

Contemporary Social Issues (SOC 2320)

***Course syllabus is subject to change at the Professor's discretion.

Course Information

Course Title: Contemporary Social Issues

Class Section: SOC 2320

Class Location and Time: Online

Professor Contact Information

Zachary R. Simoni, PhD

Office location: Green Hall 2.232

Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday 2:30p – 4:30p, and by appointment.

E-mail: zrs160030@utdallas.edu

** Please craft e-mails that are professional in style and nature. It may take up to 36 hours to respond. I will not respond to emails after 7pm. **

Course Description

This course will provide an overview of how sociological concepts and approaches can be applied to the study of the causes and consequences of various social issues in contemporary society. Topics may include poverty, crime, violence, social isolation, urban decay, changes in the family, consumerism, and health disparities.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

- 1) View your world from a sociological perspective;
 - 2) Present alternative explanations or theories of social phenomena;
 - 3) Examine scientific research, various types of research, appropriate methods, technologies and data that sociologists use to investigate the human condition;
 - 4) Examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures, and cultures;
 - 5) Recognize the structural, systemic factors which affect the quality of life of persons of different ages, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disability, and racial/ethnic backgrounds;
 - 6) Encourage one to think for oneself by obtaining information through appropriate sources; and, finally,
 - 7) Consider alternative explanations and solutions for contemporary social issues.
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Required Textbooks and Materials

Lauer, Robert and Jeanette Lauer. 2016. Social Problems and the Quality of Life, 13th Edition. New York: NY. McGraw Hill w/Connect.

Course Requirements:

For each chapter, the LearnSmart lessons help students review material they read in the text. A quiz will assess the student's understanding of each chapter; and a film will provide students with a critical thinking opportunity to express their sociological imagination by writing a well-crafted 2-page paper using sociology to explain social issues in the documentary. Four comprehensive exams will evaluate the student's understanding of the material covered.

The course Blackboard site is organized into folders by chapter and week. Each chapter folder will be available the week the material is due. For each chapter, students will be guided through the reading requirements, Smartbook lessons, Powerpoints, critical writing opportunity, and finally the required quiz. A comprehensive exam over the chapters is posted in that week's folder when the exam is due (please see calendar). Below are outlines of, and directions for, each component for each chapter (LearnSmart lesson, critical writing assignment, and quiz). Information for exams are below as well.

Smartbook Lessons: There are **FOURTEEN(14)** Smartbook lessons assigned throughout the term. In each chapter folder, there is a link to the learning program. This program has been empirically shown to help students get the most out of studying for the class, by assisting students review the chapter material and apply/practice their new found sociological knowledge. Students will be required to complete all 14 lessons, but **only the top 12 grades will count towards one's final grade.** In other words, students may choose to only complete 12 assignments, but this is highly discouraged. Instructions to access and use Smartbook are listed on BBL under "course information" and a short guide is provided below.

Please follow these instructions **CAREFULLY** as failure to do so may influence the ability to record your scores. TM

1. Click on the Smartbook link located in BBL. Each folder should have a link to LearnSmart.
2. You will be prompted to register. Click "register now."
3. Enter you email address.
4. Enter your access code or click buy online. Your access code is the number printed on the card that came with your textbook.
5. Complete the registration form

Critical Writing: There are **FIFTEEN (15) critical writing opportunities** over videos/films throughout the term. You will be required to complete **TWO (2)** critical writings over the course of the semester. Only the top two critical writing grades will count toward one's final grade, so if you don't like a grade, you are encouraged to write additional commentaries, to increase your score. In addition, I suggest you write about topics/chapters you find most interesting. Each paper is worth 50 points. The purpose of the critical writing activities is to apply critical thinking skills to address the social problem addressed in the film utilizing a sociological lens. Critical writings are due each **SUNDAY** at 11:59pm the week they are assigned (but you are encouraged to turn them in early). Directions for the critical writings are located below.

The **FIRST** writing must be completed on or before **3/6, 2017.**

The **SECOND** writing must be completed on or before **5/8, 2017.**

The **FIRST** writing must be completed on or before **2/21, 2017**

The **SECOND** writing must be completed on or before **5/1, 2017**.

Each commentary is worth 50 points. The purpose of the critical writing activities is to apply critical thinking skills to address the social problem addressed in the film utilizing a sociological lens.

