

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Department of Sociology and Social Work

Social Problems

Sociology 102

Spring 2018

Instructor: Krishna Roka
Email: krishna.roka@uwsp.edu
Office hours:
 Mon: 1:00 – 2:00 PM
 Wed: 1:00 – 2:00 PM
Office: CCC 478

Class schedule: Tue & Thur
 Sec 1- 11-12:15 PM
 Sec 2- 12:30- 1:45 PM
Room:
 Sec 1- CCC 303
 Sec 2- CCC 128

Course Overview

When you open a news website or a newspaper, what do you see on the main page? Poverty, unemployment, pollution, crime and violence and education are some of the major topics we read regularly there. Have you given a thought why some issues are covered more often and in depth over others? Why certain issues become a national spotlight ensuing debates and policy changes? How they affect individuals and families and what you can do to address them? These are some of the questions this course intends to help you answer. It will give you a sociological perspective in understanding social problems we encounter in our everyday lives. In addition, it will help you understand the nature and characteristics of social problems, make you apply multiple theoretical frameworks to understand social problems, enable you to evaluate and think about potential solutions to these issues and introduce you to major research approaches in studying and analyzing social problems. Although, the focus of the course is on social problems in the US, we will compare and cover issues globally. This global approach is important as we live in a globalized world. Throughout the course, we will study social problems using multiple perspectives and approaches to identify the interconnectivity of social problems across countries.

This is an introductory course on social problems and will cover major social problems confronting us today. Some of them include poverty, inequality, health and illness, education, unemployment, crime and violence, pollution and environment, substance abuse, urbanization and housing. We will apply different theoretical framework to understand them, discuss potential solutions and explore research methods to study them. Furthermore, we will look at how societies define above problems, how they affect individuals and what the government has done to address them.

Expected Outcomes

The major objective of the course is to introduce you to the sociological perspective in exploring social problems. Using this approach, it is expected you will be able to:

- Distinguish a ‘problem’ from a ‘social problem,’
- Apply different theoretical frameworks to understand social problems,
- Identify causes and effects of major social problems on individuals and the broader society,
- Evaluate impacts of and solutions to a particular social problem,
- See the interconnections among social problems and the larger world using multiple approaches, and
- Understand the role you as a sociologist can play in solving social problems.

Required Texts (Available in Bookstore)

- Anna Leon-Guerrero. 2016. *Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action* 5th Eds. Sage Publications.

Supplementary book (student buy the book)

- Elizabeth Currid-Halkertt. 2017. *The sum of small things: A theory of the aspirational class*. Princeton University Press.

Course Structure

To explore the various characteristics of social problems we will apply sociological concepts and theories. We will then use case studies to understand major social problems. Primarily the course will have a series of lectures from the textbook every week. I will add extra reading materials to support my lectures. Additional classroom activities include film reviews, news reports and discussion. Class presence and participation is crucial for good grades.

- **Book review:** Each student will write a 1000 words review of the book *Sum of small things* which will be due on **Week 10**. Instructions and samples of book reviews are available in D2L website. The book for this assignment has been carefully selected to enhance your knowledge of the multidimensionality of social problems. Further details will be discussed during the class.
- **Class Exams:** There will be **THREE** exams spread across the course. Each exam will cover the preceding weeks of reading materials (book chapters) and class discussion topics. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions. Further details will be discussed during the course.
- **Global Social Problem and Solution Poster:** In Week 5, I will divide the class into different groups of 5 students and each group will be assigned a social problem. The group will make a poster that will explore the problem at the global level. The poster will discuss the nature of the problem, the causes, its impacts, and solutions to solve it. The

groups will include examples from countries outside the US and present it to the class in week 14. Each group will have 15 minutes to present their poster to the class.

Poster for the project will be a three-fold cardboard poster- 28in*40in available in Target and costs \$3.29.

Each group should work on a poster that includes:

1. Definition of the social problem
2. Causes- bullet points
3. Impacts- data would be helpful
4. Solutions



Be creative and use reliable sources. You can use pictures or news clippings to make the poster attractive. Your sources must be cited in the poster.

- **Attendance:** I will take attendance before every class; therefore, it is important you attend the class and participate in class activities. There will be no excuses for missing a class, unless you inform me in advance about your absence.
- **Extra credits:** You may also earn extra credits (a total of **5 points**) by submitting a 1 page, single spaced review paper for each of the videos we watch in class. You will receive **1 point** for each report. Other ways to earn extra credits should be discussed with the instructor. You can use extra credits to compensate for missed points.

