

Spring  
2000

U.S. Values, Social Problems, Social Change  
Sociology 2031-001  
Spring 2000

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MWF 9-10am  
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Welcome to what I hope will be an intriguing and pertinent sociology course. I have designed this course to provide current sociological evidence / perspectives on a range of contemporary social problems. Patterns of social inequality in its various forms - class, racial/ethnic, gender, political - which has long been a central concern to sociological inquiry, will be a guiding theme for our discussions.

Further, this course is meant to assist you in the development of conceptual tools and analytic skills required to fully grasp the social nature of many of today's most pressing social concerns. These new concepts and analytic skills will be useful in interpreting these and other issues that will no doubt arise in the future. It is my hope that through a series of lectures, discussions and exercises, you will develop a new understanding of the social world.

It is important to understand that it is the nature of such a course that we think critically of the society in which we live. Sometimes societies can be guilty of being unable to admit their own problems and thus, do little to fix these problems. In fact, societies often create whole sets of popular beliefs and myths to cover up their problems and avoid the difficult task of solving them. My objective is to take these popular beliefs and social myths and test them against the evidence. A common set of myths revolves around the belief that most problems we hear of are really only "personal troubles" - problems of individual people. This course will challenge this popular understanding by emphasizing the social nature of contemporary problems and inequalities. I will encourage to look beyond individual psychology and unique events to the broad patterns and regular occurrences of social life that influence individual destinies.

At a time when many serious challenges face our society and societies all over the world, it seems reasonable to ask, as many new students do, "What can sociology be used for? Can it be applied in practical ways to help us solve problems?" Asking these questions is a necessary first step in developing critical thinking skills that will be useful to your academic career and beyond it. Sociology is a problem-solving tool. Our daily discussions will be far-ranging and, hopefully, thought-provoking. I hope our treatment of these many issue areas will inspire you to make important connections between your personal life and broader social forces.

I have chosen for this course, three books that were written and designed to facilitate your acquisition of a sociological perspective. Since these books will serve as a common basis for our class discussions, a serious reading commitment is a must.

Required Readings

**Social Inequality: Patterns and Processes**      **Martin Marger**

**Critical Choices: Applying Sociological Insight in Your Life, Family, and Community.**      **Scott Sernau**

**The McDonaldization of Society**      **George Ritzer**

This course will be organized in seminar fashion, involving regular reading assignments, group discussion and student presentation of material. It is my hope that we can talk about the "big issues" of our time in a comfortable and supportive manner.

It is important to me and extremely beneficial to you to make every possible effort to attend every class period! Since a significant portion of your final grade is based on class participation, regular attendance is critical. I expect each of you to contribute as a regular member of this class. Come prepared! I favor frequent and constructive participation. (Yep! it's one of "those kind" of classes).

Your final grade in this course will be determined as follows: four short writing assignments (40% / 10% each), a mid-term & final exam (50% / 25% each), and participation (10%). I do use the "+/-" grading system