

## SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Sociology 01:920:103:01

Fall 2016

MTh 8:40-10am

Office hours: M, 10-11am or by appointment

Office: 43 Davison, location of office hours TBD

Professor: Joanna Kempner

Department of Sociology

209 Sci & Engineering Resource Rm

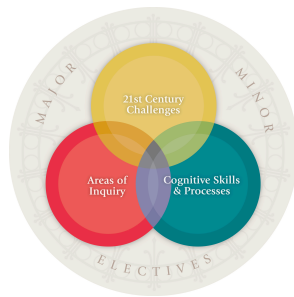
Email: [jkempner@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:jkempner@rci.rutgers.edu)

The best way to reach me is by email. Please write “Soc 103” in the subject line so that I recognize your email quickly. Don’t forget to sign your name in the email.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

We are asked to confront “social problems” every day: those issues, situations, behaviors and ideas, which are perceived and labeled as problematic and for which a solution is seen as possible and necessary. In this class, we will be learning about some of these social problems. But we will also be learning about what constitutes a social problem. Who, for example, defines what a social problem is? Why do some social problems receive so much attention, while others are ignored? And what are the impacts of defining social problems in a particular way? We will examine these questions drawing on case studies of contemporary issues, like inequality, Islamaphobia and immigration, health care, and climate change.

### CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING GOALS



This course meets the following core curriculum requirements:

- Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
- Identify and critically assess ethical issues in social science and history.
- Apply concepts about humans and social behavior to particular questions or situations.

### REQUIRED READINGS

1) Joel Best, Social Problems. WW. Norton & Company. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2012. ISBN 978-0393918632

2) I have required articles that are available on the course website (sakai). These articles are identified with below with an asterisk. ★

★I may update some of these articles during the semester, but I will give you plenty of notice if I do.

The textbook is available at the Rutgers University Bookstore and on reserve at Douglass Library. You can buy this book used on Amazon.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### *LECTURES & READINGS*

The course is organized around readings, lectures, films, and current event presentations. Lecture time is used to clarify the reading material, to present additional material related to the readings, screen films, and hold in-class exercises. Lectures are designed to explain and complement the reading materials, but you will be tested on reading material even if we do not cover it in class. Assigned material must be read prior to class. It is highly unlikely that you can do well in the course without attending lectures. Powerpoint presentations will be posted to the course website, but these will only provide an outline of the day's lecture. If you do miss a lecture, please ask a classmate for notes.

**This will be a computer and phone-free course. Many studies have now shown that electronic devices not only harm students' ability to learn, they also distract students who work nearby. Please print the PowerPoint slides prior to class and take notes by hand.**

This is a large class and I will be lecturing much of the time. I do, however, encourage discussion. My questions during lecture are not rhetorical and I encourage you to participate in class discussion and group work.

Social problems are often controversial and inevitably somebody will voice an opinion that you find disagreeable or even offensive. In this classroom, we will agree to respect each other, even if we don't like what each other has to say about the world. That means that we can disagree, but we must do so respectfully.

The films listed on the syllabus will be shown as time permits. Only films shown in class will be included in test material. If you miss a film during class, you may view the film in the media center at Mabel Smith Library on Douglass Campus. Films will be on hold for one week after the date shown in class.

### *ASSESSMENTS*

Your grade will be determined by your performance on three noncumulative exams throughout the semester and a short book report. The exams will cover all course material, including lecture and reading material, films shown in class, and guest lectures. Please bring pencils and Rutgers RUID to all exams. No additional time will be granted if you are late to exams.

Make up exams will only be allowed under extraordinary circumstances. See below. Cheating will result in a failing grade on the exam and a referral to the appropriate

Dean's office. I will hold an online review session before each exam. Time will be announced in class and via email.

Book Report: Sociologists have written thousands of excellent books on a great variety of social problems. In this class, you will read and write a short report on one such book, chosen from a short, curated list. This report will be given a grade between 0-100. Comments will be limited to those provided by the accompanying rubric. **The book report will be due November 13<sup>th</sup>. Please submit it as an assignment on sakai.**

### *GRADES*

#### Grade Allocation

Exam 1	30%
Exam 2	30%
Exam 3	30%
Book report	10%
Total	100%

***Extra credit: 2% extra credit will be given to students who miss three or fewer classes over the course of the semester. No other extra credit will be given.***

#### Grades (as a percentage)

A	90-100
B+	86-89
B	80-85
C+	76-79
C	70-75
D	61-69
F	60 or below

Final grades are *non-negotiable*.

### *EXCUSED ABSENCES FROM EXAMS*

No makeups will be given unless there are severe, extenuating circumstances. Personal holidays, broken alarm clocks, weddings, jobs, exams in other courses, and the Rutgers bus system are not acceptable reasons for missing an exam. If there are conflicts between exam days and your personal schedule, you should withdraw from the course. There will be no opportunity for extra credit.

### *ATTENDANCE*

Students are expected to attend all classes. An attendance sheet will be distributed 15 minutes after class has started. You may not sign the sheet if you come late. Students who leave early will have to sign out and will be counted as absent.

