
SYLLABUS Summer 2010

Sociology 2031-200: SOCIAL PROBLEMS

2:30-4:05 pm on M/T/W/R/F in Ketchum 235

Instructor: Shelli Walker
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 pm – 2 pm
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SUMMARY

The term “social problems” brings many issues to mind. Even as the list grows, each problem expands, encompassing many smaller, more concrete issues that are grouped together under its umbrella. Often one type of social problem is intertwined with other problems so that they quickly become a knot of seemingly endless yet interconnected issues. So what are social problems, and why do we have so many of them?

This class explores how social problems move through society, and how people and institutions act in relation to social problems to influence their outcomes. Joel Best’s text *Social Problems* will serve as our guide, and will be supplemented with articles, websites, and movies as we delve into particular issues. We will use a social construction approach, examining several cases of contemporary social problems, most within the U.S., in order to apply concepts to practical situations. When we examine actual social problems, we have the opportunity to test and apply concepts to see how well they apply. As we progress through various types of problems, we will seek out useful comparisons and return to some big questions: why do we have the social problems we have in our society? What actions are most effective in bringing attention to social problems? Can social problems be solved? What actions are most effective for addressing social problems as individuals and as a society?

OBJECTIVES

1. Learn to apply a sociological/social construction approach to social problems.
2. Learn how to identify and evaluate social problems claims.
3. Analyze contemporary social problems in class discussions and assignments.
4. Gain an understanding of the roles played by activists, experts, journalists, politicians and the public in constructing social problems.
5. Gain an understanding of the role of media, science, corporations and politics in social problems.
6. Recognize methods sociologists use to research social problems.
7. Gain conceptual vocabulary and critical tools for discussing various social issues.
8. Reflect on the basis of your knowledge and opinions using critical thinking skills.

TEXTS

1. Joel Best. 2009. *Social Problems*.
2. Articles as assigned, available on CU Learn course web site.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Students need to access CULearn

1. Through CUConnect, click on “courses” tab <https://cuconnect.colorado.edu/uPortal/index.jsp>
2. Log in directly: <http://culearn.colorado.edu>.

I use CU Learn daily to provide relevant materials, post grades, and send announcements. Assignments will be posted online and you will need to complete assignments that call for written entries on CU Learn. You need to log in several times per week to keep up-to-date in the course.

CLASS POLICIES

Attendance

Attendance in class is tracked in this class, but there are NO POINTS associated with attendance. Please sign the attendance sheet. Falsifying class attendance is considered cheating, while the benefit from such cheating is practically nothing! Attendance will only be considered when grades are on the line between two letter grades or +/- designations.

If you fail to attend two or more class times during the first week, you will be administratively dropped.

To change your registration, check your add/drop eligibility, or obtain forms related to registration, go to: <http://registrar.colorado.edu/>.

It is your responsibility to know whether or not you are still registered in this class.

Nonattendance does not constitute withdrawal. Unless you officially withdraw by university-defined deadlines, you may still receive a grade and be charged tuition for classes.

Class Participation/Class Conduct

I expect attentiveness, respect, and participation in class. This is best realized when you finish readings on time, limit side activities or multitasking during the class period, and ask questions or participate in discussions.

Please:

- + Arrive on time.
- + Bring hard copies of readings to class.
- + Bring paper and a writing utensil to complete in-class assignments.
- + Do NOT use laptops during discussions or activities. Simply close laptops at these times.
- + Be aware that laptop use during class for non-class activities is inappropriate. Such use may result in suspension of laptop privileges for the remainder of the course. If a general problem develops, I reserve the right to suspend laptop privileges for the class as a whole.
- + Turn cell phones OFF during class (not on vibrate). Cell phone use is noticeable and very distracting. Phone use during class will result in deducted points and/or being asked to leave.
- + Refrain from side conversations during films or while someone has the floor to speak.
- + Treat fellow classmates with respect, especially when opinions differ. There may be disagreements about how the world works, and how social problems should be addressed. Hate speech and defamation of any individual or group will not be tolerated, and such actions will have serious negative consequences as determined by the case.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to follow the mandate of the University of Colorado's Honor Code: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/acadinteg.html>. Cheating will not be tolerated, and will be dealt with in the most serious manner possible under the guidelines of the Honor Council. Failure to comply with this policy will be construed as cheating and violators will be immediately reported.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Students must keep graded copies of assignments. If any grading discrepancies arise, students must be able to provide the graded copy in order to have the grade reviewed for adjustment.

Students must provide official documentation in any case where a concession is requested due to an absence or incomplete assignment. When alternate arrangements are granted, make-up exams or assignments must be completed by the mutually agreed-upon time. Alternate arrangements will NOT be considered if the request is made more than 3 days after the assignment or exam was due. While these policies will be strictly enforced, any documented and verifiable extenuating circumstance or emergency will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If something of a serious nature arises during the summer session, please contact me as soon as possible.

