

SOCY 2 Social Problems

Winter Quarter 2018

Class Meets in Fairchild 101, 10A: TR 10:10–12:00pm (X-hour: W 3:30-4:20pm)

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Course Description:

Daily news reports direct much of our attention to social problems such as crime, poverty, prejudice and political corruption. Yet rarely are such 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. Seldom are we informed of the decision-making process by which some social problems become selected for coverage, while others are ignored. The purpose of this course is to subject the coverage of modern social problems to an in-depth, critical analysis. We will attempt to answer such questions as: "how does a social problem become defined as such?" and "what are the causes or sources of various social problems?"

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify, define, and illustrate basic concepts, theories, and research techniques related to the sociological study of social problems.
2. Apply these concepts, theories and techniques to different aspects of society.
3. Critically examine your social environment in terms of the connections between social problems and inequalities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, and class.
4. Explain why some social issues become defined as social problems and others do not.
5. Analyze popular culture sources about social problems and present your findings with your group as a written and oral assignment.
6. Write and think critically via class discussions, research projects, written assignments, and exams about the concepts, theories and techniques in the field.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

READINGS: The following required books are available at the Dartmouth Bookstore and Wheelock Books. They also are on 2-hour reserve at Baker Berry library, links to this information is on our course Canvas site, under “Library Reserves.”:

1. Ruane, Janet M., and Karen A. Cerulo. 2015. *Second Thoughts: Sociology Challenges Conventional Wisdom*. Sixth Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (Pine Forge) Press. ISBN: 9781452299495
2. Halpern-Meekin, Sarah, Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach, and Jennifer Sykes. 2015. *It’s Not Like I’m Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World*. Oakland: The University of California Press. ISBN: 9780520275355
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. Klein, Jessie. 2012. *The Bully Society: School Shootings and the Crisis of Bullying in America’s Schools*. New York: New York University Press. ISBN: 9780814748886
5. Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2017. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Fifth Edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield. ISBN: 9781442276239

Additional readings are available on our course Canvas site.

EXAMS: Two exams are required. Lectures, films, video clips, discussions, in-class assignments, activities, guest speakers, presentations, and readings will be covered on the exams (in other words, everything we do in class!). Both exams will be in class and open notes. Although you may consult your notes, handouts, and readings to answer exam questions, you should put materials into your own words when answering questions. You may study together; in fact, I encourage it. However, exams should be completed independently; you should not discuss the exam or your answers with classmates or anyone else while completing it.

PROJECTS AND PAPERS: Students will complete two projects and papers throughout the term. Papers should be 3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced. In order to write the paper, you will need to engage in a small sociological project and link your findings to course concepts. More details about the projects and papers, including the grading rubric, are provided on a separate handout. Two examples are posted on Canvas as well. All papers are due at the beginning of class on the selected date. You will sign up for due dates on Tuesday, January 9.

GROUP PROJECT: In groups of 4-5, students will analyze a recent school shooting using the arguments in the Newman and Klein books and the Best article. Each group will choose a specific mass school shooting and locate and read popular culture sources (newspaper, magazine, web, etc.) about the event and the individuals involved. The project will culminate with a written and oral assignment discussing on the ways that the event fits with and contradicts the arguments of Newman and Klein on school shootings and Best on claims making. The presentations will be

scheduled for the last week of class. A detailed assignment sheet and grading rubric will be distributed and posted on Canvas prior to the midterm exam.

