

Contemporary Social Problems

SYG 2010-002; Fall 2014

Tuesday-Thursday 11:00 - 12:15

CIS 1045, CRN: 81376

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It is always the same: Once you are liberated, you are forced to ask who you are.
Jean Baudrillard

Required Readings



Leon-Guerrero, Anna. 2014. *Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action. 4th Edition.* ISBN: 9781452205434

This book can be rented or purchased at the USF Bookstore, or bought online through Amazon or Half.com.



Supplemental readings will be posted on Canvas.

Course Overview

Throw a stone like a girl. How would you do that?

That person is not a real American. What does that mean?

He is not masculine enough or she is not feminine enough. How do you measure that?

S/he is poor because he has not worked hard. Is this the only reason for one's poverty?

In this course, we will try to learn about theories and methodologies which help us to tackle these questions. We will work together throughout the semester to use our sociological imagination in order to develop an in-depth knowledge about a variety of social problems. We will question the taken-for-granted, de-construct discourses, and critically examine the reasons behind the development of social problems. We will also try to see what the proper steps towards addressing these problems are. To do so, we will draw on a variety of sources, watch documentaries, discuss current issues and write reflective essay.

This class provides us with the opportunity to make mistakes, and learn from our mistakes. Throughout the semester we will be learning from each other, hoping to see our world from new perspectives.



Course Objectives

1. To develop a “sociological imagination” – the ability to understand the ways in which individual biography is shaped by social location, and how “social problems” differ from “individual troubles.”
2. To apply a critical perspective to the ways in which social problems come to be defined in larger society, how debates about social problems are framed, and how they affect you.
3. To employ social science inquiry, particularly sociological theory and methods, to analyze social problems and dominant trends in society.
4. To contrast the ways in which “social problems” are constructed differently over time and across different societies.
5. To evaluate the ways in which cultural differences between societies or economic/political relationships across national boundaries are responsible for the ways in which social problems are socially constructed.
6. To compare the ways in which social groups differ in experiencing or being defined as a “social problem,” especially as these differences pertain to socioeconomic standing, race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.
7. To critique public discussion of social problems, including those that occur within research, media, and political arenas, and to evaluate credibility of sources of information and claims.

Student Outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which individual biography is shaped by social location, and how “social problems” differ from “individual troubles” (sociological imagination) by applying sociological theories and concepts to real world social problems on exams, discussions, and written assignments.
2. Students will demonstrate the critical ability to examine how “social problems” receive attention and come to be defined in larger society, and how different groups and institutions “frame” debates on social issues, through discussion activities and assignments.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to employ social science data to study social problems and emerging trends by interpreting data in class, using data in their written work, and demonstrating knowledge on exams.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to evaluate the ways in which “social problems” are defined differently over time and across societies through written assignments.
5. Students will demonstrate the ability to evaluate the ways in which cultural, economic and political differences shape how societies view social problems through a variety of assignments.
6. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which social groups differ in experiencing or being defined as a “social problem” in multiple ways and through various assignments.
7. Students will demonstrate the abilities to critically analyze public discussion of social problems and evaluate credibility of sources of information and claims through assignments.

Expectations and Requirements

1. Attendance is mandatory. More than two unjustified absences will result in points deducted from your final grade (3 points for each session). It seems just not right to pay for your education and not making most of it.
2. Participation is mandatory. These obligations are not meant to bitter our experience of school but to make it a fulfilling one. Mandatory participation means that your input is not only welcomed but also required. Our course is an interactive class therefore, we are expected to exchange knowledge, question our assumptions and share our ideas. Don’t wait until the few final sessions.

Whenever you think you have something to say, raise your hand and share it with the rest of the class.

3. Readings are to be completed prior to coming to class. A substantial portion of class in-class tests and final paper will be relying on the reading material. Also, one cannot participate in class discussions without reading the material.
4. Assignments must be completed thoroughly and turned in on time.
5. All students are required to attend the first day of class as per USF policy.
6. You are responsible for all assignments and materials covered in class, whether or not you attend and regardless of the reasons for any absence. A good deal of the material covered in class will not come from the assigned readings. Consequently, poor attendance will likely result in a poor grade.

