

McGill University  
Winter 2014

## **Sociology 495: Social Problems and Conflicts** **Wednesdays, 11:30 – 1:30**

**Instructor: Eran Shor**

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Office Hours: Monday, 2-4 and by appointment

### Course Description

Social problems and conflicts are all around us, affecting both individuals and societies, and ranging from family violence to international wars. This course will provide students with a broad overview of some of the major problems and conflicts which are of interest to sociologists. The course is designed to enhance critical thinking, deepen analytical skills, and encourage social commitment and involvement. While it is a general survey course, we will focus on a number of specific issues, including social organizations, the impacts of new technologies, family and sexual violence, gender and ethnic inequality, and various issues on the global level, such as the global economy, environmental politics, and armed conflicts.

### Readings

Students are expected to complete weekly readings prior to the period for which they have been assigned so that they can form an opinion and be ready to participate in class discussions. The required readings consist of selections from scholarly books and journal articles. Copies of all reading material are **available as coursepacks at McGill's book store, but ALSO electronically online on WebCT**. The class webpage, <http://www.mcgill.ca/webct>, will function as the primary source of information exchange. Be sure to check the webpage before each class for updated materials such as handouts and readings. Class-related documents will be in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) or appear as MS Word files. Additional readings may be assigned during the semester and will be available on the class WebCT site.

### Class Attendance and Participation

Along with the readings, class discussions and lectures are a vital source of information about the course material. In class we will discuss both the readings assigned for the week and supplemental materials. Lecture material will NOT be posted on WebCT and is only available during class time, so students are advised to attend class regularly and to visit me during office hours if any clarifications are needed. Routine class participation is highly encouraged since you will be tested on materials and discussions that take place in class and since active participation will constitute part of your final grade. Students are responsible for all information provided in lectures, readings, and class discussions. **If you must miss class, be sure to get notes from someone else in class.**

Participation in class through asking and answering questions and expressing your own views is also strongly encouraged. Students should feel free to express their opinions in class. However, you are expected to do it in a socially responsible and respectful way. The use of mobile computing and communications devices is permitted as a tool to assist in taking lecture notes, or accessing WebCT and other class-related materials, insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process. It is NOT okay to use them for any of the following: chat with friends, watch movies, surf the web, explore Facebook, or any other non-academic activity.

### Course requirements

The requirements for this course include one written exam, administered two weeks before the end of the semester, and a final paper to be submitted at the last day of classes. The exam will consist of predominantly multiple-choice questions but MAY also contain fill in the blank, true-false, or short essay questions. Late (makeup) exams will only be allowed under the most severe, documented emergency situations. In the event that you will be allowed to take a make-up exam, the make-up exam may differ in both content and format. In the final paper students will explore more deeply one of the topics discussed in class and will highlight new aspects of this topic, relying on readings and materials other than those presented in class (see fuller instructions for writing the final paper below).

### Course Grade

Your grade in this course will be determined by your attendance and participation in classes and by your performance on the exam and the final paper. No extra credit will be offered. If you feel you have been graded unfairly, write a one page summary detailing the error/inconsistency. Upon review, your grade may either increase or Decrease. Please also note that in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Class attendance and participation: 10%  
Exam: 50%  
Final paper: 40%

### Grading Breakdown:

A	4.0	85 – 100%
A-	3.7	80 – 84%
B+	3.3	75 – 79%
B	3.0	70 – 74%
B-	2.7	65 – 69%
C+	2.3	60 – 64%
C	2.0	55 – 59%
D	1.0	50 – 54%
F	0	0 – 49%

**NOTE: Extra credit will NOT be offered in this class under any circumstances**

### Academic Integrity and Misconduct

McGill University values academic integrity. Academic misconduct (i.e. cheating, plagiarism) will not be tolerated. Suspected infractions will be forwarded to the university's academic misconduct office for review (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information on McGill's Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures).

