This course approaches some of today’s important social and political issues from a sociological vantage point. The course begins by examining the social construction perspective in examining how various issues become defined as social problems. In doing so we will explore the role of the media, experts and social movements as each promotes or inhibits change. In the middle section of the class, the main sociological perspectives of Marx, T. H. Marshall, Weber and Durkheim are developed in connection with the issues of inequality, social conflict and community. The last section of the course considers how social problems are addressed. Here we discuss the role of ‘social entrepreneurs’ who seek to ‘change the world.’ We consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of government programs and regulations versus market-based approaches, as well as the role of philanthropy and volunteerism. Finally, we consider the risk of unanticipated consequences of reforms. Along the way, we will consider a variety of social issues and social problems, including poverty, gender inequality, immigration, education, crime and global warming.

Course requirements are:
a) active class participation;
b) one short reaction memos to news stories posted before class;
c) a project proposal;
d) 2 mid-term exams;
e) an oral project presentation in class at the end of the semester; and
f) a term paper (5-7 pages) on the topic of the group project due on Friday August 4.

Required Texts:

This book is available at the Penn Book Center on 34th Street and Amazon.com. The rest of the readings are available in the “files” section of the course Canvas site.
Sociology 2. Weekly Schedule

Section 1. The Social Construction of Social Problems

Week 1. Class Overview: The Framing of Social Problems

Note: Recorded Lectures Only During Week 1.
No on-line class sessions on Tuesday May 23 and Thursday May 25.

Readings:

Joel Best, Social Problems, Chapter 1, 2

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Chapter 1


Rodney Benson, Shaping Immigration News, Chapter 1

Week 2. The Framing of Social Problems Continued

Note: On-line class meetings resume Tuesday May 30 and Thursday June 1 from 7-8:30 PM

Selectivity of Media Coverage;
Competition Among Social Problems for Media and Public Attention

Readings:

Joel Best, Social Problems, Chapter 5.


Carol Liebler, “Tales Told in Two Cities: When Missing Girls Are(n’t) News”.
Week 3. Social Movements and Social Problems:

Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday June 6 and Thursday June 8 7-8:30 PM

Readings: Joel Best, Chapter 3

Ferree, Myra Marx and Beth B. Hess, Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Chapters 2 & 3


Week 4. Experts and Social Problems: Climate Change

Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday June 13 and Thursday June 15 7-8:30 PM

Readings: Joel Best, Chapter 4


Week 5. Ongoing Social Issues: Inequality

Readings: Joel Best, Chapter 3

Dennis Gilbert, “Poverty,” Wealth and Income,” “Growth of Inequality”

Herbert Gans, “Labelling the Poor”

William Ryan, “Blaming the Victim”

Note: Online Class on Tuesday June 20
Note First Exam: Thursday June 22 (format to be announced)
Section 2. Where Do Social Problems Come From?

Week 6. Class Inequality: Karl Marx on the social ills of capitalism

**Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday June 27 and Thursday June 29 7-8:30 PM**

Readings: Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto"

Randall Collins on Marx

Week 7. Social and Ethnic Conflict / Social Citizenship

**Note: No on-line class on Tuesday July 4**
**On Line Class Resumes Thursday July 6 from 7-8:30 PM**

Readings:


**Note: Project Proposals due Thursday July 6**

Week 8. Crime & Community

**Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday July 11 and Thursday July 13 7-8:30 PM**

Readings:

Randall Collins on Durkheim


James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling “ Broken Windows.”

Week 9. March 21, 23. Education and Opportunity in American Society

**Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday July 18 and Thursday July 20 7-8:30 PM**

“Pieces of an Educational Dream”


Karen, David and Kevin Dougherty. “Necessary but not Sufficient: Higher Education as a Strategy of Social Mobility.”
Section 3. Addressing Social Problems


Note Second Exam: Tuesday July 25 (format to be announced)

Note: Online Class Continues on Thursday July 27

Readings:

Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge*, Chapters 1 & 5


Readings:


David Bornstein. 2007. *How to Change the World*, Chapters 1, 8 & 18


Note: On-line classes continue Tuesday August 1 and Thursday August 3 7-8:30 PM

Students will present their term projects.

Finals papers due Friday August 4.