

Department of Sociology  
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN MODERN SOCIETIES**

Spring 2009

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*Course Information:*

Course Number:	SOCI 113	Instructor:	Professor David Warner
Credits:	3 Hours	Office:	Mather Memorial 223C
Lecture Times:	T, Th 10:00-11:15 am	Phone:	216.368.2697
Lecture Room:	Nord 204	E-mail:	david.warner [at] case.edu
Prerequisites:	None	Office Hours:	T, Th 1:15-2:15 and by appointment

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***COURSE DESCRIPTION:***

Modern societies are dealing with a number of complex issues that have the potential to undermine the well-being of some (or all) of their members. Not all social issues, however, are considered social “problems.” Even when a social issue is deemed problematic, there is substantial debate as to the causes of and solutions to the problem.

In this course, we will use a social-constructionist approach to understand how society defines (or “frames”) social issues as undesirable social problems in need of change. Specifically, we will focus on the role of political and economic interests in defining social problems as we examine a number of issues facing modern societies, including gender inequality, racism, education, health, juvenile justice, globalization, and war. We will explore what different political perspectives view as the causes and consequences of each social problem, and how these differences result in divergent policy solutions. Although we will focus our attention largely on the United States, we will draw on the experiences of other nations to understand better the importance of the U.S. political discourse for framing social problems.

***COURSE OBJECTIVES:***

Students successfully completing this course will:

- Define what social problems are and give examples of social problems in modern societies;
- Describe how social issues are defined politically and framed in public discourse as social problems;
- Understand diverse political—radical-right, conservative, moderate, liberal, and radical-left—solutions to alleviate social problems;
- Cultivate one’s *sociological imagination*, understanding how personal troubles become public issues;
- Further develop critical thinking, oral- and written-communication abilities.

## ***COURSE FORMAT:***

As outlined at the end of the syllabus, this course is divided into three units. Unit 1 will cover social inequality as the foundation of social problems, Unit 2 will examine problems associated with the major social institutions, and Unit 3 will explore social problems associated with globalization and urbanization. Within each unit, we will cover a new social issue each week with a general overview of the topic followed by the examination of one particular social problem in detail. These in-depth examinations will use documentary films, in combination with select short articles from scholarly and popular media sources, to analyze how a social issue is framed as a problem by political discourse. I expect that students will be active participants in the learning process each class session, regularly engaging in thoughtful discussion of the topics presented (See *Course Requirements* below). To facilitate this participation, **I reserve the right to call on students during class.**

## ***REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS:***

There is one required textbook for this course, available for purchase at the Case Western Reserve Bookstore (Thwing Center, 11111 Euclid Ave.):

**Macionis, John J. 2008. *Social Problems* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. ISBN: 978-0-13-243339-6**

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In addition to the textbook, students are also required to read several *short* scholarly articles, newspaper editorials and periodical opinion pieces, which I have made available via the Course Blackboard Site. These supplemental readings are:

Associated Press. 2008. "Census Will Not Record Same-Sex Marriages." *New York Times*. (July 18<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).

Chirot, Daniel and Jennifer Edwards. 2003. "Making Sense of the Senseless: Understanding Genocide." *Contexts* 2:12-19.

Cohen, Adam. 2008. "After 75 Years, the Working Poor Still Struggle for a Fair Wage." *New York Times*. (June 17<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).

Conley, Dalton. 2002. "Forty Acres and a Mule: What If America Pays Reparations?" *Contexts* 1:13-20.

Dillon, Sam. 2008. "Obama Pledge Stirs Hope in Early Education." *New York Times*. (December 17<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) December 29, 2008).

Dixon, Marc and Andrew Martin. 2007. "Can the Labor Movement Succeed without the Strike?" *Contexts* 6:36-39.

Downie, Andrew. 2007. "Fair Trade in Bloom." *New York Times*. (October 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).

Editorial Board. 2007. "Joe Economics." *New York Times*. (January 8<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).

Editorial Board. 2008. "Darfur Crisis Threatens Chad." *Washington Times*. (May 14<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.washingtontimes.com](http://www.washingtontimes.com) August 8, 2008).

