Sociology 230: Social Problems

University of Idaho
3 Semester-Hour Credits

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4RV: June/2012
4-SOC 230 - Social Problems
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Welcome!
Whether you are a new or returning student, welcome to the Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) program. Below, you will find information pertinent to your course including the course description, course materials, course objectives, as well as information about assignments, exams, and grading. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

Policies and Procedures
Refer to the ISI website at www.uidaho.edu/isi and select Students for the most current policies and procedures, including information on setting up accounts, student confidentiality, exams, proctors, transcripts, course exchanges, refunds, academic integrity, library resources, and disability support and other services.

Course Description
Contemporary social issues and personal deviations; crime and delinquency, poverty and wealth, drugs, sexual variations, racism, sexism, and the environment. U-Idaho students: May be used as core credit in J-3-d, social science, American diversity.

Recommended: Internet access, computer

12 graded lessons, 3 proctored exams

Course Materials
Required Course Materials


Course Delivery
This course is available online and in print. An electronic course guide is accessible through BbLearn at no additional cost. Refer to your Registration Confirmation Email for instructions on how to access BbLearn.

Course Introduction
This course is designed to introduce you to the realm of social problems and their proposed solutions. You will discover how social issues become labeled as social problems and how our belief systems determine the appropriate solutions. You will be required to write essays that are informed by the text and reader. Multiple choice/essay exams will measure your understanding of the subject. As you work through this course, remember that there is no social issue that is inherently a social problem. Our key focus will be to understand why certain issues become social problems while others do not. Welcome to class!
Course Objectives

- To have a clear understanding of how social problems are defined.
- To develop a social constructionist perspective in respect to social problems.
- To be exposed to the range of social problems that sociologists study.
- To become sensitive to the consequences of social problems to all aspects of everyday life.
- To understand how historical and political processes contribute to the recognition of, and proposed policies for, social problems.
- To develop critical thinking skills.
- To improve written communication skills.

Lessons

Overview

Each lesson includes lesson objectives, an introductory lecture, and a reading and writing assignment. The written assignments consist of four essays (worth 20 points each). All answers are to be written in essay form using complete sentences. Students should write in their own words when referencing authorities, and all quotations must include complete citations of the works from which they are taken. Do not copy from the textbook or any other book.

Each lesson includes the following components:

- Lesson objectives
- Reading assignments
- Important terms
- Lecture
- Written assignment

Study Hints

- Complete all assigned readings.
- Set a schedule allowing for completion of the course one month prior to your desired deadline. (An assignment checklist is provided for this purpose.)
- The reading assignments get heavier as the course progresses. Please plan your time to accommodate the reading assignment.
- The written assignments make up 45 percent of your grade. It is imperative that you follow the instructions below on how to write a strong essay for this course.

Reading Assignments

Every lesson will include reading a full chapter from Lauer and one or more readings from Finsterbusch. I suggest that you make several photocopies of the Test-Your-Knowledge-Form on page 260 in your reader (Finsterbusch). Fill out one form for each assigned article as you progress through the course.

Written Assignments

Essays will be evaluated on the student's ability to state the answer clearly, give an appropriate example, and discuss the relevance of the term or concept to the study of society. The best essays will include examples and discussions of the relevant terms and concepts and will be two to three paragraphs in length.
To help you get the most out of your essays, use the formula of **state, show and explain.**

**State** the answer to the essay question using the appropriate sociological concepts or issues.

**Show** or illustrate the concept or issue by using an example from the world around you.

**Explain** why this concept or issue is relevant to the study of society. In other words, why do sociologists study this issue or concept?

In addition, essays must be written using proper punctuation, grammar and spelling. Many errors can be caught with a simple proofread. Please send in only your best work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. See UI rules on this.

**Email**

1 **Formatting lessons:** Type the lesson directly into the body of the email, or type the lesson using word processing software, and cut and paste it into the email.

   - Do not send email lessons as attachments. Your instructor will not accept it.
   - Do not encrypt or zip email lessons or attachments.
   - Place questions for the ISI Office at the top of the email message, marked *Attn: ISI Office.*
   - Place questions or comments for the instructor in the body of the email, before the lesson.
   - Send the email to shawnahuggins@yahoo.com.
   - Make sure to fill out the subject line or your email will go into spam.

