

**Soc 3003:**  
*Social Problems*  
**Fall 2004**

11:15-12:30 Tuesday/Thursday  
Room: 135 Blegen Hall

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Office Hours: 1123 SST Mondays: 10:00 - 11:00 / Tuesdays: 10:00 -11:00

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## Course Description and Goals:

### *Overview:*

This course focuses on contemporary social challenges confronting the United States, their meaning, significance, and possible resolution. We begin with a discussion of how “problems” emerge. How do “private troubles” of individuals become “public issues” of society-wide concern? Why do some problems recede from public attention and others emerge?

We focus especially on the way specific issues are “framed,” that is, included or excluded as the problem, what explanations are provided, and what remedies are proposed. Understanding the implications of the ways problems and solutions are framed can provide a foundation for sociological analysis of specific topic areas. We examine theories informing specific social problems, policy responses to them, and the implications of both the problems and policies for life chances and life quality. We also consider “emerging” social issues, locating contemporary social problems in the United States in larger institutional, historical and global contexts.

### *Requirements:*

1. Class participation: 20% of final grade
2. Short essay: 10% of total grade  
What is one of the most important and durable social problems in the United States? Causes and definition: How did it arise and when? How has it changed? What are some of the factors that may have transformed the way it has been defined?
3. Short paper: 20% of total grade (5 pages, plus references)  
Drawing on assigned readings, provide a critical treatment of theories of one social problem, including the history of its development (definition and causes) and proposed solutions. More specific ideas for paper topics will be distributed in class.
4. Research paper: 25% of total grade (6 pages, plus references)  
Consider some social problem not adequately covered in this class. Find 2-4 research articles discussing your topic. Drawing on assigned readings, class discussions, and your own library/web research, how do sociological concepts and theories of social problems inform your understanding of this topic (and vice versa)?

5. Rewriting Research or Short: 10% of total grade  
Rewrite either the Research paper or the Short paper, based on feedback
6. Final Exam: 15% of total grade  
Comprehensive essay (short answer) exam drawing on lecture material and course readings. Potential exam questions will be distributed on the last day of class.

### **Required Text**

Eitzen, D. Stanley and Maxine Baca Zinn. 2003. *Social Problems*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.  
**\*\*\*With Research Navigator\*\*\***

### **Recommended Text**

Skocpol, Theda. *The Missing Middle*. 1999.

### **Course Plan**

For each week's readings, think about the following:

- What do we need to know?
- What is the problem?
- What is the context?
- What do we know?
- Who are definers? Framers? Change agents? Impediments to change?
- Global context?
- What are solutions?
- Alternative Framings?

#### **Week 1: What is a Social Problem?**

**Read Chapter 1: "Sociological Approach to Social Problems" pp. 2-21**

Tuesday, September 7<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, September 9<sup>th</sup>

**Read for Next Week: Chapter 2: "Wealth and Power: the Bias of the System" pp. 22-52**

#### **Week 2: Alternative Perspectives on Social Problems**

Tuesday, September 14<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, September 16<sup>th</sup>

**Read for Next Week: Chapter 10: "Sexual Orientation" pp. 279-304 and Chapter 11: "Disability and Ableism" pp. 305-331**

**Week 3: Social Transformations, Social Movements**

Tuesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>

Thursday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 19: “Progressive Plan to Solve Society’s Social Problems” pp. 562-582***

**Week 4: Framing: What are Past Social Problems that have been Solved?**

Tuesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 14: “Work” pp. 401-431***

**Week 5: Framing: The Case of Work and Markets**

Tuesday October 5<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 3: “World Population and Global Inequality” pp. 53-78, Chapter 4: “Threats to the Environment” pp. 79-111, and Chapter 5: “Demographic Changes in the U.S...” pp. 112-178***

**Week 6: Framing: The Case of Population Aging**

Tuesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 17: “Health and Health Care Delivery” pp. 497-527***

**Week 7: Framing: The Case of Health Care**

Tuesday, October 19<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, October 21<sup>st</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 9: “Gender Inequality” pp. 242-279***

