

Social Problems: Sociology 250

Fall Term 2013

Dr. Don Hinrichs, Instructor

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Office hours: ½ hour before each class near the classroom. After class by appointment.

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Learning Objectives:

1. To understand what turns a personal trouble or social issue into a social problem.
2. To examine the theoretical perspectives sociologists use to understand social problems including their origins and proposed solutions.
3. To explore the methodological tools sociologists use to study social problems.
4. To explore how various “claims makers” shape how people view and react to various social problems.
5. To examine specific social problems in both Canadian society and cross-culturally in order to:
 - a. understand the historical, economic, cultural, and political reasons that an issue becomes a social problem;
 - b. understand the various sides in the debate about the social problem;
 - c. critically examine the claims made about the social problem and proposed solutions.
6. To explore social problems through film, reading, and research.

(Note: borrowed liberally from a syllabus by Dr. Karrie Ann Snyder,
Northwestern University.)

Required Texts and Source Material:

Course Pack (CP)

D. Stanley Eitzen (2010). Solutions to Social Problems: Lessons from Other Societies, 5th edition. (SSP)
Donald Hinrichs. Montreal's Gay Village (GV)

Henrik Ibsen. A Doll's House
Danny Dorling. The No-Nonsense Guide to Equality
Vanessa Baird. The No-Nonsense Guide to World Population
Danny Chivers. The No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change: The Science, The Solutions, The Way Forward
Jeff Karabanow, et al. Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth

Conferences: None

Examinations:

Mid-term exam: Wednesday, October 23
Final Exam: as scheduled

Book/Film Reports:

Five book/film reports are required. Details follow “Notes and Expectations” Section. Due dates are in the daily class schedule.
Due date for film report is flexible but last date for submission is November 4

Course Term Paper:

Details follow “Notes and Expectations” Section.
Due: Wednesday, November 13

Course Overview:

Introductory Issues

What is a social problem? Do all societies have the same problems? What are the politics of social problems? What is the role of globalization in social problems?
The social construction of social problems.
The social problems process model.
What role does social media play in social problems? Is social media a social problem?
How is this course organized and why?

Global Issue 1: Environmental Issues

Theoretical Perspectives on Social Problems:

Biology, psychology, sociology (functionalism, symbolic interactionism, conflict theory, feminist theory)

Researching social problems

Global Issue 2: Population

Global Issue 3: Urbanization

Family Issues: forms, functions, divorce, domestic violence

Health Issues: global perspective, delivery systems, mental illness, disability, obesity, addictions (drugs and alcohol)

Issues of Inequality:

income inequality, social class, poverty, homelessness
race, ethnicity, immigration
street youth
gender inequality, aging and ageism

Issues of sexuality: alternative orientations, pornography, prostitution

Violence:

crime and delinquency (special foci: victims, hate crime, white collar crime, child abuse)
terrorism
bullying

Daily Class Schedule (includes topics, reading assignments, and due dates for book report papers):

September

4 administration; introduction to social problems
9 introduction continued: read SSP, chapter 1; CP, item 1
11 introduction continued: read SSP 2, 3, 4; GV 7, 9
16 environmental issues: read SSP 28, 29, 30

Book report due: The No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change...

18 theories and perspectives on social problems: read CP item 10
23 sociological theories and perspectives continued: read GV 4, 10
25 researching social problems: read GV, appendix

Book report due: The No-Nonsense Guide to World Population

30 population

October

2 urbanization: read SSP 26, 27
7 family issues: read SSP 16, 17, 18

Book report due: A Doll's House

9 family issues continued

14 Thanksgiving: no class

16 health issues: read SSP 24, 252

Book report due: Leaving the Streets...

21 health issues continued: read SSP 33, 34

23 Mid-term Exam

28 issues of inequality: general, economic

Book report due: The No-Nonsense Guide to Equality

30 inequality continued: read SSP 5. 6. 7, 8

November

4 inequality: race, ethnicity, immigration

Last date to submit film report

6 inequality: gender and age: read SSP 9, 10, 13, 14, 15

Book report due: Montreal's Gay Village

11 issues of sexuality: read SSP 11, 12; GV 1, 3, 5, 8

13 issues of sexuality continued

TERM PAPER DUE

18 crime and delinquency: read GV 6

20 crime and delinquency continued: read SSP 31, 32

25 crime and delinquency continued

27 terrorism

December

2 bullying

3 the future of social problems?