1 The subject line should include:
   - Your name
   - V number
   - Course abbreviation and number
   - Lesson number(s)

   **Example:** Jane Doe, V01010101, Soc 230, #1, 2

2 At the beginning of the email: **Example:**
   - Your name
   - V number
   - Course number
   - Course name
   - Date
   - Lesson number(s)

2 **Example:**
   - Jane Doe
   - V01010101
   - Soc 230
   - Social Problems
   - 1 July 2005
   - 1, 2

**Exams**

- You must wait for grades and comments on lessons prior to taking subsequent exams.
- For your instructor’s exam guidelines, refer to your *Registration Confirmation Email.*

Refer to *Grading* for specific information on lesson/exam points and percentages.

**Proctor Selection/Scheduling Exams**
**Grading**

The course grade will be based upon the following considerations:

Twelve Lessons (20 points each) 45 percent of final grade = 240 points

Three Exams (100 points each) 55 percent of final grade = 300 points

540 total points possible

Lessons will be awarded grades as follows:

**An “A”** will be given to essay answers that state the answer clearly, illustrate with appropriate examples, and discuss the relevance of the term or concept in a way that shows a clear understanding of the concept or term. "A" papers will be relatively free of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.

**A “B”** will be assigned to essay answers that use the formula state, show, explain but are missing a clear understanding of the term or concept. These papers will have some errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation.

**“C”** essays will show a weak understanding of the concept or term and may be missing one of the three steps of state, show, explain and/or these essays show a lack of proofreading.

**A “D”** will be assigned to papers showing limited or no understanding of the concepts or terms.

**An “F”** will be given to papers that show no informed discussion of the material.

Rewrites are not an option

Your instructor will give you a letter grade on each essay. You can interpret the letter grades as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
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Exams will be 60% of the final course grade. Each exam consists of 35 multiple choice questions (worth 2 points each totaling 70 points) and three essay questions (graded as outlined above) worth thirty points in all. **NOTE:** Students must earn a minimum of 225 points on the exams combined (a C average) in order to pass the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Earned</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>486-540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>432-485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>378-431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>324-377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 60</td>
<td>0-323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final course grade is issued after all lessons and exams have been graded.

Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating or plagiarism are considered a very serious transgression and may result in a grade of F for the course.

**About the Course Developer**
Shawna Huggins has been an instructor for Independent Study in Idaho since 1994. She also teaches courses at Southern Oregon University and provides seminars on SAT and college prep for local high schools. She tutors students of all ages in most academic subjects and loves to put on workshops exploring the science of Galileo, Newton, Einstein and DaVinci. Shawna is happiest when she's learning something new, so she enjoys the access to information afforded by the internet. She is an avid reader and also a quilter. Shawna earned her Baccalaureate in Sociology/Anthropology at Southern Oregon University in 1989 and Master of Arts in sociology at Washington State University in 1992. You can visit her website at www.learningisfun.biz.

**Contacting Your Instructor**
Instructor contact information is available in BbLearn.
Assignment Submission Log
Send the completed Proctor Information Form to the ISI office at least two weeks prior to taking your first exam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Projected Date for Completion</th>
<th>Date Submitted</th>
<th>Grade Received</th>
<th>Cumulative Point Totals</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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It is time to make arrangements with your proctor to take Exam 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam 1</th>
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It is time to make arrangements with your proctor to take Exam 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Exam 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>12</td>
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It is time to make arrangements with your proctor to take Exam 3.

| Exam 3 |                               |                |                 |                         |
Lesson 1
Sociology: Studying Social Problems

Lesson Objectives
1. Distinguish between personal problems and social issues.
2. Understand how social problems are socially constructed.
3. Explore how sociologists use theory (structural-functional, conflict analysis, symbolic interaction) to study social problems.
4. Gain an understanding of the research tools sociologists use: survey, field research, experiment, and secondary analysis.
5. Understand that sociological theories are ways to explain and understand society.

Reading Assignment
Social Problems, Chapter 1, "Understanding Social Problems," pp. 3-32
Annual Editions, Chapter 2, "The Myth of the Culture of Poverty," pp. 6-9

Important Terms
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Sociology</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Social Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Theoretical Approach</td>
<td>Norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural-Functional Approach</td>
<td>Social Institution</td>
<td>Conflict Approach</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic-Interaction Approach</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Field Research</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Social Policy</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Personal Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Issues</td>
<td>Sociological Perspective</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introductory Lecture
In our culture, we value individualism. We congratulate the successful on their achievements and blame the poor for their problems. The sociological study of social problems helps us to see how society itself affects how we as individuals act, think and feel and how the social structure has an influence on our life experiences.

