



Social Problems

Soc 105

Term: Fall 2013

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Online Office Hours: Wed 11-12. I am happy to talk with you by phone or online/email. This is an optional service and you will not receive a reduction in your grade if you do not contact me. However, know that I am happy to answer questions, review materials, or assist you in learning when you ask. Please give me at least 48 hours to respond during the normal work week.

Course Description:

Students in this class will learn about the wide range of social problems. The primary focus will be on social problems in the US, but we will also be looking at global problems such as overpopulation, pollution, health, and war. In this lively course that will allow in-depth analysis of the topic, students will explore both conceptual material and personal emotions associated with both macro and micro factors associated with the study of social problems. Through the use of lecture, seminar, discussion, film, exams, and a thoughtful exploration of social problems in an end of the term paper, students will receive a full educational experience in this important topic.

Overall Goal:

To provide students with an overview of the Sociological factors which impact the creation and solution of social problems.

Learning Objectives

- To learn key sociological issues which influence the structure of social problems. This will be measured through exam, discussion, and demonstration in the writing assignments and final paper.
- To expose the student to a variety of readings about key macro and micro forces which influence the creation of social problems. Macro forces include: economics, politics, government, health care, science and technology, and micro forces focus on small group, interpersonal relations. This will be measured through exam, discussion, and demonstration in writing assignments and final paper.
- To identify the major sources of pressure that create social problems, and how both structural and interpersonal forces address those pressures. This will be measured by class discussion and discussion in the writing assignments.
- To provide information that should enable students to analyze a social problem of their choosing and give thoughtful contemplation about how to best solve that problem. This will be measured through class discussion and writing assignments.

- To allow students the opportunity to explore the wide range of social problems that exist, and to analyze how their personal views intersect with those of larger society. This will be measured by class discussion and exam.
- To pay particular attention to economic issues, political factors, community response, and interpersonal dynamics intersect to create and solve social problems. This will be measured through class discussion and writing assignments.

Required Text

John Macionis. Social Problems. Prentice Hall. Any edition. The content in are all about the same, even if chapter orders vary a little. You are invited to go online and save money if you can, just realize editions may slightly vary but the essential material is consistent across versions.

I will also post some power points about different topics under the modules for your review. These power points do **not** go with the Macionis book and their titles/chapter numbers will not correspond with your text, but they are very interesting and well-crafted and can provide you with more information about social problems in another learning format to assist you.

Rivier College E-mail Account

All e-mail communication from the instructor will be sent to your Rivier e-mail address, so it is recommended that you check this account frequently. You can access your Rivier e-mail account by clicking on the E-MAIL link at the top of every page on the Rivier web site.

Canvas

The course will utilize the Canvas learning program. It is a somewhat new online education platform at Rivier. It enables us to post materials for you, and you will submit all your materials by copying them into the submission box. You will have discussion topics, announcements, assignments, submission tabs, and you will be able to access your gradebook when you submit online. If you have technical questions, look at the Riv online tutorials, call IT, or contact your professor.

Instructional Format

This class will be delivered as a hybrid class, meaning that we will meet once a week for the eight weeks and we will use the rest of the time to do work independently or on line. For those of you who have never taken an online course, there will be a learning curve as you get adjusted to the new delivery format. Please ask questions and visit our student tutorials listed above. Your time commitment to the course is not reduced because of the online format. You will find that the three credit hours normally spent in the classroom will now be devoted to reading course material and participating in online discussions. It is strongly recommended that you set aside specific time to accomplish these tasks and to make them a part of your weekly routine.

Learning Modules

The course will be set up in Learning Modules. There will be learning goals provided to you with readings, assignments and discussions that will help you to achieve them. Each activity should be completed in the order it is presented and all assignments should be completed and delivered by the recommended due dates posted on the Canvas Assignment tab in order to help you keep on schedule.

Students are encouraged to work ahead on modules when they can, since life sometimes gets unexpectedly complicated and waiting until the last minute could become unnecessarily stressful for you if it does. Please know that I will accept materials until one week before the end of the term, but they must be in then so I can grade them so I have time to turn in grades to the registrar.

The course is designed with this logic – the first module is for you to consider what you think is a social problem before you do major learning in the field. The last module is designed for you to reflect upon what you have learned as a result of taking the class and seeing how your views may have changed. The second and third modules are divided into macro, or large scale social problems and micro, or small scale social problems. Of course, there are overlays of each on the other so they are not black-and-white. But this is a conceptually sound way for us to divide the material so you don't feel overwhelmed. You are to read the chapters but look for the big picture rather than small details. The assignments are created for you to convey what you learned about the big picture. You also have the opportunity in one module to take one specific type of social problem that interests you and delve into it in significant detail. You will present your findings to the class – we will assign dates the second week of class, so start thinking of your topic now!

