

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Fall 2020

Professor: Joanna Kempner

Department of Sociology

Sociology 01:920:103:01

Monday Lecture: 3:55-5:15PM on Zoom, Recorded and Saved on Canvas

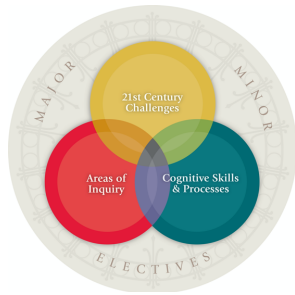
Wednesday Office Hours: 3:55-5:15PM, on Canvas

Email: jkempner@sociology.rutgers.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We are asked to confront “social problems” every day: those issues, situations, behaviors and ideas, which are perceived and labeled as problematic and for which a solution is seen as possible and necessary. In this class, we will be learning about some of these social problems. But we will also be learning about what constitutes a social problem. Who, for example, defines what a social problem is? Why do some social problems receive so much attention, while others are ignored? And what are the impacts of defining social problems in a particular way? We will examine these questions drawing on case studies of contemporary issues, like inequality, racism, mass incarceration, health care, climate change, and of course, covid and the pandemic.

CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING GOALS



This course meets the following core curriculum requirements:

- Analyze contemporary issues of social justice.
- Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The best way to reach me is by email. Please write “Soc 103” in the subject line so that I recognize your email quickly. Don’t forget to sign your name in the email. If, for some reason, you do not hear back from me in 48 hours, please feel free to write again – sometimes my emails do get lost in the rush!

REQUIRED READINGS AND FILMS

I have worked hard to use low-cost or freely accessible materials for this class. Please contact me if you have *any* trouble accessing materials.

- 1) Readings marked with an asterisk (*) can be located on the course website (Canvas) under Files. Links to readings can also be found in each Module.
- 2) Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 from A Sociology Experiment
Each chapter costs \$1 and can be purchased online. Register as a student on <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>. Each chapter comes with an audio version and interactive study guides.
- 3) Sometimes, instead of readings, I have assigned a film to watch. I have provided links to the films. While all of these movies are available to stream from Rutgers' libraries, you may sometimes find it easier to use Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc.
- 4) Links to other interactive material can be found on the course syllabus. Please notify me if you are having trouble accessing the text.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

“We are living in uncertain times.” – Understatement about 2020

Let's be flexible with each other.

Most of us are new to online learning and many of us didn't choose this format. Let me know if you are struggling. And given our constantly changing political, economic and social circumstances, I may make adjustments to the course as needed.

LECTURES & COURSE READINGS

Classrooms are always the most inspiring when there's room for interaction, debate and constructive engagement. Let's transform our digital classroom into a dialogue about the most pressing issues of our time.

Our dialogue begins with course material. We will read the occasional textbook, but we'll also read original research, longform journalism, and news excerpts detailing current events. I've also assigned documentaries, podcasts, games, and interactive tools. I'm providing a broad array of materials because I want to teach you the sociological tools and concepts that will help you understand social problems, but I also want to ensure you have a chance to practice your new skills.

Every Monday, please join me for a lecture/discussion during our regular class time (3:55-5:15PM). Lectures are designed to explain and complement the reading materials, but you will be tested on reading material even if we do not cover it in class. Assigned material must be read prior to class.

I do ask questions during these presentations. Please participate! Your questions and comments make the class work better for everyone.

Lectures will happen via Zoom and will be recorded and shared on course website for those who prefer to watch on your own time. Attendance is recommended, but not mandatory.

DISCUSSION FORUMS

Discussion forums are an important space for working through new course material. As you can see on the course site, I have already assigned you to a discussion group. Please introduce yourself to your group members.

Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to participate in four discussion-based assignments. Most of the assignments require at least two posts: an original submission in response to the assignment and then, a few days later, a response to somebody else's post. Rubrics have been provided and due dates are clearly marked on the syllabus.

When writing posts, please remember basic netiquette.

- Make posts that are on topic and within the scope of the course material.
- Take your posts seriously and review and edit your posts before sending.
- Be as brief as possible while still making a thorough comment.
- Always give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source.
- Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying.
- Don't repeat someone else's post without adding your own contribution.
- Avoid short, generic replies such as, "I agree." You should include why you agree or add to the previous point.
- Always be respectful of others' opinions even when they differ from your own.
- When you disagree with someone, you should express your differing opinion in a respectful, non-critical way.
- Do not make personal or insulting remarks.
- Be open-minded.

RESPONSE PAPERS

Response papers allow you an opportunity to reflect on course material. I have assigned four response papers. Each response paper has a different set of instructions. Some response papers ask you to think sociologically about an assigned video or a set of readings. Other response papers ask you to reflect on your experiences in class or your time during the pandemic. Response Papers should be concise—no longer than a page of text. I have provided detailed instructions and a rubric for each response paper.

