

SOCY 2031-004: Social Problems

Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:00-9:15am; MCOL W100

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sociology is often understood to be the study of social problems. But what exactly is a “social problem”? Who defines what counts as a “problem,” and how does the way in which these “problems” are posed shape the “solutions” that we come up with? This course will survey various “social problems”—economic inequality, poverty, sexism, racism, environmental degradation, violence, etc.—from a sociological perspective. Throughout, we will be particularly attentive to the ways in which these problems are rooted in social relations of domination, and we will critically examine the ideological ways in which these “problems” have come to be understood.

EVALUATION

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Reading Responses (5 total): 25%

Term Paper (5-7 pages): 25%

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Exams:

There will be 2 exams during the semester. The exams are not cumulative, but they will cover *all* material from the course—i.e. readings, lectures, films. As such, you must do all the readings and attend class regularly in order to do well on the exams.

Exams are not moveable. Please note exam dates carefully now. If you miss an exam due to an *excused* emergency, you must notify *both* me and the TA by the day of the exam and provide the appropriate documentation. Your TA and I will then discuss the possibility of a make-up exam with you.

Reading Responses:

By the end of the semester, you must have turned in 5 reading responses. Each is worth 5% of your total grade. You may choose to respond to any 5 of the reading assignments marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus. Each response should be no shorter than ½ page and no longer than 1 page, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. The responses are due the same day as the readings, and will be collected *at the end* of class. I will only accept paper copies, so make sure you print out your response beforehand.

For each response, you must: 1) summarize the main point of the reading in your own words, and 2) provide critical commentary on the reading from your own perspective. Some questions you might consider are: Was the argument convincing? Do you see any flaws or gaps in what the author has presented, or in the author's conclusions? How did you react to the reading from a personal perspective? Does the reading relate to your own experience? Does the reading connect to other readings from the course? The responses will be graded on comprehension of the reading material and the degree of engagement with it.

Term Paper:

Your final assignment for the course will be to write a 5-7 page paper. The goal of this paper will be for you to explore a “social problem” of your choice, and to critically assess existing efforts to address it. A more detailed prompt will be distributed at a later date.

Participation & Attendance:

Much of this course will be discussion-based. As such, active participation is highly encouraged. In addition to large group discussions, we will also occasionally break out into small groups and engage in other in-class activities.

Attendance is required and will be taken by the TA every session. If you are late to class, it is your responsibility to talk to the TA *after* class to make sure that your attendance is recorded. All students are allowed up to four *unexcused* absences, but each *unexcused* absence beyond four will result in a 10% penalty on your *overall course grade*. *Excused* absences (i.e. medical or family emergencies with the proper documentation) will not count against you.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1: Introduction

Jan 17 (T): No Reading Due.

Jan 19 (Th): *C. Wright Mills (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, pp. 1-25.

WEEK 2: Inequality & Labor

Jan 24 (T): *Anthony T. Atkinson (2016) *Inequality: What Can Be Done?*, pp. 9-16.

*Joseph E. Stiglitz (2013) *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, pp. 1-34.

Patricia Cohen "A Bigger Economic Pie, but a Smaller Slice for Half of the U.S." *The New York Times*, December 6 2016.

David Walters "4 Men with 4 Very Different Incomes Open Up About the Lives They Can Afford" *Esquire*, April 19 2016.

Jan 26 (Th): *Rick Fantasia & Kim Voss (2004) *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement*, pp. 1-33

Bill Fletcher Jr. (2012) "*They're Bankrupting Us!*", pp. xv-xxi.

Steven Greenhouse "How the \$15 Minimum Wage Went From Laughable to Viable" *The New York Times*, April 1 2016.

WEEK 3: Poverty

Jan 31 (T): *Kathryn J. Edin & H. Luke Shaefer (2016) *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, pp. xi-xxiv, 1-35.

Sara Goldrick-Rab "This is #RealCollege: Some students struggle to pay for food, housing" *Washington Post*, May 10 2016.

Neil Irwin "Growth Has Been Good for Decades. So Why Hasn't Poverty Declined?" *The New York Times*, June 4 2014.

Feb 2 (Th): *Kathryn J. Edin & H. Luke Shaefer (2016) *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, pp. 129-157.

Emily Badger "Why the poor pay more for toilet paper—and just about everything else" *Washington Post*, March 8 2016.