### Right to submit in English or French written work that is to be graded

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

## Tentative Course Outline<sup>1</sup>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Jan 8	<b>Introduction</b>	
2	Jan 15	<b>Science and technology</b>	<p>* <b>Dyson</b>, Freeman (1997). "Technology and Social Justice." <i>Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs</i>, Pp. 7-25.</p> <p>* <b>McLaren</b>, Anne (2001). "Ethical and Social Considerations of Stem Cell Research." <i>Nature</i> 414:129-131.</p> <p>* <b>Marx</b>, Leo (1994). "The Idea of "Technology" and Postmodern Pessimism." Pp. 11-18 in Yaron Ezrahi (ed.) <i>Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism</i>. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.</p>
3	Jan 22	<b>Modern families and family violence</b>	<p>* <b>Biblarz</b>, Timothy and Judith <b>Stacey</b> (2010). "How does the gender of parents matter?" <i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i> 72:3-22.</p> <p>* <b>Regnerus</b>, Mark (2012). "How Different are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." <i>Social Science Research</i> 41:752-770.</p> <p>* <b>Strauss</b>, Murray (2005). "Women's Violence Toward Men is a Serious Social Problem." Pp. 55-77 in <i>Current Controversies on Family Violence</i>.</p>
4	Jan 29	<b>The hookup culture and sexual violence</b>	<p>* <b>Armsrong</b>, Elizabeth, Laura <b>Hamilton</b>, and Paula <b>England</b> (2010). "Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?" <i>Contexts</i> 9:22-27</p> <p>* <b>Armsrong</b>, Elizabeth, Laura <b>Hamilton</b>, and Brian <b>Sweeney</b> (2006). "Sexual Assault on Campus: A Multilevel Integrative Approach to Party Rape." <i>Social Problems</i> 53:483-499.</p> <p>* <b>Pelka</b>, Fred (1992). "RAPED: A Male Survivor Breaks His Silence." <i>On the Issues Magazine</i>, Spring 1992.</p> <p>* "<b>Dave</b>" (2007). "From Victim to Offender." Pp. 159-169 in Eric Goode and D. Angus Vail (Eds.) <i>Extreme Deviance</i>. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.</p>
5	Feb 5	<b>Gender inequality 1: Biological explanations</b>	<p>* <b>Connellan</b>, Jennifer et al. (2000). "Sex Differences in Human Neonatal Social Perception." <i>Infant Behavior and Development</i> 23:113-118.</p> <p>* <b>Udry</b>, Richard (2000). "Biological Limits of Gender Construction." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 65:443-457.</p>
6	Feb 12	<b>Gender inequality 2: The role of the education system</b>	<p>* <b>Ceci</b>, Stephen, Wendy <b>Williams</b>, and Susan <b>Barnett</b> (2009). "Women's Underrepresentation in Science: Sociocultural and Biological Considerations." <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> 135:218-261.</p> <p>* <b>Correll</b>, Shelley (2001). "Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessments." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 106:1691-1730.</p>

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Dates and topics are **tentative**; we may move more quickly or more slowly depending on class circumstances and may also add or skip some topics accordingly. Any changes will be announced in class.