QUIZZES

There are six assigned quizzes. Quizzes are designed to assess your basic understanding of content. I will not be testing rote memorization, but instead will be assessing whether you understand general concepts. I provide study guides. Quizzes are not cumulative.

Assignment Schedule

Activity or Major Assignment	Due Date
Discussion Forum (introduction)	9/6
Discussion Forum 1	9/17 – 9/20
Quiz 1	9/20
Response Paper 1	10/4
Quiz 2	10/4
Response Paper 2	10/11
Quiz 3	10/18
Discussion Forum 2	10/25
Discussion Forum 3	10/25 – 11/1
Quiz 4	11/1
Response Paper 3	11/8
Response Paper 4	11/22
Quiz 5	11/23
Discussion Forum 4	12/3 – 12/6
Quiz 6	12/14

GRADES

Your grade will be calculated from your performance on your Discussion Forums, Response Papers and Quizzes. I will drop your lowest grade in each of these categories.

Grades will be weighted:

Discussion Forums=25%

Response Papers=25%

Quizzes=50%

Grades (as a percentage)

A 90-100

B+ 86-89

B 80-85

C+ 76-79

C 70-75

D 61-69

F 60 or below

Final grades are *non-negotiable*.

CLASS CONDUCT AND GROUND RULES

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. The University Code of Student Conduct is at <http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/disciplinary-processes/university-code-of-student-conduct/>

Social problems are often controversial and inevitably somebody will voice an opinion that you find disagreeable or even offensive. In this classroom, we will agree to respect each other, even if we don't like what each other has to say about the world. That means that we can disagree, but we must do so respectfully. You are encouraged to comment, question, or critique an idea, but you are not to attack an individual.

In addition, the Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances. Working as a community of learners, we can build a polite and respectful course community.

At times this semester we will be discussing events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have about material that may be particularly challenging for you. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork.

WELLNESS STATEMENT

As your sociology professor, I very much want to see you learn about the social world and healthcare. But more than anything else, I want to make sure that you are taking care of yourself. Yes, you need to do well in college, but I recognize that you have multiple competing pressures in your life – especially those of you who work long hours to afford this education.

I plan to challenge you in this class. I am assigning rigorous readings and regular writing assignments that will challenge your thinking. By the end of the semester, you should feel proud of all we accomplished here. But this work cannot come at the expense of your wellbeing. Working until exhaustion is not a badge of honor. Research shows that it's usually the students with the most cultural capital (i.e., the students who probably need the least amount of help) who talk to their professors when their lives get difficult. If you are struggling—for whatever reason—come talk to me. Let's get on top of whatever's ailing you before it's all too much. We got this.

Intellectual Property Statement

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. In the event that I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Rutgers Learning Centers

<https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>

The Learning Centers provide centralized academic support services to cultivate students' skills, strategies, and behaviors that lead to academic persistence and lasting success. (Including test-taking skills!)

- **Accommodating Special Circumstances:** I will receive copies of any letters of accommodation from the Office of Disability Services, but you are free to consult with me directly if you feel comfortable. You can also reach out to me if you have any special needs (defined broadly) that may make participation in the class difficult—this can include learning disabilities, parenthood, athletic obligations, employment, traumatic experiences etc. I am also open to suggestions to make our class more accessible. Here's the contact information for the Office of Disability Services:

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/> The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

On Mental Health and Wellbeing: This class should be hard on your intellect, but not on your emotional health! Here are some campus resources to help cope with the pressure and stresses you might be experiencing:

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e> Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ rhscaps.rutgers.edu/ CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community.

Scarlet Listeners (732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

- If you need help navigating violence in a relationship, or if you have found yourself dealing with other forms of sexual or relationship violence or stalking, please know that the Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance Office is here to help you.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I follow the Rutgers University's policy on academic integrity. You can familiarize yourself with this policy at this website:

http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated and I am obligated to report such conduct and violations of this policy to the Undergraduate Director of the Sociology Department and the Dean of your college.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

Module 1: Course Introduction

Sep 2: Welcome and Overview of the Course

Do: Familiarize yourself with the course site

Join: Lecture/Discussion on September 2nd

Discussion Forum (Ungraded): Introductions

Module 2: Thinking Like a Sociologist

Week of Sep 7 & 9: Social Structure and the Individual

Read:

Judith Halasz and Peter Kaufman, "Social Structure and the Individual," Chapter 3. Purchase for \$1 here: <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>

Join: Lecture/discussion on September 8th

*Note change in date due to Labor Day

Week of Sep 14 & 16: The Social Construction of Social Problems

Read:

Joel Best, Chapter 1, pp. 3-14

*Stefanie Mollborn, "Children" having Children

Join: Lecture/discussion on September 14th

Discussion Forum 1:

Submit first response by Sep 17th. Follow-up by Sep 20th

Quiz 1. Due Sunday, September 20, at 11:55pm

Module 3: Social Problems as Claims

Week of Sep 21 & 23: The Anatomy of a Claim – The American Dream

Read:

*Joel Best, Chapter 2

*Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel & Dimed* on the working poor

* Ben Casselman. (12/8/16). "Inequality Is Killing the American Dream." FiveThirtyEight.

