

Social Problems (working syllabus)

Instructor Information

- Instructor: Miles Marsala
- Email: miles.marsala@duke.edu
- Office Location: TBD
- Office Hours: TBD

Course Details

- Days: TBD
- Time: TBD
- Location: TBD

General Information

Description

During this course, we will learn and apply the sociological imagination and perspective to past and present social problems. Drawing on historical and contemporary issues, we will use critical thinking to discuss and evaluate social problems and seek potential solutions. There will be a range of topics discussed, including, but not limited to, race, class, gender, sexuality, crime, and inequality. We will learn that the social problems we face are not random or rooted in individuals' personalities and genes but are socially patterned.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, you will be equipped with the sociological imagination and be able to:

- Apply sociological theories to various social issues
- Define social problems, evaluate their origins, and assess their consequences
- Identify and describe the relationship between private issues and social problems
- Critically weigh and compare proposed solutions to social problems and develop potential solutions

Course Materials

Required Materials*

Good news: your textbook for this class is available for free online! Your book is available in web view and in various downloadable formats including; PDF, EPUB, MOBI, and others.

Social Problems: Continuity and Change, Digital ISBN: 978-1-946135-23-0, <https://doi.org/10.24926/8668.2301>.

All other reading and media materials will be provided by the instructor and available on the course website.

Course Requirements & Policies

Requirements

The format of this course is a combination of lecture and discussions based on social problems and ways to solve them. It is important that you come to each prepared to participate. Preparation for the class includes having read the assigned text for each day, taking notes on the main points and key ideas, and having prepared comments and questions related to the readings.

Participation in class will be a focus of this course. It is essential that we, as a group, be able to work together to identify social problems, their causes, and consequences, and to develop solutions. Doing the reading before class, completing assignments on time, and critical thinking outside of class will be crucial.

Grading

Your work will be graded on a point system, which will be converted to a percentage. In this course, there are 1,000 cumulative points available, which corresponds to a 100% scale. In some courses, students begin with a full grade, and points are deducted throughout the semester; this is not how I grade. In this course, everyone starts with zero points, and as you complete and turn in assignments, quizzes, and tests, points are added to your total. This is to ensure that students continue to work toward earning their grade, and not merely picking and choosing what assignments to focus on to "keep" their grade.

Grades are distributed as follows:

Attendance	150 points	15% of final grade
Participation	150 points	15% of final grade
Quizzes	100 points	10% of final grade
Position Papers	100 points	10% of final grade
Exams	300 points	30% of final grade
Group Project	200 points	20% of final grade
Total	1,000 points	100%

Late or Missed Work

It is important to stay on task and complete your assignments on time. However, life circumstances sometimes get in the way. I will allow late work to be turned in no later than one class period late but will include a 10% reduction on any work that is turned in late. Any assignments turned in more than one class period late will not be accepted and will be given zero points.

There are some exceptions to the late work policy. First, if you are aware of an upcoming absence that will conflict with an in-class quiz, test, or assignment, you may complete an excused absence form.

Second, if you experience an unavoidable, verifiable, emergent, and extenuating circumstance preventing you from submitting work on time, you may have the opportunity to submit late work.

**Additional exceptions and policies regarding an inability to complete an assignment on time will be permitted based on college policies.

Attendance Policy

Students may miss a total of three class periods, no questions asked, without penalty. Once a student misses more than three class periods, each period missed beyond three will be a 50-point deduction, up to 150-point deduction, from the final grade.

Students may arrive to class up to five minutes late without penalty, any tardiness beyond five minutes will have a 20-point deduction, up to 100-point deduction, from the final grade. Any tardiness beyond 30 minutes will be considered as an absence.

Participation

It is vital that every student participates in the course to the extent that they are comfortable. This course is designed to function on discussion and debate, for this to work, everyone must come to class prepared and ready to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about your willingness or ability to participate, please let me know.