**Students who miss 3 or fewer classes will be given a 2% increase to their final grade.**

## *COMMUNICATION*

Please feel free to ask me questions during and after class. I also encourage you to schedule appointments with me by email. When corresponding by email, please make sure that you write “Soc 103” and your name in the subject line. If you do not do this, your email may get lost.

Please do not email me at the last minute, as it may take me up to 48 hours to respond to your email.

## *CLASS CONDUCT AND GROUND RULES*

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Thus, behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, discourteous remarks, and other behaviors specified by individual instructors. Courteous expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted and strongly encouraged.

## *DIVERSITY STATEMENT*

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

## *ACADEMIC INTEGRITY*

I follow the Rutgers University’s policy on academic integrity. You can familiarize yourself with this policy at this website:

[http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI\\_Policy\\_9\\_01\\_2011.pdf](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf)

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated and I am obligated to report such conduct and violations of this policy to the Undergraduate Director of the Sociology Department and the Dean of your college.

## *COURSE ORGANIZATION*

Sep 8: Introduction to the Course

Sep 12: The Sociological Imagination

\*C Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

\*Aziz Ansari, Ch. 1 Searching for Your Soulmate. *Modern Romance*.

*Part I What is a Social Problem?*

Sep 15: Guest speaker: Lindsay Stevens, Social Construction of Social Problems

\*Kristin Luker, "Dubious Conceptions: The Controversy Over Teen Pregnancy"

Sep 19: Social Problems as Claims

Best, Chapter 1, pp. 3-28

\*Peter Parilla on Cell Phone Use While Driving: Defining a Problem as Worth of Action

*Part II: Claims*

Sep 22: The Anatomy of a Claim

Best, Chapter 2

Sep 26: Analyzing a claim: "Anyone can make it in America if they work hard enough"

\*Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel & Dimed* on the working poor

Sep 29: Analyzing a claim: "Anyone can make it in America if they work hard enough"

Movie: *Waging a Living*

Oct 3: Guest Speaker: Lisa Smith - Coordinator for Domestic Violence Services; Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance

Oct 6: How is social class maintained?

\*Annette Lareau on Unequal Childhoods

Oct 10: **MIDTERM ONE**

*Part III: Claimsmakers*

Oct 13: Claimsmakers

Best, Chapter 3

Oct 17: How Do Social Movements Gain Attention and Support?: Gay marriage

\*Verta Taylor, et al, *Culture and Mobilization: Tactical Repertoires, Same-Sex Weddings and the Impact on Gay Activism*

*Part IV: Inequality and Discrimination*

Oct 20: Gender Wage Gap

\*Barbara Risman, "Gender as Structure"

\*Karen Cerulo and Janet Ruane, "You've come a long way, baby"

Oct 24: Racial Discrimination

**Do:** Take the demonstration test called "Race ('Black - White' IAT)"

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>

Complete survey on sakai with your results.

\*Bonilla-Silva, "Racism without Racists"

\*Chris Mooney, "Across America, Whites are Biased and they Don't Even Know It."

Oct 27: Immigration and Islamophobia

\*Bayoumi, "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America"

\*Aziz Ansari, "Why Trump Makes Me Scared for My Family"

Oct 31: Mass Incarceration and #Blacklivesmatter

\*Rios, The Hyper-Criminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration

\*Deadly Force in Black and White

Nov 3: Film discussion

**For class: Watch "The House we Live In"**

**Rent from Netflix; Stream from Amazon for \$.99; watch on reserve at Douglass Library.**

*Part V: Media*

Nov 7: The Media as Claimsmakers

Best, Chapter 5

**November 8: ELECTION DAY**

Nov 10: Natural Disasters and the media

\*Eric Klinenberg on Spotlighting Disaster

Nov 14: **MIDTERM 2**

*Part VI: Experts as claimsmakers*

Nov 17: Climate Change

\*Sheldon Ungar, "Selling Environmental Problems"

*Recommended (Not on exam)*

\*Naomi Oreskes, “How do we know we’re not wrong?”

Film: Merchants of Doubt

Nov 21: Medicalization and the pharmaceutical industry

\*Peter Conrad, “Shifting Engines of Medicalization”

Nov 22: Class Cancelled

**Book report due November 22nd, 2015**

*Part VII: Policymaking*

Nov 28: Policymaking

Best, Chapter 7

Dec 1: Health Care – The uninsured, the underinsured

\*David Mechanic, “Setting Fair Limits,” *The Truth About Healthcare*

\*Kaiser Family Foundation, The Uninsured: A Primer

Dec 5: Film: Unnatural Causes

\*Laura Abraham, Mama Might Be Better Off Dead

Dec 8: Health and inequality

\*David Mechanic, “Treating Individuals or Populations,” *The Truth About Healthcare*

Dec 12: Homelessness

\*Malcolm Gladwell, Giving Homes to the Homeless

**Final exam**

**December 19<sup>th</sup>, 8am-11am, <http://finalexams.rutgers.edu/>**