

Syllabus date: 1/3/18

## **Sociology 150mg: Social Problems**

4.0 Units

Spring 2018 – MW – 2:00-3:20 PM

Location: Montgomery Ross Fisher Building (MRF) 340

**Instructor:** Professor Owens

Office: [Hazel and Stanley Hall Building](#) (HSH) 204

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10-11 AM, or by appointment

Contact Info: [annowens@usc.edu](mailto:annowens@usc.edu) (Please put SOCI 150 in the subject line)

**Teaching Assistants** (TAs will announce office hours in section):

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### **Course Description**

What is a social problem? Who decides? What are its causes? What are its solutions?

This course explores the definition, causes, consequences, and solutions of social problems in U.S. society. Through readings, lecture, and discussion, students will learn about issues such as crime, poverty and homelessness, economic and racial inequality, education, neighborhood segregation, moral debates, and more. Students will consider social problems from sociological perspectives that explore what makes something a social problem (and for whom), what causes social problems, whether the causes are structural or cultural, and whether the causes are individual or social. Students will also examine the consequences of these issues and how policy might solve social problems.

This course meets the General Education requirement for "Social Analysis" (Category C). (For students entering USC prior to Fall 2015, this course satisfies "Social Issues" (Category VI)). This course also meets the USC Diversity Requirement.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Gain knowledge about social problems in U.S. society, their causes, and their consequences
2. Examine social problems using sociological theories
3. Learn about how both social problems and the policies addressing them are socially constructed by citizens, the media, and policymakers
4. Communicate analysis of course issues through writing and discussion

**Prerequisite(s):** None

## Required Materials

Best, Joel. 2016. *Social Problems*. New York: W.W. Norton Company. [2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup> editions OK]  
This class will use [Poll Everywhere](#). See Blackboard for details on how to register your account.

## Student Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	15%
5 Response Papers (12% each)	60%
Final Exam	25%

## Assignments and Grading

*Attendance and Participation (15%):* Students are expected to attend lecture and section having completed the reading and prepared to participate. The only excused section absences are for religious holidays (please contact your TA in advance). Please do not contact teaching staff about other absences unless you will have excessive absences due to a personal or family emergency. Section cannot be “made up.” Students are expected to respect the viewpoints of their peers and engage seriously in considering viewpoints that differ from their own. The course may raise controversial issues. It is never acceptable to treat classmates or teaching staff disrespectfully, and all debate should focus on ideas, not individuals’ personal traits.

*Response Papers (60%):* There will be five 2-3 page response papers due throughout the semester. Prompts and further instructions will be posted on Blackboard in advance. See due dates and assignment submission policy below.

*Final Exam (25%):* There will be a final exam on May 7 from 2-4 PM (our designated final exam period). The exam will likely consist of definitional, short answer, and essay questions.

*Extra Credit:* Increase your semester grade by up to 2 percentage points by participating in service learning at the Joint Educational Project (JEP). JEP participation involves placement as a volunteer in a community setting where you will be a mentor or a teaching assistant and learn about the neighborhood around USC as well as the city in which you live while earning class credit. You will be trained and supervised by JEP and its staff and will engage in required weekly reflective assignments. Evidence of the successful completion of your placement will be provided to Professor Owens by JEP. Further details will be announced in class.

**Course Policies** (continued enrollment in the course indicates acceptance of these policies)

*Academic Conduct:* Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b>. Other forms of academic

dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

For this course, students must complete all written assignments and the final exam independently. Students are encouraged to maintain an active intellectual dialogue with peers and should feel free to discuss concepts and issues covered in the course informally outside of class. However, students should turn in work that solely reflects their own efforts. You must properly cite reference materials. See USC's academic integrity tutorial and guide to avoiding plagiarism: <http://usclibraries.adobeconnect.com/academicintegrity>  
[https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/903/docs/Trojan\\_Integrity\\_-\\_Guide\\_to\\_Avoiding\\_Plagiarism.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/903/docs/Trojan_Integrity_-_Guide_to_Avoiding_Plagiarism.pdf)

*Assignment Submission Policy:* You will submit response papers electronically via Blackboard. Your submission is not complete until you receive email confirmation from Blackboard/Turnitin. It is your responsibility to verify that you have properly submitted your work by the due date/time. **Each student has four "late days" to use over the course of the semester for response papers.** Each late day gives you an additional 24 hours for the assignment. For example, if a paper is due at 5pm on Friday, one late day means you can turn it in before 5pm on Saturday. You can use them in any combination you wish (e.g., you can submit four papers one day late or one paper four days late). You do not need to (and should not) notify us that you are using them; simply submit your work on Blackboard when you are ready and note at the top of the paper how many late days you are using on the assignment (e.g., "Two late days used"). Late days are meant to get you through routine illness, conflicts with extracurricular activities or other coursework, family obligations, and any last-minute emergencies that arise. Once you have used your late days, you have no margin left for error, so you should be sure to start working early! **After you have used all of your late days, no late assignments will be accepted.**

*Office Hours:* Please use the professor's and teaching assistants' office hours! Office hours are a great opportunity to make sure you understand course concepts, ask questions, ask about related research in Sociology, and learn more about potential careers. If you are unavailable during office hours, email to make an appointment at another time.