WEEK 4: Housing and Homelessness

- Feb 7 (T):** *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011) (Film shown in class)
*Matthew Desmond (2016) *Evicted*, pp. 1-5, 94-107, 144-157.
- Feb 9 (Th):** *Matthew Desmond (2016) *Evicted*, pp. 293-313.
Alastair Gee “More than one-third of schoolchildren are homeless in shadow of Silicon Valley” *The Guardian*, December 28 2016.
Jack Healy “Rights Battles Emerge in Cities Where Homelessness Can Be a Crime” *The New York Times*, January 9 2017.
Chris Walker “Homelessness in Denver: The Cold, Hard facts Behind Six Myths” *Westword*, December 4 2016.

WEEK 5: Racial Segregation

- Feb 14 (T):** *Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton (1993) *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, pp. 17-59.
- Feb 16 (Th):** *Ta-Nehisi Coates “The Case for Reparations” *The Atlantic*, June 2014.
Alvin Chang “Living in a poor neighborhood changes everything about your life” *Vox*, June 6 2016.

WEEK 6: Exam Week

- Feb 21 (T):** *Exam 1*
- Feb 23 (Th):** TBD (Film shown in class)

WEEK 7: Criminal Justice and Mass Incarceration

- Feb 28 (T):** *Michelle Alexander (2012) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, pp. 20-58.
Katie Hicks “US incarceration is 5 to 10 times higher than that of other NATO countries” *Vox*, June 16 2016.
Rob Montz “How mandatory minimums helped drive mass incarceration” *Vox*, September 3 2015.
- Mar 2 (Th):** *Michelle Alexander (2012) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, pp. 178-221.
German Lopez “How systemic racism entangles all police officers—even black cops” *Vox*, August 15 2016.

WEEK 8: Racism in the Age of Colorblindness

Mar 7 (T): *Ira Katznelson (2005) *When Affirmative Action Was White*, pp. 25-53.
Matthew Yglesias “America’s real racism problem doesn’t look like Donald Sterling” *Vox*, May 13 2014.

Mar 9 (Th): *Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, pp. 21-50.
Victoria M. Massie “Race isn’t biologically real. That doesn’t mean racism doesn’t exist” *Vox*, June 11 2016.

WEEK 9: Gender, Inequality, and the Division of Labor

Mar 14 (T): *Cecilia L. Ridgeway (2011) *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*, pp. 3-31.
Claire Cain Miller “Why Men Don’t Want the Jobs Done Mostly by Women” *The New York Times*, January 4 2017.

Mar 16 (Th): *Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003) *The Second Shift*, pp. 1-34.
Lisa Wade “The Invisible Workload That Drags Women Down” *Time*, December 29, 2017.
Lisa Wade “The Modern Marriage Trap—and What to Do About It” *Time*, January 11 2017.

WEEK 10: Masculinity, Violence, and the Gendered Order

Mar 21 (T): *R.W. Connell (1987) *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, pp. 183-188.
*R.W. Connell (2005) *Masculinities. Second Edition*, pp. 67-86.
Michael Kimmel “Masculinity, mental illness and guns: A lethal equation?” *CNN*, December 19 2012.
Emily Crockett “Many mass shooters have a history of domestic violence. It’s time to pay attention” *Vox*, January 10 2017.

Mar 23 (Th): *R.W. Connell (2005) *Masculinities. Second Edition*, pp. 244-266.

WEEK 11: SPRING BREAK

Mar 28 (T): NO CLASS

Mar 30 (Th): NO CLASS

WEEK 12: Exam Week

Apr 4 (T): *Exam 2*

Apr 6 (Th): *Frontline: Rape in the Fields* (2013) (Film shown in class)
Term Paper prompt distributed

WEEK 13: Immigration

Apr 11 (T): *Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut (2004) *Immigrant America: A Portrait*.
3rd Edition, pp. 1-36.

Dara Lind “The basics of the US immigration system” *Vox*, August 4 2015.

Apr 13 (Th): *Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut (2014) *Immigrant America: A Portrait*.
4th Edition, pp. 161-213.

WEEK 14: Environmental Degradation

Apr 18 (T): TBD

Apr 20 (Th): TBD

WEEK 15: Terrorism and War

Apr 25 (T): *Charles Kurzman (2011) *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists*, pp. 3-24, 169-204.

