Social Problems
SOC 0070-4010 and 4015
Tuesday and Thursday 8:00-9:20 and 12:30-1:50

Instructor: Ross Kleinstuber, Ph.D.
Office: 104-B Krebs
Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 9:30-11:00; Wed. 2-6 and by appt.; Fri. by appointment only
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**NOTE** This course will utilize CourseWeb (https://courseweb.pitt.edu/) for announcements, assignments, additional readings, and other materials pertinent to the course. You are expected to be familiar with CourseWeb and to check it regularly. If you have any questions about using CourseWeb, please see me.


*Other readings will be assigned throughout the course at the instructor’s discretion.

Course Description
This course is an introduction to the study of social problems. It is designed to provide students with an opportunity to learn about and discuss contemporary social problems facing US society from a sociological perspective. As you become familiar with sociological inquiry, you will likely develop an appreciation for the complexity of social life. You will also come to see that individual behavior is not so individual; rather, how we think, act and feel has a lot to do with the group norms and social structures surrounding us. By the end of this course, students will be expected to analyze the construction of social problems, their causes, and possible solutions from a sociological perspective.

Course Expectations
A course on social problems inherently deals with many controversial social issues (if they were not controversial, they would not be problematic). To get a fuller understanding and appreciation for these issues, class attendance and participation are essential. Classes will be conducted using a combination of lecture and, when appropriate, class discussions. The purpose of this course is to teach you how to think about social problems in a critical and sociological manner. In this sense, you will be challenged to support your opinions or beliefs with material from the text, the lectures, or any other appropriate source. You will be expected to participate and to interact with your classmates. As such, you will be expected to have read and thought about the assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. This will facilitate
discussion and make learning easier and more enjoyable. Because of the discussion-based nature of many classes, you are expected to attend class; many exam questions will come directly from class discussions.

Please remember that you are expected to respect your classmates at all times. There are no wrong opinions (as long as they can be defended), so when someone else is speaking, you are expected to listen, to wait until he or she is done before responding, and to respond courteously, politely, and thoughtfully. Derogatory, racist, sexist, and other offensive or insulting remarks or comments will not be tolerated.

**Course Grading**

Your grade in this course will be based out 450 points, broken down as follows:

4 Exams (100 points each): 400 points
2 Reaction papers (25 points each): 50 points

Grades will be calculated based on total points accumulated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>416.5-450</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>403-416</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>389.5-402.5</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>371.5-389</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>344.5-357.5</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>326.5-344</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>299.5-312.5</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>281.5-299</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-268</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>358-371</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>313-326</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>268-281</td>
<td>D-</td>
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</tbody>
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**Note on Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications must notify the instructor and the Coordinator of Disability Services in writing no later than the second week in the term. Documentation of a disability may be needed to determine the appropriate accommodations or classroom modifications. For information or to schedule an evaluation-of-need appointment, call the Office of Health & Counseling Services in G10 Student Union, at (814) 269-7119.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Students are expected to be familiar with the University of Pittsburgh’s Guidelines on Academic Integrity (http://www.as.pitt.edu/fac/policies/academic-integrity) and abide by them. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Anyone caught plagiarizing, cheating, or helping anyone do so will be referred to the appropriate university authorities and, at the very least, receive a 0 on the assignment. Additional penalties may apply depending on the nature of the incident.

The Guidelines on Academic Integrity forbid students from presenting “as one’s own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or words of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources.” Plagiarism is dishonest and illegal. Writers are indebted to authors from whom they borrow exact words, ideas, theories, opinions, statistics, illustrative material, or facts (beyond common knowledge). Writers are also indebted if they summarize or paraphrase in their own words material from sources. All quoted material requires the acknowledgement of the source by the use of quotation marks or indentation (if
exact wording is incorporated). In addition, both directly quoted and summarized material must be acknowledged by use of a note or parenthetical citation that indicates the author and/or date of publication and page number or numbers. If the writer indents a quotation, it must be clearly set off from the body of the text and must be documented in the aforesaid manner. Students are permitted to use any professionally recognized citation style, but to verify the various documentation procedures, writers should consult the style sheet for the particular citation format they are using (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). (Note: Language of this paragraph was adapted from both the University of Pittsburgh’s Guidelines on Academic Integrity and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Academic Integrity Policy.)

**Cell Phones**

You are expected to turn off your cell phones before coming to class. I reserve the right to answer any cell phone that rings during class or to complete any text message I catch you typing during class. **Remember, you are expected to be respectful at all times. Interruptions during class, whether they are from cell phones or unnecessary conversations, are disrespectful. Failure to respect your classmates and the instructor may result in being asked to leave.**

**Exams and Make-up Exams**

Exams are expected to be completed *in class* and may only be made up with documentation of an approved excused absence; please consult the university policy for more information. If you miss an exam due to either an emergency or an excused absence, you are expected to contact the instructor within 48 hours or as soon as reasonably possible. Barring extreme extenuating circumstances, failure to contact the instructor within 48 hours with an approved excuse and to schedule a make-up will result in a grade of 0 for the exam. Make-up exams will be given in a format to be determined by the instructor.

