

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SOCIAL PROBLEMS
FALL 2018

Prof. Rebecca M. Loew, PhD
SOC 103/CRN 3361
Office: Snow Hall, Room 508
Office Hours: Mon. 2:45- 4:45, Wed. 12:30- 1:30

RLoew@mxcc.edu
860.343.5813

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A systematic analysis of major contemporary social problems, such as mental illness, crime, poverty, racial and ethnic conflicts, with emphasis on their origins. This course is recommended as the introductory course for students who have an interest to major in sociology or social work. Prerequisite: Placement in ENG*101.

SCOPE OF THE COURSE:

This course will introduce the student to the study of social problems from the perspective of sociology. It will introduce students to “the sociological imagination” as a tool for students to develop a critical capacity to understand how the social world works. Students will become familiar with a number of key sociological concepts as well as some of the major substantive topics that sociologists study, including patterns of socialization across the lifespan, social stratification by race, gender, and age, and the functions and dysfunctions of social institutions and utilize them to evaluate the impact of mental illness, crime, poverty, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on people’s chances in life, their practices, and attitudes. This course is important because it will develop the students’ understanding of social problems afflicting U.S. society and the global community.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

1. *Think Sociologically.* Discuss the sociological imagination and explain how it helps us to recognize that our personal troubles are rooted in the operation of society. Describe how many of the troubles individual people experience have their roots in the organization of the larger society. Discuss the social constructionist approach, and explain how subjective perceptions and objective facts play a part in the social construction of social problems. Explain the process of claims making and how it relates to the construction of social problems. Discuss the structural functional approach, the social conflict approach, and the symbolic interaction approach as they are employed when analyzing social problems. Explain how one’s position on the political spectrum guides the construction of social problems and defines solutions.
2. *Understand Social Problems of Economic Inequality.* Describe the distribution of wealth and income in the United States today and the contributing factors to the trend toward increasing inequality. Compare and contrast the social characteristics of the rich and poor in the United States. Explain the relationships between poverty and: age, race, gender, family patterns, and region. Explain how the welfare system changed as a result of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals construct the issue of income inequality and how they define solutions for poverty.
3. *Understand Social Problems of Racial and Ethnic Inequality.* Distinguish between race and ethnicity and explain how race is socially constructed. Discuss the characteristics of minorities: their visibility, disadvantages, their numbers, and explain the patterns of majority-minority interaction: genocide, segregation, assimilation, and pluralism. Provide a brief history of the major minority

groups the U.S.: Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Arab Americans. Define prejudice and distinguish between positive prejudice and negative prejudice. Compare and contrast the structural functional, symbolic interaction, and social conflict perspectives on racial and ethnic inequality, and assess the criticisms of each. Recognize how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of racial and ethnic inequality as a social problem. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals define solutions for racial and ethnic inequality. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals define solutions for gender inequality.

4. *Understand Social Problems of Gender Inequality.* Explain the difference between sex and gender. Distinguish between matriarchy and patriarchy, describe the prevalence of each on a global scale, and explain how culture is involved in shaping gender prejudice and discrimination. Explain how patriarchy is related to differences between men and women in responsibility for housework. Explain how women are both a majority and a minority, and how intersection theory can be employed to understand women's minority status. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals construct the issue of gender inequality as a social problem. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals define solutions for gender inequality.
5. *Understand Social Problems of Aging & Inequality.* Explain the relationship between how a culture defines aging and the old age experience. Describe the social construction of aging in preindustrial and industrial societies. Discuss diversity among the elderly in terms of age cohorts, class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Explain the causes and consequences of ageism. Explain how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of age inequality as a social problem. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals construct the issue of age inequality as a social problem.
6. *Understand Social Problems of Crime, Violence, & Criminal Justice.* Discuss the extent of the crime problem, including crimes against persons and crimes against property. Discuss characteristics and crime rates included in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. Discuss property crime patterns and trends in the U.S. today. Discuss patterns of juvenile delinquency, hate crimes, white-collar crime, corporate crime, organized crime, and victimless crime. Compare and contrast the biological, psychological, and sociological approaches to explaining violence. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals construct the issue of crime as a social problem.
7. *Understand Social Problems Related to Sexuality.* Explain sex as both a biological and a cultural issue. Discuss the history of sexual attitudes in the United States. Discuss the findings of the Kinsey research study on sexuality and explain how the findings impacted conversations about sexuality. Discuss the prevalence of gay marriage and domestic partnerships. Discuss pornography and explain the controversy over what material is considered pornographic. Compare and contrast how conservatives, liberals, and radicals define solutions to social problems related to sexuality.
8. *Understand Social Problems of Alcohol & Other Drugs.* Describe the way in which the view of any particular drug varies across societies and over time. Explain how public opinion about a drug is related to attitudes towards racial and ethnic groups believed to use the drug. Describe the history of alcohol in the U.S. and explain how laws changed as the meaning of the drug changed. Describe the extent of drug use since 1980, including use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, and other illegal drugs. Describe and give examples of types of drugs, including stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, cannabis, steroids, and prescription drugs. Discuss drug problems in the areas of family life, homelessness, health, crime, global poverty, and terrorism. Explain how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of drug use as a social problem.
9. *Understand Social Problems of Physical & Mental Health.* Compare and contrast the AIDS epidemic in the United States with the epidemic elsewhere in the world. Explain why the poorest nations are the hardest hit by AIDS. Compare and contrast health care policies in socialist systems to those in capitalist systems. Explain why medical care in the U.S. has become so expensive. Discuss the policies that have been adopted to control health care costs. Compare and contrast the various

