

Western Michigan University
SOC 2100: Modern Social Problems
Spring 2014

Instructor: Simon J. Purdy
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Office: Sangren Hall 3234
Office Hours: TR 1:00-2:00 (or by appointment)
Class Meetings: TR 2:00-3:15 PM in Sangren Hall 1710

Required Textbook:

Leon-Guerrero, A. (2013). *Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
ISBN: 978-1-4522-0543-4

**Consult the course schedule for assigned readings. Additional readings and materials may be posted that are not found on the course schedule below; these materials will be announced in class and will be found on the ELearning website.

Course Description:

“It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.”
-Gilbert K. Chesterton, 1874-1936

The intention of this course is to introduce the scientific field of sociology through the examination and study of social problems. These “social problems” are wide ranging in their scope, from issues related to gender, race and religion to those to those related to money, media and the environment. Over the course of this semester we will learn how to identify social problems (mainly those affecting the United States, with a limited global perspective), how to understand the impact of demographics such as race, religion and gender on these problems, and how to determine their potential causes, effects and solutions using major sociological theories. The identification and theoretical arguments that are made in class will be supported with various empirical findings (such as data from the census or various academic studies). A special focus will be placed on developing your own unique evidence based solutions to social problems, culminating in a term paper at the end of the semester.

Our exploration of social problems through the sociological lens may cause you to question some of your own beliefs. Whether or not you end up changing your mind about certain issues (such as why crime victimization differs amongst racial and ethnic groups) is not important. What is important, is that you are able to develop more than one way of looking at a given issue, and thus are able to logically evaluate your personal assumptions and the bases of those assumptions (i.e., whether you are only considering evidence in support of your view).

Course Objectives:

- To develop an understanding of social problems as they exist in the modern world, through the ability to identify social problems by quantitative and qualitative evidence.

- To develop a theoretical knowledge of social problems, and develop a positive attitude toward using theory to understand the causes and effects of, and potential solutions for, any given social problem.
- To develop an original, theory based, and well informed solution to one of the social problems covered in class.

Class Structure:

The majority of information in this class will be presented in lecture form during our regular class meetings. We will also utilize a variety of media to supplement the lectures, including video and audio presentations. A major portion of the class will require your participation, as every topic we cover will be discussed as a group in order to gain the widest variety of views and therefore the best possible understanding. The class will flow from one issue to the next throughout the semester, with more or less time being allotted to any given issue depending on the interest it generates. As such, the schedule presented in this syllabus may not perfectly match the course progression.

Course Grade and Grading Scale:

Your grade for this course will consist of points earned from 4 examinations (3 exams and the final exam), as well as a final term paper, and in-class/take-home activities. The examinations will account for 60% of your grade. The term paper will be worth 25% of your grade, and the remaining 15% will consist of the various in-class and take-home activities.

Grading Scale

Percentage	Grade
93 - 100	A
88 - 92	BA
83 - 87	B
78 - 82	CB
73 - 77	C
68 - 72	DC
63 - 67	D
0 - 62	E

Ground Rules:

- 1) All assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments **will not** be accepted for any reason unless an arrangement has been made with the instructor to account for legitimate reasons (i.e. severe illness, death in the family, etc.).
- 2) If you miss an exam, you will have a chance to make it up during the university assigned retake period (Friday of exam week), if you get approval from the instructor for a legitimate reason as listed above.
- 3) All assignments and examinations must be completed by you alone. Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be handled in accordance to university policies.
- 4) Sources used in any writing assignment must be cited in APA format.
- 5) Cell phones must be turned off during all class sessions. If your cell phone becomes an annoyance to the class you will be asked to leave and it will count as an absence from the

class. Cell phones, as well as headphones and any other electronic devices are prohibited during examinations.

- 6) While computers are a wonderful advancement in the history of human technology, they often prove to be a multi-tasking distraction from the academic experience. Therefore, if you must use your computer to take notes in class, you will be required to sit in the first two rows of seats.

University Policies and Statements:

Accommodation for Disabilities

Students with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who need to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact Disability Services for Students located at Woodlawn Place at the beginning of the semester. A disability determination must be made by this office before any accommodations are provided by the instructor. For more information, contact DSS (269) 387-2116.

Student Academic Conduct

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the academic policies and procedures in the Undergraduate or Graduate Catalogs (found online, <http://catalog.wmich.edu>) that pertain to student rights and responsibilities. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity, and computer misuse. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Date	Material Covered	Readings
1/9/14	Identifying Social Problems	Chap 1
1/14/14	Theory: Functionalism	Chap 1
1/16/14	Theory: Functionalism/Conflict	Chap 1
1/21/14	Theory: Conflict/Feminism	Chap 1
1/23/14	Theory: Symbolic Interactionism	Chap 1
1/28/14	The Science of Sociology, Exam 1 Review	Chap 1
EXAM 1, Thursday Jan. 30th		
2/4/14	Social Class	Chap 2
2/6/14	Poverty	Chap 2
2/11/14	Race and Ethnicity	Chap 3

2/13/14	Race and Ethnicity	Chap 3
2/18/14	Gender	Chap 4
2/20/14	Sexual Orientation	Chap 5
2/25/14	Age and Aging, Exam 2 Review	Chap 6
EXAM 2, Thursday Feb. 27th		
Spring Break, No Class 3/4 and 3/6		
3/11/14	Families	Chap 7
3/13/14	Education	Chap 8
3/18/14	Class Cancelled	
3/20/14	Work and the Economy	Chap 9
3/25/14	Work and the Economy/Health and Medicine	Chap 9 and 10
3/27/14	Health and Medicine, Exam 3 Review	Chap 10
EXAM 3, Tuesday Apr. 1st		
Final Paper Topic Due		
4/3/14	Media and Technology	Chap 11
4/8/14	Media and Technology	Chap 11
4/10/14	Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Crime and Criminal Justice	Chap 12
4/15/14	Crime and Criminal Justice	Chap 13
4/17/14	War and Terrorism, Final Exam Review	Chap 13 and 16
FINAL EXAM, Monday Apr. 21st 2:45 PM		
FINAL PAPERS DUE		