Sociology 155 - Section 02 MWF 8:00-8:50am

# Spring 2018 Equality 115

 **Social Issues**



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T 2:15-3:15 and by appointment

**Course Overview:**

Social problems abound in society: poverty, hunger, racism, crime and violence, environmental degradation, and so on. Why do such problems exist? How do we identify or recognize “social problems”? What, if anything, can we do about them? In this class we will address each of these questions. The beginning of the course concentrates on competing perspectives to explain social problems. We will explore the **objectivist approach** – which suggests there are objective, uncontested social problems, and then focus on the **constructionist perspective**, which centers around one question: why do we ***recognize*** some social conditions as ‘problems’, while simultaneously ignoring other conditions? To answer these questions, constructionists argue, we must examine the “claims-making process,” through which advocates make the case that a condition is a social problem. We will also consider perspectives that aim to explain **why** social problems exist, regardless of how important the public finds them. We will consider the **political and economic** contexts that shape various social problems, and will focus on the role of power in these processes.

**Course objectives**:

- Students will refine critical thinking & problem solving skills, and be able to make the connection between personal troubles and social issues.

- Students will compare and contrast sociological approaches to the understanding of social issues to other ways of understanding social issues. Clearly identify and analyze a social problem – identify possible sources, solutions and social barriers to its resolution.

- Students will recognize the role of culture and ideology in shaping our understandings and evaluations of social problems. Understand and identify the role of historical, societal, class, racial, gender, and generational variation on the identification and assessment of social problems.

**Requirements:**

*Exams (3 exams, 20% each – total of 60%)*

These exams will be in class, closed-book/notes. **Exams will include material covered in class, as well as material covered in readings.**  Each exam will consist of short answer and short essay questions which draw on course readings, concepts, and lectures.

*Current Events Responses (4 responses: 7.5%, each - total of 30%)*

Throughout the course you will have 4 opportunities to submit brief (1-3 page) responses to newspaper articles that you select related to social problems topics covered in *that section of class*; you **must write** **4 responses**. In these responses you must provide connections between the article and readings and concepts covered in the current section of class.

*Practicing Sociology Assignments (10%)*

Throughout the semester I will have other assignments for you – small things that should take little time, but that will give you more practice applying sociological insights to the world around you. These assignments will take 2 primary forms: (a) assignments I give out in class (listed on syllabus as assignment A), and (b) 3 assignments that you will choose from a list of activities and complete (listed on syllabus as Assignment B). These type B assignments will be due at several points in the semester (see syllabus) – on a type B assignment due date, you turn in ANY assignment from the list of your choosing.

**Grading 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: 60-66

Anything below 60 is a failing grade. Those selecting the Pass/Fail option must average a 60. Grades of D or below will be reported as Unsatisfactory on midterm grades.

Disability Services: The Office of Disability Services has been designated by the University as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through that office and require accommodations for this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in the strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you need accommodations, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.) I would be happy to refer you to the Office of Disability Services. They will require appropriate documentation of a disability. Their phone number is 540-555-5555. For further information about the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) [Click Here](https://www.ada.gov/).

**Required books (available at the UMW bookstore and many online venues)**:

Sternheimer, Karen (2013) *Connecting Social problems and Popular Culture: Why Media is Not the Answer*.

Ore, Tracy. *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality*. I’ve assigned 5th edition; we can work with 4 or 6, as well.

***-when I list readings from the Ore book, I will give the author’s last name (ex: Lorber) and part of the article title (ex: “Social Construction of Gender”). Go to the table of contents, and locate the assigned reading that way.***

Additional readings will be **required**, and they will be posted on **CANVAS**.

**Canvas**: All course documents will be made available on Canvas – including the syllabus, and all other assignment guidelines. I will also post grades on Canvas, and will open discussion areas for students to problem-solve or talk further about the issues we raise in class. Please let me know if you have any trouble accessing the class Canvas site. ***Please recognize that we use Canvas for convenience; where there is disagreement between canvas and the syllabus, always defer to the syllabus***.

**Schedule of Classes**: *This outline is subject to change, as needed*.

You are expected to do the reading for each class period ***prior to that day’s class***.

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|  | Date | Readings | Assignment |
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| Week 1 | Jan 18 | What are Social Issues |  |
| Week 2 | Jan 20 – 23 | Book Lorber, Bornstein | Practicing Sociology Assignment A-1 Due next class |
| Week 3 | Jan 25 – 27 | Ore: Omi & Winant (“Racial Formations”), Waters (“Optional Ethnicities”), Brodkin (“How did Jews…”) |  |
| Week 4 | Feb 3-6 | Social Constructionism of social problems  | 1st Practicing Sociology Assignment “B” due Feb 3 |
| Week 5 | Sternheimer Ch 2 |  | Current Event Response 1 due Feb 8 |

**FINAL EXAM: Friday May 5, 8:30-11:00**

**-BRING YOUR OWN SCANTRON!**