

Sociology 2031-100

Social Problems

Summer 2019

Instructor: Dr. Mike Haffey
Office hrs. MTWRF after class

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Course Description and Goals: Welcome, to what I think will be an eye-opening and useful investigation into the array of societal problems that continue to haunt our modern world and negatively impact the lives of many Americans. The study of social problems such as economic inequality, unemployment and poverty, sexism and racism, addiction, social instability, conflict, violence, war, etc. and their amelioration, have long stood at the center of the sociological enterprise. Both classical and contemporary sociologists have made central to their investigations, a peculiarly, sociological explanation of a particular phenomenon or problem as well as possible courses of action that may reduce or eliminate that problem. The study of social problems continues to be a richly contested arena of competing explanations and possible solutions.

Although social problems take many forms, they all share two things in common: an objective social condition and a subjective interpretation of that social condition. As you will see, the authors of our text will encourage us to see social problems as social conditions, events, or patterns of behavior that negatively affects the well-being of a significant number of people. From this vantage point, we will investigate a variety of troublesome situations endemic to social structures and institutions, with an eye to both the empirical condition or facts and the process by which people define social problems.

The uniqueness of sociology not only is reflected in the endless available topics of study, but also is present in the perspective we use to guide our analyses: the sociological imagination. The sociological imagination is a particular lens we use to view the world, one that encourages us to think like sociologists – to focus on the role of social institutions and social structure have on our everyday lives. That is to say, the sociological imagination enables us to see more clearly the impact of social forces in the everyday lives of individuals and make the link between “personal troubles” and “public issues”, individual biography and social history, self and society. Such a sociological imagination is relevant to the study of social problems in that it encourages us to look to the social system (i.e. institutions, organizations, interactions) as the main source of social problems (a system-blame approach) as opposed to those who are suffering from the problems (a victim-blaming approach). This “social gaze,” that produces “social explanations” is peculiar to sociology and is often at-odds with more the individualistic explanations that dominate public discourse and policy.

Each of the social problems highlighted in our text is framed around three major themes: capitalism; inequality; democracy. Each of these three foci will enhance our sociological understanding of both the objective and subjective aspects of modern social problems. Remember, the many social problems that we are about to engage, affect each and every one of us, directly or indirectly. It is my hope that a clear and socially-informed understanding of the nature and origins of social problems, will inspire students – no matter what your academic major or future life path may be – to care about social problems, and become more mindful of how one’s actions, or inactions, can perpetuate or alleviate social problems. Real solutions are available.

Required Text: The textbook I have chosen for this course was written and designed to facilitate your understanding of how sociologists investigate and explain contemporary social problems. I think you will find the format and writing-style quite engaging. The authors have worked hard to make a number of complex issues as understandable as possible. You must do a little work as well. You will be expected to have read and reflected upon (and applied) the required readings each week. The reading assignments should always be done before the topic is discussed in class. There is one (1) required text for this course: American Society: How It Really Works by Wright and Rogers. This text is available for either purchase or rental at the UMC Bookstore.

Exams and Grading. Your final grade for this course will be based on the following criteria:

Five (5) multi-format exams (15% each / 75% total). Exam dates: (every Friday) 6/7; 6/14; 6/21; 6/28; 7/5. If you are going to miss an exam, it is vital that you notify me **prior** to that exam.

One (1) ongoing "social problem research project: (15%). Each student will investigate a particular social problem of your own choosing. We will dedicate each of our five Wednesday class meetings to address each of these ongoing student projects.

Class Engagement (10%): Your regular attendance and active participation in class discussions and activities is an essential component of this class. You are expected to regularly engage in civil discourse on issues and readings relevant to each session, as well as help co-facilitate our class discussion. Beyond two absences, your "class engagement" grade will be reduced by a half-letter grade for each additional absence.

Technology in the classroom: Please, no phone-use in the classroom during class meetings. I ask that any computer use in the classroom be for note-taking purposes only. Our time together is brief and I ask for your full attention during class time. Special exceptions made for those with appropriate documentation from disability services.

Accommodation for Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students) (www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website and discuss your needs with your professor.

Religious Holidays: 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, please speak with me to arrange alternative date and time. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Classroom Behavior: 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 race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. 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. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. CU's Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking or related retaliation. CU Boulder's Discrimination and Harassment Policy prohibits discrimination, harassment or related retaliation based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct under either policy 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 found at the [OIEC website](#).

Honor Code: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to [the academic integrity policy](#). Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, 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 a failing grade on that assignment. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#)

June 3 - Course Introduction

June 4 - *ch. 1 Prologue: Perspectives and Values & ch. 2 What Kind of Society is American Society?*

June 5 - Social Problem Research Project (proposal)

June 6 - *ch. 3 The Capitalist Market: How It Is Supposed to Work & ch. 4 ... How It Actually Works*

June 7 - Review / EXAM 1

June 10 - *ch. 5 The Environment & ch. 6 Transportation*

June 11 - *ch. 7 Consumerism & ch. 8 Health Care*

June 12 - *ch. 9 Finance & ch. 10 Building a High Road Economy (exam 2 take-home; due Friday)*

June 13 - "Social Problem Project" (data collection day – no class meeting)

June 14 - **EXAM 2 DUE** (email or deliver to 288 Ketchum Hall)

June 17 - *ch. 11 Thinking About Fairness and Inequality & ch. 12 Class*

June 18 - *ch. 13 Persistent Poverty and Rising Inequality & ch. 14 Ending Poverty In America*

June 19 - Social Problem Research Project (cause and effect)

June 20 - *ch. 15 Racial Inequality & ch. 16 Gender Inequality*

June 21 - Review / EXAM 3

June 24 - *ch. 17 Democracy: How It Work & ch. 18 Elections and Voting*

June 25 - *ch. 19 Taxation and the Attack on the Affirmative State*

June 26 - Social Problem Research Project (sociological explanations)

June 27 - *ch. 20 Corporate Control of the Media*

June 28 – Review / EXAM 4

July 1 - *ch. 21 Militarism and Empire & ch. 22 Labor Unions*

July 2 - *ch. 23 Democracy From Below & ch. 24 Possible Futures*

July 3- Social Problem Research Project (project presentation)

July 4 - **campus closed / no class**

July 5 - **Review / Exam 5**

