Western Kentucky University

SOCL 240: Contemporary Social Problems

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Catalog Description: Survey of social disorganization and public descensus in contemporary societies. Emphasis on social change, conflicts in cultural values and the impact of technology.

Pre-requisites: SOCL 100 or consent of the instructor

Course Text:

- Macionis, John. J. (5th edition) *Social Problems*. Boston, MA: Pearson. You will also need access to the MySocLab online course material.
- Film: Prom Night in Mississippi. You must have access to this film either via Netflix, online, library, borrowing, purchasing the film (amazon.com typically around $10-15).

Objectives:

- **Demonstrate understanding of the sociological imagination and explain how it helps us to recognize that our personal troubles are rooted in the operation of society.**
- **Explain the process of claims making and how it relates to the construction of social problems.**
- **Analyze social problems using the structural functionalist, social conflict and symbolic interactionist frameworks.**

Overview of the Course:

What does it mean to call something a *social problem*? What makes a *social problem* different or unique from other problems experienced by people? What can sociology add to my understanding and potential action when it comes to *social problems?* These are all questions we will grapple with in this course.

 In the first week of the class we will study in great detail how social problems are socially constructed, the sociological approaches to analyzing social problems and how we can respond to social problems in a constructive and analytical manner. This first week is very important to laying the foundation for how

our discussion and activities will proceed.   It is critical that you have a working knowledge and comfort level with the terms and theories in this first week of class.

After we build the foundation we will start the study of various problems we or others around us encounter in daily life. I've selected a wide variety of problems for us to think about this semester. We will start with problems that can be classified as "Problems of Inequality." We will think about how poverty, wealth, racial and gender can be considered social problems. Following the critical debates about inequality, we will start to consider, "Problems of Deviance, Conformity and Well-Being." In this section we will think about crime and criminal justice, sexuality, and physical and mental health. I selected these 3 areas as we are currently seeing a tremendous amount of debate in each of these areas. It really gives us an opportunity to engage with current debate. Finally, we will end the semester with a look at "Problems of Social Institutions." We will think about problems such as the economy and politics, work, family, education and population.

Hopefully, in this range of topics you find something that peaks your interest. Your enthusiasm is critical to making this class a success. I look forward to engaging with you!

Approach to Education

As an instructor I feel it is important for me to share with you my perspective on education. Sociology 240 uses a *participatory, learner-centered, adult education* approach. This approach recognizes that *YOU* *are responsible* for your own learning. The instructor can only provide **opportunities** to learn, but cannot force you to learn. Course material is presented in **substantive readings** from the text; **structured activities and lecture**. You are expected to work hard in this course.

*You are expected to take **responsibility** for the success of the course*, that is, you should take an active interest not just in the course material, but in the course itself, making it a success for all participants. Factors such as **interest**, **motivation**, **creativity**, and **initiative** are important elements in evaluating your performance in the course and assigning a grade.

This class will be a place for sharing ideas and voicing opinions. Intelligent argument and polite disagreement is welcome. Your papers are a place for situating your own perspective about the problems we will discuss within the context of the field of sociology. In making an argument it is important to remember, it is just that—an argument. Just as you have your own perspective there are a multitude of other perspectives that may differ from your own. Part of the work of the course is to understand other perspectives.

Descriptions of Assignments and Grading
Tests (3—100 points each): Tests are multiple choice. A study guide for each chapter is provided. Tests are proctored examinations. Therefore, you must contact the WKU Division of Extended Learning & Outreach. Their website is as follows: http://www.wku.edu/testing/index.php . These tests will

cover a great deal of material, so you will need to prepare accordingly. However, ALL material on the exams WILL be on the study guide. I will not test you on anything I did not have on the guide. You may not use any outside material to complete your exams.

Reflection Papers (3—25 points each): I will provide a series of three to four questions. The questions will be based on the readings. You will write a 2 page reaction paper to your choice of one question. These papers will require you to think critically. You must respond to the question in a well argued paper. You only have to use the readings from class. These papers are to be 2 pages, double spaced and 12 point font. You are expected to write two pages not 1.5! Each paper is worth 25 points. Twenty points will be given based on the quality of your sociological argument and 5 given based on the writing quality. Formatting and grading standards can be found on blackboard.

Application Activities (1—50 points): This assignment is a chance for you to observe the world around through the lens of the sociological theories we've discussed and apply your knowledge. You will be given a choice of 6-8 activities and you must select the one that most interests you. More detail and guidance can be found on blackboard.

