

**SOC 2750G:**  
***Social Problems in Contemporary Society***  
**Spring 2012, Section 001**

**Professor Michael D. Gillespie, Ph.D.**  
**Blair Hall 1165, M: 2:00p–4:30p**

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The central goal of this course is to introduce and apply a sociological approach to understand and explore modern social problems. Primarily, we will use the concept of *liberation sociology* to analyze patterns of inequality, we will experience efforts to alleviate such problems first-hand; and critique our own understanding about social problems by applying essential concepts to critique documentary films.

As we seek to understand the connections between our everyday lives and the social world in terms of social inequalities and institutions, we will learn to identify these connections and then use them to explore the connections between private problems and public issues.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

We will explore contemporary social problems by examining:

1. How social problems are constructed, communicated, and understood;
2. Three types of social inequality: social class/poverty, race and ethnicity, and gender;
3. How social problems become public issues and, through social institutions, shape experiences in inequality.

By the end of the semester, you will be able to describe multiple sources of social inequality, describe how different social institutions shape inequalities, and finally how individual and groups experience social problems differently.

### **TEXTBOOK AND SUPPLEMENTS**

Macionis, John J. 2010. *Social Problems*. 4th Edition. Prentice Hall

*This text is required, and available at Textbook Rental! You will need it to participate fully in lecture and class discussions. Think of the textbook as your “user guide” to the course: full of great information that will guide your working knowledge of the course and its content.*

Supplemental Materials:

When needed, supplemental sources and readings will be provided on WebCT that will guide the discussion of that week’s topic. **You are responsible for checking WebCT each week before class and obtaining your own copy and reading, viewing, or otherwise engaging the material prior class.** All supplemental materials, which can be a research article, webpage, newspaper article, movie clip, or other piece of media, are **required**.

You are responsible for completing all reading assignments and review supplemental materials. Lecture will **not** cover all the material in the book, but the assigned reading material is “fair game” for the exams.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Preparation and Engagement:

You are expected to attend every class, having prepared for a discussion on the week's topic, and be ready to engage with the documentary or other in-class exercise. You must come willing and capable of participating. To be capable of participating you must have read the material and you must have developed your own interest in the issues covered in the assigned chapter.

### Access and use of WebCT:

No materials will be distributed in class. You are responsible for obtaining course information through WebCT: <https://online.eiu.edu/webct/>

### Grade Requirements: 250 Total Points

Below is a list of the course assignments with total point values. Each item listed is required.

#### *Reflective Analytical Essay Assignments*

*(10 essays, 10 points each, 100 total points):*

Each student will complete a series of reflective analytical essays on a topic recently discussed in class and applying concepts to the film of the week.

There are **12** total essay assignments. The **1<sup>st</sup>** ("Liberation" due 23-January-2012) and **7<sup>th</sup>** ("Assessment" due 19 March 2012) are mandatory. Each student is responsible for completing 8 of the remaining 10 assignments for a total of 10. If you complete more than 10, your ten highest grades will be used in calculating your grade, however the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> assignment's grades (the two mandatory essays) cannot be dropped.

These assignments are 1 to 2 pages in length, unless otherwise specified, and **must be typewritten.** A specific assignment guide will be posted to WebCT for each; they are due at the beginning of the class period on their specific due date.

It is in your best interest to not fall behind on the written essays. **No late assignments will be accepted.** Every effort should be made to turn in assignments on time. If you know that you will be absent from lecture the day an assignment is due, you can email the assignment prior to time that the class period begins.

*Your essays must follow "Professor Gillespie's Assignment Formatting Guide" available on WebCT.*

#### *Reading Quizzes (5 quizzes, 5 points each; 25 total points):*

Reading quizzes will focus on a concept from that day's reading assignment or class discussion. They are unannounced and you must be in class to complete them. Reading quizzes are short answer essay questions.

*Exams #1 & #2 (40 points each):*

The first exam will be on **Monday March 5, 2012** during the regular class session. The exam will cover all course reading, discussion, and special content up to the preceding week (weeks 1-6).

The second exam will be on **Thursday May 3, 2012** from 8:00a to 10:00a.

Both exams will be multiple-choice with one essay question.