Percentage of Final Grade		Final Course Grade	
Midterm Exam	25%	A = 94.0-100	C+ = 77.0-79.99
Final Exam	30%	A- = 90.0-93.99	C = 74.0-76.99
Papers (15% each)	30%	B+ = 87.0-89.99	C- = 70.0-73.99
Group Project	15%	B = 84.0-86.99	D = 60.0-69.99
		B- = 80.0-83.99	E < 60.0

Course Guidelines and Policies:

Honor Principle: Assignments will be conducted in accord with the principles of academic honor detailed in the Dartmouth Organization, Regulations and Courses. I encourage you to discuss ideas from class with your classmates. However, unless otherwise noted, assignments should be completed independently and all work turned in should be your own. You may study with classmates, but (as noted above) you should not discuss the exam or your answers with classmates or anyone else while completing it. If your paper topic for a project is one that you're exploring in another class, independent study, or other academic work, you must let me and the other professor(s) know. If you have questions about what is permissible, I urge you to consult the academic honor principle (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/judicial-affairs/policy/academic-honor-principle>), the statement on sources and citations (<http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>), and talk with me.

Religious Holidays: Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities enrolled in this course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, and by the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested. Information about Student Accessibility Services is available at: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/>

Student Wellness: I recognize that the academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, that our terms are intensive, and that classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to you on campus to support your wellness, including your undergraduate dean (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~upperde/>), Counseling and Human Development (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~chd/>), and the Student Wellness Center (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/>). I encourage you to use these resources, to communicate with me, and to take care of yourself throughout the term.

Letters of Recommendation: I get many requests for letters and I have a handout describing the materials I need at least two weeks prior to your deadline. If you expect to need a letter from me after the term ends, please let me know while you're still in the class so that I can have more

detailed notes to write a stronger letter on your behalf. I enjoy writing letters for students who have stood out in some way and I take writing these letters quite seriously.

Missed Classes: It is my expectation that you attend each class meeting, including arriving to each class on time and staying for the duration. Your attendance and active participation will greatly enrich this class in many ways. Active class participation has many dimensions, including enthusiastic and intellectually-rigorous discussion (talking and listening), coming to class prepared by having completed the readings, work on in-class assignments, asking questions during guest lectures and group presentations, and regular class attendance. In the event that you miss a class for any reason, you are responsible for getting class notes for that class from another student. As a general policy, I do not make my notes available. After you review your classmate's notes, I would be happy to meet with you to talk about the material or answer questions about anything that is unclear.

Late Submissions and Make-Up Exams: The submission of assignments, exams and papers is expected on the indicated "due date" during that day's class meeting (unless otherwise stated). Requests for extensions beyond the submission date should be made prior to the due date. Please note that grades on non-approved late submissions will be penalized. Any work turned in more than 10 minutes after the start of class is considered late and the grade will be reduced. The grade on late papers and assignments will be reduced by one step (for example, from a B to a B-), and the grade will be reduced by an additional step for each day it is late. The grade on late exams will be reduced a full letter grade (for example, from a B to a C) for each 10 minutes it is late.

Grade Disputes: Any student who wishes to dispute a grade earned on any assignment, paper, or exam may do so by submitting a written memo detailing specifically why the assignment should receive a different grade. The memo should explain how the assignment met the requirements or how the answer as written (and not based on what could be inferred from what was written) addressed the question. The memo should be submitted within one week of receiving the grade. Your graded assignment and rubric should also be attached.

Classroom Etiquette: Disruptions to class negatively affect everyone's ability to learn. Everyone should arrive to class on time and not leave early. If you must arrive late or leave early, please notify the instructor in advance and sit by the door to minimize disruptions. It is inappropriate to use cell phones in class or use laptops for activities outside of taking notes (such as email or facebook). Disruptions will negatively impact your grade.

Guide to Reading Assigned Books:

As you read, take notes. After you finish each chapter, write a short summary (1-5 sentences) of that chapter.