Learning Module 1 What are social problems?

Learning Goal: To identify what social problems are, the wide range of them, and what people have tended to do about them.

Learning Issue: It is important to understand that what theory we are coming from influences whether we see something as a social problem or not. If we all agreed that something was a problem, we would likely come up with a way to address it. But we don't all agree on whether something is a problem, its cause, or what should be done about it.

Learning Materials: Chapter 1
Review of power point 1

Learning Assessment: 50 points
3 page paper on what you think is the biggest social problem and why. This is to be an opinion piece and does not need references.

Discussion Module 1:
What do you think are the most important social problems as a nation we should be addressing and why?

Learning Module 2 Macro Social Problems

Learning Goal: To learn how large scale social forces or institutions create, maintain, or prevent social problems.

Learning Issue: Many social problems are considered to be large scale, structural or institutionally created. Many of these large scale problems have similarities in their cause or how they are handled by society. This unit will require extensive reading from a variety of chapters. The goal is to review main types of macro social problems.

Learning Materials:

Module 2 Syllabus Readings:

Chapter 2: Poverty and Wealth

Chapter 3: Racial & Ethnic Inequality

Chapter 4: Gender Inequality

Chapter 5: Aging and Inequality

Chapter 6: Crime & Criminal Justice

Chapter 15: Urban Life

Chapter 16: Population & Global Inequality

Chapter 17: Technology & the Environment

Chapter 18: War & Terrorism

Learning Assessment: 100 points

You are to create a 5 page essay in which you look at these macro types of social problems and address these questions. Make sure to include good examples from your textbook – I will be looking for them to make sure you read and learned the material!

1. We continue to have these types of social problems because some people get some benefit from them. Sociology theory holds that if we all agreed that something was a problem, we would do something about it - but clearly lots of problems aren't eradicated because somebody is getting something out of them. They are "functional" in this theoretical sense. In what ways can social problems be functional or useful for society (or certain groups in it)?
2. These social problems pose major difficulties for some groups of people. A conflict theoretical perspective focuses upon how one group of people use their position of power to exploit others. The people who are victimized are often powerless to do much about them. The people who benefit from the social problems have a vested interest in not eradicating them. Look at the different types of macro problems and try to use a conflict theoretical understanding of them here.
3. Select the top 2 macro social problems that interest you and describe what you think could be done about them.

Discussion: Which of these social problems bothers you the most and why? OR Which of these social problems do you think are the biggest priority for our leaders to address?

Learning Module 3 Micro Social Problems

Learning Goal: To explore types of problems that people are most likely to experience in their everyday lives. Financial problems were discussed in the previous module!

Learning Issue: Many social problems are focused more on individual or small group behavior. Your text describes many of these “micro” level social problems. Micro problems may have causes in the large society but their impact seems to be heavily related to smaller units of analysis.

Learning Materials:

Module 3 Syllabus Readings

Chapter 7: Violence

Chapter 8: Sexuality

Chapter 9: Alcohol and Drugs

Chapter 10: Physical & Mental Health

Chapter 11: Economy & Politics

Chapter 12: Work and the Workplace

Chapter 13: Family Life

Chapter 14: Education

Learning Assessment: 100 points

Write a 5 page paper that addresses the following questions, making sure to integrate text material so that I know that you learned the material!

1. Many social problems exist because of a “blaming the victim” phenomenon. At what point do personal troubles become social problems?
2. What on the list/readings for this unit do you think are the most serious social problems that we should address?
3. Are their problems on this list that you think should not be considered to be social problems? Why or why not?

Discussion: Drug use, alcohol use, gambling, or sexual behaviors vary considerably from one culture/group to another. Do you think these are serious social problems or not?

Learning Module 4 Project

Learning Goal: To create a project that helps you to specialize in a particular social problem of interest to you.

Learning Issue: To learn research and presentation skills.

Learning Materials: You are to provide at least 5 solid references for your project

Learning Assessment: 100 points

15 minute presentation to class on a selected social problems topic. Students may use power point, lecture, or other creative format. Rubric for assessment includes:

- Statement of why you selected this problem
- Stats and facts
- Theoretical explanations
- Visual component
- Interaction component
- Resources used

Discussion: Students are encouraged to provide feedback to each other on your class presentation. This discussion may occur in class or on line.

Learning Module 5 Final Exam

Learning Goal: To see how much knowledge and opinions have changed as a result of taking this course.

Learning Issue: To take a final exam that will help the student to codify knowledge gained.