Policies

- ❖ **Academic Honesty:** It is very important for you to adhere to the rules of academic honesty, meaning that you must mention explicitly any ideas or observation, sentences or sections, which are not your own. Plagiarism is literary theft and is a serious offense. This wrong deed is on rise, unfortunately, because of the abundance of available online sources. To avoid having problems consult with the college handbook or see me. Among citation styles, I require you to use ASA style which we will practice together early in the semester. Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated at all and disciplinary action will be taken at the discretion of the instructor. The penalty may range from zero on the assignment to F for the whole class.
- ❖ USF maintains a contract with a plagiarism detection service, which allows instructors to submit students' assignments to be checked for plagiarism. I reserve the right to submit assignments to this detection system. Assignments are compared automatically with a huge database of journal articles, web articles, and previously submitted papers. The instructor receives a report showing exactly how a student's paper was plagiarized. As mentioned, academic dishonesty cannot be tolerated in the University community and will be punishable.
- ❖ Deferrals should be avoided. If for valid reasons you need an extension, you should talk to me in person, at least three days before the due date. Otherwise, the assignment will not be accepted.
- ❖ Other Considerations: I am dedicated and committed to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, and sexual orientations. If you have concerns, please advise me in earliest possible time. You can always reach me via my email or see me after each session.
- ❖ Accommodations: Students with disabilities are required to visit the Office of Student Disability Services to arrange appropriate accommodations: call 974-4309 or visit their website: <http://sds.usf.edu/>. Please contact me as early as possible if are in need of accommodations.
- ❖ If you know in advance any absences, due to personal reasons, such as religious observances, please let me know by the second week.

Tips

- ❖ Take notes and organize your thoughts constantly. We will have sessions in which we all work on mind maps to synthesize ideas. Mind map will be with us throughout the semester and hopefully our lives.
- ❖ As you find a topic interesting just jot it down, otherwise you will forget it. Later, create a mind map and keep adding to it throughout the semester. This way, the final paper will not seem scary, as you have everything ready by the end of the semester. You just will need to articulate your argument.
- ❖ Read the syllabus thoroughly. It is your manual hence necessary for your success.

- ❖ Check announcements made on Canvas frequently. It is your responsibility to remain updates.

Description of Assignments

1) Group Exams (3, each 10 points)

- ❖ Over the course of the semester, you will take three group exams. Each exam will include 50 multiple choice and true/false questions. Exams are worth 10 points each.
- ❖ Your groups will be solidified one week before the exam (including one weekend). I strongly suggest meeting with groupmates to study together and get to know one another. I will give you only one copy of the exam and only one answer sheet. No notes, readings, computers, or cell phones may be used during the exam. Use of these items during the exam constitutes academic dishonesty.
- ❖ You will have the duration of our class meeting to complete each exam (1.5 minutes per question). You will be tested on the material in the readings and class meetings. Anticipate *all* of your readings making up about 2/3rds of the exam and about 1/3 on material only covered during class.
- ❖ If you know you will have a scheduled absence, you must set up a meeting with me and take the exam early. Include any pertinent documentation (e.g., jury summons).
- ❖ If you have an unscheduled excused absence, you must contact me within one week to set up a make-up. You must bring documentation in order to have your absence be excused. The exam will not be the same as the one your colleagues took and you will take the exam without collaboration. If you fail to set up an appointment to take a make-up exam within one week of the original exam's closing time, you will receive a zero on the exam.

2) Final Research Proposal (8 points)

Due: September 16, 2014

- ❖ Early in the semester try to figure out what the topic that interests you is. Then Start mind-mapping. Consider the proposal as a way for ensuring that you are going in the right direction. The proposal should be a minimum of 200 words on your project. In this short piece clarify your topic, its significance, and the way you are going to approach it. You must have all 3 of your scholarly academic sources used for final project in the works cited of your proposal.

3) Final Research Paper (18 points)

Due: December 4, 2014

- ❖ Final paper will be at least 1500 words. This paper should be a deep analysis of the social problem that your have picked in the proposal. You are supposed to suggest a solution to the problem. So it will be a 6-8 page long paper in which you introduce a social problem, state the significance of researching it, cover different aspects of it, and finally suggest a solution to it.
- ❖ Be sure to: use Times New Roman, double space, include all (THREE) citations in a separate works cited page, use MLA/APA/ASA citation style correctly (be consistent whatever style you choose), and check your spelling and grammar.
- ❖ Further in the semester, a rubric detailing exact expectations for your final paper will be distributed.