Grading Procedure

The final grade will be determined by your participation in class discussions and performance on the exams, news reports, classroom activities and the book review.

Class Exams (3*20)	60%
Book review	15%
Solution poster	15%
Attendance	10%
Total	100%

The final grade will be calculated using the following schedule

Course grade	Percentages
A	94-100
A-	90-93

B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79
C	70-74
D	60-69
F	<60

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings and activities*
1.	Jan 22-27	Introduction What are social problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mills: Sociological imagination- The promise (Chapter 1) • Bring your most important social problem to the class in a postcard.
2.	Jan 29- Feb 2	Understanding social problems Sociological perspective Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter 1 • Sum of small things- Chapter 2 • Three main sociological perspectives (d2l)
3.	Feb 5- 9	Problems of inequality: Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter 2 • Sum of small things- Chapter 7 • Video : Poor Kids- PBS Frontline
4.	Feb 12-16	Problems of inequality: Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 3 • Video: White Like Me Groups for Poster
5.	Feb 19-23	Problems of inequality: Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 4 <i>Violence against women and girls</i> (d2l)
6.	Feb 26- Mar 2	Problems of Inequality: Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 5 Exam 1
7.	Mar 5-9	Problems of institutions: Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 7 • Sum of small things- Chapter 4 • Video: Two American Families- PBS Frontline
8.	Mar 12-16	Problems of institutions: Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 8 • Sum of small things- Chapter 3

9.	Mar 19-23	Problems of institutions: Work and economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 9 • Sum of small things- Chapter 5 • Video : Inequality for all
10.	Apr 2-6	NO CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book review due: <i>Sum of small things</i>
11.	Apr 9-13	Problems of institutions: Health Book discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 10 • <i>US obesity report 2013</i> (d21) • Video : Escape Fire <p>Exam 2</p>
12.	Apr 16-20	Problems of social world: Environment and drug abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 12 & 15 • Sum of small things- Chapter 6
13.	Apr 23-27	Problems of social world: crime and criminal justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 13 •
14.	Apr 30- May 4		POSTER PRESENTATION
15.	May 7-11	Social problem and social action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leon-Guerrero: Chapter: 17 • Rewrite/extra credit reports due (get approval from the instructor)
16.	May 17	8-10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXAM 3

*subject to change

Class Policy

Attendance and participation: Class attendance and participation is important to this course. Both physical and mental presence during the class is critical to understand the topics in the course. There will be no excuse for absence, unless there was an emergency for which I will need a written explanation. During the course we will engage in discussing major concepts and active participation from students is highly encouraged. Despite the class size I will accommodate discussion when required. Late arrival and leaving early will be marked as absence and will result in negative grade.

Readings: Textbooks and other reading materials for the course have been carefully chosen. It is required for students to read them prior to the class. Reading assignments must be completed as required by the course.

Writing: For writing assignments, students must write clearly and concisely. Each paper should be written in a format with 1 inch margin, 12 size font, use Times New Roman font and include sources. A high level of writing is expected for the course. Written papers with grammatical errors, inconclusive logics, drafts, and poor structure are unacceptable and will result in poor grades. Students must become aware of plagiarism and cite sources used for the assignment. Any evidence of plagiarism will automatically result in an F grade. A high level of academic integrity is expected throughout the course. For the UWSP's policy on academic integrity and plagiarism visit this link:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/Academic%20Integrity%20Brochure.pdf>.

Late submission: All assignments must be submitted by the time mentioned in the course structure. Late submission will result in negative grades.

Use of technology: Use of technology in the classroom is not required for the course. Therefore, use of cell phones, tablet/ipad, computer and other electronic devices are not allowed in the class. Students using electronic devices during class will receive negative grades. No recording of lecture is permitted without the instructor's permission.

Meeting: I welcome students meeting to discuss course materials and assignments. There will be a sign-up sheet in my office for you to schedule a meeting time during my office hours. You can also contact me to schedule a meeting outside my office hours.

Safe environment: The class strives for a safe environment to promote knowledge sharing. Disrespectful, degrading, or offensive language will not be tolerated. Any personal experiences shared in the class should remain confidential. UWSP Student rights and responsibilities document includes the policies regarding academic misconduct.

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Disability services: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>.

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability Services Office and inform me. I am happy to assist where necessary. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library) or the website:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/default.aspx> .

