

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS
SOCI 2251; CRN 86171
FALL SEMESTER, 2013
FRIDAY, 2-4:45
SOCIAL SCIENCE BUILDING (SSB) 3028

Instructor: Bobby Jo Otto

Office: Social Science Building, 4005

Office Hours: Friday from 11-12 and by appointment

E-mail: bobettebuchar22@yahoo.com or botto@kennesaw.edu

Phone: (C): 630-903-3861

**The best way to contact me is through e-mail; however, if you need to contact me by phone, feel free (please do not call after 10 p.m.)

**When you e-mail me, please be specific in the subject.

Course Description

What is a social problem? This can be a tough question considering how social problems change throughout time as historical context, political influence, and the media all influence what does or does not constitute a social problem. Throughout the semester, we are going to discuss how social problems are socially constructed and the influence this has on public policy. While no class can cover every social problem in American society, we will specifically address, from different theoretical frameworks, poverty, race, gender, education, drugs, sexuality, sexual deviance, crime, human trafficking, and urbanization.

Course Objectives:

- Students will analyze a number of social problems utilizing different theoretical frameworks
- Students will utilize the sociological imagination when analyzing society's social problems
- Students will analyze and interpret empirical data/research that is relevant to and explanatory of current social problems.
- Students will examine and critique different proposed solutions and offer alternatives to society's social problems.
- Students will be able to think critically about how their actions have an effect on society.
- Students will develop stronger writing skills.

Required Reading: Carl, John D. 2013. *Think: Social Problems*. Pearson Education Inc: Upper Saddle River, NJ.

**ISBN: (10): 0-205-12562 (13): 978-0-205-12562-3

**Additional articles will be on Desire2Learn concerning the substantive topics we will cover. We will discuss them in class and you will be tested on them, so it is in your best interest to read all the assigned reading for each class period.

Grading System:

- 3 Exams—60%
- Social Problem Critique—15%
- Pop quizzes—10%
- Informal writing assignments—10%
- Out of class writing assignments—5%

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR OWN GRADE

- Exam One: (your grade x .20) = a
- Exam Two: (your grade x .20) = b
- Final Exam: (your grade x .20) = c
 - Or (average three grades x .60)
- Social Problem Critique: (your grade x .15) = d
- Pop quizzes: (avg. all grades after dropping lowest x .10) = e
- Informal Writing Assignments: (avg. all grades after dropping lowest x .10) = f
- Out of class writing assignments: (avg. both grades x .5) = g

Total Grade: a + b + c + d + e + f + g (out of 100)

Grading Scale

90-100 = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-69 = D

59 and below = F

Exams

There will be three exams throughout the semester, and each will comprise 20% of your final grade. Exam questions will be drawn from the textbook, assigned readings, class discussion, lecture, and videos. Each exam will consist of 50 questions (multiple choice, true/false, and matching); however, if you would rather take a written exam, let me know prior to examination day and one will be provided to you. I will provide a study guide before each exam and we will review at the end of class prior to examination day. Please be on time for the exam. The exam will start at the **beginning of class (2:00)** and we will continue class after the first two exams. After you finish, take a break; however, **return to the classroom by 3:30 for lecture**. If you decide not to return, you may miss out on one of the informal writing assignments or quizzes, which you will not be able to make-up.

- **Make-up Policy:** I understand that emergencies happen; however, you need to contact me **BEFORE** the scheduled exam if something arises. In case an **emergency** does happen, you need to take your exam **within one week** of when the exam was scheduled. If you do not contact me (either through phone or e-mail) before your exam, you will receive a zero. If you schedule a make-up and do not come, you will also receive a zero. Make-up exams will either be taken in

the testing center on campus, the small conference room in the sociology department, or in my office.

- Examples of extreme emergency: death in the family, car accident, serious illness, arrest, court date/jury duty, University-sponsored activity (athletic events, etc.). You must provide documentation pertaining to your absence.
- Examples of non-extreme “emergencies”: routine doctor or dentist visit, forgetfulness, oversleeping.
- As the instructor, I reserve the right to determine what “counts” as an emergency and what “counts” as appropriate documentation so you should ask me before missing an exam.

Social Problem Critique

Throughout the semester, we will discuss a number of social problems that impact our society. For this assignment, you need to choose a social problem you find important and write an analysis. Since we cannot cover each social problem, you may choose to discuss a social problem that we have not covered in class. If this social problem is not in the textbook, please contact me before you begin your paper so we can discuss whether or not it constitutes a specific social problem in contemporary society. A sign-up sheet will be passed around class where you will sign up for your topic of choice.