7	Feb 19	<b>Gender inequality 3: The workplace and cultural inequalities</b>	<p>* <b>England</b>, Paula (2010). "The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled." <i>Gender &amp; Society</i> 24:149-166.</p> <p>* <b>Correll</b>, Shelley, Stephen <b>Benard</b> and In <b>Paik</b> (2007). "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?" <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 112:1297-1338.</p> <p>* <b>Williams</b>, Christine (1992). "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions." <i>Social Problems</i> 39:253-267.</p>
8	Feb 26	<b>Race &amp; ethnicity 1: Socio-biological perspectives</b>	<p>* <b>Herrnstein</b>, Richard and Charles <b>Murray</b> (1994). <i>The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life</i>. Chapters 13 and 14 (pp. 269-340). New York: Free Press Paperbacks.</p> <p>* <b>Entine</b>, Jon (2000). <i>Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We are Afraid to Talk about it</i>. Chapters 3, 4, 18, and 19 (pp. 17-42; 218-245). New York: Public Affairs.</p>
	Mar 5		
9	Mar 12	<b>Race &amp; ethnicity 2: Immigration, racial constructions and national identity</b>	<p>* <b>Lee</b>, Jennifer and Frank <b>Bean</b> (2004). "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 30:221-242.</p> <p>* <b>Oreopoulos</b>, Philip (2011). Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market? A Field Experiment with Thirteen Thousand Resumes." <i>American Economic Journal: Economic Policy</i> 3:148-171.</p> <p>* <b>Jackson</b>, Steven (1998). "A Twist of Race: Ben Johnson and the Canadian Crisis of Racial and National Identity." <i>Sociology of Sport Journal</i> 15:21-40.</p> <p>* <b>Shor</b>, Eran (2008). "Contested Masculinities: The New Jew and the Construction of Black and Palestinian Athletes in Israeli Media." <i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i> 32:255-277.</p>
10	Mar 19	<b>The environment 1: Consumption, development, and environmental degradation</b>	<p>* <b>York</b>, Richard, Eugene <b>Rosa</b>, and Thomas <b>Dietz</b> (2003). "Footprints on the Earth: The Environmental Consequences of Modernity." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 68:279-300.</p> <p>* <b>Murphy</b>, Raymond (2004). "Disaster or Sustainability: The Dance of Human Agents with Nature's Actants." <i>Canadian Review of Sociology</i> 41:249-266.</p>
11	Mar 26	<b>Final Exam</b>	
12	April 2	<b>The environment 2: "natural" disasters and global warming</b>	<p>* <b>McCright</b>, Aaron and Riley <b>Dunlap</b> (2000). "Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem: An Analysis of the Conservative Movement's Counter-Claims." <i>Social Problems</i> 47:499-522.</p> <p>* <b>Freudenburg</b>, William, Robert <b>Gramling</b>, Shirley <b>Laska</b>, and Kai <b>Erikson</b> (2008). "Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters? Improving the Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters." <i>Social Forces</i> 87:1015-1038.</p>
13	April 9	<b>Course summation and submission of final paper</b>	

## **Instructions for Preparation of Final Paper**

### **Paper Proposal**

A proposal for the final paper (up to one page) is due on **February 26 (submitted electronically as MS Word attachments to my university email address: [eran.shor@mcgill.ca](mailto:eran.shor@mcgill.ca))**. The proposal is intended to help you begin reading and thinking about your final project and will allow me to give you directions and advice. You **cannot** write your final paper without first submitting a proposal and getting it approved.

### **The proposal must include the following:**

- Your proposed topic/issue, presented in one or two paragraphs that highlight a research question and a research hypothesis
- An outline of your methodology (sampling, sample, method of analysis, etc.) and the empirical data that you propose to collect or use
- A short explanation of why this research is important/interesting, referring to the findings of previous research and identifying the gaps in the current literature
- A list of at least five academic sources you anticipate using

### **Here is an example of a proposal:**

#### **Prisoners Perceptions of Reintegration Effectiveness**

Since the late 18th century, prison has become the ultimate form of social control (Stastny 1982). However, with rates of reconviction (a plea or finding of guilt, not just an accusation) in Canada reaching 44% in the first year of release (violent and non-violent crimes combined), a large question pertains to the effectiveness of the system (Bonta 2003). As Harper's Administration continues to increase the budget for prison construction, a budget that has ballooned by 54% in 2010-2011 and will reach \$3.12 billion by 2012-13, a cost-benefit analysis of prison's societal function and role becomes increasingly imperative (Maynard 2010). While much research has focused on the causes of crime, and ways to implement new policies of transformative justice, "Less attention has been paid to the influence of state policy on prisoners' preparation for release and the pathways of reintegration following release" (Visher and Travis 2003:104).

To examine one aspect of this effectiveness problem, I will interview those who have *recently* been released or are soon to be released from the system about their perceptions of the reintegration process. I will conduct six in-depth interviews with men in various steps of the process of community reintegration. I will be talking to men who are either living in their own apartments or in a halfway house. The interview will consist of open-ended questions and all forms of anonymity will be preserved. Through these interviews I will seek to understand their perceptions of the judicial system and the reintegration process.