Illness/Absence Policy

Assignments

Assignments due in class as hard copies must be turned in at the beginning of class or when requested. Assignments due online must be posted by the provided date (and time if specified).

For all assignments,

- same-day late assignments will be docked 20%.
- assignments received one day late will be docked by 50%.
- assignments that are more than one class day late will not be accepted.
- assignments must be handed in by the correct format and method or they are subject to additional point deductions, up to 15%.
- There are NO make-up assignments in this course

The ONLY exceptions to these rules are: 1) prior arrangements with the instructor, or 2) a serious emergency that is documented and verifiable. Voluntary non-school related travel and conflicting appointments are not considered exceptions without some extraordinary cause.

Even by arrangement with instructor, each student may only use an alternate format/method twice without penalty.

Exams

1. Please see me if you know you have a schedule conflict with exam days/times.
2. If you are going to miss an exam due to an immediate or unforeseen emergency situation, you must contact me prior to or on the day of the exam (up to 5 pm) AND be able to provide documentation of your absence to ensure that you will be allowed to take a make-up exam.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Tests	200	35%
Attendance/ in-class Assignments	100	20%
Online Responses	150	30%
“Paper”	50	10%
Total points	500	

TESTS: Three tests will be given during summer session, including the final. Tests are concept-heavy and consist of fill-in-the-blank and short- answer questions, but may also include a smaller number of closed-answer questions or open-ended longer essay questions. The first test is worth 60 points, the second is worth 60, and the final is worth 80. The first and second tests in class will not be cumulative, but the final may include material from any part of the course.

ASSIGNMENTS: These vary in format, but typically require familiarity with readings. Some have right/wrong answers; others simply ask for thoughtful completion. Some involve participation and group work. They may be assigned, completed, and handed in during the same class period, or they may involve bringing material to class, or some preparation/completion outside of class. A few rules about assignments:

1. Students who fail to show up in class prepared or with proper materials have failed to follow basic instructions and will **LOSE POINTS**.
2. Bring hard copies of an article to class when requested. You will **NOT** be allowed to use online copies instead unless directly stated. Hard copy means hard copy!
3. I reserve the right to increase assignments/points if the class generally seems to require more in-class work to stay accountable to readings and be prepared to complete papers or exams.

ONLINE RESPONSES: Each week you will be required to post respond to others’ posts online based on my directions. Each post is worth 20-25 points and responses to other’s are worth 5-10 points. These will be explained in more detail in class.

PAPER The paper in this course can be completed from July 30-Aug 5. It is, in essence, a take-home essay that applies concepts from the course to a topic of choice. It will require sources to be cited, and included in a reference section. The expected length is between 3-5 pages. This will be explained more thoroughly in class.

FILMS: We will watch films during class period as time permits. You are expected to be in attendance on film days and to participate in discussion on film content. Questions on films may appear in assignments, and on quizzes and exams.

TENTATIVE READING & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Complete reading assignments by the beginning of the class for which they are assigned.

Bring hard copies of articles to class when requested.

Any adjustments to reading assignments announced in class will serve as the correct deadline.

All readings may be the basis for assignments or quiz/exam questions.

Quizzes, online responses, and in-class assignments are not listed here.

Week 1 Introduction to the course: claims and claimsmakers

T July 6 Introduction to the course, social construction
W July 7 Read Best Ch 1 (3-28), Ch 11 (325-336)
R July 8 Read Best Ch 2 (29-63), *Public Agenda assignment*
F July 9 Ch 10 “Comparison” (293-8), Drinking articles, Stats by Best

Week 2 Activism, Expertise, Science

M July 12 Public Opinion excerpt
T July 13 Best Chapter 3 (64-96), Christiensen article – Social Movements
W July 14 Shirky excerpt “Here Comes Everybody”
R July 15 Best Chapter 4 (97-105 only) Conrad “Expansion: ADHD” (146-69), Loe article
F July 16 *Test 1*

Week 3 Corporations, Regulation, Media, Food

M July 19 Best Chapter 4 (105-124) Manjoo excerpt
T July 20 Michaels on “Manufacturing Uncertainty” Seethaler excerpt
W July 21 Domhoff “Power at the National Level” article (9 pp) movie part 1
R July 22 Movie part 2 Nestle, Patel excerpts
F July 23 Best Chapter 5 Media, *Pre-paper assignment due*

Week 4 Public Opinion, Policymaking, Cars

M July 26 News excerpt, Best Chapter 6 Public Reaction
T July 27 *Test 2*
W July 28 Public Opinion excerpt-methods
R July 29 Carjacked excerpt, movie
F July 30 *Paper due* Best Chapter 7 Policymaking

Week 5 Social Problems Work, Policy Outcomes

M Aug 2 Best Chapter 8 (226-251) Social Problems Work
T Aug 3 Poverty, Homelessness articles
W Aug 4 Read Best Chapter 9 Policy Outcomes
R Aug 5 Policy Outcome discussion, Review, last day to hand in paper.
F Aug 6 **FINAL EXAM**