****In Part One** of your Social Problem Critique you will make a case as to why the social problem is important in terms of its overall impact on our society. To do this you must:

Section 1: Briefly introduce your social problem and state in general terms why it is important in terms of its overall impact on our society. Pull the reader in by offering some general empirical evidence (statistics from sociological, governmental or reputable non-profit sources) to support your claim.

Section 2: Discuss whether or not this social problem exists in the city of Atlanta, or in its surrounding suburbs. If so, provide evidence of its effect. If not, discuss how and why Atlanta has managed to avoid the effects of this social problem and whether or not it has had a history with this social problem in the past but managed to “solve” it (or lessen its affects) or if there is evidence it may affect metro Atlanta in the future. The goal of this section is to bring the social problem to the local level. What is going on with the social problem here in metro Atlanta?

Section 3: Provide additional depth on the empirical evidence of the problem’s existence outside of Atlanta. Again, use material from your text and outside sources to illustrate the scope of the social problem. Statistics should come from sociological, governmental or reputable non-profit sources to support your claims. (Discuss this in the context of the U.S. and metro Atlanta, when relevant)

Section 4: Discuss who is most affected by this social problem. Who are the most vulnerable populations and how are they affected? You may choose to integrate some results from qualitative studies here where you bring in quotes from members of affected groups. (Discuss this in the context of the U.S. and metro Atlanta, when relevant)

**You do not need to address each section in order; however, make sure you address each section in your analysis.

****Part Two:** While we discussed different solutions that could alleviate our society's problems, in your opinion, how can the social problem you discuss be changed? Be sure to discuss specific policy implications and why feasible solutions have yet to be enacted. In other words, what is preventing change—The social structure? Those in power? Again, use material from your text and outside sources to support your stance.

Logistics

- *Format:* This paper should be double-spaced, utilizing 12 point font (Times New Roman), and should be at least 4-5 pages in length. PLEASE staple your paper in the top left hand corner and you do not need to include a cover page. You should include at least three peer-reviewed sources (scholarly journals), among other sources (newspaper and magazine articles, the textbook, etc.), to validate your response in Part One of this assignment.
- Use ASA or APA format throughout. If you do not follow one of these formats, specifically in regards to citations and your bibliography, points will be deducted from your final paper grade. **If you have any questions, please ask me. I will help you in any way I can!**
- *How will you be graded:* Your final paper grade will be dependent upon a number of aspects:
 - Content: Did you accurately explain and provide evidence for the social problem you deemed as most important?
 - Clarity: Does your paper “flow?” Are transitions appropriate and clear?
 - Logic: Does your argument make sense?
 - Grammar/Spelling: Proofread!!
 - Following directions
- *Due Dates:* First, if you would like me to proofread your paper before it is due, I am more than willing to. However, the last day I will accept papers for review is November 8th. Your **final paper** will be due on **November 15th**. For every day that your paper is late, 10 points will be deducted from your overall paper grade. I will NOT accept papers over **THREE** days late, and I do NOT accept e-mailed papers.

Pop Quizzes

There will be five quizzes throughout the semester, which will be based on class readings. Each quiz will consist of 5 questions (worth one point a piece) and they will pertain to sociological concepts from the particular chapter(s) and readings we are discussing that week. If you show up late, leave early, or do not attend class (and your absence is unexcused) and miss the quiz, you cannot make it up. However, you are allowed to drop your lowest quiz grade.

Informal Writing (in-class)

I will be giving five random, in-class writing assignments throughout the semester. The purpose of these assignments is to encourage you to think about the material (readings, lectures, videos, activities, etc.) and then express your thoughts in writing. Each assignment is graded on a 3-point scale (0=Did not complete; 1=Poor; 2=Average; 3=Excellent). If you show up late, leave early, or do not attend class (and your absence is unexcused) and miss the opportunity, you cannot make up this assignment. You are allowed to **drop one** of your informal writing assignments.

Out of Class Writing Assignments

Play Spent: Living in poverty is hard, and tough decisions are often made concerning what one can or cannot afford. For this assignment, you must perform the simulation (playspent.org) than write a two-page response about how it relates to class readings and discussion. In the last paragraph, talk about your opinion of the simulation and how it affected your view of poverty.

