

SOCIAL PROBLEMS (SOC 235)

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Office Hours: W 9:00am – 12:00pm, 1:30 – 3:30pm

SOC 235-01
Fall 2007
T/R 9:30 – 10:45am
Killian 117

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

This course will provide a sociological examination of the principal causes and consequences of, and solutions to major societal problems. It includes a community engagement component to help you better understand the course content, contribute to the community, and develop your civic engagement skills.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

1. Be able to articulate (verbally and in written form) the sociological perspective on social problems.
2. Be able to make the connection between the course content and current national and/or global events.
3. Be able to apply course content to a specific social context through engagement, affecting both the student and the community.

P1: Social Sciences

This course partly satisfies the *Social Science Perspective Requirement* of the *WCU Liberal Studies Program*. Courses in Social Sciences provide systematic study of observational and analytic methods and findings of those disciplines that focus on the interpersonal functioning and institutional creations of human beings. Courses in this category may focus on the scientific study of the mental and behavioral characteristics of individuals or groups or may focus on the description and explanation of political, economic, or legal institutions. Included will be inquiry into basic social scientific concepts such as mind, behavior, class, society, culture, freedom, government, property, equality, and rights.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Eitzen, D. Stanley and Maxine Baca Zinn. 2006. *Social Problems (10th edition)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- 1) *The New York Times*
 - www.nytimes.com
- 2) Ambassador James A. Joseph, “Higher Education and the Public Good: The Civic Engagement Imperative.” Keynote Speech, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Democracy Project National Meeting, Snowbird Utah. June 13, 2006.
 - Class Handout.
- 3) Glassner, Barry. 1999. “Introduction: Why Americans Fear the Wrong Things.” *The Culture of Fear*. New York: Basic Books.
 - Class Handout.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Service Learning/Civic Engagement (150 points total): Service learning “. . . combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community” (Campus Compact

National Center for Community Colleges). Civic Engagement involves “. . . working with others, over time, to get something done for mutual benefit” (Plenary Workshop, 2006 AASCU American Democracy Project national meeting).

1a. Project (75 points): Class members will be responsible for organizing a project related to civic engagement. Projects may be conducted on an individual or team basis. Details regarding these projects will be given in class, at which time projects will be identified and chosen.

1b. Class Presentation (75 points): Class members and/or groups will give a brief demonstration of their project during the final exam period. Details regarding the class presentation will be distributed later in the semester. **CLASS ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY DURING THESE PRESENTATION PERIODS.**

2. New York Times Articles with Paragraphs and Questions (10 at 15 points each, 150 points total): You are expected to read the NYT online. Ten times throughout the semester you are to turn in an article that is relevant for the current chapter. Submissions must use articles that are recent to the date of submission. Only one article may be submitted at a time. Make sure to include:

- The TITLE of the article and the DATE at the TOP OF THE PAGE, not in the paragraphs.
- 2-3 paragraphs connecting the article to the content of the CURRENT topical reading.
- 2 questions for discussion. Questions should reflect that you have read and thought about the material in the article and the chapter.

All paragraphs and questions must be typed. During the course of the semester, you may be asked to talk about your article and share your questions. There are 24 possible class days for you to turn in an article with paragraphs and questions. You are required to turn in an article with paragraphs and questions 10 of these days.

3. 3 In-Class Exams (75 points each, 225 points total): In-class exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.

4. Class Attendance and Participation (75 points total): Students will be given credit for participating in in-class discussions and activities. Points will vary. Class attendance and participation (attendance, discussion, and preparedness) will also be used to determine borderline grades at the end of the semester.

GRADING

Letter grades in the course will be determined using the following percentage scale (600 points total):

A- = 90-92% (540-557 points), A = 93-100% (558-600 points)

B- = 80-82% (480-497 points), B = 83-86% (498-521 points), B+ = 87-89% (522-539 points)

C- = 70-72% (420-437 points), C = 73-76% (438-461 points), C+ = 77-79% (462-479 points)

D- = 60-62% (360-377 points), D = 63-66% (378-401 points), D+ = 67-69% (402-419 points)

F = below 60% or 360 points.

COURSE POLICIES

Turn off all electronic devices prior to the beginning of class.

Makeup exams will be given only under the following circumstances: a) you contact me prior to the exam with a legitimate reason for not taking the exam on time; and/or b) you provide written evidence (e.g., medical excuse, funeral notice) for why you did not take the exam at the scheduled time. All makeup exams must be taken during finals week. You are responsible for contacting me to schedule the makeup exam.

