

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Department of Sociology and Social Work
Social Problems
Sociology 102, Section 1
Fall 2016

Instructor: Krishna Roka
Email: krishna.roka@uwsp.edu
Office hours:
 Tues: 1:00 – 2:00 PM
 Thurs: 1:00 – 2:00 PM
Office: CCC 478

Class schedule:
 Mon- 11:00AM-12:15PM
 Wed- 11:00AM-12:15PM
Room: CPS 229

Get Your CLICKERS

Course Overview

This is an introductory course on social problems. When you open a news website or a newspaper, what do you see on the main page? Poverty, unemployment, pollution, crime and violence and education are some of the major topics we read regularly there. Have you given a thought why some issues are covered more often and in depth over others? Why certain issues become a national spotlight ensuing debates and policy changes? How they affect individuals and families and what you can do to address them? These are some of the questions this course intends to help you answer. It will give you a sociological perspective in understanding social problems we encounter in our everyday lives. In addition, it will help you understand the nature and characteristics of social problems, make you apply multiple theoretical frameworks to understand social problems, enable you to evaluate and think about potential solutions to these issues and introduce you to major research approaches in studying and analyzing social problems. Although, the focus of the course is on social problems in the US, we will compare and cover issues globally. This global approach is important as we live in a globalized world. Throughout the course we will study social problems using multiple perspectives and approaches to identify the interconnectivity of social problems across countries.

The course will cover major social problems confronting us today. Some of them include poverty, inequality, health and illness, education, unemployment, crime and violence, pollution and environment, substance abuse, urbanization and housing. We will apply different theoretical framework to understand them, discuss potential solutions and explore research methods to study them. Furthermore, we will look at how societies define above problems, how individuals are affected by them and what the government has done to address them.

Expected Outcomes

The major objective of the course is to introduce you to the sociological perspective in exploring social problems. Using this approach, it is expected you will be able to:

- Distinguish a ‘problem’ from a ‘social problem,’
- Apply different theoretical frameworks to understand social problems,
- Identify causes and effects of major social problems on individuals and the broader society,
- Evaluate impacts of and solutions to a particular social problem,
- See the interconnections among social problems and the larger world using multiple approaches, and
- Understand the role you as a sociologist can play in solving social problems.

Required Texts (Available in Bookstore)

- Anna Leon-Guerrero. 2016. *Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action* 5th Eds. Sage Publications.

Supplementary book (student buy the book)

- J.D. Vance. 2016. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. HarperCollins.

Course Structure

To explore the various characteristics of social problems we will apply sociological concepts and theories. We will then use case studies to understand major social problems. Primarily the course will have a series of lectures from the textbook every week. I will add extra reading materials to support my lectures. Additional classroom activities include film reviews, news reports and discussion. Class presence and participation is crucial for good grades.

- **Book review:** Each student will write a 1000 words review of the book *Hillbilly Elegy* which will be due on **Week Ten**. Instructions and samples of book reviews are available in D2L website. The book for this assignment has been carefully selected to enhance your knowledge of the multidimensionality of social problems. Further details will be discussed during the class.
- **In-class assignments:** There will be several classroom activities during the course that will be graded. Examples include: review of news article, review of a video and more. Attendance and participation are therefore crucial to maintain a good grade.
- **Class Exams:** There will be **THREE** exams spread across the course. Each exam will cover the preceding weeks of reading materials (book chapters) and class discussion topics. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions. Further details will be discussed during the course.

- **Social Problem and Solution Poster:** In Week 5, I will divide the class into different groups of 5 students and each group will be assigned a social problem to find solutions. The group will make a poster that includes what is the problem, what are the causes, what are the impacts and solutions to solve it. The poster will be displayed in the lobby of DUC or other public space on campus in week 13.
- **Attendance:** To record your attendance I will use your CLICKER responses during the semester. Every week there will be questions integrated in the lecture that requires you to use CLICKER to answer them. Each response will be used to calculate your attendance at the end of the semester. There will be no excuses for missing a class, unless you inform me in advance about your absence.
- **Extra credits:** You may also earn extra credits (a total of **5 points**) by attending lectures and events outside the class. Submit a 1 page, single spaced review paper for each activity you attend. You will receive **1 point** for each event. Other ways to earn extra credits should be discussed with the instructor. You can use extra credits to compensate for missed points.