Article Review: For this assignment, you need to find a newspaper article about a contemporary social problem somewhere in the world. First, how does the author portray the social problem? Who is negatively affected? Second, compare and contrast how theorists within the three main paradigms (functionalism, conflict, and symbolic interaction) would attempt to explain the problem. Your response must be two pages in length and you need to staple the article to your paper. **While there is no due date for this assignment, you must turn it in before Thanksgiving break**

Course Policies and Conduct

Academic Dishonesty

According to KSU's academic policy in the student handbook "No student shall receive, attempt to receive, knowingly give or attempt to give unauthorized assistance in the preparation of any work required to be submitted for credit (including examinations, laboratory reports, essays, themes, term papers, etc.). Unless specifically authorized, the presence and/or use of electronic devices during an examination, quiz, or other class assignment is considered cheating. Engaging in any behavior [that] a professor prohibits as academic misconduct in the syllabus or in class discussion is cheating. When direct quotations are used, they should be indicated, and when the ideas, theories, data, figures, graphs, programs, electronic based information or illustrations of someone other than the student are incorporated into a paper or used in a project, they should be duly acknowledged. No student may submit the same, or substantially the same, paper or other assignment for credit in more than one class without the prior permission of the current professor(s)". (http://www.kennesaw.edu/student_life/forms/shb/ksushp14.pdf)

**Plagiarism is only one example of academic dishonesty. Familiarize yourself with the above website concerning all aspects of academic dishonesty. Violation of the Academic Honesty policy will result in an F in the course and possible disciplinary action. All violations will be formally reported. Do not cheat, plagiarize, or violate any of the rules concerning this policy! Again, do not cheat, plagiarize, or violate any of these rules!

Disabilities and Accommodation

Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services, of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to me in which an accommodation is sought.

- If you are a student with a documented disability, please contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss accommodations.

Withdrawals

Last day to withdrawal from the course is October 11th—the midpoint of the semester. If you withdraw by this point, you will not receive an academic penalty.

Extra Credit

I do not offer any extra credit so please do not ask. Yet, there will be two bonus questions on each exam, which will give you a chance to improve each exam grade.

Desire2Learn

Check D2L frequently as important announcements and content will be continuously posted.

Classroom Behavior

- We will be talking about a number of controversial topics throughout the semester and while I encourage class discussion, be respectful of your peers. Do not interrupt your classmates or say derogatory comments towards each other; it will not be tolerated. Do not talk when others are speaking; that also includes me! If you intentionally offend someone or myself, I reserve the right to ask you to leave class on that particular day. If you are respectful, there should be no problems.
- Technology is a fundamental aspect of the classroom; however, it can often interfere with the learning environment if it is used inappropriately. Therefore, laptops are NOT ALLOWED in my classroom. Also, DO NOT use your cell phones (or other electronic devices—iPods, MP-3 players, etc... I shouldn't have to explain myself) while you are in my class; please turn them off! If you choose to utilize technology in a manner that I deem inappropriate (see above), I reserve the right to confiscate your technological device for that day.

Phone Numbers That May be Useful

- **Teaching Support Numbers**
 - Writing Center: 770-423-6380
 - Disability Services: 770-423-6443
- **Health and Medical Services**
 - Student Health Service Clinic: 770-423-6644
 - KSU Counseling and Psychological Services: 770-423-6600

Important Dates to Remember

- 9/6th—Play Spent Write-up Due
- 9/27th—Exam One
- 10/11th—Midpoint of the Semester
- 10/25th—Exam Two
- 11/15th —Social Problem Critique Due
- 11/22nd —Final Exam; 3:30-5:30

Course Schedule

****The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations will likely occur****

****Reading schedule: For each class period, please read the assigned material (textbook and additional readings on Desire2Learn). Since quizzes and writing assignments are given out randomly, it is in your best interest to be prepared for class. Furthermore, reading the assigned material will enhance your participation and the class discussion****

DATE	SUBJECT	READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS DUE
August 16 th	Introduction to Class: Syllabus, Introductions, and Chapter One	The Study of Social Problems: Pp. 3-8 (Carl)
August 23 rd	Chapter One	Theory and Methods: 8-19 (Carl) AR: “Telling the Truth about Damned Lies and Statistics” by Joel Best
August 30 th	Chapter Two: Poverty and Wealth	Pp. 21-27 (Carl: read until “The Effects of Social Class”) AR: “As Rich-Poor Gap Widens in the U.S., Class Mobility Stalls” by David Wessel
September 6 th	Chapter Two: Poverty and Wealth	Pp. 27-37 (Carl); Play Spent write-up due AR: “Nickel-and-Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America” by Barbara Ehrenreich
September 13 th	Chapter Three: Race and Immigration	Pp. 39-45 (Carl) AR: “The Roots of White Advantage” by Brown et al.