**Reaction Papers**

The reaction papers are an opportunity for you to explain what you think about a particular topic and why. You are expected to answer the questions presented, but in doing so, you are expected to defend your position, to anticipate potential counter-arguments, and to refute them. You should be aware that I will be reading your papers with a critical eye, so you must explain your positions. Be sure, however, to answer ALL questions presented as well. That is the most important aspect. **YOUR GRADES ON THE REACTION PAPERS WILL BE BASED ON YOUR ABILITY TO CLEARLY INDICATE YOUR POSITION, YOUR ABILITY TO DEFEND YOUR POSITION WITH SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS, AND YOUR ABILITY TO ORGANIZE YOUR PAPER LOGICALLY AND COHERENTLY.** Keep in mind that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions; however, that does not mean that all opinions are created equally. You will be expected to provide factual evidence to support your opinion, and you will be graded on your ability to do so. The goal of these assignments is to teach you how to find and utilize factual evidence in order to formulate an informed and educated opinion.
Although no specific page requirements will be placed on the papers, papers should typically run in the two to five page range (double-spaced with standard font and margins). All reaction papers are graded out of 25 points.

Throughout this course, there will be SEVEN (7) reaction papers assigned (as designated below). You must choose TWO (2) topics that interest you and write a reaction essay. All reaction papers will be due before the start of class on the due dates indicated below and MUST be submitted through CourseWeb. To submit a paper via CourseWeb, once you are in the page for this course, select “Reaction Papers” on the left side. Once there, click on the heading of the reaction paper you are submitting, and this will take you to the submission portal. From the submission portal, you have the option of either uploading your paper (please .doc, .docx, or .pdf formats) or typing your paper in the box provided. Either method is acceptable. Once you have uploaded your file or entered your text, click “Submit,” review your submission, then click “OK.” If you do not click “OK,” the paper will not be submitted.

Students are expected to make every effort to submit papers on time. You are expected to begin your work early and back up your work. Considering all work will be handed in via the Internet, there are very few legitimate reasons for not completing assignments on time. If you know you will not be in class, you can still submit your paper through CourseWeb. Barring EXTREME extenuating circumstances or a documented excused absence, all late papers will lose 2.5 points (which is equivalent to a whole letter grade) for each day or part of a day that they are late. In other words, papers submitted one minute late up to 24 hours late will lose 2.5 points; papers submitted 24 hours and 1 minute late up to 48 hours late will lose 5 points, and so on. No papers will be accepted more than FIVE days late (again, barring EXTREME extenuating circumstances).

Remember, you are expected to do YOUR OWN work on these reaction papers and to properly cite ALL sources you use. Plagiarizing papers by misrepresenting or passing off the ideas, words, formulas, or data of another as one’s own is UNACCEPTABLE and will be dealt with harshly. Please refer to the “Academic Honesty” section above.

**Reaction Paper Topics and Approximate Due Dates**

Note: Neither topics nor due dates are set in stone and are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion. Please consult CourseWeb for details on the papers. Remember, you must select TWO topics on which to write a paper and in the event of discrepancy, papers will be due on the date listed on CourseWeb (not the date listed on the syllabus).

1. Critically think about and provide your reaction to the game “Sociopoly” that we played in class. (Due: Jan. 26)
2. Assignment on LGBT equality issues TBD (Due: Feb. 23)
3. What policy should the United States implement toward drugs that are now illegal? Be sure to defend your policy. (Due: March 1)
4. Which theory (or theories) of crime best explain the behavior of the offender described in the fact scenario (scenario will be presented on CourseWeb), and based upon the facts presented, what do you believe an appropriate punishment should be and why? (Due: March 15).

5. React to and critically evaluate the film *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*. (Due: March 24)

6. What public policies (if any) should we take in regards to controlling the production and dissemination of pornographic materials? Why? What are the benefits of your proposal? How likely is your proposal to pass? (Due: March 31).

7. Is there a way to make the American education system more equitable? If so, what is it? If not, why not? (Due: April 21).

**Schedule**

***Please note: The dates on this schedule and the assigned readings are tentative and likely to change. Please check CourseWeb regularly for scheduling updates.***

January 7: Introduction to the Course: Distribution of syllabus, getting to know each other, and overview of the course

January 12: What are social problems?
   - Kendall, chapter 1

January 14-21: Poverty and Economic Inequality
   - Kendall, chapter 2
   - Ehrenreich, “Nickel and Dimed”
   - Morris, “On A Plate”

January 26-28: Racial Inequality
   - Kendall, chapter 3
   - McIntosh, “White Privilege”
   - Wise, “White America’s Greatest Delusion”

February 2-4: Gender Inequality
   - Kendall, chapter 4
   - Wade, “Children, Chores, and the Gender Pay Gap at Home”

*FEBRUARY 9: EXAM 1 (date is subject to change)*
February 11-16: LGBT Issues
- Kendall, chapter 6
- Isidore, “How Businesses Can Still Discriminate Against LGBT People”
- Rivas, “41% of Transgender People Have Attempted Suicide”

February 18-23: Drug Use & Abuse
- Kendall, chapter 8

February 25-March 1: Crime & Criminal Justice
- Kendall, chapter 9
- Wolfers, et al. “1.5 Million Missing Black Men”

MARCH 3: EXAM 2 (date is subject to change)

March 8-10: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK 😎

March 15-17: Problems in the Media
- Kendall, chapter 14
- Butler, “Shooters of Color are Called ‘Terrorists’ and ‘Thugs’ …”
- Glassner, pages 109-114

March 22-24: Pornography, Prostitution, and Sexual Violence
- Kendall, chapter 7

March 29-31: Problems in Healthcare & Mental Illness
- Kendall, chapter 10

APRIL 5: EXAM 3 (date is subject to change)

April 7-12: Family Problems & Family Violence
- Kendall, chapter 11
- Hochschild, “The Second Shift”

April 14-19: Problems in Education
- Kendall, chapter 12
- Kozol, “Savage Inequalities”
- Olen, “The Curse of Student Loan Debt”

April 21: Can Social Problems be Solved?
• Kendall, chapter 18

FINAL EXAM: Date as determined by Final Exam Schedule