Directions: The critical writings provide students with the opportunity to properly apply the course material from both the readings as well as in class lecture. The paper should be a well-written full 2-page (double spaced, 1" margins, 11 pt. Cambria – or similar – font) essay discussing a point/perspective integrating the week's chapter reading material with the film. Papers should conform to either ASA or APA publication style, excluding an abstract. A superb paper would be well organized and focused. Remember you have limited space to make your argument, so being concise is paramount. Please see the information below for more clarification. Some hints to improve your grade are located below as well as a rubric to guide through the process.

HINT: *This is not a film summary*; you need to integrate sociological ideas from the text, not just summarize the film, or play film critic. I want to know you developed a sociological insight from the film, *not your opinion about the film*. Also, keep personal anecdotes to a minimum, and instead try to incorporate course material wherever possible.

HINT: Do not make your paper "longer" by altering margins, adding space between paragraphs, using a larger font size, or added phrases/statements/sentences that do not add quality to the paper. I grade these papers based on content and depth of discussion. This takes the average student approximately 2 quality pages to accomplish.

HINT: You are encouraged to write additional papers if you are not happy with a grade, taking my comments into consideration when writing your next paper. **Papers are graded on two components: writing and integration of course material.** See the rubric below.

Grading Rubric:

A= The paper is well written, integrates course material pertinent to the film while demonstrating the student has a clear understanding of the key concepts from the readings and in class lectures.

B= The paper is well written, the paper applies course material, however depth is lacking and some of the concepts are not well understood/addressed.

C= The paper is adequately written but hard to follow at times, mostly summarized the film and very little course material was discussed.

D= The paper is poorly written, and does not incorporate any relevant material.

F= The paper is poorly written and did not incorporate any relevant material. The paper relied on opinions and personal anecdotes.

Suggested Paper Organization:

First Paragraph: In a short and concise paragraph (3 to 4 sentences), clearly articulate the film's main sociological message and introduce the reader to the most important concepts.

Body of the Paper (2 to 3 paragraphs): Using course material, apply two to three concepts clearly articulating how they are related to the film and society in general.

Last Paragraph: In a short and concise paragraph (3 to 4 sentences), reiterate the film's main sociological message and clarify your application of course material.

Quizzes: There are **Fifteen (15) time-limited quizzes (10 mins)**. Each quiz consists of 5 multiple choice questions for a total of 10 pts. Students are encouraged to complete all 15 quizzes, but only the TOP TWELVE quizzes will be included in the final point tally (the three lowest grades – or zeroes if you skip a quiz - will be dropped). The purpose of the quizzes is to test your conceptual and factual knowledge about the materials that was covered in the chapter. These quizzes will not include material from the assigned films. Make sure you receive notification from Blackboard indicating that your work has been submitted.

Directions: Within each chapter, there is a link to a quiz. The quizzes will only be open from MONDAY at 12:00am through SUNDAY at 11:59pm of the week in which they are assigned. Students will only be allowed to take the quiz once. Considering you have the entire week, late grades are not accepted (see make-up policy below).

Section Exams: There will be **FOUR (4) section exams** during the semester. Each exam will cover 3-5 chapters. Each exam consists of multiple choice and short answer questions (4-5 sentences). The purpose of the section exam is to test your conceptual and factual knowledge about the section material covered. Lastly, make sure you receive notification from Blackboard indicating that your work has been submitted.

Smartbook Work	12 graded x 10pts.	= 120pts	97+= A+
Quizzes	12 graded x 10pts each	= 120pts	94-96 = A
Critical Writings	2 graded x 50pts each	= 100pts	90-93 = A-
Exams	4 exams x 50	= 200pts	

If you have any questions on the gradebook, please calculate your grade by hand, before emailing me.

Course & Instructor Policies

Communications:

All official email correspondence will be sent ONLY to the zrs160030@utdallas.edu address. All students are responsible for ensuring that the correct e-mail address is listed in Blackboard by the beginning of Week 1. It is your responsibility to make sure a valid email UTD address is provided. Failure on your part to do so can result in you missing important information that could affect your grade.

Drop/Add:

According to UTD policy, January 25th, 2017 is the last day to drop a class without a "W."

Accommodation of Religious Beliefs:

Religious beliefs shall be reasonably accommodated with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements. Please notify me in advance if there is a conflict.

Reasonable Accommodations:

It is the policy and practice of The University of Texas at Dallas to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. However, written notification from the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with me and allow one week advance notice. Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact OSA for a confidential discussion. OSA is located in the Student Services Building, SSB 3.200. They can be reached by phone at 972-883-2098, or by email at studentaccess@utdallas.edu.