In addition, here are some overall questions to guide your reading of the assigned books:

1. *Summary.* Provide a brief summary of the social problem identified in the book.
2. *Thesis.* What is the author's thesis? In other words, what exactly does the author argue is the problem, and what is the primary cause of the problem? How is the author's argument similar to and different from other theories on the problem (specifically, how does the author say her/his work differs)?
3. *Context of the Problem.* According to the author, why should we care about this problem? What is the history or background of this problem? What claims does the author discuss regarding the positive and negative aspects of the situation? Who are the primary claimsmakers? In other words, how is the problem framed and who frames it in this way?
4. *Evidence.* What grounds or 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 or data affect the author's thesis?
5. *Importance.* Why is this important? What does the author use to argue that the problem deserves attention? What factors does the author focus on as producing this problem?
6. *Addressing the Problem.* What conclusions are proposed? How does the author's work affect our understanding of this social problem? For example, will this book affect the way we think about the problem, how we define the problem, or how we might address the problem? What are the typical solutions proposed for this problem? What, if any, are the solutions offered by the author?
7. *Your Personal Position.* Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?

(Thank you, Professor Denise Anthony, for sharing some of these tips!)

Class Schedule:

DATE		TOPIC AND READINGS
1/4	R	<u>Introduction to Course</u> <i>No Readings</i>
1/9	T	<u>What is a Social Problem? How do Sociologists Study Social Problems?</u> Ruane. Introduction: The Sociological Perspective & 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.
1/11	R	<u>Income Inequalities and Poverty</u> Ruane. Essay 19: Welfare is Ruining this Country Halpern-Meekin et al., p.1-58 & 217-233. Introduction, Chapter 1 and Appendixes
1/16	T	Ruane. Essay 9: The More We Pay, the More It's Worth & Essay 10: Money is the Root of All Evil Halpern-Meekin et al., p.59-151. Chapters 2-4
1/18	R	Ruane. Essay 12: America Is the Land of Equal Opportunity Halpern-Meekin et al., p.152-215. Chapters 5-6 (<i>finish the book</i>)
1/23	T	<u>Studying Social Problems Through the Study of School Shootings</u> Ruane. Essay 13: Violence is on the Rise in the United States Newman, p.3-73. Part 1 - Chapters 1-3
1/25	R	Ruane. Essay 15: There Ought to Be a Law Newman, p.77-176. Part 2- Chapters 4-7
1/30	T	Ruane. Essay 16: Honesty is the Best Policy Newman, p.179-306. Part 3 - Chapters 8-11 and Epilogue (<i>finish the book</i>)
2/1	R	<i>No Readings</i>
2/6	T	MIDTERM EXAM
2/8	R	<u>Studying Social Problems Through the Study of School Shootings (cont.)</u> Ruane. Essay 3: Children Are Our Most Precious Commodity Klein, p.1-80. Introduction and Chapters 1-3
2/13	T	Ruane. Essay 11: You've Come a Long Way, Baby Klein, p.81-126. Chapters 4-6
2/14	W	Klein, p.127-243. Chapters 7-10 and Conclusion (<i>finish the book</i>)
2/15	R	No Class. Work on your final project.

DATE	TOPIC AND READINGS	
2/20	T	<u>Racial Inequalities and Racism</u> Ruane. Essay 7: What's in a Name? Bonilla-Silva, p.xiii-119. Preface and Chapters 1-5
2/21	W	Brainstorming with learning fellows for final project (optional)
2/22	R	Ruane. Essay 20: Immigrants are Ruining This Nation (On Canvas) Roberto Gonzales. 2016. "Chapter 8: Adulthood." Pp. 176-207 in <i>Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America.</i> Oakland: University of California Press.
2/27	T	Ruane. Essay 22: Education Is the Great Equalizer Bonilla-Silva, p.120-253. Chapters 6-11 (<i>finish the book</i>)
3/1	R	<u>Group Presentations and Conclusions</u> GROUP PROJECTS DUE <i>No Readings</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP PRESENTATIONS DURING CLASS
3/6	T	Ruane. Conclusions: Why Does Conventional Wisdom Persist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP PRESENTATIONS DURING CLASS
3/10	S	FINAL EXAM, Saturday, March 10, 3:00pm in our classroom (Fairchild 101)