Course Description and Goals:

Overview:
This course focuses on contemporary social challenges confronting the United States, their meaning, significance, and possible resolution. We begin with a discussion of how “problems” emerge. How do “private troubles” of individuals become “public issues” of society-wide concern? Why do some problems recede from public attention and others emerge?

We focus especially on the way specific issues are “framed,” that is, included or excluded as the problem, what explanations are provided, and what remedies are proposed. Understanding the implications of the ways problems and solutions are framed can provide a foundation for sociological analysis of specific topic areas. We examine theories informing specific social problems, policy responses to them, and the implications of both the problems and policies for life chances and life quality. We also consider “emerging” social issues, locating contemporary social problems in the United States in larger institutional, historical and global contexts.

Requirements:
1. Class participation: 20% of final grade
2. Short essay: 10% of total grade
   What is one of the most important and durable social problems in the United States? Causes and definition: How did it arise and when? How has it changed? What are some of the factors that may have transformed the way it has been defined?
3. Short paper: 20% of total grade (5 pages, plus references)
   Drawing on assigned readings, provide a critical treatment of theories of one social problem, including the history of its development (definition and causes) and proposed solutions. More specific ideas for paper topics will be distributed in class.
4. Research paper: 25% of total grade (6 pages, plus references)
   Consider some social problem not adequately covered in this class. Find 2-4 research articles discussing your topic. Drawing on assigned readings, class discussions, and your own library/web research, how do sociological concepts and theories of social problems inform your understanding of this topic (and vice versa)?
5. Rewriting Research or Short: 10% of total grade
   Rewrite either the Research paper or the Short paper, based on feedback

6. Final Exam: 15% of total grade
   Comprehensive essay (short answer) exam drawing on lecture material and course readings. Potential exam questions will be distributed on the last day of class.

**Required Text**
***With Research Navigator***

**Recommended Text**

**Course Plan**
For each week’s readings, think about the following:

- What do we need to know?
- What is the problem?
- What is the context?
- What do we know?
- Who are definers? Framers? Change agents? Impediments to change?
- Global context?
- What are solutions?
- Alternative framings?

**Week 1: What is a Social Problem?**
Read Chapter 1: “Sociological Approach to Social Problems” pp. 2-21

Tuesday, September 7th
Thursday, September 9th

*Read for Next Week: Chapter 2: “Wealth and Power: the Bias of the System” pp. 22-52*

**Week 2: Alternative Perspectives on Social Problems**
Tuesday, September 14th
Thursday, September 16th

Week 3: Social Transformations, Social Movements
Tuesday, September 21st

Thursday, September 23rd

Read for Next Week: Chapter 19: “Progressive Plan to Solve Society’s Social Problems” pp. 562-582

Week 4: Framing: What are Past Social Problems that have been Solved?
Tuesday, September 28th

Thursday, September 30th

Read for Next Week: Chapter 14: “Work” pp. 401-431

Week 5: Framing: The Case of Work and Markets
Tuesday October 5th

Thursday, October 7th


Week 6: Framing: The Case of Population Aging
Tuesday, October 12th

Thursday, October 14th

Read for Next Week: Chapter 17: “Health and Health Care Delivery” pp. 497-527

Week 7: Framing: The Case of Health Care
Tuesday, October 19th

Thursday, October 21st

Read for Next Week: Chapter 9: “Gender Inequality” pp. 242-279
Week 8: Framing: The Case of Gender Inequality  
Tuesday, October 26th  
Thursday, October 28th  

*Read for Next Week: Chapter 8: “Racial and Ethnic Inequality” pp. 214-241*

Week 9: Framing: The Case of Racial and Ethnic Inequality  
Tuesday, November 2nd  
Thursday, November 4th  

*Read for Next Week: Chapter 15: “Families” pp. 432-465*

Week 10: Framing: The Case of Marriage and the Family  
Tuesday, November 9th  
Thursday, November 11th  


Week 11: Framing: The Case of Crime and Deviance  
Tuesday, November 16th  
Thursday, November 18th  

*Read for next week: Chapter 16: “Education” pp. 466-496*

Week 12: Framing: The Case of Education  
Tuesday, November 23rd  
Thursday, November 25th –No Class; Thanksgiving  

*Read for next week: Chapter 18: “National Security in the Twenty-First Century” pp. 528-561*

Week 13: What are Emerging Social Problems?  
Tuesday, November 30th  
Thursday, December 2nd
Week 14: Conclusions
Tuesday, December 7th
Thursday, December 9th

Week 15:
Tuesday, December 14th

Additional Recommended Texts—for more in-depth analysis
Elijah Anderson, Streetwise, 1999
Howard Becker, Outsiders, 1963
Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed, 2001
Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, Families that Work, 2003
Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 1975
Sharon Hays, Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood, 1996
Katherine Newman, No Shame in my Game, 1999
Thomas Scheff, Being Mentally Ill, 1984

Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor*, 1977


Useful Web References:

- AFL-CIO: [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)
- American Society of Training and Development: [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)
- Americans United for Affirmative Action: [www.auaaa.org](http://www.auaaa.org)
- American with Disabilities Act: [www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/ada.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/ada.htm)
- Census Bureau Homepage: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
  - [http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1mnboth.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1mnboth.html)
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)
- Centers for Disease Control: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- EconData.net: Your Guide to Regional Economic Data: [www.econdata.net](http://www.econdata.net)
- Economic Policy Institute: [www.epi.org](http://www.epi.org)
- Employee Benefit Research Institute: [www.ebri.org](http://www.ebri.org)
- Income Page: [www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html)
- Juggling Work and Family: [www.pbs.org/workfamily](http://www.pbs.org/workfamily)
- National Center for Health Statistics: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/)
- NewWork News: [www.newwork.com](http://www.newwork.com)
- Population Reference Bureau: [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)
- Progressive Policy Institute (work, family, and community): [www.ppionline.org](http://www.ppionline.org)
- Project on Global Working Families: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/globalworkingfamilies)
- Public Agenda: [www.publicagenda.com](http://www.publicagenda.com)
- School-to-work: [www.stw.ed.gov](http://www.stw.ed.gov)
- SLOAN Work and Family Network Literature Database: [http://library.bc.edu:4545/ALEPH/-/start/bcl03](http://library.bc.edu:4545/ALEPH/-/start/bcl03)
- Workers with Disabilities: [www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com)