

SOCIOLOGY 1020

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Winter 2011

Grande Prairie Regional College
(3 UT Credits)

Instructor: Alan Segal

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Office Hours: Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays: 16.30 – 17.30 Or By appointment

Course Description:

SO1020 inquires into contemporary and historical concepts, assumptions, and expressions of gender. Political, personal, cultural, and social implications of gender will comprise the central thread of the course.

Course Prerequisite: SO1000

Required Reading:

Social Problems by Joel Best

Assignments:

All written work must be submitted by email, as a regular message. Do not send as an attachment. There is a lateness penalty of one letter grade per day, including weekends, for all late papers. The 'received date' indicated in my College mailbox will count as the final statement of submission. All late assignments will receive a 1-grade reduction per calendar day of lateness. Journal marks will be reduced by one letter for every 2 days beyond the due date.

Academic assignments for this course emphasize synthesis of ideas and the best questions you can think of to advance that synthesis. Analysis does not mean just reporting what others have said on a topic. Picking one small aspect of a book or article is equal to not utilizing it at all. Other authors' ideas or conclusions are valuable because they add insight or specific detail that helps you to ask questions about the topic you have selected. My assignments are a philosophical inquiry that is advanced through your and others' investigations. Research is one kind of investigation. What questions are worthwhile becomes part of your analysis. Conclusions can be valuable but it isn't obligatory to state any. Grammar is important to communicating precise meaning. Therefore, while it will not be valued as highly as content, it will be evaluated and therefore can affect your mark. All research must be presented in MLA style, both in the text itself and the 'Works Cited' section at the end of the paper.

Clearly stipulate your name, and course and section numbers. Omitting any of these requirements can result in a lateness penalty equivalent to that of one day.

Essay: (F, D- to A+) Due the Last Class of March.

Select a feature of our sociocultural lives that is a) perceived as a social problem; b) is being asserted as a problem; c) one that is ignored presently but which you consider ought to be a social problem. Utilizing the text for the course, assess the worthiness of the feature you've chosen. Discuss whether or not society should react to it with indifference, embrace it as a step toward improvement, dismiss it as a manipulative ploy, etc. When contemplating your essay or project, you should not aim for a summary or description. Instead, a critical analysis of the concepts you think are relevant to the analysis, must be examined. You may use first person words like 'I', but the paper is not to be a large opinion piece. You will select your own topics and the expected minimum length is 1200 words. As this is a Sociology course, sociological concepts among others, are expected in your essay. And research is expected as you confirm that what you have chosen is being pushed as a problem.

Midterm Presentations: (F, D- to A+) Time to be Discussed

This can be individual or group presentations. You will select a feature of contemporary Canadian society that you think ought to be seen as a problem, or one that is now perceived as such, but which you believe does not deserve the label. You will discuss your position using concepts from Best's book, and also will guide us through a philosophical analysis of how we should approach the topic.

Two Journals: (F, C to C+)

Journals are due the first class of February and the first class of March.

Anything pertaining to the sociology of creating, encouraging, criticizing, or averting the construction of social problems is open for journal discussion. Whatever we touch on in class discussions or lectures, class interaction; details from your personal life that is relevant to our course observations and suggestions, is a suitable topic. No research is necessary or expected. The purpose is to allow informal communication with the instructor. Grammar and general writing clarity are expected in all written assignments in university courses. While recognizing that we speak and write informally when communicating our personal observations, the journals should be coherent and reasonably articulate. Evaluations will reflect this expectation.

Discussion Bonus:

Everyone may (but not necessarily will) receive a bonus mark based on a combination of the frequency and quality of the participation. Discussion postings to the Moodle discussion forum also will be considered class participation. You will be eligible for a bonus mark only if you display commitment to the course by reading and completing the required assignments. *Although attendance is not relevant to the regular assignments for the course, it is important to your eligibility for a bonus mark. If you are absent for more than 4 classes, you will not receive a bonus grade.*

The bonus mark offers an A, B, C, or D. No plus or minus signs will be used. If you receive a bonus mark, it will be added to your overall grade total prior to working out a final mark.

Tabulation of Marks

Letter grades have a corresponding point value. Your final mark will be formulated by adding the points for each letter grade you have received, and dividing by the total number of points achievable for the course (13.4). A percentage will be derived and converted to a final letter mark according to the grid stipulated below.

NOTE: (1) No class averaging will be done. (2) All marks will appear on Moodle. You are responsible for monitoring your grade input, and informing me that a mark has not appeared for which you deserve credit.

Grade Equivalency:

A+	95-100%
A	90-94%
A-	87-89%
B+	83-86%
B	80-82%
B-	77-79%
C+	73-76%
C	65-72%
C-	60-64%
D+	55-59%
D	50-54%
D-	45-49%

NOTE: On the College's marking grid there is no D-. Therefore no such final mark will be recorded. However, for the assignments that will be evaluated on a full grading grid, I will use D- as a non-failing mark.

Discussion Sequence

1. ***Introduction to Course***

2. ***A Note to the Reader, Chapter 1***

Class Discussion:

Describe the objectivist and subjectivist perspectives. Are these important to the formation of social attitudes or the aftermath of the formation? What characteristics of the social problem process does Best introduce in this chapter? How many of you mourn the loss of Pluto's designation as a planet?

3. ***Chapter 2***

Class Discussion:

Explain the significance of claims, rhetoric, warrants, etc., to establishing a public viewpoint on an issue.

4. ***Chapters 3 & 4***

Class Discussion:

Types of Claimsmakers, Polity, Frames and Framing, Resources, Opportunity Structures, Ownership, SMOs, Advocacy, Authenticity, Credibility. These are some of the social discourses within which social problems are constructed. We shall discuss these and other concepts, but always from the vantage point of social and cultural impact.

5. **Chapters 5 & 6**

Class Discussion:

Of the various spheres of claims and claims assertion, what is the contribution of media? Are some media more influential than others? Of all the sources of claims mentioned by Best, which of them have proportionately greater effect, why, and is this appraisal constant or fluctuating? Claiming is not guaranteed to command a supportive audience. Why do claims succeed or fail? How do we actually know if the public is responding? Must all claims be directed at popular culture?

What are landmark dominant narratives? Can you think of any that embody resistance to certain claims, or endorsement of them?

6. **Chapters 7 & 9**

Class Discussion:

Prepare to discuss the process of transforming a belief in a social problem, into policy. How closely aligned can we expect policy and the interpretation of a problem to be? What does Best mean by policy streams? What are symbolic politics?

7. **Chapter 8**

Class Discussion:

What is social problems work?

8. **Chapters 10 & 11**

Class Discussion:

What is the purpose of chapter 10? What does Best hope to convey to readers as he nears the conclusion of his book? One part of this section addresses the problems of progress. Would you have thought this could be possible? Best asks in the final chapter if this “stuff is useful”. What is your answer?