

Introduction to Contemporary Social Problems (SOCY 105)

Fall 2014

Section FC01

Tuesdays & Thursdays 6:00-7:15 PM

Art-Sociology Building 2309

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Open Monday-Friday 8am-4pm

Course Description

This course is an examination of contemporary social problems through sociological perspectives. It is designed to provide you with an understanding of how major systems of power such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, among others, are interrelated, and result in numerous social problems. Throughout the semester, we will explore ways in which these social problems are part of the organization of society, and way we can use our own agency to address them.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to...

1. ...critically examine social problems in a way that is sociologically mindful, by considering the larger picture, seeing how the world is socially constructed, and understanding patterns;
2. ...understand systems of power and how they intersect to create social problems; and
3. ...view themselves as competent social actors with an understanding of how they can be catalysts for change.

Student Expectations

Throughout this course, we will engage in exploration of many emotionally charged, complex issues. You will be challenged in many ways you have never been before, and asked to consider things from possibly new and challenging perspectives. As such, it is imperative that we create and maintain an environment free of judgment and full of support and respect. Be ready to openly share your opinions, thoughts, and beliefs, but also be understanding and accepting of the perspectives of others. We are all here to learn from one another.

Required Readings

Leon-Guerrero, Anna. 2014. "Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action." (4th ed.), Sage. [ISBN: 978-1-4522-0543-4]

The book is available via the UMD Bookstore, but you may be able to find it for cheaper on Amazon or some other site. I highly recommend signing up for a free trial of Amazon Student – you get a free 6-month trial that includes free 2-day shipping. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/student/signup/info>

There are also various articles and chapters you are required to read, which are listed in detail in the Course Outline. All of these readings are available via ELMS for download. Additional required reading may be assigned throughout the semester, which you will be given in a timely manner.

Attendance

Class attendance is expected. Students are also expected to be on time and not leave early. Some of the material covered in class will not be covered by the readings; therefore, attendance is necessary in order to gain full understanding of the various topics discussed. If you are late to class or leave early, you will be marked absent for half of the class. If you miss class, you are responsible for the material covered in class and announcements made in class.

Excused absences (such as for religious holidays or medical and family emergencies) must be discussed with me, prior to the absence if at all possible. **Remember:** it is your responsibility to inform me of any intended absences for religious observances in advance, per University Policy (http://president.umd.edu/policies/docs/iii_510a.pdf).

Active Participation

In order for you to get as much out of the class as you can, you need to invest. Part of this is attending, but a larger part is participating – ask questions, offer opinions and thoughts, respond to classmates as to me as a professor. I worked hard to make this course as relevant and contemporary as possible, but I absolutely welcome connections you may make with your own life. If you want to discuss something you come across out of class, bring it up! All viewpoints are welcome in class and all of us will be respectful of each other as we discuss these issues candidly.

Small Assignments

Throughout the semester you will be given various small assignments. These assignments will help you dig deeper into the material, and engage with your own experience throughout the semester. They will also give you an opportunity to check your understanding of topics covered. The assignments will vary, and you will be given more details as each is assigned. Assignments are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise specified.

Discussion Board Reflections

Throughout the semester, you are expected to respond to at least **seven (7)** of the weekly reflection questions on ELMS. **Each reflection should be no shorter than 150 words and no longer than 300 words.** The reflection statements will be graded on your ability to:

- 1) Answer the questions posted on ELMS.
- 2) Define and utilize concepts discussed in class and in the reading. This means that you **must** refer to at least one of the readings in each post – a specific reference, page number, etc.
- 3) Give thoughtful, organized responses.

Your reflections **must be posted before 5pm on Wednesday** of the given weeks you choose to answer. Late submissions will not receive credit.

You can also receive bonus points each week by responding to a classmate's reflection. Responses must be **at least 75 words** to receive credit. Responses must also be posted before 5pm Wednesday.

Quizzes

Throughout the semester, you will have four quizzes. These quizzes will evaluate your understanding of the concepts and topics covered up to the point of the quiz. All quizzes will be administered via ELMS, and will be open for 3 days online. **You must complete each quiz in one sitting** (you cannot close it and come back later once open), and you may only complete each quiz once. If you fail to complete a quiz during the time it is available, you will receive zero credit. Each of the 4 quizzes is worth 5% of your final grade in the course.

