

Social Problems
Sociology 115, Spring 2008
Hamilton College
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-10:15 AM, LIB 215

Tentative and Subject to Revision

Instructor

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Office Hours: Drop-in hours Tuesday 1-4; appointments available Tuesday and Thursday 10:30-11:30; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday after 4; and other times if necessary.

Website: <http://academics.hamilton.edu/sociology/marthur/classes.html>

This course serves as an introduction to the sociological study of social problems. We will consider the construction of social problems, methods for analyzing their emergence and nature, the reactions to social problems by the general public and by populations especially concerned with individual problems, the shaping of social problems by advocacy groups and the media, and the potential solutions to social problems. The first half of the course will consist of a general survey of these topics; in the second half of the course, students will choose the specific social problems that the course will focus on and will help to teach their classmates about these social problems. This course is structured as a Proseminar. That means that continued active participation and oral communication is a major focus of the course.

Goals of the Course

By the end of the semester, you should:

- 1) Understand what social problems are, where they come from, and why it is so hard to solve them;
- 2) Gain understanding of the nature of a specific set of social problems;
- 3) Know how to conduct policy analysis research into social problems;
- 4) Enhance your skills in research, writing, and sociological analysis; and
- 5) Develop your skills in oral communication and presentation.

Required Materials

Best, Joel. 2007. *Social Problems*. W.W. Norton. (In syllabus: **Best**)

Rubington, Earl and Martin S. Weinberg. 2002. *The Study of Social Problems*. Oxford University Press. (In syllabus: **R&W**)

Bardach, Eugene. 2004. *A Practical Guide to Policy Analysis*. CQ Press. (In syllabus: **Bardach**)

These texts will also be available on reserve in the library; other readings will be made available on e-reserve or distributed directly to students. Readings that can be found on e-reserves are indicated on the syllabus with an **E**.

Grading

- 1) **PARTICIPATION (20%)**. As this course is a Proseminar, active and engaged participation is vital to your academic success this semester. You are expected to come to class each day having done the reading and prepared to discuss it. When your classmates give presentations, you are expected to engage with their work, ask questions, and participate in any discussion if they invite it. If you have difficulties participating in class, please see me or the Oral Communication center as soon as possible to work on these skills, as you will be unable to earn a grade above a B in this course without significant oral participation in class. Your participation grade will also include some short in-class writing assignments and evaluation of your peers' presentations.
- 2) **QUIZZES (10%)**. For approximately the first 8 weeks of the semester, there will be multiple-choice quizzes posted in Blackboard based on the readings. Each daily quiz will contain approximately 5 to 7 randomly-selected questions; each will be worth one point towards your total quiz grade. These quizzes will only be available until 9 am the day we discuss the readings in class and can not be made up. Longer quizzes will be administered just before spring break and just before the end of the semester.
- 3) **TERM PROJECT STAGES (25%)**. Each student will select one social problem for sustained research over the course of the semester. A series of assignments during the semester will focus on this social problem, including selection of a topic, completion of an annotated bibliography, selection of a reading to assign to your classmates, meeting with me in the weeks prior to your oral presentation (see below) and completion of a rough draft of your project to be submitted to the PolicyOptions Wiki.
- 4) **ORAL PRESENTATION (30%)**. In the final month of the semester, each student will give an oral presentation of 20-30 minutes on the social problem they have been researching. These presentations will use PowerPoint unless other arrangements are made individually in advance. These presentations will follow a prescribed format to be distributed later in the semester; students will be expected to prepare some questions for discussion and to be able to answer questions about their social problem from classmates. Those presentations which earn an A will be those which are most interactive and instructive. Presentations will be evaluated in terms of content and presentation skills. Keep in mind that you must meet with me about your presentation 1-2 weeks prior to the date you are scheduled to give it, and you must select a reading on your topic that will be assigned to your classmates at least 2 weeks prior to the date you are scheduled to give your paper.
- 5) **FINAL PAPER (15%)**. Drawing on the comments received on the wiki assignment and the oral presentation, each student will submit a final paper of 8-10 pages on the social problem they have researched all semester.
- 6) **READING**. You are expected to complete all assigned readings, and I reserve the right to implement frequent reading quizzes if I sense that readings are not being completed. Readings must be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned.

