

Social Problems: SOC 1020
Thursdays: 5:15-8:00
Turney Center Industrial Complex

Instructor

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Course Description

This course will introduce you to the sociological study of social problems with an emphasis on gender. The discipline of sociology has often been motivated by the pressing issues of the day. Marx (1818-1883) was driven toward an analysis of capitalism because he saw the working class being exploited by the titans of industry. W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) wrote extensively on racism and the color line in the United States as he was excluded from professorships at white universities and saw white scholars justifying Jim Crow segregation. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) wrote extensively about the exclusion of women from social institutions and how sociologists should study families and children. These scholars were influenced by their time and developed sociology as a discipline to make social change. By applying the insights from these and other sociologists, we will be investigating current social issues and emphasizing the ways that sociology can inform social policy.

This section of Social Problems is focused on gender and society. Gender is one of the most influential stratifying social forces. Sociologists understand gender as both a social institution that structures society as well as an individual trait that we enact in routinized ways. Throughout the semester, we will examine how gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality to shape exposure to social problems.

A class on social problems can focus on many aspects of society. Early in the semester, we will focus on defining social problems from social constructionist and life course perspectives. We will examine examples of gendered social issues from a variety of domains of social life. In the later portion of the semester we will focus on social problems associated with the criminal justice system with an emphasis on how race, gender, and class shape the United States legal system and contribute to mass incarceration.

Sociology does not provide simple answers to the problems that our society faces. However, sociology does provide a toolkit of theories and methodologies to help us describe, understand, and evaluate societies and social processes. Elections and the media tend to simplify social problems into simple solutions. Sociology challenges simple explanations by showing the complexity of social issues within any society and economy, especially one that is rapidly becoming more complicated. In this class, we will examine several pressing social issues for our society including persistent poverty, racial inequality, gender inequality, health disparities, climate change, and mass incarceration.

Learning Goals

- Learn to read and write like a social scientist.
- Develop a nuanced understanding of how gender, race, and class shape social life.
- Use the sociological imagination to critically analyze social issues.
- Apply sociological concepts to your own life and interactions.

- Examine and critique sociological methodologies' strengths and weaknesses.
- Understand how systems of power and inequality intersect to create social issues and individuals' social contexts.

Required Materials

Three books are required for this course.

1. Stomblor, Mindy, and Amanda M. Jungels, eds. (2016). *Focus on Social Problems: A Contemporary Reader*. Oxford University Press.
 - a. Abbreviated FSP
2. (2016). *Social Problems: Continuity and Change*. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.
 - a. Free online textbook available at: <http://open.lib.umn.edu/socialproblems/>
 - b. Abbreviated SPCC
3. Western, Bruce. (2018). *Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison*. Russel Sage Foundation. New York.

Grading

10%-Participation & in-class work
 20%-Reflections (10% X 2)
 30%- Gendered Problems in the News Paper
 20%-Midterm exam
 20%-Final exam

Grade Scale

A: 93-100; A-: 90-92
 B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82
 C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72
 D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62
 F: <=59

Assignments

Reflections (20%):

Understanding social issues is a personal process as well as an intellectual endeavor. Throughout the semester, you will write TWO reflections about class readings. There are two due dates for reflections on the syllabus. These dates are the *last* day that the reflection can be turned in. I would recommend turning the reflections in early based on a reading that you find interesting, provocative, or frustrating. Reflections should be 1-2 pages in length.

Reflections are due at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. For instance, if you choose to write a reflection on *Doing Gender*, you should turn in the reflection by class-time on September 13th. Please bring a printed copy to class. See course schedule for due dates.

Each reflection is worth 10% of the final grade. Reflections will be graded on four criteria:

1. The author clearly and succinctly summarizes the social issue, its implications for society, and connects the issue explicitly to course concepts.
2. The author discusses their previous knowledge of the issue, what they learned about the issue, and how your opinions have developed on the topic.
3. The reflection is written clearly, demonstrates critical engagement with course themes, and is free of grammatical errors.
4. The author proposes questions for further discussion or research.

Gendered Problems in the News Paper (30%):

The news media has a wider range of perspectives than ever before. News media often creates the framing of social problems and contributes to how the issue is discussed in society. This project aims for you to critically analyze news sources and identify differences in how social problems are framed. There are several parts of this assignment.