Final Paper

This course is intended to give students a broad understanding of social problems from a sociological perspective, and how they are often interrelated. To this end, students are expected to write a **6-8 page final paper** that illustrates their cumulative knowledge gained. This will serve as your final exam. For this paper, choose a contemporary film (must have been released in 2003 or later) that highlights a particular social problem. *You may not select a documentary.* Write a reflective analysis of the film, relating it to the various topics we have covered in class. It would behoove you to choose a film that highlights a social problem from multiple angles, because you will need to discuss how the film's social problem relates to:

CHOOSE 1:

Bases of Inequality

- Race & Ethnicity
- Social Class & Poverty
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation

CHOOSE 2*:

Social Institutions

- Families
- Education
- Work & the Economy
- Health & Medicine
- Media

Social and Physical Worlds

- Alcohol & Drug Abuse
- Crime & Criminal Justice
- Cities & Suburbs
- War & Terrorism

Individual Action and Social Change

- Social Action

*Choose your 2nd and 3rd topic from across these three categories, e.g. "Families and Social Action," or "Health & Medicine and Alcohol & Drug Abuse."

The goal is to discuss how each of the topics you chose is interrelated, rather than looking at each individually. How do they connect to each other, intersect and overlap? Be sure to bring in key class concepts like power, privilege and oppression.

Feel free to extend beyond the film, if necessary. In other words, if the film doesn't explicitly highlight how the social problem relates to various topics, you can still talk about what ways they relate outside the purview of the film.

The paper should be **double-spaced with your name, date, course name and title on a cover page**. In addition to the content, students will be graded for correct grammar and spelling. Citations should be in ASA format (you **NEED** citations), which means you will need a **reference page** – this does **not** count towards the page limit. **The final paper is due Thursday, December 11 at the beginning of class.**

Leading up to the final paper, you have two smaller assignments due:

- 1. Ideas Post:** You must submit three (3) ideas for films you might use for the final paper. Include the name of the film and the year it was released. Additionally, for each film, list out the three topics you would potentially use to analyze the film (according to the Final Paper directions above). This assignment should be posted to ELMS, under the Assignments tab. **This post is due no later than 11:45pm on October 2.**
- 2. Paper Outline:** You must submit a detailed outline that includes the film you are analyzing and a *brief* overview of the plot, the social problem it highlights, the three chapters you will relate that social problem to as well as **preliminary conceptualization** of how you will relate each topic. In other words, you should include some discussion (a few sentences) about the ways you intend to connect the topics to one another. **This outline is due Thursday, November 6 at the beginning of class.**

Late Work/Make-up Policy

Assignments must be turned in on time! Assignments are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise specified. Late assignments will receive one letter grade reduction each day they are late. Make-ups or extensions for assignments or tests are only granted for emergency situations (illness, family emergencies, etc.) and must be accompanied by documentation that is e-mailed to me.

Grading

Attendance & Active Participation	10%
Discussion Posts	10%
Small Assignments	15%
Quizzes (5% each)	20%
Paper Ideas Post	5%
Paper Outline	10%
Final Paper	30%
Total Possible:	100%

Final Grade Calculations:

A+	97-100%	B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%
A	93-96%	B	83-86%	C	73-76%	D	63-66%
A-	90-92%	B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	D-	60-62%
						F	Below 60

Syllabus Revisions

This syllabus may be updated or revised at any point during the semester. If any changes are made, you will be made aware of them and given a new copy of the updated syllabus in a timely manner.

Accommodations For Students With Learning, Emotional, Psychological, And Physical Disabilities

In accordance with university policy, every effort will be made to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office (0126 Shoemaker Hall) and who provide me with a DSS Accommodation form that has been updated for the Summer 2013 semester. *This form must be e-mailed to me by the second week of class.* For more information, please visit their website, <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/>.

Honor Code

You are required to follow the Code of Academic Integrity set in place by the University of Maryland Student Honor Council. The standards of this code hold you accountable for:

- a. *Cheating*: Intentional use of unauthorized information to aid you in class assignment or exam.
- b. *Fabrication*: Intentionally falsifying or inventing citations or other information.
- c. *Facilitating Academic Dishonesty*: Knowingly assisting another student to engage in cheating, fabrication, or plagiarism.
- d. *Plagiarism*: Knowingly using someone else's words as one's own without correct citation methods. This includes using another text and changing a word here or there without proper citation.

The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads: *"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."* For more information visit <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.

Copyright Notice

Class lectures and other materials are copyrighted, and may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from me.

Course Outline

Reading must be done **prior** to the class date it is listed, in order to facilitate the best learning and class experience. Additional reading may be assigned at any point, which you will be given in a timely manner. Films listed will be viewed in-class, unless otherwise specified.

Social Problems – Personal Troubles or Public Issues?

I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty.
- John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

WEEK 1

- 9/2 Tuesday *Syllabus and Class Overview*
- 9/4 Thursday *Sociology and the Study of Social Problems*
Chapter 1, Leon-Guerrero

Power, Privilege and Oppression

"The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people."
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

WEEK 2

- 9/9 Tuesday *Power, Privilege, and Oppression*
- "Privilege, Oppression, and Difference" by Allan Johnson pp. 12-22
in *Privilege, Power & Difference*
- "The Matrix of Domination and the Paradox of Being Privileged and Unprivileged at the Same Time" by Allan Johnson pp. 49-53
in *Privilege, Power & Difference*
- "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh
- Film: Tim Wise "The Pathology of Privilege"
- 9/11 Thursday "Oppression" by Marilyn Frye pp. 29-32
- "Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post-Race America" by Charles A. Gallagher.