Reading Quizzes

The purpose of these quizzes is to ensure that students are doing the reading and prepared to discuss the topics for the week that we will cover in class. All quizzes are available online and can be taken as many times as a student wants. These are not meant to be a burden or detriment to your grade, but to prepare you to participate. Reading quizzes will be about the reading for the upcoming week on the course schedule. For example, the reading quiz for week three covers the material from chapter 2, sections 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and chapter 3, sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4. All quizzes are due before class begins on the first day of class for that week.

Position Papers

Position papers allow students to apply the concepts and theories from class and the reading to specific social problems. For these papers:

1. Read/listen/watch the assigned reading or other media for each paper.
2. Summarize the assigned material AND provide at least two alternative positions or solutions.

- Evaluate your alternative positions and choose one with which you most agree. Use theories, concepts, discussion material, and other supporting materials to defend your chosen position logically.

Papers should be 3 to 4 pages, double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins. Be sure to read, review, and edit your papers for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Papers are due online before class begins on the day listed on the course schedule.

Exams

Exams will cover the chapters listed next to each exam on the course schedule. Even if we do not discuss a specific topic or section of the reading in class, it will on the test. In addition to the readings, exams will also cover anything covered in class discussion.

Group Project

Group projects will provide everyone in the course with a wider variety of viewpoints, help students learn to work and problem solve together, and work on public speaking.

Early in the term, students will form groups and determine a social problem about which they want to know more. At the end of the semester, each group will give a 15- to 20-minute presentation to the class. Presentations may take a variety of forms, including but not limited to, oral reports, a created group activity for the class to participate in, or any approved media by the instructor.

Students will evaluate each member of their group for participation and assistance during the project. Class members and the instructor will also grade their peers' presentations. Each member of the group will receive the same grade, so be sure to work together.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading	Due
Week 1			
Class 1	Review syllabus and course introduction	Syllabus	
Class 2	The Sociological Imagination	<i>The Sociological Imagination</i> by C. Wright Mills Ch. 1, Sections 1 & 2	
Week 2			
Class 1	Understanding Social Problems	Ch. 1	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Poverty	Ch. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	
Week 3			
Class 1	Poverty	Ch. 2.4, 2.5, 2.6	Reading Quiz
Class2	Racial & Ethnic Inequality	Ch. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3., 3.4	
Week 4			
Class 1	Racial & Ethnic Inequality	Ch. 3.5, 3.6, 3.7	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Gender Inequality	Ch. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3	
Week 5			

Class 1	Gender Inequality	Ch. 4.4, 4.5, 4.6	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Sexual Orientation & Inequality	Ch. 5	
Week 6			
Class 1	Exam 1	Chapters. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Class 2	Sexual Behavior	Ch. 9	
Week 7			
Class 1	Aging & Ageism	Ch. 6	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Health and Health Care	Ch. 13	Position Paper 1
Week 8			
Class 1	Alcohol & Other Drugs	Ch. 7	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Opioid Crisis		
Week 10			
Class 1	Crime & Criminal Justice	Ch. 8	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Exam 2	Chapters. 6, 7, 8, 9, 13	
Week 11			
Class 1	The Changing Family	Ch. 10	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Schools & Education	Ch. 11	Position Paper 2
Week 12			
Class 1	Work & The Economy	Ch. 12	Reading Quiz
Class 2	Urban & Rural Problems	Ch. 14	
Week 13			
Class 1	Population & the Environment	Ch. 15	Reading Quiz
Class 2	War & terrorism	Ch. 16	
Week 14			
Class 1	Exam 3	Chapters. 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16	
Class 2	Group Project Work		
Week 15			
Class 1	Group Presentations		
Class 2	Group Presentations		

*Other possible texts include, but are not limited to: *Investigating Social Problems*, A. Javier Trevino; *Social Problems*, Kornblum, Seccombe, & Julian; *Understanding Social Problems*, Mooney, Knox, & Schacht; *Social Problems*, Joel Best