

Contemporary Social Issues: SOC 1020

MW 4:00pm-5:15pm

Furman 325

Instructor

Peter Vielehr, MA, PhD Candidate

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Email: Peter.S.Vielehr@Vanderbilt.edu

Office: Garland 203C

Office Hours: M 12:30-2; W 3-4; or by appointment

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 as she saw women relegated to family roles. These scholars were influenced by their time and developed sociology as a discipline to understand society and 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 Contemporary Social Issues 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. Gender cannot be understood in isolation from other aspects of social structure and social identity. Throughout the semester, we will use an intersectional lens to examine how gender in concert with race, class, and sexuality influence 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. Politicians and the media tend to simplify social problems into simple solutions. Sociology challenges simple explanations by showing the complexity of social issues using empirical evidence. 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. Stompler, 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

5%-Participation & in-class work
10%-Current Event Presentation
25%-Reflections (8.33% X 3)
25%- Gendered Problems in the News Paper
15%-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 (25%):***

Understanding social issues is a personal process as well as an intellectual endeavor. Throughout the semester, you will write THREE reflections about class readings. There are three 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 by noon 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 noon on September 3rd. Please upload to Brightspace. See course schedule for due dates. I will use your reflections to guide class discussion on the readings for the day.

Each reflection is worth 8.33% 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.

Current Event Presentation (10%):

Once during the semester, you will give a short (10-minute max) presentation on an ongoing social issue drawing on at least three media sources. You should prepare a single PowerPoint slide and a list of your sources. Please send it to me by noon on the day of the presentation. Your presentation should answer the following questions:

1. Broadly, what is the issue? Who is being impacted?
2. What aspects of social organization influence the issue?
 - a. How is the issue stratified by gender, race, and class?
3. Who are making claims about the issue and what are the major claims?

A sign-up sheet will be circulated the second day of class.

Gendered Problems in the News Paper (25%):

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. Select 10 articles about a social problem. Based on the infographic at MediaBiasChart.com, choose your articles so that you represent the full range of possible framings. Articles are due on 9/24 in-class. Please bring hard copies of your articles.
 - a. I am also teaching a similar course inside of a prison near Nashville. One of the challenges of teaching in prison is that insiders do not have any access to the Internet. In order to have a diverse range of topics for the students, I will be providing them with articles you have selected. I will not include your name or

anything written by you. They will be completing the same assignment and I will report back on the similarities and differences among the papers. If you have any concerns or do not want your articles to be shared, please see me in office hours prior to the due date.

2. Select one or two peer-reviewed sociology articles on the problem to bring in a sociological perspective.
 - a. I would recommend looking at the journals *Gender and Society*, *Social Problems*, and *Social Forces* first. From the journal's homepage, you are able to search in the journal for keywords.
3. Conduct a content analysis of the news articles.
4. 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 be 4-5 pages and is due on 11/7.

Midterm (15%) and Final Exams (20%):

The midterm and final exams will be multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. The midterm will be taken in-class on October, 10th and the final will be on December, 14th at 9:00 AM. 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:

I will not take formal attendance throughout the semester. However, for the first few weeks—as recommended by the university—I will be taking daily attendance. I respect the fact that you are adults that can make informed decisions about your learning, your grade, and the financial investments made in college courses.

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 5% 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 an electronic copy should be submitted through Brightspace. 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. Large spacing and extraneous white space does not count toward page limits.

Citations:

All materials used for written assignments should be cited. If you use an idea that is not your own, you must cite the source of the idea. Citation styles with parenthetical, in-text, citations should be used. ASA style is the most common style in sociology and APA style is common across psychology and interdisciplinary journals. Please choose either ASA or APA style and use it consistently throughout your written work. See the Purdue Online Writing Lab website for information on American Sociological Association style and other citation styles.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/583/01/>

Late Work Policy:

All written assignments will be collected through Brightspace. Assignments are considered late if they are not turned in by the end of class on the due date. Each 24-hour period after the due date will count as one day late and a penalty of 10% per day will be applied. Late penalties accrue over the weekend and days that class does not meet; therefore, please email the assignment to stop the accrual of late penalties on days that class does not meet and provide a print copy during the next class session.

Electronics:

Use of computers is allowed as long as they do not distract from classroom discussion. Please use technology in ways that enhance learning and do not cause distraction for you or other students. As a matter of respect for your fellow students and professor, please refrain from listening to music, watching videos, checking social media, or other distracting uses of technology.

Email:

Email is an important tool for professional communication. I will try to respond to all emails within 24-hours, excluding weekends. If you do not hear from me within 3-days, please resend your message. Missing an email is a common mistake since we all receive many emails throughout the day. If your question is better suited for an in-person conversation, I may ask you to come to office hours or make an appointment with me.

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:

If you need accommodations due to a disability please let me know as soon as possible so that your needs may be properly addressed. The Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services (EAD) office provides confidential assistance with identifying needed accommodations.

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.

Campus resources:

Vanderbilt has a variety of resources that are meant to help you succeed in your college career. A list of on-campus student resources can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/iicc/resources/on-campus-resources/>. If you read this prior to 8/31, email me a fabulous picture of a unicorn with the subject “unicorn” and you will receive 2% extra credit. Additionally, Vanderbilt Writing Studio offers assistance with writing and editing assignments. I am happy to assist you with writing, but the writing studio is another resource that I highly recommend. Information can be found at: <http://vanderbilt.edu/writing/>.

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.