The Bases of Inequality

"Some things you must always be unable to bear."
- William Faulkner

WEEK 3

- 9/16 **Tuesday** *Race and Ethnicity*
Chapter 3, Leon-Guerrero
- 9/18 **Thursday** "Defining Racism: 'Can We Talk?'" by Beverly Daniels Tatum

WEEK 4

- 9/23 **Tuesday** "The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism" by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, pp. 25-52 in *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America (3rd Ed.)*

Film: "Race: The Power of an Illusion" Episode 1—The Difference Between Us [GN269.R33 2003b]
- 9/25 **Thursday** "Fluid Boundaries, Slippery Regions" by Leslie Houts Picca and Joe Feagin, pp. 177-212 in *Two-Faced Racism*

"Unmasking Racism: Halloween Costuming & Engagement of the Racial Other" by Jennifer Mueller, Danielle Dirks & Leslie Houts Picca, pp. 315-335 in *Qualitative Sociology* (2007)
- Quiz #1** – opens Thurs 8pm, closes Sunday: 11:30pm

WEEK 5

- 9/30 **Tuesday** *Social Class and Poverty*
Chapter 2, Leon Guerrero
- 10/2 **Thursday** "At the Edge of Poverty" by David Shipler, pp. 3 -12 in *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*

"What is Poverty in America?" (Executive Summary), by the Heritage Foundation.

Film: "30 Days: Minimum Wage" [HN59.2. A13 2006]
- Paper Ideas Post Due**

WEEK 6

- 10/7 Tuesday **Gender**
Chapter 4, Leon-Guerrero
- 10/9 Thursday "Why Sexist Language Matters" by Sherryl Kleinman pp. 299-304 in
Qualitative Sociology 25(2), 2002
Film: "Miss Representation" [HQ1421.M57 2011]

WEEK 7

- 10/14 Tuesday **Sexual Orientation**
Chapter 5, Leon-Guerrero
- 10/16 Thursday Film: "Tying the Knot" [HQ1034.U5 T95 2005]
- Quiz #2** – opens Thurs 8pm, closes Sunday: 11:30pm

Part III. Our Social Institutions

*"If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature,
but by our institutions, great is our sin."
- Charles Darwin*

WEEK 8

- 10/21 Tuesday **Families**
"The Power and Limits of Social Class" by Annette Lareau, Chapter
12, pp. 343-352, in *Unequal Childhoods*
Chapter 7, Leon-Guerrero
- 10/23 Thursday **Education**
Chapter 8, Leon-Guerrero

WEEK 9

- 10/28 Tuesday **Work and the Economy:** Chapter 9, Leon-Guerrero
Health and Medicine: Chapter 10, Leon-Guerrero
- 10/30 Thursday Film: TBD

WEEK 10

11/4 Tuesday *The Media*
Chapter 11, Leon-Guerrero

11/6 Thursday

Final Paper Outline Due

Quiz #3 - opens Thurs 8pm, closes Sunday: 11:30pm

Part IV. Our Social and Physical Worlds

*"I'm not interested in preserving the status quo; I want to overthrow it."
- Niccolò Machiavelli*

WEEK 11

11/11 Tuesday *Crime and Criminal Justice*
Chapter 13, Leon-Guerrero

11/13 Thursday "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander, Chapter 5 in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
Film: "The Scars of Stop-and-Frisk"

WEEK 12

11/18 Tuesday *Alcohol and Drug Abuse*
Chapter 12, Leon-Guerrero

11/20 Thursday *Cities and Suburbs*
Chapter 14, Leon-Guerrero
"Use of Black English and Racial Discrimination in Urban Housing Markets" by Douglas Massey and Garvey Lundy, in *Urban Affairs Review*, pp. 452-469, 2001.

WEEK 13

11/25 Tuesday Film: TBD

11/27 Thursday No Class - Thanksgiving Break

Part V. Individual Action and Social Change

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

- Robert F. Kennedy

WEEK 14

12/2 Tuesday ***War and Terrorism***
Chapter 16, Leon-Guerrero
"Terrorism" by Ziad Munson, in Contexts 7(4), pp. 78-79, 2008

12/4 Thursday ***Social Problems and Social Action***
Chapter 17, Leon-Guerrero
"Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression: The Role of Allies as Agents of Change" by Andrea Avyvazian.

Quiz #4 – opens Thurs 8pm, closes Sunday: 11:30pm

WEEK 15

12/9 Tuesday Film: TBD

12/11 Thursday Class Wrap-Up
Final Paper Due