Course Schedule

January 22	Introduction to the Course: What is a Social Problem?
January 24	Defining Social Problems and Doing Social Problems Research R&W, "Social Problems and Sociology" (3-14) Best, "The Social Problems Process" (3-28) Bardach, "Preface" and "Introduction" (ix-xvii)

- January 29 **Claims, Claimsmaking, and Social Movements**
 Best, "Claims" (29-63)
 Best, "Activists as Claimsmakers" (64-96)
 Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements" *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (611-639) **E**
- January 31 **Claims, Experts, and the Media**
 Best, "Experts as Claimsmakers" (97-128)
 Best, "The Media and Claims" (129-162)
 Best, "Claims Across Space and Time" (292-321)
- February 5 **Other Constituencies**
 Best, "Public Reaction" (163-193)
 Best, "Social Problems Work" (226-259)
- February 7 **The Constructionist Perspective**
 R&W, "Social Constructionism" (279-358)
 ***Social Problem Topic Choices Due
- February 12 **Social Pathology and Social Disorganization**
 R&W, "Social Pathology" (15-46)
 R&W, "Social Disorganization" (47-84)
- February 14 **Writing About Policy**
 Review PolicyOptions Wiki guidelines @ <http://www.policyoptionswiki.org>
 Bardach, "The Eightfold Path" (1-60)
- February 19 **Library Research**
 Bardach, "Assembling Evidence" (61-90)
- February 21 **No Class**
- February 26 **Value Conflict and Deviant Behavior**
 R&W, "Value Conflict" (85-118)
 R&W, "Deviant Behavior" (119-171)
- February 28 **Labeling and Critical Perspective**
 R&W, "Labeling" (172-220)
 R&W, "Critical Perspective" (221-278)
- March 4 **Social Policy Outcomes**
 Best, "Policy Outcomes" (260-291)
 Bardach, "Things Governments Do" (123-132)
 ***Annotated Bibliography Due
- March 6 **More on Policy Research**
 Bardach, "Smart (Best) Practices Research" (91-106)

- March 11 **Practicing Social Problems Analysis:
Human Trafficking as a Social Problem**
Laczko, "Introduction: Data and Research on Human Trafficking,"
International Migration Review **E**
The quiz for today is a longer review quiz
- March 13 **Summarizing the Approaches**
R&W, "A Sociological Review of the Perspectives" (357-366)
Best, "The Uses of the Constructionist Stance" (325-336)
- April 1 **Oral Presentation Skills**
Review Oral Communications Center handouts online at:
<http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/departments.html?dept=Oral%20Communication>
(In particular, you should be absolutely certain to look at the handouts titled
"Introductions and Conclusions," "Maximizing Your Presentation's
Effectiveness," "Citing Sources," "More on Citing Sources," "Tips for
Effective Oral Delivery," and "Engaging your Audience")
Bardach, "Specimen of a Real-World Policy Analysis" (107-122)
- April 3 **Oral Presentation Skills**
Tuftes, "PowerPoint is Evil," *Wired*
<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html>
DeFoe, "The Truth Is, You Gave a Lousy Talk," *Chronicle* **E**
Review Oral Communication Center handouts (online) titled "Using Visual
Support in Oral Presentations" and "Using PowerPoint."
Watch Airey, "How Not to Use Powerpoint," available at
<http://www.davidairey.com/how-not-to-use-powerpoint/>
***Schedule your pre-presentation appointment with me & locate the
reading you will assign to your classmates.
- April 8 **Student Presentations: Meat Production and Energy Dependence**
Wiki Assignment/Draft Due
Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, pages 32-84 (E)
Broder, "House, 314-100, Passes Broad Energy Bill," *New York Times* (E)
Brami, "Can the United States Shed its Oil Addiction?" *The Washington
Quarterly* 117-130 (E)
- April 10 **Student Presentations: Information Overload and Pesticides**
Edmundson, "Dwelling in Possibilities" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (E)
Graff, "Paralysis by Analysis?" *Clueless in Academe*, 96-112 (E)
Toffler, selections from *Future Shock*, 262-285 (E)
Barnards (ed) "How Should Pesticides be Handled?" (selections by various
authors) from *The Environmental Crisis—Opposing Viewpoints*, pgs. 65-102 (E)

