

*SYLLABUS Spring 2011*

**Sociology 2031-200: SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

9 – 9:50 am M//W//F Humanities 1B80

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Office: Ketchum 35  
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**Goals of the Course**

The aim of this class is to create a meaningful conversation about the social problems of our times, and to give students the tools and practice to analyze social problems using a sociological perspective. This class will focus on how social problems are constructed. We will work through characteristics and processes that social problems have in common, as well as discuss specific issues. The social construction perspective argues that social problems revolve around how people think about them, how the public and organizations react to them, and how various actors and institutions work to solve them. Social problems are complex and dynamic. They often affect multiple aspects of society. Most problems have developed over time, and their current state is a result of many past decisions and actions. In this class we will consider how past decisions and actions inform the problems we grapple with now, and explore how changes in society now are affecting how we address problems as we move into the future.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**CU Learn / Online**

Students must use CULearn: <http://culearn.colorado.edu> to access readings, relevant materials, grades, and class announcements. Assignments will be posted online and you may need to turn in assignments via CU Learn. Plan to log in several times per week to keep up-to-date in the course.

**Required Reading**

Required reading materials are available on the CU Learn course web site. You may be required to make print copies of some articles to bring to class with you.

**Recommended Reading**

1. Joel Best. 2008. *Social Problems*. (CU bookstore or order online)  
The bulk of the lecture material is based on concepts that are explained in this book. Students who have more success with a book reference should definitely get a copy of this book.
2. Eric Olin Wright and Joel Rogers. 2010. *American Society: How it Really Works*  
We are using several readings from this book.

## Graded Course Components

COMPONENT	Points	% of Grade
Attendance	50	8%
In-Class/Online Work	100	17%
Tests	250	42%
Papers	200	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is tracked and is necessary to complete many assignments.

#### ***First Two Weeks:***

If you fail to attend two or more classes during the first 2 weeks, I reserve the right to drop you.

If you do not plan to take the course, dropping the class is your administrative responsibility.

Nonattendance is not a guarantee that you have been dropped. Ensure your enrollment status matches your intention by obtaining the forms at <http://registrar.colorado.edu/>.

#### ***Absences:***

You may miss up to 5 classes, or 10% of the class, for any reason, excused or unexcused, without loss of attendance points. You cannot make up any work completed in class on the day of the absence. Any scheduled assignments may be turned in on-time or late with penalties listed below. After 5 absences, each additional absence for any reason results in a 10-points deduction. Use your allowed absences wisely.

### IN-CLASS/ONLINE WORK

In-class assignments vary in format, but will include exercises for which you complete work alone or with others, often using class notes or readings to complete the assignment. These assignments are worth between 5-20 points each. Most of these assignments will not be announced, although some may carry over multiple class periods. Attendance is necessary to complete these assignments and receive points. All students will get “buffer points” equivalent to the value of one assignment, which will offset one missed assignment or bad score.

### TESTS

Tests are designed to evaluate your completion and understanding of the concepts and readings. There are 3 exams. The first is 70 points, the second is 80 points and the final exam is 100 points. Questions focus on general information: processes, and concepts rather than specific details about social problems. The question format is mixed, with more questions in a short-essay or long-essay style. Any material from readings, lectures, and films are fair game for tests.

### PAPERS

There will be 4 papers due in this class. Each is worth 50 points. Papers ask students to bring together concepts from the course and apply them to a social problem. Papers will be roughly 3.5-5 pages in length, typewritten, and include citations to materials from class. It will combine elements of the first two papers, adding information from the final segments of class to create a complete project. Specific instructions for each paper will be provided in class and posted.

## **General Assignment Information**

Here are some basic rules on handing in assignments, and penalties associated with failure to follow instructions.

- \* All writing assignments must be typed
- \* Writing assignments must be handed in using the method (email/post online/hard copy) specified. Failure to hand in typed assignments by the method specified without explicit permission from the instructor will result in a 5% deduction from the assignment. (Permission requires a discussion with instructor.)

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Except for in-class assignments, due dates are provided in the syllabus. Reminders are given in class. It is the student's responsibility to stay informed about the current assignments due in class. Any adjustments to these dates will be announced in class and posted online. In-class assignments completed during a single class are not announced in advance and cannot be made up later. For all other assignments, late assignments will be accepted as follows. Lack of knowledge about assigned work is not a valid reason for a further extension.

