

SOC 302: Social Problems, Fall 2013
T,TH 11am-12:15pm, Wham 203
Instructor: Kristi Brownfield

Faner Hall 3433
Mon, Tues, Thurs: 8-10am
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Sociology Dept. Phone: 453-2494

Required Texts:

Best, Joel. *Social Problems*. 2nd Edition.

Also recommended by not required:

Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals*.

Hochschild, Arlie. *The Second Shift*.

Schneider, Anne and Helen Ingram. *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy*.

Tuchman, Gaye. *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University*

You will NEED to get a copy of the required book to pass the class. You will need to read the recommended works to complete review assignments. However owning the book is not necessary so long as you are able to get copies to read (e.g., from the library, from a friend, etc.).

Course Objectives:

This course will explore a social constructionist perspective to social problems theory. Rather than looking at the conditions of what we consider “social problems,” we will primarily be examining what actors have the power to define those situations as “social problems,” why those conditions and not others are defined as “social problems,” and why some “social problems” aren’t actually as bad as we think they are.

Plagiarism:

See the student handbook for a definition of plagiarism. Taking another person’s work and passing it off as your own will not be tolerated in this class. You will receive an immediate zero for plagiarized work. The second attempt at plagiarism will be reported to the university and I reserve the right to give a failing grade for the course at that point.

Electronics:

Electronics are welcome and, on some days, will be encouraged in this class. However, your electronics use should be *related to* this class and should not be disruptive to other students. This means please turn off cell phone ringers. Do not play music or videos. No headphones. Be respectful of the classroom as a learning environment. Please note that if you’re being disruptive or I notice your inattention you will be required to write a thousand-word essay about a sociological concept of my choosing.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Blog Discussion Participation: 10 points each x 10 weeks = 100 points

Response Papers: 25 points each x 3 papers = 75 points

Social Problem Portfolio = 75 points
Leading Weekly Discussion: 100 points
Term Paper: 150 points
Total possible points: 500 points

Grading Scale:

450 or above – A
400 to 449 – B
350 to 399 – C
300 to 349 – D
299 or below – F

Participation and Attendance:

I expect students to attend class every day and to come to class on Tuesdays having reviewed the assigned readings for that week, which we will discuss as the week progresses. I keep track of attendance, participation in classroom discussions, and visits to my office, all of which I take into consideration if your final grade is borderline. The more often you are here, participate, and come see me if needed, the more likely I am to raise a borderline grade. The more frequently you are absent without telling me why, or you come in late, the less likely I am to raise a borderline grade. Do not be late for class. Being late is disruptive and disrespectful.

While there is no official attendance policy missing lectures and discussions will result in lower grades on the assignments you have to complete outside of class. If you want a good grade in this class, be in your seats.

Blog Discussion Participation:

Students are expected to finish all the readings before class and participate in the discussion of the reading materials in class. In addition to in class discussions, the readings will be posted weekly on SIU Online. Everyone is expected to post a 150-word response analyzing aspects of the readings due by 9am on Fridays. Some suggested topics to write about:

Questions the readings raised for you

Videos, articles, or other interesting internet-based material that is related to the readings (along with a discussion of how they are related)

Applying sociological theories and ideas in the readings to your life (e.g., how you act, popular culture you consume, etc.)

Responses and thoughts – connected to the readings – to things other people have posted to the group

You are required to post a comment ten times to receive full credit.

Response Papers:

There will be three short (500-750 words) out-of-class writing assignments given in September, October, and November, each worth 30 points. These are reflective writing assignments based on the recommended books. You will be given a specific prompt to write about based on the book at various points throughout the semester. These papers will not have a specific deadline (beyond 12/05 – our last day of class) but I would recommend you do not procrastinate them to the end of

the semester and complete the assignment as soon as the prompt is posted. While there will be four (4) prompt choices, you only have to answer three (3).

Social Problem Portfolio:

You will be expected to create a “before and after” social problems portfolio. The portfolio will include twenty (20) pictures of three (3) social problems that exist within the United States. Five (5) of those pictures you must take personally (cell phone camera is fine) and the other pictures may come from internet sources (as long as they are properly cited in ASA style). The pictures should reflect how you view those social problems and why you think they are social problems.

You will turn this portfolio in twice. The first, “before,” will be due during third week of class (09/07). Then at the end of the semester, you should recreate your portfolio with the *same three (3) social problems*, and use the images to display the ways your thinking about those problems has changed or been influenced by this class. The “after” portfolio will be due during week fifteen (11/26).

Leading Discussion:

Every student will have to lead discussion on a particular social problem during weeks five through sixteen. You will likely work in groups (no more than four per group) and you must select your social problem from the list provided with the syllabus. If you would like to discuss a social problem *not* listed, you may ask but I would prefer if you stick with the list.