April 15	<p>Student Presentations: Genetic Technology and Wal*Mart Cooper, "Human Genome Research." <i>CQ Researcher</i> 10: 401-424 (E) Sobel, "The HIPAA Paradox." <i>Hastings Center Report</i> 37: 40-50 (E) Fishman, from <i>The Wal-Mart Effect</i> 1-22 (E) Lichtenstein, from <i>Wal-Mart</i> 3-11 (E)</p>
April 17	<p>Student Presentations: Darfur and Organized Crime Glazer, "Stopping Genocide," <i>CQ Researcher</i> 685-708 (E) Hager <i>et al</i>, "The Criminology of Genocide," <i>Criminology</i> 525-555 (E) BBC News, "Q&A: Sudan's Darfur Conflict" (E) Worsnop, "Mafia Crackdown." <i>CQ Researcher</i> 265-288 (E)</p>
April 22	<p>No Class</p>
April 24	<p>Student Presentations: Educational Inequality and Surveillance Kozol, from <i>The Shame of the Nation</i>, chapters 2 and 10 (E) Orwell, from <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> 1-33 (E) Center for Democracy and Technology, "The Nature and Scope of Governmental Surveillance Activity." Available from http://www.cdt.org/wiretap/wiretap_overview.html</p>
April 29	<p>Student Presentations: Abortion and Health Care Duberstein and Singh, "Sexual Behavior of Single Adult American Women." <i>Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health</i> 40: 27-?? (E) Henshaw and Finer, "The Accessibility of Abortion Services in the United States, 2001." <i>Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health</i> 35: 16-?? (E) Paul, "The First Ache." <i>New York Times Magazine</i> (E) John Edwards Campaign, "Reforming Health Care to Make it Affordable, Accountable, and Universal." 1-16. (E)</p>
May 1	<p>Student Presentations: Global Warming and Drugs Spencer, "How Serious is the Global Warming Threat?" <i>Society</i> 44: 45-50 (E) Ungar, "The Rise and (Relative) Decline of Global Warming as a Social Problem" <i>The Sociological Quarterly</i> 33: 483-501 (E) Wald, "Study Details How the U.S. Could Cut 28% of Greenhouse Gases." <i>The New York Times</i> (E) History Channel documentary on marijuana (can be viewed on Blackboard)</p>
May 6	<p>Student Presentations: Mental Illness Lenzer, "Bush to Screen Population for Mental Illness," <i>WorldNet Daily</i> (E) Pear, "Mental Disorders Common," <i>New York Times</i> (E) National Institute of Mental Health. "The Numbers Count: Mental Disorders in America." (E)</p>
May 8	<p>Course Review and Conclusion</p>
Date TBA	<p>Final Paper Due</p>

Course Policies and Procedures

Course Assignment Policies

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day for which they are assigned. If you are unable to attend class on the day an assignment is due for any reason, the assignment must be turned in to my mailbox in the sociology department prior to 8:30 am. If you will be away from campus or have spontaneous printer problems, you may email your paper to me prior to 8:30 am; please save all emailed documents as *.doc, *.rtf, *.html, or *.pdf files (pay particular attention to this if you use Office 2007, as the default file type for your program is incompatible with campus computers). If you don't know how to do this, instructions are available on the ITS website—just go to <http://www.hamilton.edu/college/its/> and search for “Office 2007”. If you do not receive an email from me stating that I have received and opened your paper, it has not been submitted and will be considered late. All papers and assignments that are turned in after the start of class will be considered late unless you have sought prior permission for an extension. Late assignments will begin losing points as soon as class starts.

I am always open to reviewing and reconsidering your grade on any written work you complete in this course. If you can't read my handwriting on a comment or if you think I have made a math error, come and see me and I will be happy to take care of it. If you have a more substantial complaint or dispute, you should write a short memo explaining what you believe to be the problem and give it to me with your graded assignment. I will then review your assignment and your memo. Be aware that you may receive no change in grade or a decrease in grade; grade improvements are not guaranteed. If you have questions about these policies or if you want to discuss any of your assignments before or after they are due, please see me in office hours. In addition, please note that this syllabus is provisional and subject to change at any time.

Academic Integrity

I expect all students to adhere to the Hamilton College Honor Code. All violations will be reported; please be aware that I have caught and penalized many students in the past.