September 20 th	Chapter Three: Race and Immigration	Pp. 46-53 (Carl) AR: “Discrimination in a Low-Wage Market: A Field Experiment” by Pager et al. Review for Exam One
September 27 th	Exam One: Chapters 1-3, and additional readings After the Exam: Chapter Four: Gender	Pp. p.55-62 (Carl)
October 4 th	Chapter Four: Gender	Pp. 63-67 (Carl) AR: “The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the ‘Female’ Professions” by Christine L. Williams
October 11 th	Chapter Nine: Education Midpoint of the Semester	Pp.127-139 (Carl) AR “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America” by Jonathan Kozol
October 18 th	Chapter Thirteen: Crime Chapter Fourteen: Criminal Justice	Pp.187-199; 201-213 (Carl); Review for Exam Two AR: “Schools and Prisons: Fifty Years after Brown v. Board of Education” by the Sentencing Project
October 25 th	Exam Two: Chapter 4, 9, 13-14, and additional readings After Exam: Chapter Eleven: Drug and Alcohol Abuse	Pp.155-169 (Carl); Legalization of Marijuana **An article from the NYT and Huffington Post will be posted on line. A PDF from the White House concerning the cons of legalization will also be on D2L for you to read.
November 1 st	Chapter Twelve: Sex and Social Problems Related to Sexuality	Pp. 171-185 (Carl) AR: “Normalizing Heterosexuality: Mothers’ Assumptions, Talk, and Strategies with Young Children” by Karin A. Martin
November 8 th	Human Trafficking	AR: “Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with Transnational Dimensions” by David R. Hodge
November 15 th	Chapter Sixteen: Urbanization-Social Problems from the Growth of the Cities <i>Also: What Can be Done to Alleviate Social Problems?</i>	Pp. 223-237 (Carl) Last Day of Class AR: From <i>Building American Cities: The Urban Real Estate Game</i> “The Rise and Fall of Mass Rail Transit” by Joe R. Feagin and Robert Parker

November 22 nd	Final Exam: Chapter 11, 12, 16, notes on human trafficking, and additional readings	3:30-5:30 (note time change) Article Review Due before this date
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Appendix B: Grading Rubric

	Sophisticated (100-90)	Highly Competent (89-80)	Fairly Competent (79-70)	Not Yet Competent (69 and below)
Paper Content/ Ideas/ Use of Sociological Concepts (80 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paper that is well written, interesting and demonstrates an understanding of the topic. • Paper shows a nuanced grasp of sociological principles and the ability to apply these principles. • Literature/lecture material is drawn upon judiciously and referenced appropriately. • The topic is approached creatively and the student includes his/her own ideas and observations. • The way the material is handled suggests that the student learned, took advantage of the course and its readings, and accepted challenge posed by the assignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A satisfactory paper meeting the expectations of how the question or topic should be covered. • Necessary and relevant content is included; irrelevant material is omitted. • Paper demonstrates a good grasp of sociological principles but some awkwardness applying them. • The paper demonstrates student's knowledge of the topic and indicates student input beyond text or class notes. • There are no serious gaps and few wrong or incorrect points (except those from imaginative thinking or risk taking opinions). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper is unclear and difficult to read or understand. • Paper raises doubt about the student's grasp of the topic and sociological principles. • Irrelevant points or ideas are given as if the student hopes to cover all bases in hopes that some will be correct. • The work demonstrates a minimum investment of time and/or effort. • There are a sufficient number of points made and references used to suggest the student has some understanding of the topic or question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paper that fails to minimally address the topic or respond to the question. • No evidence is offered to indicate student's understanding of the course content. • There is little evidence of independent learning, and paper is inconsistent with sociological principles. • Writing is poor, making it difficult to understand the student's point of focus.
Organization/ Clarity/ Mechanics (20 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of paper as a whole is logical and quickly apparent; connections among and between paragraphs are clearly articulated and smooth. • Wording is precise and unambiguous. • Quotations are integrated properly and explicated where necessary. • There are no incomplete or run-on sentences and there are virtually no spelling or grammatical errors. • Quotes are all properly attributed and cited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of paper as a whole is logical and apparent, but transitions between paragraphs are not consistently smooth. • Paper is for the most part precisely worded and unambiguous; sentence structure is mostly clear. • Quotations are framed effectively in the text. • There are few minor spelling or grammatical errors. • Quotes are all properly attributed and cited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of the paper as a whole can only be discerned with effort. • Parts of paragraphs do not connect logically. Wording and sentence structure is often imprecise or confusing. • Quotations are not framed effectively in the text. • There are a number of spelling and grammatical errors. • In a few places, quotes are not attributed and cited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of the paper as a whole is not logical or discernable. • Throughout the paper, wording is imprecise or ambiguous; sentence structure is consistently confusing. • Paper is unacceptably sloppy. • Quotes are frequently not attributed or improperly cited.