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*SYLLABUS Spring 2010*

**Sociology 2031-2: SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

M/W/F 11 AM

Duane (PHYSICS) G125

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Instructor: Shelli Walker  
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**COURSE SUMMARY**

Using Joel Best's text *Social Problems* as our guide, we will employ a social construction approach that asks questions such as: How do certain conditions come to be social problems? Through what processes are social problems identified, assessed, and addressed? How are social problems communicated to audiences? What role do groups such as activists, experts, politicians, journalists, and the public play in these processes? As we explore these questions, we will be concerned with who defines social problems, what effect this has on how it is perceived, and why some social problems receive more attention than others do.

Social problems vary based on a society's history and particular structure. We will examine these processes by drawing on cases of particular contemporary social problems with a focus on the U.S. We will look for useful comparisons across social problems cases that help illuminate the concepts from the readings and lectures. You will have many opportunities to apply these concepts, and consider their usefulness as well as their limitations.

Material presented in this class may challenge values and beliefs that you have acquired throughout your life. Your own opinions can sometimes obscure the focus of sociology, which requires you to not only develop awareness of your own perspective, but also to shift your focus away from your own opinion to patterns in collective opinions and behaviors. I hope this course encourages you to reflect on your beliefs and question your assumptions as well as those of others. I also hope this material leads you beyond the realm of opinion to consider issues in a broader way and to learn how to apply sociological concepts and recognize larger patterns that will improve your critical understanding of current and future social problems.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Understand the social problems process and how to apply it to varied issues.
2. Consider the importance of media, science, politics, and the public.
3. Learn how to assess strengths and weaknesses of explanations for social problems.
4. Understand how sociologists research social problems.
5. Analyze major contemporary social problems in class discussions and assignments.
6. Gain tools for deconstructing patterns for various issues.
7. Reflect on the basis of your knowledge and opinions.

## TEXTS

1. Joel Best. 2009. *Social Problems*.
2. Articles as assigned, available on CU Learn course web site.

## CU LEARN

This course has a CULearn web site which students can access by logging in to CUConnect (<https://cuconnect.colorado.edu/uPortal/index.jsp>) and clicking on the “courses” tab, or by logging in directly to <http://culearn.colorado.edu>. Relevant materials and web links will be uploaded on a continuous basis, and students are encouraged to ensure they can access the site, familiarize themselves with the site contents, and check back at least weekly throughout the semester for updates, resources, and assigned readings.

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Midterm	100
Assignments/Quizzes	90-115
Papers	90
Final Exam	120
<b>Total points</b>	<b>400-425</b>

**ASSIGNMENTS/QUIZZES:** These are largely short-term assignments that will be assigned during class. They will often be assigned, completed, and handed in during the same class period, although a few may involve completion outside of class. They vary in format, and usually require familiarity with reading, although some will have right/wrong answers and others will receive points for thoughtful completion. I reserve the right to increase assignments/points if the class generally seems to require more in-class work to stay accountable to readings and be prepared to complete papers or exams.

**PAPERS:** There are 3 short paper assignments worth 30 points each for a possible total of 90 points. Papers should be a minimum 2 pages and maximum 3 pages in length and should not have a title page but must include references, follow style conventions, and use proper grammar. A link to sociology (ASA) style rules is posted on CU Learn. Additional specific rules and rubric information will be provided in class and will help guide these assignments.

**EXAM:** The mid-term exam is worth 100 points. This exam consists of a combination of multiple choice, short answer or open-ended short essays, and fill-in-the-blank questions.

**FINAL:** The final is scheduled for Monday, May 3, 4:30 pm – 7 pm and is worth 120 points. It will consist of a mixed question test in similar style to class exams. You will be notified in class if you need to bring a blue book or pencil, and more details on the exam’s format will be discussed in the two weeks prior to the exam. You must bring your student ID to exams.

**FILMS:** During the semester, we will watch films during class period as time permits. You are expected to participate in discussion on film content. Questions on films may appear in assignments, and on quizzes and exams.

Students must keep graded copies of assignments. If any grading discrepancies arise, students must be able to provide the graded copy in order to have the grade reviewed for adjustment.

