



Course SOC 2320: Contemporary Social Issues
Professor Dr. Nicholas Vargas
Term Spring 2015
Meetings Mon & Wed 11:30am-12:45pm
Location JSOM 2.115
Text Social Problems, 2nd edition, Joel Best
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Professor's Contact Information

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Description: This course has been constructed to introduce you to the social problems process. We will pay particular attention to the steps that social issues take to become a focus of concern in our everyday lives. Why is it that some social issues receive little scholarly and public attention, while others are seen and discussed regularly? Social problems claimsmakers have a variety of ways that they can depict a given issue. The decisions they make influence the “success” and “marketability” of their claims, but audiences rarely hear about them. In the first part of this course you will be introduced to a ‘behind the scenes’ look at the construction, marketing, implementation, and effectiveness of various social problems claims. In the second part of this course, we will build from the social problems process to examine a variety of contemporary social issues in the United States. Topics may include health, residential segregation, education, incarceration, urbanization, the environment, and others.

Objectives:

- Understand claimsmaking strategies
- Apply portions of the social problems process to contemporary social problems claims
- Become a critical consumer of knowledge
- Evaluate the validity of social problems claims
- Devise effective claims regarding social issues

Course Requirements:

- 1) 8-12 Pop quizzes on assigned readings (20%)
- 2) Three exams—Multiple choice and short answer essay (20% x 3)
- 3) Essay Paper and Presentation (20%)

Pop-Quizzes

I plan on giving *at least* one reading pop quiz every two weeks. Quizzes ensure that you are prepared for class each day. Because this is a discussion oriented course, quizzes will make a significant contribution to your final grade (20%). It is imperative that you read the material deeply and come prepared for discussion each day. If you do so, you should fare well on the quizzes.

There will be no make-up quizzes. If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence (i.e., a signed document from a doctor stating that you were ill and that you were advised not to work or attend class) you can make it up by writing a 700 word response to the readings (or video) that you missed within three business days of your absence. I will not accept late papers.

On most days, pop-quizzes will start at the very beginning of class. If you are a couple of minutes late, you will have less time to complete the quiz. If you are 5 minutes late, you may not have a chance to take the quiz at all. Make sure to be on time.

Exams:

There will be three exams. Exams will be a combination of multiple choice questions and short answer essay. Make-up exams will only be permitted in extreme documented circumstances. If you know you will be absent on the day of an exam, discuss with the professor at least 2 weeks in advance of the exam.

* The second exam for this course is cumulative. In order to understand the latter stages of the social problems process, it is imperative that you have an understanding of the earlier stages.

Grading Scale:

The grading scale to be used will be: A+ 97-100, A 93-96, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 67-69, D 63-66, D- 60-62, F 59 or less.

Course Policies:

1. *No laptops, tablets, or phones may be used in class.* Recent research has shown that laptops and internet access impede learning in the classroom not only for the user, but also for those sitting nearby. If you have a documented disability that requires the use of a laptop, please see me privately after class the first day.
Source: <http://news.yorku.ca/2013/03/13/multitasking-on-laptop-impedes-classroom-learning-york-u-study-shows/>
2. *Students should adhere to the university policy for academic dishonesty.* Academic dishonesty of any form will not be tolerated. Pay particular attention to university policy regarding plagiarism.
3. *Students are expected to attend class and participate regularly.* Attendance is not officially graded, but pop quizzes account for a significant portion of your final grade. Moreover, classroom participation makes for a more enjoyable class for everyone.
4. For UT Dallas Policy related to the following go to:
<http://coursebook.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies/>

Student Conduct and Discipline
Copyright Notice
Class Attendance
Student Grievance Procedures
Disability Services
Avoiding Plagiarism

Academic Integrity
Email Use
Withdrawal From Class
Incomplete Grade Policy
Religious Holy Days

Assignments & Academic Calendar

Week	Topics	Readings	Important Dates
Weeks 1-9	Construction of Social Problems	Ch's 1-7 in Joel Best Various Articles in Reader	
W1: Jan 12-Jan 14	The Social Problems Process	Jan 12: Introduction Jan14: 1) Best (Ch. 1) 2) Blumer "Social Problems as Collective Behavior" *On Blackboard	
W2: Jan 19-Jan 21	Claims: Constructing Problems	Jan 19: No Class-MLK Day Jan 21: 1) Best (Ch. 2) 2) Zernike "The Difference between Steroids and Ritalin" 3) Huff "How to Talk Back to a Statistic"	No Class on Monday
W3: Jan 26 – Jan 28	Activists as Claimsmakers	Jan 26: Best (Ch. 3) Jan 28: 1) Meyer "How Social Movements Matter" 2) Freeman "On The Origins of Social Movements"	
W4: Feb 2 – Feb 4	Experts as Claimsmakers	Feb 2: Best (Ch. 4) Feb 4: Loseke & Cahill "The Social Construction of Deviance: Experts on Battered Women" (Social Problems article)	
W5: Feb9 – Feb 11	Exam Week	Feb 9: Exam Review Feb 11: Exam Day	Feb 11 W: Exam 1

W6: Feb 16 – Feb 18	The Media and Claims	Feb 16: Best (Ch. 5) Feb 18: Sternheimer “It’s not the media.” Video	
W7: Feb 23 – Feb 25	Public Reaction	Feb 23: Best (Ch. 6) Feb 25: “Crisis and Spread of Misinformation Online”	Feb 25 F: Proposal for Final Paper Due
W8: Mar 2 – Mar 4	Policy making and the Uses of the Constructionist Stance	Mar 2: Best (Ch. 7) Mar 4: Best (Ch. 11)	
W9: Mar 9 – Mar 11	Exam Week	Mar 9: Exam Review Mar 11: Exam	Mar 11: Exam 2
W 10: Mar 16 – Mar 18	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Weeks 11-16	Contemporary Social Issues	Blackboard Articles	
W11: Mar 23 – Mar 25	Student Loans and Education	Mar 23: E-Learning Mar 25: E-Learning	
W12: Mar 30 – Apr 1	Religious/Non-Religious Tensions	Mar 30 : E-Learning Apr 1: E-Learning	
W13: Apr 6 – Apr 8	Race, Policing, and Incarceration	Apr 6: E-Learning Apr 8: E-Learning	

W14: Apr 13 – Apr 15	Exam Week	Apr 13 :Exam Review Apr 15: Exam	Apr 15W: Exam 3
W15: Apr 20 – Apr 22	Presentations	Apr 20: Presentations Apr 22: Presentations	
W16: Apr 27 – Apr 29	Presentations	Apr 27: Presentations Apr 29: Presentations (Papers Due!)	April 29 F: Final Paper Due

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.