The Vanderbilt Honor Code clearly discusses examples of plagiarism and unauthorized aid for exams. You can read the Honor Code at https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/. Practices of attributing credit to appropriate sources will be essential throughout your professional life. Please be aware of the University’s policies on plagiarism. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Course Schedule*					
Week	Day	Date	Topic	Reading	Due
1	Wednesday	8/22	Course Introduction		
2	Monday	8/27	What are social problems? Who makes claims?	FSP: Introduction & Reading 1 (pg. xvii-12) Mills: <i>Sociological Imagination</i> SPCC: http://open.lib.umn.edu/social-problems/chapter/1-1-what-is-a-social-problem/	
	Wednesday	8/29	Framing Social Problems	FSP: pg. 13-24; 56-66 SPCC: http://open.lib.umn.edu/social-problems/chapter/1-4-doing-research-on-social-problems/	
3	Monday	9/3	What is Gender?	BS: West and Zimmerman. (1978). "Doing Gender."	
	Wednesday	9/5	Gendered Institutions	Ridgeway. (2014). "The Persistence of Gender Inequality." <i>Supplementary:</i> Risman. (2004). "Gender As A Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism"	
4	Monday	9/10	Intersectionality	BS: King. (1988). "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness-The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology"	
	Wednesday	9/12	Gender and the life course	BS: Carpenter. (2010). "Gendered Sexuality Over the Life Course: A Conceptual Framework." <i>Sociological Perspectives</i>	
<i>Gender Socialization</i>					
5	Monday	9/17	Media and Gender Messages Film: <i>Killing Us Softly 4</i>	FSP: pg. 356-371; 234-235 <i>Supplementary:</i> BS: Sink and Mastro. (2017). "Depictions of Gender on Primetime Television" BS: Tukanhinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi. (2015). "Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television"	

	Wednesday	9/19	Consumerism and objectification	FSP: pg. 38-48; 239-249	First Reflection Due
6	Monday	9/24	Resisting Hegemonic Gender	BS: Averett. (2016). "The Gender Buffet."	Articles due
	Wednesday	9/26	Film: <i>The Mask You Live In (Part 1)</i>	FSP: 229-233; 236-238	
7	Monday	10/1	Film: <i>The Mask You Live In (Part 2)</i> Men and #MeToo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/aug/15/us-womens-rights-campaigner-accused-of-sexual-harassment?CMP=share_btn_fb • https://www.chronicle.com/article/I-Want-to-Hear-Those/244119 • https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2018/08/11/michael-kimmels-american-sociological-association-award/ • https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/08/10/michael-kimmels-former-student-putting-name-and-details-those-harassment-rumors 	
	Wednesday	10/3	Gender and Sexual Harassment	<p>BS: Quinn. (2002). "Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The Power and Meaning of 'Girl Watching.'"</p> <p><i>Supplemental:</i> BS: Gruber and Fineran. (2016). Sexual Harassment, Bullying, and School Outcomes for High School Girls and Boys."</p>	
8	Monday	10/8	Review and Catch up		
	Wednesday	10/10			Midterm Exam
<i>Gendered Sexuality</i>					
9	Monday	10/15	Sex Ed in the US	FSP: 268-298	
	Wednesday	10/17		BS: Elliott. (2010). Parents' Constructions of Teen Sexuality- Sex Panics, Contradictory Discourses, and Social Inequality	

				BS: Bridges and Moore. (2018). “Young Women of Color And Shifting Sexual Identities.”	
10	Monday	10/22	LGBTQ coming of age	FSP: 299-310 <i>Supplemental:</i> BS: Robinson. (2018). “Conditional Families and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth Homelessness- Gender, Sexuality, Family Instability, and Rejection.”	
	Wednesday	10/24	Sex in College	BS: Risman. (2019). “Is Recreational Sex a Social Problem? Or what’s wrong with kid’s today?” BS: Wade. (2017). Introduction; Chapter 1; Chapter 7	
11	Monday	10/29		BS: Wilkins. (2012). “Becoming Black Women- Intimate Stories and Intersectional Identities”	
	Wednesday	10/31	Reproductive Justice	BS: Price. (2010). “What is Reproductive Justice? How Women of Color Activists Are Redefining the ProChoice Paradigm.”	Second Reflection Due
<i>Gender and Mass Incarceration</i>					
12	Monday	11/5	Defining Mass Incarceration	FSP: 182-197	
	Wednesday	11/7	Incarceration and families	Comfort. (2016). “‘A Twenty Hour-a-Day Job’: The Impact of Frequent Low-Level Criminal Justice Involvement on Family Life”	Gendered Problems in the News Paper due
13	Monday	11/12	Prisons and Reentry	<i>Homeward:</i> Chapters 1 & 2	
	Wednesday	11/14		<i>Homeward:</i> Chapters 3 & 4	
	Monday	11/19	NO CLASS-THANKSGIVING BREAK		
	Wednesday	11/21			
14	Monday	11/26		<i>Homeward:</i> Chapters 5 & 6	
	Wednesday	11/28		<i>Homeward:</i> Chapters 7 & 8	
15	Monday	12/3		<i>Homeward:</i> Chapters 9 & 10	Third Reflection Due
	Wednesday	12/5	Social Change	<i>Homeward:</i> Chapter 11	

				FSP: 668-674; 681-692	
	Friday	12/14	9:00 am: Scheduled final exam		Final Exam

*The course schedule may change during the semester; all changes will be posted to Brightspace.