Make-up Policy:

Because of the online nature of this course, I do not allow make-ups for quizzes, exams or LearnSmart and critical writings. I only allow makeups if there is documentation of a technical error or an extreme emergency. Documentation of a technical error entails an email from IT or a screenshot indicating the date of issue. REMEMBER, not all quizzes and critical writings are used to calculate final grades. Proper evidence of a medical emergency is required for make-up exams. Although I am aware that technical errors do occur with the Blackboard system, students must provide evidence of the technical glitch or error. In the case of a technical error, the student must provide screenshot evidence of the error with a message in Blackboard including the date and time of the error.

Academic Honest Policy:

Faculty expect all members of its academic community to function according to the highest ethical and professional standards. Academic dishonesty and misconduct includes, but is not limited to, acts of abetting, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and misrepresentation. Candidates are expected to honor the Academic Code of Conduct as detailed UT Dallas Student Catalog. Please consult this resource for additional information regarding the specific procedures to be undertaken when a student violates the UT Student Code of Conduct - UTDSP5003.

<https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003>

Let me make it clear: if you cheat or plagiarize you will fail the course and your name will be forwarded to the University Compliance Office. Please don't do it.

Reservation:

I reserve the right to make changes in this syllabus to better serve the class's needs. Any changes will be announced in advance.

Course Calendar on next page

Contemporary Social Issues Course Calendar Spring 2017:

Date	Topic	Weekly Objectives
Week 1: 1/9-15	Understanding the Social	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 1 LearnSmart Lesson 1 Chapter Quiz 1 Critical Writing 1: The Merchants of Cool (2003)
Week 2: 1/16-22	Alcohol and Other Drugs	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 2 LearnSmart Lesson 2 Chapter Quiz 2 Critical Writing 2: Chasing Heroin (2016)
Week 3: 1/23-29	Crime and Delinquency	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 3 LearnSmart Lesson 3 Chapter Quiz 3 Critical Writing 3: Prison State (2014) Exam 1
Week 4: 1/30-2/5	Violence	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 4 LearnSmart Lesson 4 Chapter Quiz 4 Critical Writing 4: Newtown Divided (2013)
Week 5: 2/6-12	Sexual Deviance	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 5 LearnSmart Lesson 5 Chapter Quiz 5 Critical Writing 5: Rape on the Night Shift (2012)
Week 6: 2/13-19	Poverty	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 6 LearnSmart Lesson 6 Chapter Quiz 6 Critical Writing 6: Poor Kids (2012)
Week 7: 2/20-26	Gender and Sexual Orientation	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 7 LearnSmart Lesson 7 Chapter Quiz 7 Critical Writing 7: Growing Up Trans (2015) Exam 2
Week 8: 2/27-3/5	Race, Ethnic Groups, and Racism	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 8 LearnSmart Lesson 8 Chapter Quiz 8 Critical Writing 8: A Class Divided (1985)
*****YOU MUST COMPLETE ONE CRITICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT BEFORE 3/6 *****		
Week 9 3/6-12	Government and Politics	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 9 LearnSmart Lesson 9 Chapter Quiz 9 Critical Writing 9: Immigration Battle (2015)

Week 10: Spring Break	Take a Break	Take a Break
Week 11: 3/20-26	Work and the Economy	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 10 LearnSmart Lesson 10 Chapter Quiz 10 Critical Writing 10: Is Wal-Mart Good for America? (2004)
Week 12: 3/27-4/2	Education	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 11 LearnSmart Lesson 11 Chapter Quiz 11 Critical Writing 11: Dropout Nation (2012) Exam 3
Week 13: 4/3-9	Family Problems	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 12 LearnSmart Lesson 12 Chapter Quiz 12 Critical Writing 12: Growing Up Online (2008)
Week 14: 4/10-16	Health Care and Illness	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 13 LearnSmart Lesson 13 Chapter Quiz 13 Critical Writing 13: Sick Around the World (2008)
Week 15: 4/17-23	War and Terrorism	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 14 LearnSmart Lesson 14 Chapter Quiz 14 Critical Writing 14: The Wounded Platoon (2010)
Week 16: 4/24-30	The Environment	Lauer and Lauer Chapter 15 LearnSmart Lesson 15 Chapter Quiz 15 Critical Writing 15: Climate of Denial (2012)
Finals Week: 5/1-7	Finals	Exam 4 due by 5/7 Please finish it early!!!

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