**Week 8: Framing: The Case of Gender Inequality**

Tuesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, October 28<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 8: "Racial and Ethnic Inequality" pp. 214-241***

**Week 9: Framing: The Case of Racial and Ethnic Inequality**

Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>

Thursday, November 4<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 15: "Families" pp. 432-465***

**Week 10: Framing: The Case of Marriage and the Family**

Tuesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, November 11<sup>th</sup>

***Read for Next Week: Chapter 12: "Crime and Justice" pp. 332-367 and Chapter 13: "Drugs" pp. 368-400***

**Week 11: Framing: The Case of Crime and Deviance**

Tuesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup>

***Read for next week: Chapter 16: "Education" pp. 466-496***

**Week 12: Framing: The Case of Education**

Tuesday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>

Thursday, November 25<sup>th</sup> –No Class; Thanksgiving

***Read for next week: Chapter 18: "National Security in the Twenty-First Century" pp. 528-561***

**Week 13: What are Emerging Social Problems?**

Tuesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Week 14: Conclusions**

Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>

**Week 15:**

Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

**Additional Recommended Texts—for more in-depth analysis**

Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise*, 1999

Howard Becker, *Outsiders*, 1963

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 2001

Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, *Families that Work*, 2003

Joseph Gusfield, *Contested Meanings: The Construction of Alcohol Problems*, 1996

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1975

Anita Garey. (1995). Constructing motherhood on the nightshift: "working mothers" as "stay-at-home moms". *Qualitative Sociology*, 18(4), 415-437.

Sharon Hays, *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 1996

Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*, 1995

Katherine Newman, *No Shame in my Game*, 1999

Thomas Scheff, *Being Mentally Ill*, 1984

Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, 2000.

P.J. Smock. (2000). Cohabitation in the united states: An appraisal of research themes, findings, and implications. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 1-20.

Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness*, 1970

Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor*, 1977

Linda Waite & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage: Why married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially*. New York: Broadway Books.

William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996

Useful Web References:

AFL-CIO: [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)

American Society of Training and Development: [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)

Americans United for Affirmative Action: [www.auaaa.org](http://www.auaaa.org)

American with Disabilities Act: [www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm)

Bureau of Labor Statistics: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

Census Bureau Homepage: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1mnboth.html>

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/>

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.chpp.org](http://www.chpp.org)

Centers for Disease Control [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)

Digest of Educational Statistics 2001 – National center for Education Statistics:  
[www.nced.ed.gov//pubs2002](http://www.nced.ed.gov//pubs2002)

EconData.net: Your Guide to Regional Economic Data: [www.econdata.net](http://www.econdata.net)

Economic Policy Institute: [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org)

Employee Benefit Research Institute: [www.ebri.org](http://www.ebri.org)

Income Page: [www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html)

Juggling Work and Family: [www.pbs.org/workfamily](http://www.pbs.org/workfamily)

National Center for Health Statistics: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/)

National Institute of Health [www.nih.gov/](http://www.nih.gov/)

National Institute on Aging [www.nia.nih.gov/](http://www.nia.nih.gov/)

National Vital Statistics Report: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data.nvsr.gov](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data.nvsr.gov)

NewWork News: [www.newwork.com](http://www.newwork.com)

OECD publications scheduled for release from **November 2003 through January 2004:**

<http://www.oecdwash.org/PUBS/BOOKS/RP041/rp041cov.htm>

Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education: [www.ed.gov/offices/OCR](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR)

Population Reference Bureau: [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)

Progressive Policy Institute (work, family, and community): [www.ppionline.org](http://www.ppionline.org)

Project on Global Working Families:

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies)

Public Agenda [www.publicagenda.com](http://www.publicagenda.com)

School-to-work: [www.stw.ed.gov](http://www.stw.ed.gov)

SLOAN Work and Family Network Literature Database:

<http://library.bc.edu:4545/ALEPH/-/start/bcl03>

Statistical Abstract: [www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract-02.html](http://www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract-02.html)

Workers with Disabilities: [www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com)