Assessment of Student Learning:

Activity	Points Possible	Approx. Percent of Total Grade
Tests	300	71%
Reflection Papers	75	17%
Application Activities	50	12%
Total	**425**	**100%**

Points Needed	Percent	Letter Grade
382.5-425	90%-100%	A
340-382	80%-89%	B
297.5-339	70%-79%	C
255-297	60%-69%	D
254 and below	59% and below	F

Expectations of Students:

Quality of Written Work: This is an academic course. Therefore, I expect you to write with the highest quality. I expect complete sentences in all written work. I expect well thought out responses. Further, I will deduct points if you use text message abbreviations or language in your formal papers or in the discussion boards. I still value proper grammar and expect you to do the same while in this course. This is not the place for "slang" terminology unless you are using it to make a theoretical point.

Further, write in a professional manner. I do not expect your papers to sound like you just sat down at your computer and typed a conversation to me. Avoid phrases such as, "Well, in my personal

opinion"—even if I am asking for your thoughts and opinion, that is not a necessary phrase. Think "professional tone" while writing. Also, limit the use if "I." Once again, even when asking you to respond from your own life you can minimize the first person. There is nothing worse than reading a paper that begins every sentence with "I think", "I want to discuss", "I believe", "I feel", etc. Please refrain from addressing the reader directly. For example, there is no need to thank me for reading your paper. Finally, proof read all your work. I really hate to read papers that are full of grammatical errors. It takes away from your thoughts and ideas and frustrates me. You do not want me to grade your paper frustrated!

Professional Communication

With the use of our personal mobile devices to write and respond to email I've noticed a disconcerting trend among students. I will receive emails like the following example (an actual email I've received):

To: Donielle.lovell@wku.edu

Subject: NONE

 grades are not posted

  And that will be it. No salutation, no proper sentences, no closing comments, and not even a name. This is highly unprofessional and sounds rude to the reader. In the work world you will be expected to compose proper messages and you are expected to do so in this course. Therefore, I expect all emails to include greeting, actual sentences that thoroughly explain the purpose of your email and a closing that includes your name. For example:

To: Donielle.lovell@wku.edu

Subject: Grades in SOCL 240

Greetings Dr. Lovell,

I was curious as to when grades for our first reflection paper will be posted.

Thank you for your time,

Jane Doe

I am taking a very strict perspective on this. I will no longer respond to emails that are unprofessional.

Professor Policies

I will no longer respond to unprofessional emails.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to **comply with all academic standards and ethics** as defined in the Western Kentucky University College Catalogue (page 42). You are expected to do your **own work** in this course. Plagiarism, fraud and other forms of cheating will **NOT** be tolerated. I have the authority to either fail you on the paper plagiarized and even for the course or depending on the seriousness of the offense, to take it to WKU administration which can have serious consequences. Do not test me on this. I have failed students in the past and will continue to do so for academic dishonesty. I take this VERY seriously. DO NOT TEST ME—THERE IS NO SECOND CHANCE. **Act with integrity**.

IT IS **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** TO UNDERSTAND THESE GUIDELINES. Make sure you know what constitutes plagiarism and cheating **BEFORE** turning in any assignments. Once you turn in an assignment, you are representing it as your own work. If you are suspected of committing plagiarism, pleas of "I didn't know what plagiarism was" will not be accepted. If you are concerned about your knowledge of plagiarism, please see me and I will give you a handout with examples of plagiarism. **Please note, copying and pasting directly from a website is plagiarism. Copying and pasting directly from a website and changing a few words is STILL plagiarism. Copying and pasting from Wikipedia is also plagiarism and very easy to identify so just don't do it.**

Instructor Policies:

Office Hours: Since this is a distance learning course, please email me directly and we will set up a times that works for you for a telephone conversation, skype call, etc. Email is always the best form of contact and I try to respond within 24 hours.

Americans with Disabilities Act: "In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services in Downing University Center A-200. The phone number is 270-745-5004; TTY is 745-3030. Per university policy, please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the OFSDS."

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act): Once a student reaches 18 years of age or attends a postsecondary institution, he or she becomes an "eligible student," and all rights formerly given to parents under FERPA transfer to the student. Therefore, I am unable to disclose information about grades, attendance, class schedule, etc. to parents, spouses and other interested parties. If you would like to give these rights to your parents or spouse you need to file a waiver with Western Kentucky University. Until I have received such waiver, please discourage other parties from contacting me regarding your status as my student.

Support for Students:
There are a number of resources that as a WKU On Demand student in which you have access. If you need assistance with library sources for your papers, online tutoring, writing help, career services or

help with any function in blackboard please check out the "Student Support" tab in blackboard. This is also where you can access the WKU Help Desk for technical issues. Further, if you find you have software needs such as creating capability with Microsoft office, Adobe PDF reader or the latest version of Java you can access those programs through the "software" tab which is located at the top of your blackboard screen.