## **CLASS RULES**

- + Please arrive on time to class.
- + Bring hard copies of readings to class.
- + Bring paper and a writing utensil with which to take notes in class. There will be discussions or possible in-class assignments that require you to have paper and pen on hand.
- + Notes will NOT be posted online. You are responsible for all class material, so if you miss a lecture, get notes from a fellow student. I encourage you to get to know at least one person from the class with whom to share notes. I do not give out notes.
- + No laptop use during class discussions or activities. Simply close laptops during activities, or you will be asked to do so.
- + Inappropriate use of laptops for non-class activities is strongly discouraged. Please show respect and a sense of discipline during class. Inappropriate laptop use during may result in suspension of the privilege to use your laptop during class for the remainder of the semester. If a general problem develops that results in inattentiveness, I reserve the right to suspend laptop privileges for the class as a whole.
- + All cell phones must be turned off before class. If I notice use of cell phones during class, you may be asked to leave the class.
- + Refrain from side conversations during class.

## **Class Participation/Class Conduct**

Complete reading assignments by the beginning of the class for which they are assigned, or as specified during class. Adjustments to reading assignments may be announced in class, and will serve as the correct deadline. All readings may be the basis for assignments or quiz/exam questions.

Class time is designed to discuss, explain, and complement readings. The reading material is essential to understanding and engaging with lecture and class discussion. Please bring in questions you have concerning the readings.

I expect participation in class discussion. I also expect students to be respectful to others. This means raising your hand, and refraining from talking over others. It is likely that there will be disagreements about how the world works, and how social problems should be addressed. In this class, disagreements should be handled with respect toward other opinions. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a civil and appropriate manner at all times in the classroom. Hate speech and defamation of any individual or group will not be tolerated, and will result in a serious reduction of a student's grade in the class.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students are also expected to follow the mandate of the University of Colorado's Honor Code: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/acadinteg.html>. Cheating in this class will not be tolerated, and will be dealt with in the most serious manner possible under the guidelines of the Honor Council. Failure to comply with this policy will be construed as cheating and violators will be immediately reported.

## TENTATIVE READING & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Quizzes and in-class assignments are not listed. Bring hard copies of articles to class during the week assigned. Readings subject to adjustment based on class announcements.

- Week 1**      **Introduction to the course**  
**Jan 11-15**    *Begin reading Best Chapter 1*
- Week 2**      **Knowledge & Claims**  
**Jan 18-22**    M 1/18 MLK Jr Day—NO CLASS  
*Read Best Chapter 1 (3-28) Wed*  
*Best Chapter 11 (325-336) for more on social construction*
- Week 3**      **Claims & Claimsmakers**  
**Jan 25-29**    *Read Best Chapter 2 (29-63) Mon*  
*Best Chapter 10 “Comparison” (293-298) Mon*  
*Week 3 articles*  
WEEK 3 PAPER DUE FRIDAY 1/29 – REQUIRED
- Week 4**      **Activist Claimsmakers & Social Movements**  
**Feb 1-5**      *Read Best Chapter 3 (64-96) Mon*  
*Shirky excerpt “Here Comes Everybody” Mon*  
*Week 4 articles*  
WEEK 4 PAPER OPTION DUE FRIDAY
- Week 5**      **Expert Claimsmakers—Medicalization**  
**Feb 8-12**    *Read Best Chapter 4 (97-105 only) Mon*  
*Conrad “Expansion: ADHD” (46-69) Wed*  
*Loe “New Prescription” article (4 pages) Wed*  
WEEK 5 PAPER OPTION DUE FRIDAY
- Week 6**      **Experts & Science**  
**Feb 15-19**    *Read Best Chapter 4 (105-124) Mon*  
*Michaels “Manufacturing Uncertainty” (10 pp) Wed*
- Week 7**      **Science, Corporations, Regulation**  
**Feb 22-26**    *Read Domhoff “Power at the National Level” article (9 pp) Wed*  
*Brown excerpt Fri*
- Week 8**      **Using Food as an Application**  
**Mar 1-5**      *Read Food folder articles as explained in class*  
WEEK 8 PAPER OPTION DUE FRIDAY
- Week 9**      **Review/Exam/Media**  
**Mar 8-12**    *Begin reading Best Chapter 5 (129-141) Fri*  
*Paul & Elder (1-16) Fri*  
**MIDTERM EXAM MONDAY MAR 8**