Reflective Essays (7, 28 points)

- ❖ Throughout the semester we will be doing group activities, having guest lecturers, or watching documentaries. On seven different occasions you will be asked to write reflective essays during class time. These essays are not meant to be merely a report or a

summary. They are supposed to be a space for you to critically talk about the activity or the documentary. Handing in a summary will not get any points; I need to see your stance and opinion.

Paper Presentation (8 points)

- ❖ Last few sessions (depending on class size) will be all yours to present your final paper. The presentation should be less than 8 minutes. You can use powerpoint, prez, or any other medium which you deem most appropriate.

How your attendance/participation will be assessed (8 points)

- ❖ Participation is not only about attendance. It is about getting involved and contributing. Surely, some students may not feel talking and verbalizing their ideas. The main reason for that is usually the assumption that one's ideas are not worthwhile or the fear of being judged or making mistakes. Remember this quote "I cannot wait to make my first mistake." If it is relevant, then share it. Still, if you have any issues, I am happy to talk about it.

Grading Summary


Group Exams (3 total)	30 Points
Final Research Proposal	8 Points
Final Research Paper	18 Points
Paper Presentation	8 Points
Reflective Essays (7 total)	28 Points
Attendance	8
Total	100

Feedbacks and Objections

If you are not happy with anything, please do not hesitate to contact me. It could be about your grades, or an annoying experience in the classroom. I am always available to discuss these issues, either via email or in person. But, bear in mind that whenever you have something to talk about in person, bring with you a note to my office. Before talking, I will read your note and then we will discuss it.

Grading Scale

Grade	%
A	90 – 100
B+	88 - 89
B	83 – 87
B-	80 - 82
C+	78 - 79
C	73 – 77
C -	70 – 72
D+	68 – 69
D	63 – 67
D-	60 - 62
F	below 60

 This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

The Course Calendar

Dates	Themes	Readings	Due Dates
Session 1 – 8/26 T	- Introduction - Syllabus - How to draw a mind map?	Canvas	
Session 2 – 8/28 Th	- Sociological Imagination - Group Activity: Titanic	Canvas	
Session 3 – 9/2 T	- Sociological Perspectives - Divorce	Ch 1	
Session 4 – 9/4 Th	- Inequality	Ch 2	
Session 5 – 9/9 T	- Food Stamp Activity		In-class reflective Essay 1 (See the requirements in the syllabus)
Session 6 – 9/11 Th	- Race and Ethnicity - “Introduce yourself” Outdoor group Activity	Ch 3	In-class reflective Essay 2
Session 7 – 9/16 T	Charles Jones: Under-representation	Guest Lecturer	Research Proposal
Session 8 – 9/18 Th	First Group Exam	Chapters 1,2, and 3	
Session 9 – 9/23 T	Gender	Ch 4	
Session 10 – 9/25 Th	“Job Stratification” Outdoor group activity		In-class Reflective Essay 3
Session 11 – 9/30 T	Sexual Orientation	Ch 5	

Session 12 – 10/2 Th	Screening: Miss-representation		In-class Reflective Essay 4
Session 13 – 10/7 T	Education	Ch 8	
Session 14 – 10/9 Th	Julie Dell-Jones: Language and Power	Guest Lecturer	In-class reflective Essay 5
Session 15 – 10/14 T	Second Group Exam	Chapters 4,5, and 8	
Session 16 – 10/16 Th	Work and Economy	Ch 9	
Session 17 – 10/21 T	The Media	Ch 11	
Session 18 – 10/23 Th	Jaime Robb: Homelessness	Guest Lecturer	In-class reflective Essay 6
Session 19 – 10/28 T	Crime and deviance	Ch 13	
Session 20 – 10/30 Th	- Crime and Deviance - “Doing Nothing Activity”		
Session 21 – 11/4 T	Screening: The End of Poverty		
Session 22 – 11/6 Th	Travis Bell: Sport and Commodification of Athletes	Guest Lecturer	In-class reflective Essay 7
Session 23 – 11/11 T	Veteran’s Day ☺		
Session 24 – 11/13 Th	- The Environment - Screening: Fierce Green Fire	Ch 15	
Session 25 – 11/18 T	Third Group Exam	Chapters 9, 11, 13, and 15	
Session 26 – 11/20 Th	Paper Presentation		
Session 27 – 11/25 T	Paper Presentation		
Session 28 – 11/ 27 Th	Thanks Giving ☺		
Session 29 – 12/2 T	Paper Presentation		
Session 30 – 12/4 Th	Paper Presentation		Final Research Paper