Western Carolina University policy regarding **cheating and plagiarism** allows for a range of sanctions for students whose work is determined to have been either taken from others or provided to others. “Others” refers to other students as well as to authors of books or articles. Any student in the course who is determined to have plagiarized will receive a zero on the plagiarized assignment.

FREE ACADEMIC SERVICES

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Western Carolina University is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for students with documented disabilities. Students who require disability services or reasonable accommodations must identify themselves as having a disability and provide current diagnostic documentation to Disability Services. All information is confidential. Please contact Kimberly Marcus for more information. Phone: (828) 227-7234; E-mail: kmarcus@email.wcu.edu.

The **Catamount Academic Tutoring (CAT) Center**, located in 135 Killian Annex, offers FREE learning resources, academic skill workshops, and small-group tutoring for most 100 and 200-level courses. Tutoring sessions are facilitated by trained peer leaders in a relaxed, informal setting. Visit the CAT Center website at www.wcu.edu/catcenter to schedule tutoring appointments and find information about workshop offerings in areas such as Time Management, Note Taking, Reading Comprehension, and Exam Preparation. For several years running, with no end in sight, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has reported that employers across professional fields name communication skills (writing and speaking) as the TOP quality/skill they look for in college graduates. How prepared will you be? Writing is like any other skill. The more you do it, the better you get. Plus, if you work with a personal trainer on a regular basis, you not only become better sooner, you achieve a higher standard of performance. The **University Writing Center** in Hunter Library offers personal training in effective academic and professional writing. Plus, it's free! Make an appointment by calling 227-7197. Visit www.wcu.edu/writingcenter to view on-line resources, frequently asked questions, and more.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE **Note: This schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via your email account. You are responsible for being aware of changes made to this schedule.**

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC/ASSIGNMENT</u>	<u>READING</u>
T 8/21	Course Introduction	No Reading
R 8/23	Sociological Approach to Social Problems	Chapter 1
T 8/28	OUT OF CLASS EXERCISE – NO CLASS	
R 8/30	Sociological Approach to Social Problems (continued)	
T 9/04	The Culture of Fear	Glassner Introduction
R 9/06	Guest Speaker – Animal Rights	
T 9/11 – T 9/18	Social Problems & Civic Engagement	Joseph Keynote Speech
R 9/20	EXAM 1	
T 9/25 – T 10/02	Wealth & Power: The Bias of the System	Chapter 2
R 10/04 – T 10/09	World Population & Global Inequality	Chapter 3
R 10/11	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS	
T 10/16 – R 10/18	Threats to the Environment	Chapter 4
	T 10/16 – Guest Speaker	
T 10/23	ADVISING DAY – NO CLASS	
R 10/25 – T 10/30	Poverty	Chapter 7
R 11/01	EXAM 2	
T 11/06 – R 11/08	Health and Health Care Delivery	Chapter 17
T 11/13 – R 11/15	Work	Chapter 14
	R 11/15 – Guest Speaker	

T 11/20	National Security in the 21 st Century	Chapter 18
R 11/22	THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS	
T 11/27	National Security in the 21 st Century (continued)	
R 11/29 – T 12/04	Progressive Plan to Solve Society’s Social Problems	Chapter 19
R 12/06	EXAM 3	
W 12/12	FINAL EXAM PERIOD (PRESENTATIONS) 12:00 – 2:30PM	

OUT OF CLASS EXERCISE
Civic Engagement Project

INDIVIDUAL STEPS:

Step 1: Identify some general social problems you are concerned about. If possible, list them in the order of your concern.

Step 2: Think about the top two social problems you listed. What makes each a social problem? Who, besides yourself, has defined this as a social problem? As defined, who/what is to blame for the social problem?

Step 3: Identify some ways these problems could be addressed using the civic skills listed below. Stated differently, how might you (with your group) engage a community to address these problems? Name some potential activities.

Step 4: What questions and/or concerns do you have about the civic engagement project?

Some things to think about:

- Do not choose a large problem that you cannot affect. Instead, choose little bits of things to bite off.
- Even if your project is small (and most will be), IT HAS TO MATTER TO YOU.
- Be respectful of the existing system. Don’t try to “know everything.”