By questioning ex-prisoners' perceptions of the contributions and inadequacies of the criminal justice system during their process of community integration, I hope to gain an in-depth understanding of the programs, institutions and obstacles involved in the process of integration. As prison is a process of resocialization, a creation of a new culture and norms, this study aims to establish an understanding of what needs are being successfully addressed and what needs are being neglected in order to facilitate prisoner's successful reintegration into the community.

### **References:**

- Basen, Ira. 2006. "Doing the crime and doing the time." CBC.ca Reality Check. Retrieved Oct 18, 2011. (<http://www.cbc.ca/canadavotes2006/realitycheck/crimetime.html>).
- Bonta, James. 2003. *The Recidivism of Federal Offenders*. Public Safety Canada 8.
- Maynard, Robyn. "Building Prisons, Creating Prisoners." *The Dominion*, Dec 17 2010. Retrieved Oct 16, 2011 (<http://lib.trinity.edu/research/citing/asa%20style%20citations.pdf>).
- Morris, Norval and David J Rothman. 1995. *The Oxford History of Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Stastny, Charles and Gabrielle Tyrnauer. 1982. *Who Rules the Joint?* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Visher, Christy A. and Jeremy Travis. 2003. "Transitions from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:89-113.

## Final Paper Guidelines and Requirements

Students will write a paper on one of the social problems discussed in class. The paper must use resources that go **substantially beyond** those discussed in class (i.e. lecture materials and assigned readings).

While your paper may be based entirely on secondary sources, you are strongly encouraged to conduct **empirical research** – that is an analysis of data – of your own, in addition to relying on sociological literature. Such empirical research may include, for example, content analysis of newspaper coverage of a certain issue, the delivery of opinion surveys regarding a certain controversial subject, a few interviews with people who are relevant to the issue you wish to study, a comparative analysis of 2-3 historical case studies (or a theoretical analysis of a single case), or a statistical analysis of relevant data. You are encouraged to come see me for more information and consultation, and to discuss your plans.

Papers will be **maximum 8-page** long (not including bibliography, graphs and tables). The paper must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman fonts, double-spaced, with all margins set at one inch and no additional spacing between paragraphs. The first lines of all paragraphs must be indented. All pages (except for the title page) must be numbered consecutively at the bottom right-hand margin.

**The paper is due before the beginning of the last class, on April 9. Late papers will not be accepted under any circumstances. Papers must be submitted electronically as MS Word attachments to my university email address ([eran.shor@mcgill.ca](mailto:eran.shor@mcgill.ca)).**

### **Important things to consider when writing your paper:**

- Each paper must include an introduction (in which you clearly state your research question), a theoretical literature review, a methodological section, a section describing your research findings, a conclusion/discussion, and a reference list. You are strongly advised to use subtitles whenever you begin a new topic, in order to facilitate the reading.
- Whenever you present arguments, data, or opinions you must support them with evidence in the form of examples or (preferably) references to academic sources. In addition, whenever you bring an idea that is not originally yours, you **MUST** cite your source in the text (e.g.: Durkheim 1897). If you cite a source word for word, your citation must appear in quotes and a page number must also be given (e.g. Durkheim 1987:78). In addition, you must make sure that any reference within the text also appears in the bibliographic list at the end of the paper. For more details on the rules of academic writing, please see a brief guide for the American Sociological Association rules of citation at: <http://lib.trinity.edu/research/citing/asa%20style%20citations.pdf>
- Sources that are directly cited and sources that are simply paraphrased should be referenced within the paper in order to avoid plagiarism. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under McGill's Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

### **The grade for the paper will be based on:**

1. Content and Originality
  - a. Refrain from simply repeating what you find in the literature. Try to reorganize what the literature says on the topic and bring the results from your own empirical research to either highlight new points of view or support existing ones.
  - b. Present different views on the issue and make sure to highlight the tension between them, as well as the way most scholars think about this issue today.
2. Organization
  - a. Clear structure and format
  - b. Logical sequencing and continuity of ideas
  - c. Clarity of Expression and Conciseness
3. Presentation Style
  - a. Grammar (e.g. sentence structure, noun-verb agreement, etc.)
  - b. Spelling and punctuation
  - c. Reliance on academic sources and correct citation (follow ASA Manual style) and full matching between in-text references and bibliographic list.