**Week 10      Media**  
**Mar 15-19**    *Read Best Chapter 5 (142-162) Mon*  
                  *Paul & Elder (17-27) Wed*  
                  *Week 10 Media folder as explained in class*  
WEEK 10 PAPER OPTION DUE FRIDAY

**SPRING BREAK MON MAR 22-FRI MAR 26**

**Week 11      Public Response**  
**Mar 29-Apr 2** *Read Best Chapter 6 (163-193) Mon*  
                  *Glassner "Culture of Fear" Wed*  
                  *Week 11 folder as explained in class*

**Week 12      Public/Polycymaking**  
**Apr 5-9**      *Read Best Chapter 7 (194-206) Wed*  
                  *Week 12 folder articles Fri*  
WEEK 12 PAPER OPTION DUE MONDAY APR 5

**Week 13      Polycymaking/ Social Problems Work**  
**Apr 12-16**    *Read Best Chapter 7 (206-225) Mon*  
                  *Week 13 Policy folder as explained in class*  
                  *Best Chapter 8 (226-251) Fri*

**Week 14      Problems Work/ Policy Outcomes**  
**Apr 19-23**    *Read Week 14 Problems work folder as explained in class*  
                  *Best Chapter 9 (260-276) Fri*  
WEEK 14 PAPER OPTION DUE FRIDAY

**Week 15      Outcomes/ Review**  
**Apr 26-30**    *Read Best Chapter 9 (276-291) for Mon*

**FINAL EXAM: MONDAY MAY 3 4:30 PM**

## ACCOMMODATIONS

### Attendance

Attendance will be tracked in this class in order to be available if issues later arise for which attendance would be a factor. There are **NO POINTS** associated with attendance. Please sign the attendance sheet. Understand that falsifying class attendance will be considered cheating, while the benefit from such cheating is practically nothing! Attendance in class is not graded and is up to you.

This class is fully enrolled. During the first two weeks of the semester, you must attend regularly to guarantee your place in this course. If you fail to attend two or more class times during the first two weeks, you will be administratively dropped.

To change your registration, check your add/drop eligibility, or obtain forms related to registration, go to:

[http://registrar.colorado.edu/Students/registration/registration\\_packet/drop\\_add.html](http://registrar.colorado.edu/Students/registration/registration_packet/drop_add.html)

It is your responsibility to know whether or not you are still registered in this class. Nonattendance does not constitute withdrawal. You need to adjust your registration. Unless you officially withdraw by university defined deadlines, you may still receive a grade and be charged tuition for classes.

### Illness/Absence Policy

There are two general cases when attendance can be directly consequential to a grade. This is when a student does not turn in an assignment on time, or a student must miss a class during which an exam or assignment takes place.

For Assignments:

1. Paper copies of assignments must be turned in during the class period when they are due.
2. Late assignments will not be accepted without a documented and verifiable emergency or an agreement made in advance.
3. Assignments turned in by alternate means (sent by email) without approval will be docked points equal to up to 15% of the grade.
4. Alternate arrangements must be made with me before the class during which the assignment is due; otherwise, penalties apply.
5. Missed in-class assignments are worth small point amounts but add up. Those with verifiable, excused absences should check in with me ahead of time or on the day of the missed class in order to determine the possibility and method for a make-up assignment.

For Exams:

1. If you **KNOW** at the start of the semester that you have something important scheduled which interferes with an exam date, please notify me during **first two weeks of the semester**, or as soon as you are aware of the conflict, but at least two class periods prior to the exam date.
2. If you are going to miss an exam due to illness or some other immediate emergency situation, you must contact me prior to or on the day of the exam (up to 5 pm) **AND** be able to provide documentation of your absence to ensure that you will be allowed to take a make-up exam.

Students are responsible for providing official documentation in these situations. Any make-up assignments or exams should be completed within one week prior to or after the original assignment, or in extraordinary cases, by another mutually agreed-upon time. Failure to follow these procedures will result in a 0 grade on the assignment or an F grade on the exam. While these policies will be strictly enforced, any documented and verifiable extenuating circumstance or emergency will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If something of a serious nature arises in your semester, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can determine the best route to help you complete the class, or at least to avoid any permanent damage to your academic record.

**Disabilities:** If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please provide me with a letter from Disability Services. Disability Services is located in Willard 322. Information is available at [www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices). Please be aware: There are strict rules about providing accommodations for disabilities that require documentation before accommodations can be extended.