We may look at a family in poverty and blame the family for their circumstances. We may believe that they are lazy, unambitious and uneducated. But, we may be wrong. The Sociological Imagination (C. Wright Mills) helps us to see how this family's situation has been formed by the social structure. You will learn throughout this course about the power of society to affect the lives of individuals and groups. In this course you will repeatedly be shown how social problems are socially constructed. This means that there are no social issues that are inherently social problems. Social problems are defined by those with the power and influence to label issues as problems. The sociological study of social problems focuses on how social problems are defined and labeled.

Chapter 1 provides you with the basic tools to study society. First of all, the sociologist must approach the study of society objectively. Sometimes it is difficult to be value-free in the study of society as we are all members of the population of interest. The sociological perspective encourages us to step back, out of our personal experience, and to view the world through social scientific lenses. In order to do this, it is critical to understand the basic theories and methods sociologists use. Theory and method must always go together. Methods provide the way to collect data, but theory is how we give meaning to this data. Basically, there are three general theoretical paradigms in sociology. In the past, sociology
The Formal Definition: Structural-functionalism is the most macro of approaches. It is also one of the oldest theories in sociology. Comte, Spencer and Durkheim are often referred to as the founding fathers of functionalism. Conflict approaches may be micro or macro and have their roots in the work of Karl Marx. Where functionalism assumes that parts of society work together harmoniously, conflict theorists argue that inequality generates change. On the micro level, we find symbolic interaction. Developed in the 1930s by George Herbert Mead and his students, this social-psychological theory has its philosophical roots in the work of Max Weber.

The Visual Definition: Understand that each theory sees society in a different way. I like to think of the theories as different colored sun glasses. When you "wear" your functionalist theory glasses (green - the color of living organisms), you see how the social structures of society work together for the benefit of society. Thus, you focus on how formal education contributes to the operation of society. You focus on how the family functions as an institution of socialization and sexual regulation, and how this benefits society, and so forth. When you "wear" your conflict theory glasses (red - the color of conflict), you focus on the consequences of the unequal distribution of education in society. You focus on the difference of financial power between men and women and the consequences of this for children of divorce. When you "wear" your symbolic interactionist glasses (purple - the color of feelings, meaning), you focus on the meaning of education to the individual. For example, what are the consequences to the student if he/she is labeled as gifted or challenged? You focus on the experience of family life and how men and women experience marriage differently.

The Popular Culture Definition: For those of you who are Star Trek fans, or have at least seen the original series or The Next Generation, here are some helpful tips: A member of Star Fleet Academy would define functionalists as similar to Data or Spock. Always asking, "What function does this serve? What is its function?" Always remembering that this is a macro level view (in the star ship looking down at the social organizations as a whole) so it keeps the focus on social structure, social institutions, or groups within society. A conflict theorist would be likened to Worf or the Ferengi. Worf is chief security officer. He would ask, "Who is in charge? Who has the power? Who makes the rules?" The Ferengi would say, "I have all the money and you don't, so how do I make more and what rules can I make that prevent you from getting what I have?" Again, this is a macro approach, so the focus is on the group - what group is in power, what group in in charge? Symbolic interactionist theory is very much embodied by Deanna Troy, the ship's counselor. She always asks, "What is the meaning? How do you feel? What is your interpretation?" This theory is set at the micro level (you are off the ship and interacting on the planet with individuals) which makes it very appropriate for Deanna's representation as she is a counselor. So remember, we focus on the meaning people give to labels, experiences and situations.

If you have yet another method of understanding these theories, please pass them on to your instructor. In the meantime, have fun with them.
**Written Assignment**

- Submit four written essays.
- The essay section counts as 20 points toward your final grade.

1. What is the Culture of Poverty? What are its strengths and weaknesses as an explanation for stratification in our society?

2. Identify, define and discuss four fallacies of critical thinking as presented in the text.

3. What is the difference between participant observation and the experiment method in gathering social data? Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each.

4. What is the difference between a personal problem and a social issue? Give an example and discuss.