by the conventions of civilized discourse. All points of view must be expressed politely and with due respect for the differing opinions of others.

Required Reading

Textbooks:

The following books are required, and can be purchased from the Dartmouth Bookstore or Wheelock Books. They are also on reserve in Baker/Berry library.

1. Ruane, Janet M. and Karen A. Cerulo. 2012. *Second Thoughts: Sociology Challenges Conventional Wisdom*. Fifth Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. ISBN: 9781412988094
2. Collins, Jane Lou, and Victoria Mayer. 2010. *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom in the Low-Wage Labor Market*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 9780226114064
3. Newman, Katherine S., Cybelle Fox, David J. Harding, Jal Mehta and Wendy Roth. 2005. *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. New York: Basic Books. ISBN: 0465051049 (or 0465051030 for hardcover)
4. Clawson, Dan and Naomi Gerstel. 2014. *Unequal Time: Gender, Class and Family in Employment Schedules*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
5. Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2013. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Fourth Edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield. ISBN: 9781442220553

Additional readings are available on our course Blackboard site, under “Additional Readings.”

Course Schedule

DATE		TOPIC & READINGS
1/6	T	<i>Introduction to course</i> No readings
1/8	TH	<u>What is a Social Problem? How do Sociologists Study Social Problems?</u> Ruane p. 1-18. Introduction: The Sociological Perspective and Essay 1: Numbers don't lie (On Canvas) Joel Best. 1987. "Rhetoric in Claims-Making: Constructing the Missing Children Problem." <i>Social Problems</i> , vol 34, no 2, pp. 101-121.
1/13	T	<u>Income, Inequality, and Poverty</u> Ruane, p. 205-216. Essay 19: Welfare is Ruining this Country Collins and Mayer, p. 1-54. Chapters 1-2
1/15	TH	Ruane, p. 97-109. Essay 9: Essay 9: The More We Pay, the More It's Worth and Essay 10: Money is the Root of All Evil Collins and Mayer, p.55-113. Chapters 3-4
1/15	TH	Get tickets to MLK Keynote address, free
1/19	M	MLK Keynote Address: Ella LJ Smith, 7PM
1/20	T	Ruane p.125-138. Essay 12: America Is the Land of Equal Opportunity Collins and Mayer, p.114-164. Chapters 5-7 (On Blackboard) Alissa Quart. 2013. "Crushed by the Cost of Childcare." <i>New York Times</i> , August 17.
1/22	TH	<u>Inequalities in Gender, Class and Work and Family</u> Clawson and Gerstel, p. 1-85. Chapters 1-4
1/27	T	Clawson and Gerstel, p. 89-156. Chapters 5-7
1/29	TH	Ruane p. 139-156. Essay 13: You've Come a Long Way, Baby Clawson and Gerstel, p. 159-208. Chapters 8-9
2/3	T	Clawson and Gerstel, p. 209-272. Chapters 10-12
2/5	TH	<u>Mid-term Review</u> No readings

2/10	T	<u>Mid-term exam</u>
2/10	T	Denise McWilliams, Executive Director, New England Innocence Project 4:15-5:30
2/12	TH	<u>Studying Social Problems Through the Study of School Shootings</u> Ruane, p. 141-148. Essay 13: Violence is on the Rise in the United States Newman, p. 3-73. Part 1 - Chapters 1-3 Ruane, p.161-180. Essay 15: There Ought to Be a Law and Essay 16: Honesty Is the Best Policy Newman, p.77-176. Part 2- Chapters 4-7 Ruane, p.29-41. Essay 3: Children Are Our Most Precious Commodity Newman, p.179-306. Part 3 - Chapters 8-11 and Epilogue
2/17	T	
2/19	TH	
2/24	T	<u>Racial Inequalities and Racism</u> Ruane, p.73-84. Essay 7: What's in a Name? Bonilla-Silva, p.1-73. Chapters 1-3 Ruane, p.217-230. Essay 20: Immigrants are Ruining This Nation Bonilla-Silva, p.75-149. Chapters 4-6 Ruane, p.245-257. Essay 22: Education Is the Great Equalizer Bonilla-Silva, p.151-275. Chapters 7-10
2/26	TH	
3/3	T	
3/5	TH	<u>Group Presentations and Conclusions</u> GROUP PROJECTS DUE No readings GROUP PRESENTATIONS DURING CLASS Ruane, p.271-274. Conclusions: Why Does Conventional Wisdom Persist? GROUP PRESENTATIONS DURING CLASS
3/10	T	
3/14		FINAL EXAM, Saturday, March 14, 11:30AM

Discussion Paper Assignment

In this assignment you are to write a brief review and analysis of the book. Use the questions below as a *guide* to your analysis. The paper should be written as an essay, not as answers to the specific questions below. The paper is due the first day the book is discussed in class. It is **highly recommended** that you read the entire book *prior* to writing the paper, even though the discussion of the book may span two class periods.

Due: in class first day book assigned.

1. Summary and thesis statement (one paragraph)

Provide a brief summary of the book (1-3 sentences)

What is the author's thesis?

2. Context of the problem

According to the author, why should we care about this problem?

a. what is the history or background of this problem?

b. what are the effects or consequences of this problem (negative and positive)?

Are there different consequences of the problem for different groups?

3. Causes of the problem

What factors (causes) does the author explain produce this problem? How is this author similar to or different from other theories on this problem? i.e. How does the *author* say his/her work differs from others who have analyzed this problem?

4. Evidence

What kind of evidence does the author use to examine this problem? What does this type of evidence reveal about the problem? How is it helpful for enhancing our understanding of the problem? Is the evidence adequate to address the questions raised by the author? How might additional information, evidence or data affect the author's thesis?

5. Solutions to the problem

What are the typical solutions proposed for this problem? What, if any, are the solutions offered by the author?

How does the author's work affect our understanding of this problem? For example, will this book affect the way we think about a problem, how we define what is a problem, how we understand the extent of the problem, how we might address the problem, etc.

6. Take a personal position (one paragraph)

What are your own reactions to the author's examination of this problem? Do you agree with the author? Why or why not? What do you think are the best ways to address this problem?

Policy on Late Papers

Discussion papers handed in any time after the beginning of the class in which they are due will receive a full letter grade reduction, meaning that the highest possible grade you can get on a late paper is a B. Because your paper is expected to be a source of discussion for the class, **if you do not come to class on the day your discussion paper is due, you will receive an additional letter grade reduction, meaning the best possible grade you can receive is a C.** I will deduct an additional half a letter grade for each additional class period your paper is late. **Any paper more than two weeks late will not be accepted.**

Extensions may be given for extreme individual circumstances. If you are having problems completing an assignment, for whatever reason, it is best to talk with me as soon as possible. Talk to me after class, come to see me in my office during office hours, or email me and we can set up a time to meet. I may be able to help you get the paper done on time, and I will be more sympathetic than if I hear of your problem the day before or the day the assignment is due. **Please note that talking with me will not necessarily lead to an extension.**

Also note that computer failure is never considered a justifiable excuse for a paper extension. Computers sometimes freeze or breakdown; power outages happen. The best way to deal with these possibilities is to **save your work, and save often.**