Final Exam as scheduled

Notes and Expectations:

1. Right to submit in English or French written work that is to be graded
(approved by Senate, 21 January 2009.)

*In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights,
students have the right to submit in English or in French any written
work that is to be graded.*

2. Please follow **directions** in preparing all course work and in writing examinations.
There is a minimum 2-point penalty for failure to do so.

3. **Term paper general guidelines.** Written assignments are an important learning experience and an important dimension of the course. Good writing takes time and work. Composition is as important as content because a paper is a total communications package. Paper grades will reflect the quality of both. **Some specifics:** Papers **MUST** be stapled. Unstapled papers will accrue late days until stapled. Except for book reports, a cover page is required. **NO** hard or plastic covers.

Prescribed page length is not negotiable but excludes cover page and attachments. Any written text that exceeds the page limit will not be read and there will be a minimum 2-point grade penalty. Absolutely no single-spacing. Use 12-point type, Times or Times New Roman font, and appropriate margins (minimum of 1 inch on the left and the right, 1 inch on top and 1 1/2 inches on the bottom). There will be a grade-point penalty for failure to follow these directions.

4. Late paper submission. The major course research paper will be accepted late, However it will be penalized 2 points for each day late, including Saturdays and Sundays. (**Note: book report papers will not be accepted late. See assignment directions.**) If you are not in class the day it is due, it is your responsibility to get it to me in a timely fashion. There is a drop box for papers outside of the sociology department office, 712 Leacock building. Secretaries empty the box once a day, confirm the date of submission, and sign the paper. To ensure that your paper receives the correct date of submission, you should drop it in the box by 3 p.m. The date that the department staff stamp on the paper will be the date the paper was submitted. This date is non-negotiable. **DO NOT** drop your paper at the TA's office or any office other than the main sociology department office. I cannot assume responsibility for papers not handed directly to the TA or me or turned in at the sociology department office. If I do not have a paper from you, I will assume you did not turn it in and late days will begin to accrue unless conditions in #5 below apply. **Submission by email**, except under unusual circumstances that should be discussed with me in advance, will **not** be accepted. Papers submitted by email without permission are not read. **Requests for extensions**, etc., must come to me, not the teaching assistant.

5. Excuses: First, there are **very few** valid excuses for a late term **paper**. Sufficient notice has been given for this paper and proper planning will ensure you get the paper in on time even if you are sick. **Exams:** missed exams should be for medical reasons only and require written verification. Some family emergencies may qualify but written certification is also necessary. If you are absent from class for an extended period of time, I recommend that you notify me by email. If I am not informed, I can't help you.

6. Classroom etiquette: please turn off cell phones, pagers, alarm watches and iPods or any other electronic device that makes noise or distracts you or others. Once you are in the classroom, do not leave to go to the bathroom or get food. If you do need to leave, don't come back. You may use a **computer** to take notes – ONLY! **Note: If you have a medical problem that necessitates you leaving the classroom periodically, please talk to me and sit near an exit.**

7. Information responsibility: You are responsible for getting all notes, handouts, assignments, and miscellaneous information that is given in writing, orally in class, or posted on WebCT.

8. Course reading: It is your responsibility to do assigned reading before the class. Please bring the readings to class the day they are discussed.

9. Exams: While the focus of exams will be the material covered since the previous exam, exams are, none-the-less, cumulative. You just can't forget or disregard course material. In studying for exams, do not forget the material in the course pack. The format of exams will be matching, short answers, definitions, and correct/incorrect questions. All course material, including readings and material in the course pack, are eligible for

testing. If I do not have an exam from you, I will assume that you did not take it and you will get a “0” unless conditions in #5 above apply.

10. **Course pack.** All course handouts and several readings are in the course pack. It is essential that you purchase a course pack. This is the only way you will have the handouts. **Please bring the course pack to every class.**

11. **WebCT:** Important class announcements will be posted from time to time. Also, students may use the site to ask each other questions or request information. Students can post class notes on the site if they want to.

12. **No course work will be accepted after the last class for the course ends without my permission in advance or permission from the appropriate university office.**

Also, I will not discuss the grades on any papers or exams that have been returned prior to the last class.

13. I reserve the right to alter reading assignments, the date a topic is presented, or the exact content of the course. I further reserve the right, under unusual circumstances, to change dates of exams and due dates of papers. These dates would never be moved up, only delayed slightly, again, for unusual circumstances and for reasons that I would consider beneficial for you. Such a decision would be made in a timely and fair fashion after consultation.

