

SOC 201: Social Problems

Inequality in America

MWF 11-11:50

Admin 303

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As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.
Nelson Mandela

Course Description

This course will challenge you to think creatively about some of society's more intractable social problems. We will focus specifically on persistent and systemic forms of inequality that exist within the United States. In order to better understand these issues, we will critically analyze both objective data and subjective interpretations by evaluating how different communities come to label a problem a "social" one. Further this course will introduce you to sociological approaches to the study of social problems with the goal of understanding and framing human social behavior. Finally, we will work together to research and theorize potential solutions to social problems and inequalities by using both our sociological imaginations and an examination of existing social organizations engaged in social justice work.



Textbooks (Available at the Campus Bookstore and Online)

Eitzen, D. Standley, Maxine Baca Zinn and Kelly Eitzen Smith (2011) *Social Problems*, 12th Edition

Leon-Guerrero, Anna and Kristine Zentgraf (2008) *Contemporary Readings in Social Problems*

Additional required readings will be provided on the Blackboard class website and are listed below in the course schedule.

Course Objectives

- Students will be able to clearly demonstrate their understanding of objective and subjective data examining contemporary social problems.
- Students will analyze the historical and ongoing institutional inequalities in the United States and globally that harm the well being of individuals and social groups.
- Students will be able to articulate the diverse ethical and moral philosophies that construct specific phenomena as persistent social problems.
- Students will use their sociological imagination to make connections between cultural and institutional inequality and contemporary social problems.

Course Assignments and Grading

- **Attendance and Participation (10%):** You may have three absences throughout the semester. No excuse is required. More than three absences will result in a loss of points for course participation. Students with extraordinary circumstances are required to meet with me.
- **Solution Activities (20%):** Students will participate in solution activities at least two times during the semester. On solution activity days, students in small groups of 2-3 will present research on the proposed solutions to the social problem we are discussing. Group presentations must include the introduction of new information, a handout for your classmates and discussion questions. After presenting solution activities, students will turn in notes and research to the professor for grading.
- **Two Essay Exams (40%):** Students will have one week to complete their essay exam. Each exam will include a total of 5 essay questions of which the student may select 3 questions to answer. Each question will be 2-3 pages long and your final set of essays must be 7-9 pages. All supporting material must come from academically rigorous sources and be properly cited.
- **Final Paper (30%):** Using a combination of their own research, individual analytic skills and material presented in the class, students will write a 8-10 page essay that considers the following topic: Select one discussion area that we have addressed so far and present a persuasive argument in response to the question. Demonstrate your understanding of the material discussed in class and provide support based on additional research you have conducted outside of class. All supporting material must come from academically rigorous sources and be properly cited.

Classroom Policies

The professor reserves the right to change the syllabus and assignments. Changes may be made to accommodate the specific needs of the class.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty, including the giving or receiving of improper help on examinations or assignments, falsifying records, and plagiarism (the act of stealing and using, as one's own, the ideas or the expression of ideas of another) is not tolerated at Concord University. These behaviors can result in failure of the course or expulsion from the university. Please refer to page 39 of the university academic catalog for the consequences of academic dishonesty.

Academic Resources

Free Drop-In Tutoring is available in the Library, Student Center Study Lounge (2nd floor), and the Rahall Atrium. For specific information, contact the Academic Success Center (asc@concord.edu; 304-384-6074). The schedule will be posted online: <http://www.concord.edu/ssss/node/4>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Concord University is committed to responding to the needs of students with disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please inform me at the beginning of the semester if you have a disability and are requesting accommodations. Students should register with CU's Disability Services Office, located in the Athens campus Jerry L. Beasley Student Center, Bottom Floor, across from the Campus Post Office. The Disability Services Office phone number is 304-384-6036 or you can email the Director Nancy Ellison at nellison@concord.edu for assistance.

Course Readings

Readings listed for each day of class in the course schedule are to have been read **prior** to coming to that day's class. Additional reading maybe assigned and will be distributed in class or on the course Blackboard website.