*Technology Policy:* Laptops and tablets are not allowed in class. Research suggests that most students learn more effectively taking notes by hand. Laptops and tablets also distract those around you. If you are one of the rare people for whom laptops or tablets facilitate better learning, please request permission to use your device from Professor Owens. Mobile devices are only allowed in class for answering poll questions.

## Course Schedule and Required Readings (subject to change)

Wk	Date	Topic	Reading Due
1	M, 1/8	Introduction to the Course	
<b>UNIT 1: The Social Problems Process</b>			
	W, 1/10	What are Social Problems?	Best, Ch 1
2	M, 1/15	No Class, MLK Day	
	W, 1/17	Social Problems Claims	Best, Ch 2, 3
3	M, 1/22	Experts and Activists as Claimsmakers	Best, Ch 4
	W, 1/24	The Media as Claimsmakers	Best, Ch 5
	<b>F, 1/26</b>		<b>Response Paper 1 due by 5 PM</b>
4	M, 1/29	Policymaking	Best, Ch 7
<b>UNIT 2: Crime and Punishment</b>			
	W, 1/31	Causes of Crime	Laub and Sampson Ch 3, Raine Ch 8
5	M, 2/5	Policing and Incarceration	<a href="#">Kramer et al. 2017</a> , Western, Ch 1
	W, 2/7	The Great American Crime Drop	Sharkey Ch 1, Ch 8
6	M, 2/12	Mass Incarceration	Best, Ch 9
	W, 2/14	Mass Incarceration	Western, Ch 4, 7
	<b>F, 2/16</b>		<b>Response Paper 2 due by 5 PM</b>
7	M, 2/19	No Class, Presidents' Day	
<b>UNIT 3: Poverty and Homelessness</b>			
	W, 2/21	Culture and Social Structure	<a href="#">Wilson 2010</a>
8	M, 2/26	Trends in Poverty	Shaefer, Edin, and Talbert 2015
	W, 2/28	War on Poverty	Edin and Shaefer, Ch 1
9	M, 3/5	Eviction and Hardship	<a href="#">Desmond 2016</a>
	W, 3/7	Homelessness	Stuart Ch 1, NYT <a href="#">Invisible Child Pt 1</a>
	<b>F, 3/9</b>		<b>Response Paper 3 due by 5 PM</b>
			<i>3/12-3/14—No Class, Spring Break</i>
<b>UNIT 4: Inequality and Mobility</b>			
10	M, 3/19	Income Inequality	Reeves Ch 2, Jencks 2014, Cavaille 2015
	W, 3/21	Social Mobility and Reproduction	Reeves Ch 3, 4
11	M, 3/26	Poverty Concentration	<a href="#">Jargowsky 2015</a> , Wilson Ch 2
	W, 3/28	Racial Segregation	Rothstein Ch 1, 4
12	M, 4/2	Neighborhood Effects	Chetty et al: Equality of Opportunity
	W, 4/4	Housing Policies	<a href="#">Massey 2013</a> , <a href="#">The Dream Revisited</a>
	<b>F, 4/6</b>		<b>Response Paper 4 due by 5 PM</b>
<b>UNIT 5: Education</b>			
13	M, 4/9	Equality of Opportunity	Goyette Ch 4
	W, 4/11	School Choice	<a href="#">Contexts Forum on charter schools</a>
14	M, 4/16	Equality of Outcomes	Goyette Ch 5
	W, 4/18	Higher Ed	Hamilton and Armstrong Ch 1, 8
<b>UNIT 6: Social Problems in 2018</b>			
15	M, 4/23	TBA	
	W, 4/25	TBA	
	<b>F, 4/27</b>		<b>Response Paper 5 due by 5 PM</b>
<b>FINAL EXAM—MONDAY, MAY 7—2-4 PM</b>			

All readings other than Best are available on Blackboard. Full book references:

Edin, Kathryn J. and H. Luke Shaefer. 2015. *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Goyette, Kimberly A. 2017. *Education in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hamilton, Laura T. and Elizabeth A. Armstrong. 2013. *Paying for the Party*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Laub, John H. and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Raine, Adrian. 2013. *The Anatomy of Violence*. New York: Pantheon Books, Random House.

Reeves, Richard V. 2017. *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That is a Problem, and What to Do About It*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright.

Sharkey, Patrick. 2018. *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Revival of City Life, and the Next War on Violence*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Stuart, Forrest. 2016. *Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Wilson, William Julius. 2009. *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

## Support Systems

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs:* Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu) Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with DSP each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP and should be delivered to Professor Owens as early in the semester as possible.

*The Writing Center:* Offers free services to all USC students in the form of individual consultations and small-group workshops. Contact [writing@usc.edu](mailto:writing@usc.edu), [dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/](http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/)

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call.* Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline*—Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)  
(800) 273-8255

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center:* For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance:* (213) 740-5086. Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support:* Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*Student Support and Advocacy:* (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student, e.g., personal, financial, and academic issues. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*Diversity at USC:* Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information:* Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety:* UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)