*Volunteer Service Paper (45 points)*

Each student will complete 2.5 hours of volunteer service and complete a written paper analyzing their experience, discussing the relevant social problem addressed through the service project, and applying course materials.

An assignment guide for this project is posted on WebCT.

### **COURSE GRADING**

Based on the requirements, there are 250 points to be earned in this course. Final letter grades are based on the following scale:

- A: 225-250 (90% or greater)
- B: 200-224 (80% - 89.9%)
- C: 175-199 (70%-79.9%)
- D: 150-174 (60%-69.9%)
- F: <150 (<59.9%)

At any moment in the semester, you can gauge your progress in the course by taking the total amount of points you have earned divided by the total amount of points possible for the assignments you have completed to that point. I will also attempt to keep your grades up to date on WebCT.

Grading FAQ:

Question: Do you grade on a "curve"?

Answer: No. I grade on points; a grading curve is simply grade inflation.

Question: Can I earn extra credit?

Answer: Any opportunities for extra credit will be afforded to all students in the course and at the discretion of the instructor.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

### Course Ground Rules:

Sociology is one of the few subjects that allows us to explore ourselves as part of something bigger, how something beyond our immediate lives has the ability to impact who we are, and also how who we are impacts other individuals and groups. Sociology is dynamic and exciting.

Surviving this class, first and foremost is through your own energy, engagement, inquisitiveness, and ability to be open-minded. An environment conducive to open dialogue is the goal. The classroom is a space for learning, not just from lecture but also from your fellow students.

There are three ground-rules under which you and I will be approaching this course:

1. If you always agree with me, then there is only one of us doing the thinking – and that is dangerous!
2. You are expected to be active in creating your own knowledge.
3. Do not be afraid to ask questions in or outside of class.

### Class Attendance:

You will sign-in each class-period. While attendance is ***not*** a part of the grade requirements for this course, if you have 3 or fewer absences from lecture (and do not leave at the break), you will be eligible for Prof. G's rounding rule. The rounding rule means that if you are within 1.5 percentage points of the next grade level you will receive the next highest grade (i.e. you have a 78.5% after the final exam, and hence a C, you will earn a B). In essence, your attendance can only help your grade by being present to learn the course material and if you are within the rounding interval!

### What is "Class Participation"?

Class participation is class engagement. Engagement in this course is exercised through your continued and productive contribution: reading assignments are completed, assignments are finished and submitted on time, and you come to class ready to be engaged.

Engagement in the course is both critical to your personal success and the success of the group.

If you are going to be absent from a class session and have a legitimate reason for missing class (emergency, illness, death, etc.), please contact me by email or telephone prior to the start of class.

It is your responsibility to be accountable for your attendance and engagement in the class. While I do not take attendance, in-class assignments cannot be made-up; providing a legitimate justification for missing class and a possible assignment is necessary.

You are expected to attend every class: While class attendance is NOT part of your grade, the content of the course, as well as the quizzes and exams, is a product of what happens in the classroom.

The textbook is a road map, but your participation and attendance are what make the course most interesting and informative. Being overly absent is detrimental to your learning experience and understanding of sociology.

### General Classroom Conduct Policy:

In all of my classes, I strive to provide a positive and productive learning environment for students. It is important that we all act in a respectful manner toward each other and do not disturb the class.

I ask your cooperation in observing the following rules:

- Arrive on time.
- Do not come and go during the class period. This is disrespectful and disruptive for me and your fellow students. If you must go to the restroom, do so quietly, causing as little disruption as possible.
- Observe the electronics policy at all times (see below).
- Do not carry on side conversations with your neighbors unless you will be prepared to share with the rest of your colleagues.

### THE Electronics Policy:

If you bring your cell phone to class, please show respect for me and the other members of the class by either turning it off or setting it so that it does not make any noise. It is unacceptable to make or receive calls, or to text message while in the classroom. You will be asked to leave if you are using a cell phone while in class; this includes text messaging.

Should you be an EMT, police officer, or other professional “on call,” please set your phone to vibrate during class, and quietly leave the classroom to return any calls received. Failure to abide by this policy will result in your dismissal from the classroom.

**I do not allow use of personal computers in class.** If you do bring your PC to lecture, you will be required to put it away or to leave the classroom. If you must use a computer for academic purposes, you must bring appropriate documentation from the office of student services.

