

University of Manitoba
Department of Sociology

SOC 2010 A01 Critical Issues in Sociology

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11.30-12.45
320C Isbister Building
Fall 2010, 3 Credit Hours

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Course Summary

The *Undergraduate Calendar* description of this course reads: 'A form-specific, content variable course especially designed for Honours students. The intent of this course is to develop critical thinking and improve students' oral, writing and research skills. It is also designed to create a cohesive cohort of Honours students through the use of group work and assignments.'

This year, the course will focus on social problems and social problem-solving, with a largely local focus. We will consider how various phenomena, once labelled 'social problems', are addressed in attempts to solve them. The first part of the course will focus on how sociology as a discipline has theorized and approached 'social problems.' From this general overview, we will concentrate on social problem-solving initiatives. The course is organized around a major research essay, in which students explore a social problem and its social-problem efforts associated with it, drawing on both primary (interview) and secondary data. Through this study, we will be alert to the complex intersection of social interaction and social institutions, exploring if, when and how race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and other processes are relevant to struggles over the definitions of, and problem-solving associated with, social problems.

This course is designed as a seminar. This will require the active participation and involvement of every student.

Course Objectives

As an introduction to the Honours program, this course will accomplish a series of cognate objectives. In addition to (a) introducing students to theoretical debates about social problem definition and social-problem solving and (b) providing an opportunity for substantive study of a social problem, the course will also provide an introduction to:

- applied research methods – preparing a research ethics application & qualitative interviewing
- social policy analysis
- theories of social change

The course will further:

- develop students' ability to communicate orally; to lead seminars; to work together as a team; research and write papers; and

Required Readings – see schedule

- Most readings are available by photocopy in the Sociology mail room
- Some supplementary readings can be downloaded directly (see addresses in schedule) and all others are available from the Elizabeth Dafoe Library.

Assessment

Synthesis Paper

- The objective of the paper (approx 1,800 words, or about 6 pages) is to explore the theoretical issues associated with studying social problems. Through the synthesis paper, students will provide evidence of their mastery of theory as well as their capacity to apply the information. The synthesis paper is worth 25% of the final grade.

Presentation No. 1: Situating Research Topic

- Students will make a 10 - 15 minute oral presentation. The presentation will identify the selected social problem topic and will explore its relationship to the literature theorizing social problems. This presentation is worth 10% of final grade.

Research Essay

- The essay is designed to help build a scaffold to the Honours thesis. Students will identify and research a social issue that interests them. Research essays (approx 4,000 words, or about 13- 14 pages) must integrate theoretical and empirical material, and they must include some discussion of social-problem solving, as well as content from two original interviews with a representative of a social problem solving organization. More information on preparing the essay will be presented in-class. The research essay is worth 40% of your final grade. No time extensions will be granted, so you should plan your time carefully to meet this deadline.

Presentation No. 2: Research Essay Overview

- Each student will make a 30 minute scheduled presentation to present their research essay, and to respond to questions from classmates and the instructor. Students will present on the issue that they have selected for their research essay. Your presentation is worth 10% of your final grade.

Seminar Participation

- This course will operate as a seminar and is not a lecture-based course. Each student must arrive in class ready to participate (by having read that day's assigned reading). Then, being ready, students must *actively participate*. Effective seminars are the product of group interaction. Each class we will identify and review the major concepts, ideas and techniques contained in the day's reading(s). Each class will begin with a discussion of basic information (definitions, key facts, etc.) and will move toward discussions that integrate comprehension and application. It is every seminar participant's job to address the day's reading(s), including (a) being willing to raise questions about any aspect of the reading that is unclear and (b) offering comments on content to dispute or explore further.

Note: Students will rely on each other in their learning. As a seminar, learning in this course will happen through mutual engagement. Fifteen percent of your final grade will be based on evaluations of your preparation for, and participation in, the weekly seminar – including peer assessments of your contribution.

Grade Weights

Synthesis paper	25%
Presentation No. 1	10%
Presentation No. 2	10%
Research Essay	40%
Seminar Participation	15%

Grade Distribution

Generally speaking, the following letter/percentage/GPA/descriptive scale will be used, however students should note that these are guidelines only, and may be altered depending on the final grade distribution

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>GPA</i>	<i>Description</i>
A+	91-100%	4.5	Exceptional
A	80-90%	4.0	Excellent
B+	75-79%	3.5	Very Good
B	70-74%	3.0	Good
C+	65-69%	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60-64%	2.0	Adequate
D	50-59%	1.0	Marginal
F	49% or less	0	Failure

Students should familiarize themselves with the University policy on appeal of term and final grades, found in the University of Manitoba's *Undergraduate Calendar*. Please note that concerns about term work must be discussed with the instructor in the first instance; then can be appealed up to ten working days after grades have been made available to students.

Late Submissions

Late papers will be penalized 3% per day late (including weekends). Medical documentation will normally be required to waive this penalty. However, if you know before the due date that a paper will be late you should contact me immediately. Extensions may be granted under extenuating circumstances, entirely at the instructor's discretion, ONLY if the student contacts the instructor PRIOR to the deadline. No time extensions will be granted for the Research Essay, so you should plan your time carefully to meet this deadline.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence. Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (Section 7.1) and 'Examinations: Personations' (Section 4.2.8) found in the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar. *Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and range from failing the course to expulsion from the University.* Guidelines for properly referencing your papers will be distributed in class.

Note: The Faculty of Arts reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

Voluntary Withdrawal

Last day for voluntary withdrawal from the course without academic penalty is ***November 17, 2010.***

Religious Holidays

The University of Manitoba acknowledges the right of all students to observe recognized holy days of their faith. You will need to inform the instructor in writing of your intended absence(s) at least three weeks in advance, particularly if such absence(s) coincide with the set in-class test dates.

Special Learning Needs

Students with special learning needs (who, for legitimate reasons, require extra time to write a test, or who require aids or other supports) should introduce themselves to the instructor during the first week of the course in order to organize suitable accommodation and assessment arrangements.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Handed out first day of class
(Subject to change without notice)

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to Susan Prentice for permission to follow her Sociology 2010 course syllabus in the preparation of this syllabus.