As discussion leaders, your responsibility will be to:

- (a) Generate readings for the class about your social problem: readings should include two (2) academic articles (preferably within the field of Sociology but Psychology is acceptable), two (2) pieces of literature from different social movements associated with the social problem, two (2) examples of news reports about the social problem, and two (2) examples of how the social problem is presented within popular culture (e.g., movies, television shows, comics, books, cartoons, etc.)
- (b) Create discussion questions for the class: create three to four different questions to pose to the class about the readings and the social problem.
- (c) Maintain an active classroom discussion regarding your social problem: find creative ways to get people talking about the social problem you are presenting

On the Tuesday of the *week before* you are scheduled to lead discussion you must turn in a typed sheet of paper with your name(s), your articles (with links or PDF copies), a brief (no more than a page) summary of your main talking points, and your discussion questions.

Term Paper:

You are required to write a 2500 to 3750 word (10-15 pages) term paper on a social problem. This social problem may *not* be the same one for which you lead discussion. The term paper will broadly outline the origins of the social problem, the actors involved with the labeling of the issue as a social problem, the actors involved with continuing to keep the issue a social problem, and an analysis of the state of the social problem within current society. More specific information about the term paper will be available later in the semester. You will be asked to turn in two drafts of your paper throughout the semester and a paper proposal.

Paper proposal (1-page) due: 09/03 - 10 points
Rough draft (at least 5 pages) due: 10/01 - 25 points
Second draft (should be nearly full paper) due: 11/05 - 25 points
Final paper due: 12/05 -- 100 points

Turning Work In:

I ask that students turn their work in digitally through email [kabrownf@siu.edu]. All work should be sent by 9:00am on the day that it is due. Assignments should be turned in as PDF or Word (.doc or .docx) files. No other formats will be accepted. **No late work will be accepted.**

Extra Credit:

There will be NO extra credit offered in this class. My preference is that students complete the *actual* credit rather than attempting to make up for missed assignments at the last minute.

Tentative Course Schedule: (topics/readings subject to change, full and complete reading lists will be available on SIU Online each week)

Week 1: 08/20, 08/22
Readings: CH 1-2

Week 2: 08/27, 08/29
Prompts 1 and 2 Posted: Wannabe U, Rules for Radicals
Readings: CH 3-4

Week 3: 09/03, 09/05
Term Paper Topic Due: 10 points
Before Portfolio Due
Readings: CH 5-7

Week 4: 09/10, 09/12
Readings: CH 8-9

Week 5: 09/17, 09/19
Readings: CH 10-11

Week 6: 09/24, 09/27
Prompt 3 Posted: Deserving and Entitled

Week 7: 10/01, 10/03
1st Rough Draft Due (at least five pages): 25 points

Week 8: 10/08, 10/10

Week 9: 10/17

Week 10: 10/22, 10/24

Week 11: 10/29, 10/31

Prompt 4 Posted: Second Shift

Week 12: 11/05, 11/07

2nd Rough Draft Due (should be nearly a completed page): 25 points

Week 13: 11/12, 11/14

Week 14: 11/19, 11/21

Week 15: 11/26

After Portfolio Due

Week 16: 12/03, 12/05

Term Paper Final Draft Due

Social Problem Topic List

Rape/Rape Culture	Euthanasia
Health	Species Extinction
Environment	Food and Drug Safety
Feminism	Foster Care
Murder	Gentrification
Guns	Homelessness
Sexuality	Human Experimentation
Education/Public Education	Identity Theft
Debt	Judicial Reform
Animal Rights	Literacy
Discrimination	Media
Race/Ethnicity	War
Gender	School Violence
Obesity	Stress
Immigration	Suicide
Economy	Sexual Harassment
Aging	Toxic Waste
Inequality	Voting/Voter's Rights
Work	Unions
Health Care/Medicine	Urban Sprawl
Alcohol/Drugs	Downsizing
Hate Crimes	Superstores vs. Main Street
Abortion	Wall Street
Cost of Living	Energy Dependency
Wages	Organic Food
Animal Rights	Gambling
Cheating	Religion

Discussion Ground Rules

1. Acknowledge your privilege! We all have advantages and information we have been given that colors our perceptions of the world and how the world works. Understand and acknowledge those privileges, from white privilege, to male privilege, to class privilege, to able-bodied privilege, to heterosexual privilege, and many other types of privileges.
2. Be willing to listen to the perspective of others – *especially* when they come from different backgrounds and experiences.
3. Acknowledge that discrimination – both individual and institutional – exists. Acknowledge that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and other such prejudices exist and affect the lives of people every day.
4. We do not blame victims for their experiences of oppression.
5. We do not demean or put down anyone in this class for their experiences.
6. Anecdotes are not the best form of evidence to use for your claims. Anecdotes are a *type* of evidence and should be judged alongside other evidence such as scientific research or collected testimonials. If your claim begins with “I saw someone once” or “I knew someone who” be ready to back your claim up with other evidence.
7. The classroom will be a safe space to discuss issues that are often sensitive and the cause of strong emotions. If a student within the class makes a comment they do not wish repeated outside of the classroom, please preface your remarks saying so and the class will agree to the student’s wishes.