### **Assignments handed in:**

- ...On the day assignment was due, but after the class during which it was due has ended: - 8%
- ...By the next class period: - 15%
- ...By the end of day on next class: -20%
- ...After end of next class day but within one week: - 40%

Assignments are no longer accepted one week after assignment is due (end of class one week from due date). Exception: prior arrangements with instructor.

## **Making Special Arrangements**

Students may petition the instructor in cases where they have schedule conflicts with the date of a scheduled assignment. In general, alternate dates will be arranged in two types of cases: 1) arrangements are made with the instructor prior to the assignment's due date based on anticipated absences for legitimate reasons, or 2) a serious illness or emergency arises and it can be documented and verified after the fact. In the unique and rare case of an unanticipated, ongoing difficulty that affects a student's performance or attendance, the student should bring the situation to my attention as soon as possible. These instances will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Special arrangements are only binding after a student verifies arrangements through email with the instructor. Due to the number of students in the course, verbal arrangements are not sufficient to guarantee the terms of an alternate arrangement.

## **Preparation and Pacing**

Students are expected to perform college-level work. This course has a significant amount of reading. Tests are designed as a way to keep students accountable to completing the reading for the course. However, the more complex task is to apply and extend the ideas in papers. Students should prepare for this course by staying up to date on readings, and improving their skills of recognizing main ideas and skimming when appropriate. Note taking and following reading guides is also recommended. For the best performance in this course:

- Keep up with the reading. Stay within a week of the reading assigned.
- Take notes as you go on main ideas from lecture and readings.
- Complete questions from reading guides as you go.
- Start papers early.
- Take advantage of office hours.

## **Student Responsibilities**

There is a point where teaching ends and learning begins. My goal is to do my best to make this class challenging, relevant, and interesting. I know the class won't be perfect and I am responsive to questions, constructive comments, and feedback you have about the course. I'm happy to clarify any areas about which the expectations of the class are unclear. Whining is unflattering, does not create a fun class environment, and is discouraged.

## **GENERAL CONDUCT**

Know what is expected of your behavior in class:

- + Be on time
- + Pay attention/stay on task (no side activities during class)
- + Finish assigned readings prior to class for which they were assigned
- + Bring readings in hard copy to class when requested
- + Bring pen and paper for in-class activities
- + Use technology appropriately (see below)
- + Do not have side conversations during class lectures or films
- + Consider your comments: address others with respect. No derogatory comments.
- + If you have questions at any point, please raise your hand and ask.

The inability to conform to expected classroom conduct may result in penalties. Please be aware of these expectations and the consequences for failing to uphold them.

## **Appropriate Uses of Technology#**

Please respect class time. Use technology at appropriate times and only for class-related activities. I'm not interested in being a technology cop, but if you are blatantly distracting others or are inattentive in class due to your use of technology, the following penalties will be enforced.

### **Laptop use:**

Laptop users: Sit toward the back to avoid distracting those in front of you. Appropriate use during class is using the laptop for taking notes. Multitasking has been shown to negatively affect both your ability to participate in class and retention of material.

Inappropriate use can result in the following penalties:

- 1) first offense = point deduction and suspension of use for that day.
- 2) additional offenses may result in suspension of laptop use for remainder of course.
- 3) widespread inappropriate use by the class will result in suspension of all laptop use for all students in the course.

The enforcement of this policy is at my discretion, and will be determined mainly by the level of blatant, distracting, or inappropriate use that negatively affects the class experience.

### **Phone use during class:**

There is no appropriate use for a cell phone during class time. Penalties for phone use include automatic deduction of points up to 2% of your grade for any use during class. Additional use may result in student being asked to leave the class. Chronic repeat misconduct will be reported as "disruptive behavior" according to CU guidelines on classroom behavior:

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html>

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to follow the mandate of the University of Colorado's Honor Code: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/acadinteg.html>. Cheating 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.

### **Grade Discrepancies**

Students must keep graded copies of any returned assignments. On group assignments, it is the student's responsibility to coordinate with group members in order to obtain a copy of the graded assignment. If any grading discrepancies arise, students must be able to provide the graded copy in order to have the grade reviewed for adjustment. Incorrectly recorded grades do occasionally happen. I will be happy to correct any errors and discrepancies should be brought to me ASAP.

### **Disabilities**

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please seek assistance from the university's Disability Services, located in Willard 322. Information is also available at <http://colorado.edu/disabilityservices>. To receive accommodations, students must provide me with a letter from Disability Services. There are strict rules about providing accommodations for disabilities. Documentation is required before accommodations can be extended. Once you have your letter indicating accommodations, please

come to see me during office hours or by appointment if you would like to discuss your arrangements or arrange any scheduling your accommodation may call for.

