

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

- A. Department Information:
Division: Humanities and Social Science
Department: Sociology
Course ID: SOC 110
Course Title: Contemporary Social Issues
Units: 3
Lecture: 3
Laboratory: None
Prerequisite: None
- B. Catalog and Schedule Description: Careful examination of the social influences on human behavior focusing on social patterns and processes, structure and function, conflict and change in society and culture in general with emphasis on American institutions in a multi-cultural society and their relationship to global patterns.

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- A. Identify key micro and macro discrepancies between ideals of a society and their actual achievement, which is a basic definition of any social problem issue. Using the sociological perspective, place ostensibly personal problems into a larger social context, hence establishing the basis of social problems. Evaluate various social problems from the perspective of the main theoretical perspectives, functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, and postmodern. Evaluate the main reasons for studying social problems and explore them from the point of view of the sociological imagination.
- B. To analyze and apply sociological research methods such as field research, survey research, secondary analysis of existing data, and quasi and standardized experiments to the study of social problems such as poverty, drugs, racial and ethnic inequality, and crime. Evaluate how the data supports or detracts from the theoretical perspectives discussed in section. For example when discussing family and parenting issues evaluate data pertinent to marital status, labor force participation, childcare arrangements and TV viewing patterns.
- C. To recognize and interpret how social problems are shaped by culture and as well as social structure. To explore and critically evaluate how scientific data can be used by policy makers to construct tentative solutions to social problems. Draw inferences about possible principles for studying the future of social problems.

IV. CONTENT:

- A. The definition and four elements of a social problems, the role of the social scientist in studying social problems, using the sociological imagination to frame pertinent social issues as problems, the three theoretical perspectives (symbolic interactionism, conflict, and functional) on social problem, and guiding principles for studying the future.
- B. The individual in modern society: Alienation, Anomie, and Postmodernism. Functionalists' views of how social situations create individual social problems. Interactionists views of how individuals respond by seeking meaningful, even deviant, identities. Conflict theorists' views of how social problems are often the result of alienation, powerlessness, and self-estrangement. Postmodernism is explored as a break from the past, along with adolescent and youth suicide, and alternative futures.
- C. Definitions and types of drugs. Social consequences of drug use. Social control strategies and solution attempts. Sociological perspectives on the drug problem.

- D. The meanings of sexual conformity and deviance. Changing patterns of sexual behavior in the US. Sociological perspectives on sexual issues as social problems.
- E. Crime, law and prosecution. Measuring the extent of crime, violence and violent crime in the US. White-collar crime and juvenile delinquency. The criminal justice system. Sociological perspectives on crime.
- F. The sociohistoric perspectives on problems of race and ethnic relations. International comparisons; dimensions of the problem. The nature of institutional discrimination; specific problem areas; and sociological approaches to race and ethnic problems.
- G. Poverty in sociohistoric context. Poverty in international context. The definition and nature of poverty. Who are the poor? The impact of poverty on individuals, groups and society. Work and welfare. Sociological perspectives on eliminating poverty.
- H. The nature of sex versus gender. The biological argument versus the sociocultural. Socialization and sexism. Gender inequality in an international context. Newer identified forms of sexism. The social construction of maleness. Sociological perspectives on dealing with gender problems.
- I. The family in a sociohistorical context. Problems of divorce. The nature of violence, victimization and abuse in families and society. The need for and types of social intervention strategies.
- J. Educational issues in a sociohistorical context. Education in international context. The school as a bureaucracy. Education and social class. Educational problem areas and the improvement of education.
- K. Work in sociohistorical perspective; the impact of corporations on the work environment; multinational corporations and the global problems of working; problems of unemployment. Problems of job satisfaction; occupational health and safety. Work and the postmodern future.
- L. Health care in an international context; health care in a sociohistorical context. The social organization of health care. The nature of bioethics and life and death decisions. The AIDS epidemic; mental disorders; alternative perspectives on medicine.
- M. The nature of the global population problem; the link of population and environmental problems. Population, environment and global hunger. Coping with the limits of growth in advanced industrial societies.

V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. Lectures in basic theories, concepts and data.
- B. Read Text, CD's, DVD's and other media sources.
- C. Class and group discussion of significant issues and topics.
- D. Analytical/ critical thinking/writing exercises.
- E. Writing assignment/Application of concepts.
- F. Use Internet to find information.

VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Lecture: Wealth, poverty and social welfare as linked social problems.
- B. Reading:
 - 1. Read the chapter on Wealth and Poverty in the text.
 - 2. Read the essay on reserve b Herbert Gans, "The Functions of Poverty."
- C. Class and group discussion of significant issues and topics
 - 1. Class discussion: Discuss how and why many approaches to poverty seem to focus upon a blaming the victim mentality. Discuss whether individualistic or structural explanations for poverty are the most accurate.
 - 2. Group discussion: Divide the class into collaborative learning groups and have members of each group serve as informal experts discussing the problems of poverty and how they would eliminate it from the conflict, symbolic interactionist and functional perspectives.
- D. Analytical /critical thinking/writing exercises
 - 1. Collect sample newspaper, magazine advertisements and the Internet that show wealth, power, and prestige are used to sell products ranging from alcoholic beverages and jewelry to automobiles and houses. Evaluate the materials by developing an operational

definition of wealth, power, and prestige. Decide upon a conceptual framework: either conflict, functional or symbolic interactionist. Finally, evaluate both the instrumental (achievement, economic, political) and expressive (self-expression, affiliation and social acceptance, concern for others, and individualism) assumptions expressed by the advertisements.

2. Read article by Dawn H. Currie on reserve: "Decoding Femininity: "Advertisements and Their Teenage Readers." Now find advertisements in mens or womans magazines, the Internet or TV programs that target men or woman. Write out a one-page response that that points out how they are based upon the assumptions and cultural value patterns discussed in lecture and reading that conveys the message that " sex sells."
 3. Write a two-page paper discussing the issue of pornography or prostitution from all three sociological perspectives, functional, conflict and symbolic interaction. What would be the consequences for both the individual and society if pornography or prostitution were eliminated? In what ways would the US be a better society? In what ways would such changes create other problems for society? Gather materials from the Internet.
- E. Writing assignments/application of concepts exercises.
1. Write a two-page paper discussing drug use and abuse from the three sociological perspectives, conflict, and functional and symbolic interaction. Discuss which helps us best understand how class, gender and age play a part in drug abuse. Discuss which perspective helps us to understand why Heroin is on the upsurge with middle class students. Which one best explains why some fraternities consume large enough quantities of alcohol to literally poison members. Look for materials in the library and the Internet.
 2. Write a two-page analysis discussing why sexual orientation often becomes a master status for gays and lesbians. Discuss if this master status designation is more associated with how people perceive themselves or how others perceive them. Justify your arguments by referring to how macro level social structures contribute to micro level patterns of human behavior.
 3. Gather unemployment statistics from the Internet, the US department of labor, or a local unemployment office. Now write a one-page analysis and make some inferences about the characteristics of unemployed people, and which of the three theories (conflict, functional, or interactionist) best explain why unemployment persists in society.

VII. EVALUATION(S):

A. Methods of Evaluation

1. Objective examinations and quizzes (for lecture and text reading assignments)
 - a) Typical questions:
 - i) According to the text, social phenomena-such as new technologies-typically become social problems when:
 - 1) they systematically disadvantage or harm a significant number of people
 - 2) they are seen as harmful by a number of significant people
 - 3) the people most affected by the problem demand social change
 - 4) all of the above
 - 5) only A and b above
 - b) Compare and contrast functionalist, conflict, and interactionist perspectives on social problems. Select a specific problem such as unemployment and discuss how each approach might explain its causes, effects, and solutions.
 2. Analysis of writing and application of concepts
 3. Analysis of critical thinking and analysis essays

B. Frequency of Evaluation

1. Midterm, final exam and periodic quizzes
2. Immediate evaluation of all interspersed critical thinking and written assignments

VIII. TYPICAL TEXT(S):

Jacoby, Joe & Gotthoffer, Doug. On The Net Sociology, 2002. Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 2002.

Kendall, Diana, Social Problems in a Diverse Society, 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 2002.

Parrillo, Vincent N., John Stimson and Ardyth Stimson, Contemporary Social Problems, 5th edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 2002.

Holm, Charles and James Glenn. California's Social Problems, 2nd. Ed. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage publications, 2002

Simon, David R. and Joel H. Henderson, Private Troubles and Public Issues: Social Problems in the Postmodern Era. 2nd ed., New York: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 2002.

IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS: None