- Editorial Board. 2008. "Religious Liberty." *Washington Times*. (August 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.washingtontimes.com](http://www.washingtontimes.com) August 8, 2008).
- Ehrenhalt, Alan. 2008. "Trading Places: The Demographic Inversion of the American City." *The New Republic* (August 13<sup>th</sup> Edition).
- Hartmann, Douglas. 2003. "The Sanctity of Sunday Football: Why Men Love Sports." *Contexts* 2:13-19.
- Kielczewski, Adar. 2008. "Real Dearth Men." [AmericanThinker.com](http://AmericanThinker.com). (Published June 22, 2008; Accessed August 8, 2008)
- Krieg, Eric 2008. "The Greenwashing of America." *Contexts* 7:58-59.
- Laszewski, Chuck. 2008. "The Sociologists' Take on the Environment." *Contexts* 7:20-26.
- Logan, John. 2003. "Life and Death in the City: Neighborhoods in Context." *Contexts* 2:33-40.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. 2008. "U.N. to Keep Darfur Force, but U.S. Withholds Its Vote." *New York Times*. (August 1<sup>st</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).
- Renzulli, Linda A. and Vincent J. Roscigno. 2007. "Charter Schools and the Public Good." *Contexts* 6:31-36.
- Ryan, Charlotte and William A. Gamson. 2006. "The Art of Reframing Political Debates." *Contexts* 5:12-18.
- Schrobsdorff, Suzanne. 2008. "Doctors within Borders." [Newsweek.com](http://Newsweek.com) Web Exclusive (Published August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008; Accessed August 8, 2008).
- Shipler, David K. 2004. "A Poor Cousin of the Middle Class." *New York Times*. (January 18<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) August 8, 2008).
- Shorto, Russell. 2008. "No Babies?" *New York Times Magazine*. (June 29<sup>th</sup> Edition; Accessed via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) July 17, 2008).
- Western, Bruce and Becky Pettit. 2002. "Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality." *Contexts* 1:37-43.
- U.S. Congress. 2007. "House Resolution 194: Apologizing for the Enslavement and Racial Segregation of African-Americans." "United States House of Representatives, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session. February 27.
- Zimmerman, Ann and Kris Maher. 2008. "Wal-Mart Warns of Democratic Win." *The Wall Street Journal Online*. (Published August 1<sup>st</sup>, Accessed August 8, 2008).

## ***COURSE REQUIREMENTS:***

Students successfully completing this course will carefully integrate the course material and not simply memorize “facts.” This emphasis may be different from other courses with which you are familiar and is one of the challenges of this course. In this end, I will use the following methods of evaluation to measure careful analysis and integration of the course material.

### 1) Attendance & Class Participation:

Regular class attendance is essential and expected. Classroom participation will compromise about 20% of the final grade in this course and *unexcused* absences will result in lower final attendance and participation scores (See Attendance Policy below). Therefore, regular attendance is necessary for successful completion of this course. However, attendance alone is not sufficient—students must also *participate* in class discussions.

To facilitate participation, each class session has a set of readings matched to it. You should complete these readings before the class session for which they are assigned, as they will allow you to participate in the lesson. Students are expected to demonstrate their proficiency with the readings through their class participation.

I will monitor and record students’ attendance and participation in class activities, assessing the overall quality of participation at the end of the semester. Students with *regular* and *relevant* participation will receive the maximum credit. Again, **attendance without participation is not sufficient for full credit.**

### 2) Short Quizzes:

At least eight (8) short quizzes will be administered at random throughout the semester. These quizzes will consist of 10 multiple choice questions drawn from the Macionis (2008) chapter(s) assigned for the topic being covered at the time the exercise is announced. Your six (6) highest-scoring quizzes will be used in the calculation of your final grade. As you are allowed to miss two of these quizzes without penalty, no make-up assignments will be given. **No exceptions.**

### 3) Critical Analysis Papers:

You will complete three Critical Analysis Papers during the course of the semester—one for each Unit of the course. In 3-5 pages, you will *critically* examine one of the social problems we covered in-depth in the course. Your analysis of the social problem will center on the documentary film viewed in-class for the problem you select. You will use the assigned readings and *three* additional popular media articles to analyze how this social issue is defined as a social problem, and what this discourse means for the development of political solutions to this problem. The Unit 1 paper is due at the start of class on **Thursday, February 12<sup>th</sup>** and the Unit 2 paper is due at the start of class on **Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>**. The Unit 3 paper is due no later than **12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>** and must be turned in to the Sociology Department Main Office (226 Mather Memorial). ***Electronic submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances.***

More detailed instructions on the content and format of the Critical Analysis Papers are included at the end of this syllabus.

## ***ATTENDANCE POLICY:***

Students absent from class are responsible for finding out about the missed material—including getting any notes or handouts—from a fellow student. *I do not release my notes to students; please do not ask.* Students who miss the viewing of a documentary film will have a limited opportunity to examine the film outside of class, as all films are guaranteed to be available through the Kelvin Smith Library Course Reserves for **one week** following the in-class showing. As noted above, short quizzes will be administered in class and students who miss one of these quizzes will **not** be permitted—for *ANY* reason—to make it up given that the best 6 out of 8 scores are used in the determination of the final grade.