forms of health insurance. Explain how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of health as a social problem.

10. *Understand Social Problems of the Economy & Politics.* Compare and contrast capitalist, socialist, and mixed economic systems. Compare and contrast how capitalism is constructed by both conservatives and liberals. Explain how capitalism impacts personal freedoms. Compare and contrast democratic, authoritarian, and monarchical political systems. Discuss the role of corporations and government in the U.S. economy. Describe voter apathy and explain why it is a problem in the United States. Compare and contrast how voter apathy is constructed by conservatives and liberals. Explain how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of economic and political problems.
11. *Understand Social Problems of Work & the Workplace.* Explain the importance of work. Discuss the Industrial Revolution and explain how it changed the workplace. Discuss the Information Revolution and explain how it impacted the workplace. Discuss deindustrialization and explain how it changed the workplace. Describe the distribution of minorities in the workplace. Provide an overview of the emergence of labor unions in the United States over the course of the twentieth century and how they have influenced working conditions. Compare, contrast, and critique how sociology's major theoretical paradigms view work-related problems.
12. *Understand Social Problems Related to Family Life.* Discuss the issues in the debate over the definition of "family." Explain the sociological approach to family problems. Explain how childcare corresponds to families' income and children's age. Discuss social problems related to divorce, including the effect of divorce on children and the issue of child support. Describe advances and controversies in reproductive technology. Discuss how the structural-functional, symbolic-interaction, social-conflict, and feminist perspectives approach issues and problems of family life, and identify criticisms of each perspective.
13. *Understand Social Problems Related to Education.* Discuss the issues in the debate over the definition of "family." Explain the sociological approach to family problems. Explain how childcare corresponds to families' income and children's age. Discuss social problems related to divorce, including the effect of divorce on children and the issue of child support. Describe advances and controversies in reproductive technology. Discuss how the structural-functional, symbolic-interaction, social-conflict, and feminist perspectives approach issues and problems of and define solutions for family life, and identify criticisms of each perspective.
14. *Understand Social Problems of Population & Global Inequality.* Describe the history of world population increase. Discuss high fertility and low mortality as causes of population increase. Explain why contraception is not often used in poor nations. Describe the measures used by demographers to calculate population change. Explain the factors contributing to population decline in high-income nations. Explain the factors contributing to population increase in low-income nations. Describe and evaluate the contributions of the structural-functional perspective's modernization theory and the social conflict perspective's world system theory to gain insight in understanding world population problems. Explain how one's position on the political spectrum guides the construction of global poverty.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK: Macionis, John J. *Social Problems*, 6th ed., NJ: Prentice Hall.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION METHODS

Weekly discussions (14 discussion assignments; 10 points each)	140 points
<u>Exams (3 exams; 50 points each)</u>	<u>150 points</u>
TOTAL	290 points

Weekly Discussions

Every week, you will be asked by the instructor to answer questions relating to assigned chapter on the week discussion board. You also need to respond to the posts of at least TWO classmates. YOUR RESPONSES TO YOUR CLASSMATES SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO COURSE CONTENT. A weekly discussion assignment is worth 10 points.