1. Vanderbilt students taking a nearly identical class will select sets of 10 articles representing a range of perspectives on the issue. They are asked to use the infographic at MediaBiasChart.com to inform their article selection. The Infographic will be uploaded to the computer lab network. You will receive articles on 9/27.
2. Conduct a content analysis of the news articles.
3. Draft a paper that discusses the problem, the different frames used to discuss it, and the similarities and differences across the articles. The paper should draw on course themes and readings. It should be 4-5 pages in length and is due on 11/8.

Midterm (20%) and Final Exams (20%):

The midterm and final exams will be multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. These exams are meant to assess your understanding and application of key course concepts, readings, and lectures. The exams will be closed-book. Prior to the exams, we will discuss the format and topics being covered.

Course Expectations/Policies

Participation (10%):

I will not take formal attendance throughout the semester. However, for the first few weeks—as recommended by the university and to learn names—I will be taking attendance

Class participation is a portion of your grade and whether you attend will reflect on your participation grade. Absences are noticeable and will negatively impact your success in this course. Tardiness is a disruption to the whole class and will influence your participation grade. Completion of in-class assignments and classroom participation will account for 10% of your grade. It is advantageous to your grade to prepare for class, attend class (on time), participate in discussions, and be a good classroom citizen.

Assignment Formatting:

All assignments should be typed and paper copies should be submitted. The text should be double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, and have 1” margins on all sides.

For all written work, your name should appear in the top right corner of the document header with the date you turn the assignment in and the assignment name. The page number should be in the document footer. Large spacing and extraneous white space does not count toward page limits.

Citations:

In-text citations should be given for all sources. In-text citations should include author and date as well as page number if it is a direct quotation—for instance, lecture can be cited as (Vielehr 2018). Quotations should be used sparingly; paraphrasing is usually more effective. Sources from course materials do not need to be included on a separate reference page. If you use sources outside of course materials, please provide a reference page. Since you have limited access to online information about formatting you will not be graded on citation or reference format but please use the following general guides:

For a book:

Author's full name, inverted so that last name appears first. Year. *Book Title in Title Caps and Italicized*. Publishing City: Publisher.

For a scholarly article:

Author's full name, inverted so that last name appears first. Year. “Article Title in Title Caps and in Quotes.” *Journal Title in Title Caps and Italicized* Volume Number(Issue Number):page numbers of article.

Late Work Policy:

Late work will not be accepted without prior approval.

Classroom Citizenship:

This class will discuss challenging topics which may prompt considerable disagreement among the class members. Having differing viewpoints is an asset for learning only if we can treat each other’s experiences and ideas with respect and civility. In classroom discussions, we will work to create a community of learners who support one another despite our differences.

Disability accommodations:

Nashville State complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Consult with the office of Student Disability Services. If you need any accommodation(s) for this class, notify the instructor by the second class meeting.

Content advisory:

Discussing the current challenges to our society can be difficult since we all have some relationship to the issues we discuss. We will be discussing sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexism, racism, objectification of women, mass incarceration, and other challenging topics.

Many students have had experiences in their lives that may make some topics especially difficult to discuss. If you think that some topics will be difficult for you, please see me so that we can discuss ways to make the course more accessible to your needs.

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Do not cheat or plagiarize. I have found that the vast majority of students would not consider cheating or plagiarizing. I have had it happen, however, and it is one of the most challenging things to manage as a professor. I want all students to be successful and thrive but also take academic misconduct very seriously.

NSCC Plagiarism Policy:

Any form of academic dishonesty, cheating, plagiarizing, or other academic misconduct is prohibited. "Plagiarism may result from: (1) failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas, (2) failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks, and (3) failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your works" (A Writer's Reference, 331). Academic dishonesty may be defined as, but is not limited to, intentionally trying to deceive by claiming credit for the work of another person, using information from a web page or source without citing the reference, fraudulently using someone else's work on an exam, paper, or assignment, recycling your own work from another course, purchasing papers or materials from another source and presenting them as your own, attempting to obtain exams/materials/assignments in advance of the date of administration by the instructor, impersonating someone else in a testing situation, providing confidential test information to someone else, submitting the same assignment in two different classes without requesting both instructors' permission, allowing someone else to copy or use your work, using someone else's work to complete your own, altering documents, transcripts or grades, and forging a faculty/staff member's signature.

In addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions that may be imposed through regular college procedures as a result of academic dishonesty, the instructor has the authority to assign an "F" or a "Zero" for the exercise, paper or examination, or to assign an "F" for the course.

If a student believes that he/she has been erroneously accused of academic dishonesty and if his/her final grade has been lowered as a result, the student may appeal the case through the appropriate college grade appeal procedures.

Classroom Misconduct and Procedures:

Nashville State Community College has a zero-tolerance policy for disruptive conduct in the classroom. Students whose behavior disrupts the classroom will be subject to disciplinary sanctions. The instructor has primary responsibility for control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity. He/she can order temporary removal or exclusion from the classroom of any student engaged in disruptive conduct or conduct which violates the general rules and regulations of the College. Disruptive behavior in the classroom may be defined as, but is not limited to, behavior that obstructs or disrupts the learning environment (e.g., offensive language, harassment of students and professors, repeated outbursts from a student which disrupt the flow of instruction or prevents concentration on the subject taught, failure to cooperate in maintaining classroom decorum, etc.), the continued use of any electronic or other noise or light

emitting device which disturbs others (e.g., disturbing noises from beepers, cell phones, palm pilots, lap-top computers, games, etc.). Each student should refer to the current Nashville State Student Handbook for guidelines for student conduct.

| Course Schedule* | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|--|--|----------------------|
| Week | Date | Topic | Reading | Due |
| 1 | 8/30 | Course Introduction What are social problems? | | |
| 2 | 9/6 | Who makes claims? Social Problem Framing | FSP: pg. xvii-12; 13-24; 56-66 SPCC: http://open.lib.umn.edu/socialproblems/chapter/1-1-what-is-a-social-problem/ SPCC: http://open.lib.umn.edu/socialproblems/chapter/1-4-doing-research-on-social-problems/ | |
| 3 | 9/13 | What is Gender? Gendered Institutions | West and Zimmerman. (1978). "Doing Gender." Ridgeway. (2014). "The Persistence of Gender Inequality." Risman. (2004). "Gender as A Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism" | |
| 4 | 9/20 | Intersectionality and the Life Course | King. (1988). "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness- The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology" Carpenter. (2010). "Gendered Sexuality Over the Life Course: A Conceptual Framework." <i>Sociological Perspectives</i> | |
| Gender Socialization | | | | |
| 5 | 9/27 | Objectification of women in the Media | FSP: pg. 356-371; 234-235; 38-48; 239-249 Averett. (2016). "The Gender Buffet." | |
| 6 | 10/4 | Masculinity | FSP: 229-233; 236-238 Quinn. (2002). "Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The Power and Meaning of 'Girl Watching.'" | First Reflection Due |

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| 7 | 10/11 | | | Midterm Exam |
| Gendered Sexuality | | | | |
| 8 | 10/18 | Sex Ed in the US | FSP: 268-298 Elliott. (2010). Parents’ Constructions of Teen Sexuality- Sex Panics, Contradictory Discourses, and Social Inequality Bridges and Moore. (2018). “Young Women of Color And Shifting Sexual Identities.” | |
| 9 | 10/25 | Sexual Development | FSP: 299-310 Risman. (2019). “Is Recreational Sex a Social Problem? Or what’s wrong with kid’s today?” Wade. (2017). Introduction; Chapter 1; Chapter 7 | |
| 10 | 11/1 | Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Violence | Price. (2010). “What is Reproductive Justice? How Women of Color Activists Are Redefining the ProChoice Paradigm.” Richie. (2012). “Male Violence Against Black Women.” In <i>Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation</i> . NYU Press. | |
| Mass Incarceration and Reentry | | | | |
| 11 | 11/8 | Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration | FSP: 182-197 Comfort. (2016). “‘A Twenty Hour-a-Day Job’: The Impact of Frequent Low-Level Criminal Justice Involvement on Family Life” <i>Homeward</i> : Chapter 1 | Gendered Problems in the News Paper due |
| 12 | 11/15 | Studying Reentry | <i>Homeward</i> : Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 | |
| | 11/22 | NO CLASS-THANKSGIVING BREAK | | |

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| 13 | 11/29 | Overcoming challenges of reentry | <i>Homeward</i> : Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | Second Reflection Due |
| 14 | 12/6 | Wrap up | <i>Homeward</i> : Chapter 11 FSP: 668-674; 681-692 | Final Exam |
| *The course schedule may change during the semester; all changes will announced in class. | | | | |