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As per University policy, excused absences exist only for illness, death/personal crisis, participation in athletic events or other extra-curricular activities, and religious holidays.

- 1) **Illness:** Students who wish to claim an excused absence due to illness will be required to submit a statement from a health professional briefly describing the illness and the dates ill. University Health Services (UHS) "...will provide written verification of the date of a student's visit, and with student permission will communicate with the appropriate dean's office in the event of hospitalization or prolonged illness" (*CWRU Undergraduate Instructor's Manual* 1999, p. 11).
- 2) **Death or personal crisis:** "In the event of a death in the family or other personal crisis requiring the student's absence from class, the student should notify the Office of Undergraduate Studies, 368-2928, which will provide documentation of such absences to instructors" (*CWRU Undergraduate Instructor's Manual* 1999, p. 12).
- 3) **Athletic events or other extra-curricular activities:** "Students who are involved in athletic or other extra-curricular activities may present written explanations of an event-related absence provided by the coach or sponsor. Such explanations are not automatically excuses for absences from class. Any such events are scheduled well in advance; students should let the instructor know about the absence ***ahead of time and make prior arrangements*** to make up work" (*CWRU Undergraduate Instructor's Manual* 1999, p. 12, emphasis added).

Consequently, students participating in athletic events or other extra-curricular activities must arrange to submit critical analysis papers *early* should a scheduling conflict exist. Students who seek exemption after the fact will **not** be permitted to submit their assignments without penalty, as outlined above. Again, electronic submissions will **not** be accepted under any circumstances.

- 4) **Religious holidays:** "Any student who is unable to attend classes or participate in any examination, study, or work requirement on a particular day because of his or her religious beliefs is excused from any such activity. The student will be given the opportunity to make up the examination or work that was missed, to the extent possible, at the discretion of the instructor" (*CWRU Undergraduate Instructor's Manual* 1999, p. 11).

If you will miss class due to religious observances, you should inform me the class period prior to the absence and you must turn in your critical analysis papers *early* if you will be absent on the due date. Again, electronic submissions will **not** be accepted under any circumstances.

I reserve the right to submit a report "to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for such action as the dean considers appropriate" if I feel "a student is jeopardizing his or her class work by absence..." (*CWRU Undergraduate Instructor's Manual*, p. 11).

## **GRADING:**

Students will *earn* their final grade based on their level of attendance & class participation, six highest scoring quizzes, and performance on each of the critical analysis papers.

### Weight of the Course Requirements:

Attendance & Class Participation	40 points
Six Short Quizzes (@ 10 points each)	60 points
Unit 1 Critical Analysis Paper	30 points
Unit 2 Critical Analysis Paper	30 points
Unit 3 Critical Analysis Paper	40 points
Total Possible:	<u>200 points</u>

In constructing the grading system for this course, I have considered two things: (1) the highest point total earned and (2) the lowest minimum competence needed to pass. Therefore, the highest grade earned in this course will become the maximum score and final grades will be determined as the percentage correct relative to the highest score. For example, if the highest scoring student earns 180 points out of 200 then all other scores are evaluated relative to this. In this scenario, a student with a raw score of 160 would earn a final course grade of a “B” because she earned 89% of the highest point total. This system is not a “curve” because there is no set number of As, number of Bs, etc. It is possible for everyone in this class to earn an A—although typically a grade of A is earned by only those students whose performance on all assignments and in classroom discussions is truly outstanding.

Here are the highest point totals I will use to assign final grades in this course:

To earn a(n)	A	students need at least	90%	of highest point total
	B		80%	
	C		70%	
	D		65%	

These percentage cut-offs are absolute. Students must earn the minimum percentage of the highest point total listed for each grade; I will **not** “round-up” final grades. A student who accumulates 89.9% of the highest point total has earned a B—*No Exceptions*. I will **not** entertain requests to award additional participation points at the end of the semester in order for students to earn a higher grade; students are advised to put in sufficient effort during the semester to earn their desired grade.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS:**






As describe above, the Unit 1 and Unit 2 Critical Analysis Papers are due at the beginning of class (10:00 a.m.) on February 12<sup>th</sup> and March 26<sup>th</sup>, respectively, and the Unit 3 Critical Analysis Paper is due by 12:30 p.m. on May 5<sup>th</sup>. **Papers turned in after these times will be docked 10% per day late.** Papers will be considered one-day late if they are submitted after the specified time but on the due date. Late papers must be submitted within one week of the original due date—except for Critical Analysis Paper #3 which must be submitted by 5pm on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>. Papers submitted after these dates will **not** be accepted.