Student Athletes

Student athletes are required to notify me in advance to be excused from class and are responsible for making up all missing assignments and readings.

Classroom Conduct

This course is heavily reliant on discussion, which includes difficult dialogue at times. **This is an inclusive and safe classroom.** All discussion points and questions are valued; as such students are expected to treat one another and the professor thoughtfully and with respect. Racist, sexist, homophobic or other pejorative or discriminatory language will not be tolerated and students who insist on such behavior will be asked to leave the classroom.

Cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off before coming to class.

DO NOT text message or use your phone during class!

Course Schedule

Understanding Social Problems

Aug 25 - Introductions and Syllabus

Aug 27 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 1, “The Sociological Approach to Social Problems”

Aug 29 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, “The Art of Savage Discovery: How to Blame the Victim” by William Ryan

Structural Inequalities

Sept 1 - **No Class, Labor Day**

Sept 3 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 3, “World Population and Global Inequality”

Sept 5 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, “Poverty and Inequality in the Global Economy” by Michael D. Yates

Sept 8 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 4, “Threats to the Environment”

Sept 10 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, “Nature’s Trust: A Legal, Political, and Moral Frame for Global Warming” by Mary Christina Wood

Sept 12 - Solutions Activity: Environmental Justice

Sept 15 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 17, “The Health Care System”

Sept 17 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, “Pills, Power, People: Sociological Understanding of the Pharmaceutical Industry” by Joan Busfield

Sept 19 - Solutions Activity: Inequality and Healthcare

Sept 22 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 16, “Education”

Sept 24 - Read: Excerpt from *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozel (**Blackboard**)

Sept 26 - Solutions Activity: Reshaping Education

Essay Exam #1 Due

Identity Inequalities

Sept 29 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 8, “Racial and Ethnic Inequality”

Oct 1 - Read: “Individualism Reconsidered” by Kinder and Mendelburg (**Blackboard**)

Oct 3 - Solutions Activity: Addressing Racism

Oct 6 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 9, “Gender Inequality”

Oct 8 - Read: “Patriarchy, The System, An It, Not a He, a Them or an Us” by Allen Johnson (**Blackboard**)

Oct 10 - Solutions Activity: Deconstructing Gender Inequality

Oct 13 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 10, “Sexual Orientation”

Oct 15 - Read: “Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity” by Michael Kimmel (**Blackboard**)

Oct 17 - **No Class, Fall Break**

Oct 20 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 7, "Poverty"

Oct 22 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, "An Understanding of Poverty From Those Who Are Poor" by Stephanie Baker Collins

Oct 24 - Solutions Activity: Fighting Poverty

Essay Exam #2 Due

Violence, Harm and Inequality

Oct 27 - Read: *Social Problems*: Chapter 15: Families

Oct 29 - Read: "Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender" by Natalie J. Sokoloff and Ida Dupont (**Blackboard**)

Oct 31 - Solutions Activity: Addressing Family Violence

Nov 3 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 12, "Crime and Justice"

Nov 5 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, "Poverty, Inequality and Youth Violence" by Ronald C. Kramer

Nov 7 - Solutions Activity: Crime and Justice

Nov 10 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 13, "Drugs"

Nov 12 - Read: Excerpt from *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (**Blackboard**)

Nov 14 - Solutions Activity: Addressing Drug Use

Nov 17 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 18, "National Security in the Twenty-First Century"

Nov 19 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, "Combat Casualties and Race: What Can We Learn From the 2003-2004 Iraq Conflict" by Brian Gifford

Nov 21 - Solutions Activity: War and Violence

Nov 24-28 - No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Dec 1 - Read: *Social Problems* Chapter 19, "Progressive Plan to Solve Social Problems"

Dec 3 - Read: *Contemporary Readings*, "Where Do We Go From Here?" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dec 5 - Wrap up Activity: Getting Involved and Making a Difference

Final Paper Due Dec 10th