Andrew Shaver “You’re more likely to be fatally crushed by furniture than killed by a terrorist” *Washington Post*, November 23 2015.

Apr 27 (Th): *Charles Tilly (2004) “Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists” *Sociological Theory* 22(1):
5-13.

WEEK 16: Toward a Democratic Society?

May 2 (T): *Students for a Democratic Society (1962) *The Port Huron Statement*, pp. 3-25,
33-63.

May 4 (Th): No Reading.

*****I reserve the right to change the reading assignments on the syllabus. I will, however, be sure to notify you in a timely manner if I end up doing so.*****

IN CLASS EXPECTATIONS

- Arrive to class on time.
- Turn your cell phone off.
- Put away newspapers and magazines.
- Refrain from having conversations with, or in other ways distracting, your classmates
- Remain for the whole class.
- Display professional courtesy and respect in all interactions related to this class.
- If you must use your laptop, use it ONLY for classroom purposes. If laptop privileges are being regularly abused, I reserve the right to revoke those privileges.

EXAM EXPECTATIONS

On exam days, students:

- are not allowed to wear caps or hats where I can't see where their eyes are looking,
- cannot use ear phones of any kind,
- are responsible for ensuring that nothing from the class is visible,
- must not have a cell phone turned on or visible from the second they enter the door to take the exam to when they leave the room after completing the exam,
- are not allowed to leave the room for any reason until an exam has been turned into the professor or TA, and once a student has left the room for any reason, the exam will not be returned. If you are sick during an exam and must leave the room, then you will have to forfeit that exam or accept the grade as the number of points you got until you left the room.

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM—See section, below, on Academic Integrity for full description. *All instances of cheating and plagiarism are taken extremely seriously and will be immediately reported.*

OUT OF CLASS EXPECTATIONS

The TA and I are here to help you understand the course material. We encourage you to approach us if you are having difficulty with the class, or if you want to clarify a concept, etc. However, we both have multiple professional obligations, and we ask you to be professional, as well, in approaching us for help. Some tips:

- Respect posted office hours. Plan your weekly schedule to align with scheduled office hours.
- Do not expect the professor or TA to answer emails immediately, or over the weekend. I do not answer emails at all hours of the day and night. You can expect an answer to your email within the next 1 to 2 business days from when you send it.
- Send emails to your professor or TA using a professional format. That is:
 1. Always fill in the subject line with a topic that indicates the reason for your email to your reader.
 2. Respectfully address the individual to whom you are sending the email (e.g., Dear Professor Smith).
 3. Avoid email, chat room or text message abbreviations.

4. Be brief and polite.
5. Add a signature block with appropriate contact information.
6. Reply to emails with the previously sent message. This will allow your reader to quickly recall the questions and previous conversation.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Disability Accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Injuries](#) guidelines under the Quick Links at the [Disability Services website \(http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/\)](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/) and discuss your needs with your professor.

Religious Observances: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. *In this class, it is important that if the date of an exam is during a religious holiday you observe that you let me know immediately at the beginning of the semester so that we can decide what to do. In fact, it is helpful if you let me know in writing, by email, at the beginning of the semester any days you will miss due to religious observances, so that the proper accommodations can be made.* See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Learning Environment and Salutations: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. *I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.* See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and

employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127. Information about the OIEC, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/institutionalequity/>

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [academic integrity policy](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy) of the institution (available here: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy>). Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at honorcode.colorado.edu.

Student-Athletes: It is the student's responsibility to notify each instructor—in the first week of the semester and in writing--about any known conflicts between academic requirements and intercollegiate varsity athletic events. For conflicts that arise during the regular term, instructors have full authority to decide whether and/or how to accommodate those conflicts. While an instructor has the right to refuse to allow make-ups or other accommodations, he or she is permitted to provide such accommodations. Intercollegiate varsity athletics events during final exams, which are normally forbidden by university policy, must be approved in writing by the BFA Intercollegiate Athletics Committee well in advance of the event. Students involved in these events must then work with their instructors in regard to any missed work, as required above.

Club Sports: It is the student's responsibility to notify each instructor—in the first several weeks of the semester and in writing--about any known conflicts between academic requirements and sport club events. For conflicts that arise during the regular term, instructors have full authority to decide whether and/or how to accommodate those conflicts. While an instructor has the right to refuse to allow make-ups or other accommodations, he or she is permitted to provide such accommodations.