Learning Materials: Review of entire book

Learning Assessment: 50 points

Final Exam. This will be posted and returned on Canvas

Discussion: None for this module

Discussion Forums

Students are given discussion items for each module. You are encouraged to share your views on the items posted. You may wish to respond to comments that your classmates make. You may also wish to share links or materials to help others to learn related material that you find interesting and useful. All postings must be courteous and respectful. Online and hybrid classes work best when students interact with each other and discussion forums provide a great opportunity to do so. The discussions will be reviewed but not graded, and considered to be extra-credit with those of you regularly and constructively participating in discussions being given more of a boost than students who do not use this learning opportunity.

Assignment Grading Weights

At the end of the semester, I will total all percentage points you have earned on your assignments and will use the following scoring scale found in the Rivier College catalog to assign a letter grade:

100-93 (A); 92-90 (A-); 89-87 (B+); 86-83 (B); 79-77 (C+); 76-77 (C); 72-70 (C-); 69-67 (D+); 66-63 (D); and below 62 (F).

Netiquette

"Netiquette" is a code of behavior for the internet. You should follow these basic guidelines in addition to normal rule of behavior for a classroom setting:

- Use proper language.
- No jokes, insults, or threats of a personal, racial, or sexual nature. Otherwise, humor and wit are encouraged and appreciated.
- Challenge ideas, not people.
- DON'T USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. IT'S MORE DIFFICULT TO READ AND PEOPLE FEEL AS IF THEY ARE BEING YELLED AT.
- Check for typing errors and accuracy of spelling. Make sure your posting can be understood.

How to succeed in an online course

Researchers have found that students that have done well with online classes:

- Are highly motivated
- Are independent
- Are active learners
- Possess good organizational and time management skills
- Have discipline to study without external reminders
- Can adapt to new learning environments

Try the following tips to manage your time during our online course:

- Try reserving a specific time each week for assignments such as reading, discussion board posting, etc. Try dedicating the time you would otherwise be spending in a classroom working on assignments.
- Read the reading assignments in advance of posting to the discussion board and submitting assignments. This will give you time to think over the topics before delving into assignments.
- Print the syllabus and keep it handy, especially the Course Outline and Calendar. Keep the calendar near your computer and check off each due date as you complete assignments.
- Read all of the postings of your classmates. To truly create an online classroom, you should interact with multiple students during the course.
- Ask questions through the Discussion Board forum, weekly chats, and to the instructor directly if necessary. Ask questions early and often!
- Do not get behind in readings and course assignments. Your grade will suffer if assignments are late and it will be difficult to get caught up once you fall behind.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Rivier College wants to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. To accomplish this goal effectively and to ensure the best use of our resources, the College expects students to provide timely notice of a disability to the Office of Special Services for verification and for evaluation of available options. Any student whose disabilities fall within ADA should inform the instructor within the first two weeks of the term of any special needs or equipment necessary to accomplish the requirements for the course. To obtain

current information on this procedure, contact the Office of Special Services at (603) 897-8497, or visit http://www.rivier.edu/academics/support_services.asp?id=73

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic honesty. In general, plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else's work in whatever form: copyrighted material, notes, film, art work, reports, statistics, bibliographies, and the like, as one's own, and failing to acknowledge the true source. Quoting word-for-word, or almost so, or using the argumentation of another source without acknowledging this dependence also constitutes plagiarism. Cheating is defined as the giving or attempting to give or to receive unauthorized information or assistance during an examination or in completing an assigned project. Submission of a single work for two separate courses without the permission of the instructors involved is also a form of cheating.

If students are unsure whether a specific course of action would constitute plagiarism or cheating, they should consult with their instructor in advance. Penalties for plagiarism and cheating vary with the degree of the offense and may take the form of the following academic sanctions:

- the grade of F for the work in question;
- the grade of F for the course;
- notification of the department chair and/or Academic Dean of the College of the misconduct of the student;
- recommendations that the student be suspended or dismissed from the College.

Health Considerations

The flu and contagious germs make it challenging to fulfill necessary social roles, like going to work or school. Please do not attend class if you are sick and contagious. No one appreciates being exposed to illness that may make them sick. I will not take formal attendance but I always know who participates, who attends regularly and that information inevitably will influence my grading. If you are sick or have to miss, let me know via email. There is a big difference in missing class because one is sick or because one simply wants to do something else.

Weather Considerations

New England weather can be unpredictable. As a rule, if the college is open, we will have class. That said, sometimes people travel long distances to attend class and the weather conditions in one place may be quite different than those in another. It is my position that no one should put themselves at risk to attend class, even if Riv is open, if the roads are treacherous. If I cannot make it because of weather I will post an Announcement on Canvas.