GROUP STEPS:

Step 1: I will discuss students’ stated problems with the class. I will list them on the board for everyone to see.

Step 2: We will address whether the approaches to the problems are doable and, if not, how we can make them doable.

Step 3: Students will get into groups based on similar interests.

Step 4: Groups will do their homework (research) on the problem they have chosen.

Step 5: Groups will collectively decide what to do about the problem and informally present their ideas to the class.

Step 6: Groups will go out and carry out their project using the 4 civic skills: communicating, organizing, critical thinking, and collective decision making.

Step 7: Groups will measure the efficacy of their project.

Step 8: Groups will present their project at the end of the semester, describing what they did and reflecting on the experience.

A Typology of Civic Skills¹:

Skill = A learned power of doing something competently.

¹ Taken from Dr. Mary Kirlin’s Plenary Workshop, American Democracy Project Meeting, Snowbird, Utah, June 2006.

Skills are: Learned and mastered through repeated practice in diverse settings.
Transferable to new settings as proficiency increases.

Communicating → Oral and written communication.

Organizing → Organizing tasks, acquiring resources.

Critical Thinking → Identifying and describing, analyzing and explaining, synthesizing, thinking critically and constructively, formulating positions on issues.

Collective Decision Making → Expressing your own opinion, understanding others' preferences, and working towards a decision (using compromise, not necessarily consensus) for the common good.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Your presentation should include four aspects:

1. A description of activities, events, problems, and any other relevant information related to your civic engagement experience.
2. A connection between your engagement experiences and course content (readings, lectures, discussions). In other words, how has your civic engagement experience helped you understand or apply course content or meet the course goals?
3. A connection of your service activities to citizenship and civic engagement. In other words, how has the experience affected your thinking about being a good citizen or what it takes to be a good citizen? What is the connection between volunteering, working with others, and citizenship?
4. The impact of service on philosophy of life, values, and vocational choices. How has your service impacted you?

Presentations should be around 15-20 minutes each, depending on the number of people in your group. The style of presentation is up to you, but each group member must participate in order to be evaluated. Contact me if you need any assistance.

Some specific questions you may want to consider when preparing your presentation:

1. What activities did you participate in? What did you do, with whom, and where?
2. If you worked with an organization, what is its mission, what services are provided, and what is your evaluation of the effectiveness of the services?
3. How does this experience relate to your classroom studies? Are you able to apply any knowledge, theories, or skills learned in class to your civic activities?
4. What difference do you think you made to the people you served?
5. What have you learned from the people you served?
6. Did this experience change your perceptions or attitudes about people, society, or community issues?
7. What did you learn about your personal values, philosophy of life, vocational choice, or faith through this experience?
8. Did [are]you use[ing] this experience to think about issues of social justice (such as fairness in the way people are treated, equality of opportunity for all, the way services are made available to poor people, etc.)?
9. Did you use this experience to think about the role and duties of citizenship in a democracy?
10. If you worked directly with clients, how would you describe your relationship with them and your attitudes about them? Has this experience changed your views about them?
11. What are you learning about community issues and social problems in general and in this community?

Note: The presentation and paper guidelines represented in this handout are derived from Dr. Joe McDonald's (2004) Social Problems syllabus (Western Carolina University).

Liberal Studies Course Statement

This course is a Liberal Studies course. The learning goals of the Liberal Studies Program are for students to:

- Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral and visual data;
- Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience;
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments; demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being;
- Demonstrate an understanding of
 - Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present;
 - Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships;
 - Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity; scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology;
 - Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.

Liberal Studies Perspectives Category

This course is a Perspectives course. The primary goals of the Perspectives courses are:

- To promote love of learning and to cultivate an active interest in the Liberal Studies;
- To build on the Core's foundation through practice and refinement of areas of academic emphasis;
- To provide students with a broadened world view and knowledge base;
- To provide experiences in the arts, humanities, and social sciences from which connections between disciplines can be revealed;
- To provide an introduction to the challenges of living in a global society;
- To create opportunities for reflection on values, and for discussing differences in values in a critical yet tolerant manner;
- To afford opportunities to make career or disciplinary choices.

In addition, each Perspectives course will be expected to include emphasis *on one or more* of the following:

- Critical analysis of arguments
- Oral communication
- Service learning
- Moral reflection
- Cultural diversity
- Any other creative but defensible area of intellectual development that a discipline wants to focus on, and that the program chooses to adopt.