### Academic Integrity:

ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO COMPLETE THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT WORK. While students are encouraged to study in groups, their completed assignments are expected to be the independent work of the individual student.

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the provisions of the University’s Student Conduct Code, available online at: [www.eiu.edu/~judicial](http://www.eiu.edu/~judicial).

These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submissions, plagiarism, complicity to such acts, computer misuse, and classroom disruptions. Any breach of academic integrity will result in a failing grade.

If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic misconduct, you will be referred to the Director of Student Standards for appropriate actions.

You are responsible for your work, the quality of your work, and the validity of your work. Any violation of academic integrity is serious and, if founded, will result in a zero for the assignment. *Ignorance is not an excuse and will not prevent a failing grade.*

### Help with course material:

Office hours are provided for students to seek guidance and help with course content. Office hours are provided for the sole purpose of helping students and should be taken advantage of as needed. I am more than willing to go the extra mile, but only if you are, too.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

### **Disabilities Statement:**

Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) if they wish to discuss any necessary academic accommodations.

### **Medical Emergency Statement:**

For medical emergencies, go to the nearest phone and call 911. All faculty offices have telephones and during normal business hours (8-12 and 1-4:30), the Sociology Office (Blair 3170) is open.

Be sure to state the floor and room number of the emergency to the 911 operator. If possible, someone should go to the central entrance of Blair Hall to direct EMS personnel to the medical emergency scene. If the medical emergency is on the second or third floor, someone else should hold the elevator on the first floor for EMS use.

### **Tornado Statement:**

In case of a tornado warning, proceed to the center of the hallway on the first floor, near the posted severe weather signs. Under no circumstances should you attempt to leave the building.

### **Building Fire Statement:**

In case of fire, activate the fire alarm and exit the building. When a fire alarm sounds, everyone must exit the building and cannot re-enter the building until allowed by the building coordinator or fire department official. Fire alarms are located at the north and south ends of the corridors just inside the fire doors.

The closest exits for all classrooms in Blair are on the north and south ends of the building. Under no circumstance should the elevator be used. Group assembly areas for all classes in Blair are either on the patio area between Blair and Old Main or on the southeast corner of the North Quad. As you exit the building, continue moving well away from the exits so that you do not impede the progress of other students or the work of fire officials. Move a safe distance away from the building.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The course content and this syllabus are subject to change at any time to allow for a flexible and open learning environment.

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment(s)
9-Jan-12	Introduction to the Course; Service; and Social Problems	<i>"The Sociological Imagination"* (Mills)</i>
16-Jan-12	<b>No Class: Martin Luther King Jr. Day</b>	
23-Jan-12	Liberation Sociology and Social Problems	Macionis, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-25) <i>"What is Liberation Sociology?"* (Feagin and Vera)</i>
30-Jan-12	Claims Making and Constructing Social Problems	<i>"Claims"* (Best)</i>
6-Feb-12	Poverty and Inequality <b>***Service Site Notification Due***</b>	Macionis, Chapter 2 (pp. 26-53);
13-Feb-12	Race and Ethnicity	Macionis, Chapter 3 (pp. 54-85);
20-Feb-12	Gender	Macionis, Chapter 4 (pp. 86-113);
27-Feb-12	Reconstructing Inequality	Supplements on WebCT; Crossword Puzzle
5-Mar-12	<b>EXAM 1</b>	
12-Mar-12	<b>Spring Break!</b>	
19-Mar-12	Social Institutions: Family Life	Macionis, Chapter 12 (pp. 316-339)
26-Mar-12	Social Institutions: Education	Macionis, Chapter 13 (pp. 340-365)
2-Apr-12	Social Institutions: Politics and the Economy	Macionis, Chapter 10 (pp. 262-287)
9-Apr-12	Social Institutions: Work and the Workplace	Macionis, Chapter 11 (pp. 288-315)
16-Apr-12	Social Institutions: Urban Life	Macionis, Chapters 14 (pp. 366-391)
23-Apr-12	Social Institutions: Global Communities	Macionis, Chapter 15 (pp. 392-417)
30-Apr-12	<b>EXAM 2</b>	
		* Denotes Reading Posted on WebCT