

Current Issues in Sociology
Eastern Illinois University
Soc 4900-001 Fall 2013

Class: MW 2:00-3:15

Professor: Darren Hendrickson, Ph.D.

Phone: 581-8364

Office Hours: MW 3:30-4:30, Th 1:00-3:00, or by appointment

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“The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of...self-consciousness.”

- C. Wright Mills

“Society is an insane asylum run by the inmates.”

- Erving Goffman

“She says she wants to be a sociologist, but she better first get checked by a neurologist.”

- lyric from *Suzy Greenberg*
by Phish

Required Text/Readings:

- Joel Best. 2012. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Jonathan Cohn. 2008. *Sick: The Untold Story of America's Health Care Crisis—and the People Who Pay the Price*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Richard H. Hersh & John Merrow (eds.). 2005. *Declining By Degrees: Higher Education at Risk*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sudhir Venkatesh. 2008. *Gang Leader for the Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Select Articles Available on the Course D2L Page

Course Description:

As you already know, this is the “capstone” class for sociology majors. The official course description for Sociology 4900 - Current Issues in Sociology is as follows, “analysis of selected current social problems.” Obviously that is a very broad course description. More specifically though in this course we are going to engage in an in-depth sociological investigation and discussion of a select number of contemporary social problems. You have already completed the “core” requirements for the sociology major (Sociological Theory, Research Methods, and Social Statistics) as well as a range of sociology electives. Now, as you approach the end of your undergraduate career, this course is designed to give you the opportunity to reflect on and demonstrate what you know about sociology and what you can do with your sociological knowledge. In other words, consider this course an opportunity to bring together everything you have learned as a student of sociology and apply that knowledge to, as the course description states, “an analysis of selected current social problems.”

The specific objectives for this course are as follows:

- Continue to develop your sociological imagination - recognizing the connections between individual experiences and larger social forces.
- Provide opportunities to apply your sociological knowledge base to contemporary social issues and problems.
- Demonstrate a sociological perspective promoting multicultural understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for critical thinking.

Course Requirements:

(1). *Research Paper & Presentation.* In this course you are required to write a research paper in which you address a specific social problem of your choice. By design I am giving you a tremendous amount of latitude in selecting a social problem to research and write about. Unfortunately as you know there is an almost endless list of social problems you may write about but ultimately you should select, research, and write about a social problem that is of interest to you - this will make the whole process more enjoyable. The objectives for this assignment include giving you the opportunity to both further develop an in-depth sociological knowledge of a social problem and to use and display the sociological skill set that you have developed over the course of your undergraduate career. In addition to writing the research paper you will also be required to present what you have learned from your research to the class. Specific assignment details, directions, and due-dates for the research paper and presentation will be distributed at a later date.

(2). *Take Home Exams.* After reading and discussing the books *Sick* and *Gang Leader for a Day* you will be required to complete an essay-based take home exam. These two exams will require you to reflect on and write about connections between what you have read, discussions in class, and material that you have learned in this and other sociology courses. Specific exam instructions and due dates will be distributed at a later date.

(3). *Defining Sociology Paper*¹. For this writing assignment you are required to read the “Introduction” to *Great Jobs for Sociology Majors* by Stephen Lambert (available on the course D2L page) and then write a paper where you address the following questions: how does Lambert define sociology? Thinking back to your experiences and courses as a student of sociology is this an appropriate definition? What, if anything, is missing and what would you add to his definition of sociology and sociological inquiry?

- Your paper is to be typed, double-spaced, and approximately 2 - 3 pages in length.
- Papers are due, in-class, on Wednesday, August 21

¹Adapted from: Byng, Michelle. 2010. “Sociology W380: Doing Sociology in the Real World.” Syllabus published in *TRAILS: Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology*.

(4). *Current Event Paper & Presentation.* Given that this course is titled Current Issues in Sociology and the focus is on contemporary social problems you are required to complete a Current Event Paper and Presentation. One of the great things about sociology, as you know, is that society is our vast laboratory and we are literally surrounded by sociological phenomenon, concepts, and issues. For this assignment you are expected to monitor the local, national, and/or international news (I certainly hope that you already do this). For example, you can read newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, or *Champaign-Urbana's News-Gazette* (all have websites), or you can look at sites like Yahoo! News or CNN. For those with smart-phones and tablets organizations like the Associated Press (AP), USA Today, and Reuters all have free apps – yes, they have an app for that. While monitoring and reading various news stories you are required to find a news item of interest to you that somehow illustrates an issue or topic of sociological concern and then write a brief paper explaining how this news item connects to sociology. The specific details for this assignment are as follows:

- Find an article in the news that somehow relates to one or more sociological issues. Your article should be from the last six months (this is supposed to be about a “current” event).
- Write a paper - typed, double-spaced, approximately 2 - 3 pages in length - where you discuss how the news item you have selected is specifically connected to the field of sociology.
- Deliver a brief presentation to the class where you summarize the news story and explain how this story is connected to or illustrates key sociological concepts, concerns, issues, or theories.
- You are required to include a copy of the news story with your paper.