Join: Lecture/Discussion on September 23rd*

Note the day change

Watch: Mini-Lecture, posted on Canvas

Week of Sep 28 & 30: Social Class, Inequality, and Poverty

Read:

Peter Kaufman, and Paltz Todd Schoepflin, *Social Class, Inequality and Poverty*.

Purchase for \$1 here: <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>

*David Leonhardt. (12/8/16). “The American Dream, Quantified At Last.” *The New York Times*.

Play: <http://playspent.org/html/>

Join: Lecture/Discussion on September 28

Response Paper 1, due October 4th at 11:55pm:

Quiz 2 Due Sunday, October 4th, at 11:55pm

Module 4: Race and Gender Inequality in America

Week of Oct 5 & 7: Race in America

Read:

Rayshawn Ray, Patrick Sharkey, “Race and Ethnicity,” Chapter 7.

Purchase for \$1 here: <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>

*Bonilla-Silva, “Racism without Racists”

*Chris Mooney, “Across America, Whites are Biased and they Don’t Even Know It.”

Join: Lecture/Discussion on Oct 5th

Do: Take the demonstration test called “Race (‘Black – White’ IAT).” Next take the “Arab-Muslim” IAT.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>

Do: Record your results from both IAT tests on Canvas by October 14th, 10pm.

Response Paper 2, due October 11th by 11:55pm:

Week of Oct 12 & Oct 14: Gender Discrimination

Read:

Angela Barian, Todd Schoepflin, “Gender & Sexuality,” Chapter 6. Pp. 1-27

Purchase for \$1 here: <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>

*AAUW, “The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap”

Join: Lecture/Discussion on October 12th

Quiz 3, Due Sunday, October 18th, at 11:55pm

Module 5: Social Movements – How to Change the World

Week of Oct 19 & 21st: Social Movement Theory and the Gay Rights Movement

Read:

*Best, Chapter 3

Join: Lecture/Discussion on October 19th

Watch: “How to Survive a Plague”

Available to stream from Rutgers Library

Discussion Forum 2: Study Guide for Movie.

Check-in with group early. Complete Guide due Oct 25th

Week of Oct 26th and Oct 28th: #BlackLivesMatter

Read:

*Jill Lepore, “The Invention of the Police,” *The New Yorker*. *You may also choose to listen to this:*

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-invention-of-the-police>

*Bruce Western – Inequality, Crime, and the Prison Boom (34-51)

*Deadly Force in Black and White

Join: Lecture/Discussion on October 26th

Watch: NYTimes – The Scars of Stop and Frisk

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000001601732/the-scars-of-stop-and-frisk.html>

Listen: Michelle Alexander: “Jim Crow Still Exists in America”

<https://www.npr.org/2012/01/16/145175694/legal-scholar-jim-crow-still-exists-in-america>

Discussion Forum 3:

Submit first response by Oct 29th. Follow-up by Nov 1st

Quiz 4, Due Sunday, November 1st, at 11:55pm

Module 6: Gratitude And Vote!

Week of Nov 2 and Nov 4: Gratitude

Read:

*How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain

*The Neuroscience Behind Gratitude

Join:

Guest Speaker on Gratitude, November 2nd

Response Paper 3, Due November 8th by 10pm

Module 7: American Healthcare in Crisis

Week of Nov 9th and 11th: Access to Healthcare

Read:

*Kant Patel, Healthcare Politics and Policy in America, 4th Edition, pp. 355-

Join: Lecture/Discussion on November 9th

Week of Nov 16th & Nov 18th: Health and inequality

Watch: Unnatural Causes, Episode One

http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/episode_descriptions.php

Available to stream from Rutgers Library

Read:

*Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “The Black Plague,” The New Yorker

You can also choose to listen to this article here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-black-plague>

*Katherine J. Wu, “Study of 17 Million Identifies Crucial Risk Factors for Coronavirus Deaths”

Join: Lecture/Discussion on November 16th

Response Paper 4: Pandemic Diary, due November 22nd by 10pm

Quiz 5, Due Monday, November 23rd, at 11:55pm

Nov 23rd: Take Thanksgiving Week Off!

Module 8: Contentious Policies/Experts as Claimsmakers

Week of Nov 30th & Dec 2nd: Why is Climate Change in Doubt? Are Vaccines Next?

Read: *Joel Best, Experts as Claimsmakers

Watch: “Merchants of Doubt”

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3675568/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Available to stream from Rutgers Library

Join: Lecture/Discussion on November 30th

Discussion Forum 4:

Submit first response by Dec 3rd. Follow-up by Dec 6th

Week of Dec 7 & 9: Homelessness and the Politics of Deservingness

Read:

*Malcolm Gladwell, Giving Homes to the Homeless

Join: Lecture/Discussion on December 7th

Quiz 6, Due Sunday, December 14th at 11:55pm