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Grading System:

Mid-term exam: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

5 book/film reports: 10% (2 points each)

Term paper: 30%

Notes about grading: 1) the top numerical grade that will be assigned to written work is 90, or its equivalent, unless the paper is truly exceptional. 2) Exam grades may be curved (points added) if I think that the grades are too low. However, no one who earned a 90 or better on the exam will receive the added points. Additionally, no one who receives points can earn a grade higher than an 89.

Written Assignments:

Book/Film Reports:

Students have the opportunity to submit **5 book reports OR 4 book reports and one film report.** **Books for book reports:** The Non-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change, The No-Nonsense Guide to World Population, The No-Nonsense Guide to Equality, A Doll's House, Leaving the Streets, Montreal's Gay Village. **Films** that may be used for the film report are at the end of the syllabus.

Guidelines:

1. There are reading guides for each book in the course pack.

Answer the following questions for each of the book reports:

No-Nonsense...Climate: Qs 1, 7, 9, 11

No-Nonsense...Population: Qs 2, 5, 6, 9

A Doll's House: Qs 1, 3, 5, 6

No-Nonsense...Equality: Qs 4b, 5, 7, 10

Leaving the Streets: Qs 2, 3, 10, 13

Montreal's Gay Village: Qs 3, 5, 6, 7

Answer the questions in a one or two page paper. Be sure to use the number of the question you are answering. Answers do not need to be full sentences if fragments and a few words will suffice. You do not need to repeat the question. No cover page. Paper must be typewritten (not hand written.)

2. **Film report:** Select a film from the list of films at the end of the syllabus. For the report, identify the social problem dealt with. How is the social problem constructed by the filmmaker? In other words, how do you know that this is the social problem? Who are the different claims makers in the film and are their views subjective or based on objective facts? 2 page limit; no cover page; typewritten.
3. You will receive 2 points for each of the 5 reports you submit. No extra points for submitting 6 reports. You get a 0 for each of the 5 reports not submitted.
4. Reports will not be graded, only perused for completeness. Any problems will cause the points assigned to be reduced.
5. **Reports MUST be submitted in class the day they are due. Due dates for the book reports are on the daily class schedule. NO exceptions; no excuses, no do overs. NO email submissions. The date of the film submission is flexible. However, the last date the film report may be submitted is November 4.**

Term Research Paper:

Pick a **specific social problem** you want to investigate.

Important note: The problem you select to study must be a specific one. Violence, for example, is too general. Examples of specific topics would be gun

control, school shootings, bullying, sexual harassment, rape, female circumcision. You may consult us if you want to have your problem approved in advance. Now select a **specific city or country** in which you will study this social problem. Consult a minimum of **6 sources**. These sources can be books, journal articles, Internet sources, newspapers, a film, interviews.

Restrictions: Any combination of these sources is acceptable **except** as follows: 1) Only **one** source may be from *Wikipedia*. 2) Only one source may be a film and it cannot be one of the films listed below for the film report. 3) If feasible, you may interview 5 people as **ONE** of your sources. The sources consulted must be in an acceptable bibliography attached to the end of the paper. The bibliography must have the sources in alphabetical order but in any acceptable format. For people interviewed, give their first name and status (male/female, resident of area, employee, etc.)

Paper format: (Be sure to number your responses to the following and answer the questions in order):

1. State the country or city and country you are focusing on in this research.
2. Identify the social problem you are focusing on. Why do you think that this is a social problem? Is there disagreement about this? Explain.
3. Speak to each of the following components of the Natural History Model of the Social Problems Process: claims making and claims makers; media response; public reaction; policymaking.
4. Describe how the conflict perspective can be applied to this social problem.
5. Describe how the symbolic interactionist perspective can be applied to this specific social problem.
6. Do a complete functionalist analysis of your social problem in the context in which you studied it.

Maximum paper length excluding cover page and bibliography: 4 pages

Due: Wednesday, November 13

Films for film report”

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|
| “Running With Scissors” | “Fahrenheit 9/11” | “Crash” |
| “North Country” | “Why God, Why Me?” | “Sicko” |
| “Bowling for Columbine” | “Defending Our Lives” | “Bully” |
| “An Inconvenient Truth” | “Capitalism: A Love Story” | “Tough Guise” |
| “Waging A Living” | “Maria Full of Grace” | “3 Needles” |
| ‘Dead Men Walking” | “Pursuit of Happiness” | “Desert Flower” |
| “Slum Dog Millionaire” | “Little Miss Sunshine” | “Crossing Over” |
| “The Boys of St. Vincent” | “Super Size Me” | “Kinky Boots” |
| “The Homeless Home Movie” | “A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story” | |