(5). *Course Participation.* Because this course is designed and run in a seminar format, as opposed to a traditional lecture course, the active participation of all students is both expected and required. As such, your level of participation will be factored into your final course grade. Over the course of the semester you will receive two participation grades - one around the midpoint of the semester and another at the end of the semester. Your final participation grade will be the average of these two scores. Remember, attendance is not the same as participation. Participation involves engaging in an informed discussion about course topics, readings, videos, as well as answering and asking questions.

Basis for Final Grade:

Research Paper.....	30%
Research Presentation.....	10%
Annotated Bibliography.....	5%
Research Paper Proposal.....	5%
Two Take Home Exams.....	20%
Defining Sociology Paper.....	10%
Current Event Paper & Presentation.....	10%
Participation.....	<u>10%</u>
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>

Course Schedule:

Aug. 19 - Aug. 21	General Course Introduction Defining Sociology Reading: Lambert. <i>Introduction: The Value of a Degree in Sociology</i> (D2L)
<i>Defining Sociology Papers Due Wednesday, Aug. 21</i>	
Aug. 26 - Aug. 28	Understanding Social Problems Current Event Presentations Reading: Best. <i>Damned Lies and Statistics</i>
Sept. 4	Current Event Presentations (cont'd) Reading: Best. <i>Damned Lies and Statistics</i>
Sept. 9 - Sept. 11	Current Event Presentations (cont'd) Health Care Reading: Cohn. <i>Sick</i>
Sept. 16 - Sept. 18	Health Care (cont'd) Reading: Cohn. <i>Sick</i>
Sept. 23 - Sept. 25	Health Care (cont'd) Gangs & Crime Reading: Venkatesh. <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>
Sept. 30 - Oct. 2	Gangs & Crime (cont'd) Reading: Venkatesh. <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i> Reading: Reviews and Response to <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i> (D2L)
Oct. 7 - Oct. 9	Gangs & Crime (cont'd) Social Inequality & Economy
Oct. 14 - Oct. 16	Social Inequality & Economy (cont'd)
Oct. 21 - Oct. 23	Education Reading: Hersh & Merrow (eds.). <i>Declining By Degrees</i>
Oct. 28 - Oct. 30	Education (cont'd) Reading: Hersh & Merrow (eds.). <i>Declining By Degrees</i>
Nov. 4 - Nov. 6	Education (cont'd) Globalization

Nov. 11 - Nov. 13	Globalization (cont'd)
Nov. 18 - Nov. 20	Globalization
Nov. 25 - Nov. 29	☺☺☺ <i>Thanksgiving Break</i> ☺☺☺
Dec. 2 - Dec. 4	Student Presentations
Dec. 11— 2:45 - 4:45	Student Presentations (cont'd)

Policies:

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class on a regular basis. Attendance will be taken on a daily basis, but it will not be used directly as part of your final grade determination. However, I will consider course attendance for students with “borderline” final grades. Regular class attendance is strongly recommended. You are responsible for any course material that you miss if you are not in class, regardless of the reason for your absence.

Late/Missed Assignments: Please make every effort to ensure that assignments are turned in and/or completed on time. If, for some reason, you know that you are going to miss an assignment due date please notify me in advance so that we can discuss the possibility of alternate arrangements. Also, late writing assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for every day that they are late. Plan ahead to ensure that you are able to meet the due dates for this course.

Cheating and Plagiarism: Not allowed. If you are found cheating or plagiarizing you will receive a zero for that assignment, exam, or quiz and you will be immediately reported to the Office of Student Standards. See the University policy regarding academic integrity for details about plagiarism.

Tape/Video Recorders: The use of tape recorders, or other recording devices, during class is not allowed. Exceptions will be made only under special circumstances.

Cell Phones/Text Messaging: I understand that many of you like to stay connected and many important people are constantly trying to get a hold of you, but if you have a cell phone please turn off or disable the ringer before coming to class. Furthermore, text messaging during class is not permitted or tolerated.

Special Needs: Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) to address any necessary academic accommodations. Adaptations of methods, materials, or testing can be made to provide for your equitable participation in class as long as I am aware of your needs before tests and assignments.

Medical Emergencies Statement: For medical emergencies, go to the nearest phone and call 911. All faculty offices have telephones and during normal business hours (8:00-12:00 and 1:00-4:30), 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 egress of other students or the work of fire officials. Move a safe distance away from the building.

Note: All material in this course syllabus, including exam and assignment due-dates, may be subject to change.