### Course Concerns

If you have any questions or encounter difficulties with any aspect of the class, I encourage you to contact me to discuss it. Come to my office hours, make an appointment, or email me. I am available and genuinely want you to enjoy the class, be challenged, and succeed at the course.

### Course Grade

Grading is on a straight scale (no curve). There are +/- designations. The attendance policy is explained above. There are also buffer points for assignments, explained above. Grades will be posted on CU Learn. You can figure out your grade at any point in time using your scores out of the total possible points.

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>Percent of Final Points</b>
A	93% or higher
A-	90-92%
B+	88-89%
B	83-87%
B-	80-82%
C+	78-79%
C	73-77%
C-	70-72%
D+	68-69%
D	63-67%
D-	60-62%
F	<60%

Note that grades are rounded based on the first decimal place.

## TENTATIVE READING & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Quizzes and in-class assignments are not listed. In-class assignments spanning multiple days will be announced in class with notices posted on CU Learn. Readings, film showings, and scheduled due dates are subject to adjustment. If adjustments are made, they will be announced in class.

WEEK & TOPIC	READINGS & DUE DATES
Week 1: January 10-14 Introduction to Social Problems	W: Syllabus W: Best Ch 1 Social Problems Process F: Best Ch 11 Uses of Constructionist Stance F: <b>Complete opening assignment</b>
Week 2: January 17-21 Knowledge & Claims	<b>M: NO CLASS: LABOR DAY</b> W: American Society Ch 1 Perspective & Values F: American Society Ch 2 What Kind of Society
Week 3: January 24-28 Breaking Down Claims	M: Best Ch 2 Claims W: Fallacy Handout F: <i>Stat Spotting</i> reading
Week 4: January 31-February 4 Activist Claimsmakers & Social Movements	M: Loseke "Claims-Makers and Audience" W: Drinking Age readings F: Marijuana and Drinking reading <b>PAPER 1 DUE Friday</b>
Week 5: February 7-11 Claimsmaking & Technology	M: Guest Speaker Scheduled-Questions Due W: Christiansen: Social Movements handout F: Shirky: <i>Here Comes Everybody</i> excerpt
Week 6: February 14-18 Experts, Evidence, & Science	M: <b>TEST 1 Monday</b> W: F: Loe "Prescription", Best "Experts-Medicalization"
Week 7: February 21-25 Capitalism, Power, & Corporations	M: Seethaler: Lies & Science chapter 8 W: Film excerpt: <i>The Corporation</i> American Society "Concentrated Power" F: American Society Ch 5 "Environment"
Week 8: February 28-March 4 Power, Experts, & Environment	M: Heiner "Problems-Environment" Domhoff "Who Rules America" W: Film F: King "When Markets Become Contentious" <b>PAPER 2 DUE Wednesday</b>
Week 9: March 7-11 Food Industry	M: Nestle <i>Food Politics</i> excerpt W & F: Film

Week 10 March 14-18 Media/Public Response	M: <b>TEST 2 Monday</b> W & F: Sociology of the News: Media Effects
<i>SPRING BREAK MARCH 21 – 25</i>	
Week 11 March 28 – April 1 Public Response/Exam/Polycymaking	M: Warr: Safe At Home, Heiner media W: Best: Public Opinion F: Wealth Gap Yawns
Week 12 April 4-8 Polycymaking/Social Problems Work	M: Sunstein: Going to Extremes W: American Society: Democracy as Value F: American Society: Why We Vote <b>PAPER 3 DUE Friday</b>
Week 13 April 11-15 Polycymaking- Homelessness	M: Best Ch 8 “Social Problems Workers” W & F: Gladwell article, Kertesz article, NAEH Chronic Homeless handout F: Tentative Guest Speaker-Questions Due
Week 14 April 18-22 Policy Outcomes-Poverty, Education	M: American Society: Poverty & Economy W: Best Ch 9 (276-291, 15 pp) F: American Society: Race, Poverty & Education reading
Week 15 April 25-29 Education/Outcomes/ Review	M: How Schools Really Matter, No Child Left Behind articles W: <b>PAPER 4 DUE Wednesday</b> F: Possible Review Assignment
<b>F INAL EXAM: TUESDAY MAY 3 1:30-4 PM</b>	