Offenses against academic integrity include, but are not limited to:

- ↳ Submitting work that does not use proper attribution of all sources, whether print, internet, or simply a conversation with a classmate or friend. Proper attribution includes a correctly formatted citation and bibliographic entry every time you use an idea that did not come entirely from your own head, whether you quote directly, paraphrase, or merely draw on a text. All standard citation formats are acceptable in this course (such as MLA, Chicago, APA, etc.) though you need to be internally consistent. For those who are not familiar with a particular citation format, here are two links for the citation format used by the American Sociological Association: http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/sociology/resources/writing_citation.html and <http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>.
- ↳ Copying work from other students or writing papers as a joint effort, unless specifically directed to do so. This does not prohibit you from discussing assignments with your peers, but the product of your work must be your own. In addition, you may not submit papers written for other courses without my prior approval.
- ↳ Purchasing your papers from a web source, hiring someone to write your papers for you, submitting papers written by other individuals, or downloading or copying all or part of your

paper from a website. Be aware that it is easier to detect this sort of dishonesty than you might think and many students have been caught.

As part of the proper adherence to standards of academic integrity, you are expected to follow proper citation procedures in all written work. You may use any accepted citation style with which you are familiar, or you may familiarize yourself with the American Sociological Association style (a style guide is available at <http://academics.hamilton.edu/sociology/marthur/race05/styleguide/>). Be sure to cite all sources, whether written, electronic, or oral/conversational, that you draw on in your course papers. These guidelines apply to oral presentations as well as to longer written works.

Course Attendance and Participation Policies

You are expected to attend all class meetings. Attendance is not a formal part of your grade. However, you can not participate if you are not in class. Missing class more than twice during the semester will result in a significant lowering of your grade and will likely impair your ability to do well on course assignments. If you must miss class for a legitimate reason, such as illness, a family emergency, religious observance, or required attendance at intercollegiate athletic competition, it is your responsibility to let me know in advance or as soon as possible afterwards. Any time you miss class, you should get notes from another student and you should come see me during my office hours.

The participation grade in this course is designed to measure the extent to which you are an engaged and active thinker and contributor to the class as a whole. Therefore, students who earn full credit for participation will attend class, contribute to class discussions, complete all in-class writing assignments, and meet with me privately at least once during the semester to discuss their writing. Please remember that some of the issues we discuss in this course may be emotional and/or controversial. Respectful course participation means arguing with ideas rather than attacking people.

Writing Center

All students are encouraged to make use of the writing center for all of the writing assignments you complete this semester, at any stage in the writing process. Information about the Writing Center's services and hours, along with useful information on writing style and on improving your writing, is available on the Writing Center's website at <http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/>. If English is not your first language, I particularly encourage you to make use of the Writing Center and the ESOL program so that your grade in this course will fully reflect your sociological skills.

Oral Communication Center

You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the oral communication center this semester. Information about the center is available at online; particularly take note of the handouts on the lab: <http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/department.html?dept=Oral%20Communication>. For best results, schedule an appointment to run through your presentation with the center a few days to a week before you will present in class so that you have time to incorporate the feedback you get into your class presentation. You can also visit the center while still in the planning stages of your project. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class or have public speaking anxieties, I encourage you to visit the oral communication center early in the semester to plan for the greatest possible success in this course.

Library and Technical Support

As your course presentations will require use of the library and of technology, you should familiarize yourself with support in both of these areas. The Multimedia Presentation Center in the library is a great place to go to work on your presentations; support staff is available there to help you with technical skills and you can always email mpc@hamilton.edu for more information. The subject reference librarian who supports sociology courses is Reid Larson (rslarson@hamilton.edu); you can contact him for reference support, including help finding good sources and information about research skills.

Information Technology

You are expected to check your email regularly for any notice I may send out. Though I will use Blackboard on some occasions, I will primarily use the website associated with this course, with which you should familiarize yourself. It contains an updated syllabus, course assignments, question for the analytical response papers, and links to other resources. The website is available at <http://academics.hamilton.edu/sociology/marthur/classes.html>

Support Services

Some of the issues that we discuss in this course may be troubling. While I am always happy to meet with you in office hours to process emotional as well as intellectual issues raised by the course, there may be times when it is more helpful to speak to someone with training in emotional and mental health. If you feel like you would benefit from such assistance, I encourage you to make an appointment with the Counseling Center at x4340. More information about the Counseling Center's services, staff, and confidentiality policies is available on the Counseling Center's website at http://www.hamilton.edu/college/counseling_center/

Students with Disabilities

If you are a person with a physical, neurological, psychological, medical, learning, or other type of disability and will need accommodations of any kind to ensure your success in this course, please come speak with me as soon as possible after the start of the semester so that we can develop an individual plan. For more information about disability student services, contact Allen Harrison in the Dean of Students' office at aharriso@hamilton.edu.