### ***EXTRA CREDIT:***

In the interest of fairness to all students, **No Extra Credit** will be awarded in this course; students are advised to put in the amount of preparation necessary to complete successfully the course requirements as outlined in this syllabus.

### ***CLASSROOM CONDUCT:***

It is my belief that learning cannot occur in a classroom environment devoid of respect. Therefore, I place the utmost premium on respectful conduct in the classroom, representing diversity, and acknowledging different experiences and opinions. As a student, respectful classroom conduct entails two things:

- 1) Engaging in classroom behavior conducive to lecture and the educational goals of your fellow classmates. Accordingly, students enrolled in this course will:
  - a. Arrive in class and be prepared to begin the lesson on-time.
  -  b. Turn **off** all cell phones, pagers and other electronic personal communication devices **prior to entering the classroom**.
  -  c. Turn **off** all MP3 players, IPODs and other portable audio/video devices **prior to entering the classroom**. Students will also remove the headphones, earpieces, etc. associated with these devices. Electronic recording of classroom activities is not permitted.
  -  d. **Stow-away** laptop computers, Tablet PCs, or other personal computing devices. Students are not permitted to take notes electronically in this course unless it is medically necessary and the student is registered with the Coordinator of Disability Services.
  -  e. Direct their attention to the lesson and participate in all classroom activities. Students will **not** read newspapers, magazines, books or other materials during class, unless directed to do so as part of a class exercise.
  -  f. Refrain from eating during class. Students may consume beverages during class, so long as they are not disruptive.
- 2) Engage in behavior that respects the opinions of all members of the class. At the core, this course is about socially controversial issues. I welcome differing political viewpoints and encourage students to share their opinions in a respectful manner that does not personally attack or belittle the opinions of others.

**Students who choose to engage in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom and repeated disruptions will be reflected in lower class-participation scores. I reserve the right to define additional behavior as disruptive as needed.**

These policies are designed to comply with the Standards of Conduct outlined in the *Case Western Reserve University General Bulletin*, which reads in part:

“A student enrolling in the University assumes an obligation to behave in a manner compatible with the University's function as an educational institution. It is clear that in a community of learning, willful disruption of the educational process, destruction of property, dishonesty, and interference with the rights of other members of the University cannot be tolerated. The University retains the power to maintain order within the University and to exclude those who are disruptive to the educational process.” (p.41)

I encourage students to read the Standards of Conduct policy in its entirety. The General Bulletin is available at <http://www.case.edu/bulletin/casegenbulletin04-06.pdf>.

### ***ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:***

“The University’s mission rests on the premise of intellectual honesty: in the classroom, the laboratory, the office, and the solitary examination desk. Without a prevailing ethic of honor and integrity not only in scientific pursuits but also in all scholarly activity, the very search for knowledge is impaired.... [E]ach of us must therefore accept individual responsibility for our behavior and our work, and refrain from taking credit for the work of others.” (from the *CWRU Statement on Ethics*, <http://studentaffairs.case.edu/office/judicial/policies/ethics.html>).

I strongly encourage students to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the University’s Academic Integrity Policy, including what constitutes an academic integrity violation (<http://studentaffairs.case.edu/office/judicial/policies/integrity.html>). It is my policy that any student found committing acts of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade in this course at minimum. There are no exceptions to this policy.

### ***OFFICE HOURS:***

Often students feel that office hours are a forum only for discussing difficulties in a course or contesting a grade on an assignment. While these reasons are appropriate, office hours need not be confined to such narrow tasks. Rather, I encourage students to also come to office hours to discuss a reading you found particularly interesting, ask about further reading on a subject, if you have questions about the material covered in class, or to simply talk about your experiences in this class and at the University. I would like each student to come to office hours at least once this semester. If you cannot make the scheduled office hours listed on page 1, please e-mail me to set up an appointment. Students with disabilities who are registered with the Coordinator of Disability Services (368-5230) and who may need individual arrangements are especially encouraged to make an appointment. *Please note that I respond to email only during standard business hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday –Friday) when classes are in session.*

### ***CONFIDENTIALITY:***

In compliance with *The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA), all confidential course materials will be provided directly to each student and will not be posted, displayed, or otherwise made available in a public forum. Although students may sign a FERPA Waiver consenting to the release of educational records to a parent, it is my policy not to discuss the grades or progress of any student in this course with anyone but that student, except as necessary to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Coordinator of Disability Services, the Academic Integrity Board, or other agents of Case Western Reserve University as outlined in this syllabus.