Grading Procedure

The final grade will be determined by your participation in class discussions and performance on the exams, news reports, classroom activities and the book review.

In-class activities (5*2)	10%
Class Exams (3*20)	60%
Book review	10%
Solution poster	10%
Attendance	10%
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Total	100%

The final grade will be calculated using the following schedule

Course grade	Percentages
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79
C	70-74
D	60-69
F	<60

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings and activities*
1.	Sep 6-9	Introduction What are social problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mills: Sociological imagination- The promise (Chapter 1)
2.	Sep 12-16	Understanding social problems Sociological perspective Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter 1 • Three main sociological perspectives (d2l)
3.	Sep 19-23	Problems of inequality: Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter 2 • Video 1: Poor Kids- PBS Frontline (online discussion)
4.	Sep 26-30	Problems of inequality: Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 3 • Groups for Poster
5.	Oct 3-7	Problems of inequality: Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 4 <i>Violence against women and girls</i> (d2l)
6.	Oct 10-14 EXAM 1 Oct 10	Problems of Inequality: Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 5
7.	Oct 17-21	Problems of institutions: Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 7
8.	Oct 24-28	Problems of institutions: Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 8 • <i>Is American culture to blame for failing schools?</i>- NYT (d2l)
9.	Oct 31- Nov 4	Problems of institutions: Work and economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 9 • Video 2: Inequality for all (online discussion)
10.	Nov 7-11	Problems of institutions: Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 10 • <i>US obesity report 2013</i> (d2l) • Video 3: Escape Fire documentary •
11.	Nov 14-18 EXAM 2 Nov 14	Problems of social world: Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 15 • Video 4: Mother: Caring for 7 Billion documentary

12.	Nov 21-23	Problems of social world: drug abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 12 • Book review due: HillyBilly
13.	Nov 28-Dec 2	Problems of social world: crime and criminal justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 13 • Solutions Poster (April 28)
14.	Dec 5-9	War and terrorism Student loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 16 • Video 5: Ivory Tower documentary
15.	Dec 12-15	Social problem and social action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 17 • War on Poverty after 50 years: Did we win it? • Rewrite/extra credit reports due (get approval from the instructor)
16.	Dec 19-22	Exam week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXAM 3

*subject to change

Class Policy

Attendance and participation: Class attendance and participation is important to this course. Both physical and mental presence during the class is critical to understand the topics in the course. There will be no excuse for absence, unless there was an emergency for which I will need a written explanation. During the course we will engage in discussing major concepts and active participation from students is highly encouraged. Despite the class size I will accommodate discussion when required. Late arrival and leaving early will be marked as absence and will result in negative grade.

Readings: Textbooks and other reading materials for the course have been carefully chosen. It is required for students to read them prior to the class. Reading assignments must be completed as required by the course.

Writing: For writing assignments, students must write clearly and concisely. Each paper should be written in a format with 1 inch margin, 12 size font, use Times New Roman font and include sources. A high level of writing is expected for the course. Written papers with grammatical errors, inconclusive logics, drafts, and poor structure are unacceptable and will result in poor grades. Students must become aware of plagiarism and cite sources used for the assignment. Any

evidence of plagiarism will automatically result in an F grade. A high level of academic integrity is expected throughout the course. For the UWSP's policy on academic integrity and plagiarism visit this link:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/Academic%20Integrity%20Brochure.pdf>.

Late submission: All assignments must be submitted by the time mentioned in the course structure. Late submission will result in negative grades.

Use of technology: Use of technology in the classroom is not required for the course. Therefore, use of cell phones, tablet/ipad, computer and other electronic devices are not allowed in the class. Students using electronic devices during class will receive negative grades. No recording of lecture is permitted without the instructor's permission.

Meeting: I welcome students meeting to discuss course materials and assignments. There will be a sign-up sheet in my office for you to schedule a meeting time during my office hours. You can also contact me to schedule a meeting outside my office hours.

Safe environment: The class strives for a safe environment to promote knowledge sharing. Disrespectful, degrading, or offensive language will not be tolerated. Any personal experiences shared in the class should remain confidential. UWSP Student rights and responsibilities document includes the policies regarding academic misconduct.

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Disability services: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>.

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability Services Office and inform me. I am happy to assist where necessary. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library) or the website:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/default.aspx> .