- The initial message responding to the instructor's questions is due midnight, Saturday, of each week.
- The responses to at least two classmates is due midnight, Sunday, of each (and every) week.

You will be graded on how completely you answer the assigned discussion questions and by the quality of your response to other students' postings. **Refer to the grading rubric for a specific explication of how points are assigned to discussion responses.** Your use of critical thinking skills, the research you conduct on the discussion board questions (drawn primarily from the course text), and your application of the readings will be assessed. You will have one week to conduct research and post. *No late postings will be accepted, not even for partial credit.*

Exams

- The exams will draw from material in the text and readings, films, discussions, and instructor comments for the calendar period covered by the exam.
- Exams consist of 50 multiple choice questions. Students have 90 minutes to complete each test.
- The exams are to be taken closed notes, closed text, no internet searching. The Honor System will be used.
- Exams 1 & 2 will be available midnight (end of day) the Sunday before they are due. Please note in your calendars that **Exam Due Dates are:**
 - Sunday, 9/30 midnight
 - Sunday, 11/18 midnight
 - **Thursday, 12/13 midnight.** Exam will be available at noon on Sunday, 12/9.

Grading System:

Letter Grade	Percent Grade	4.0 Scale (BOR Policy)
A	93.0 - 100.0	4.0
A-	90.0 - 92.9	3.7
B+	87.0 - 89.9	3.3
B	83.0 - 86.9	3.0
B-	80.0 - 82.9	2.7
C+	77.0 - 79.9	2.3
C	73.0 - 76.9	2.0
C-	70.0 - 72.9	1.7
D+	67.0 - 69.9	1.3
D	63.0 - 66.9	1.0
D-	60.0 - 62.9	0.7
F	Less than 60.0	0.0

NOTE: THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER ANY ASPECT OF THE READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS, IN WHICH CASE THE STUDENTS SHALL BE INFORMED IN ADVANCE.

ADDITIONAL SYLLABUS INFORMATION

For information about the college's policies and procedures regarding academic honesty, accessibility/disability services, attendance, audio-recording in the classroom, grade appeals, plagiarism, religious accommodations, weather/emergency closings, and more, please go to the following website: www.mxcc.edu/catalog/syllabus-policies/



COURSE OUTLINE

Weeks- DUE DATES	Topic	Assignments
Week 1, 9/1 & 2	Chapter 1: Introduction to the Sociological Approach to Social Problems; Sociological Theory and Methods	Chapter 1 Welcome and Introductions
Week 2, 9/8 & 9	Chapter 2 Poverty & Wealth	Chapter 2
Week 3, 9/15 & 16	Chapter 4 Gender Inequality	Chapter 4
Week 4, 9/22 & 23	Chapter 5 Aging and Inequality	Chapter 5
Week 5, 9/29 & 9/30 TEST 1 DUE 9/30	Chapter 3 Racial & Ethnic Inequality	Chapter 3, <u>TEST 1 (Chapters 1- 5)</u>
Week 6, 10/6 & 7	Chapter 6 Crime, Violence, and Criminal Justice	Chapter 6 :
Week 7, 10/13 & 14	Chapter 7 Sexuality	Chapter 7
Week 8, 10/20 & 21	Chapter 8 Alcohol and Other Drugs	Chapter 8
Week 9, 10/27 & 28	Chapter 9 Physical & Mental Health	Chapter 9
Week 10, 11/3 & 4	Chapter 10 Economy & Politics	Chapter 10
Week 11, 11/10 & 11	Chapter 11 Work & the Workplace	Chapter 11
Week 12, 11/17 & 18 TEST 2 DUE 11/18	Chapter 12 Family Life	Chapter 12 <u>TEST 2 (Chapters 6- 12)</u>
Week 13, Thanksgiving	Review and catch up	NO assignment due
Week 14, 12/1 & 2	Chapter 13 Education	Chapter 13;
Week 15, 12/8 & 9	Chapter 15 Population & Global Inequality	Chapter 15
**EXAM DUE THURSDAY, 12/13 BY MIDNIGHT	Final Exam	<u>FINAL EXAM (Ch. 13 & 15)</u>