

University of Manitoba  
Department of Sociology

## **SOC 2010 A01 Critical Issues in Sociology**

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10.00-11.15 am  
320C Isbister Building  
Fall 2012, 3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Dr. Sonia Bookman  
Office: 334 Isbister Building  
Telephone: 204 474 7832  
Email: Sonia.Bookman@ad.umanitoba.ca  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11.30 am-12.30 pm, Thursdays 12.30-1.30 pm

### **Course Summary**

This course is designed specifically for Honours students with the intent of developing a range of important skills, including critical thinking, oral, writing and research skills. It is also intended to cultivate a cohesive cohort of Honours students through class participation, discussion and assignments.

While form-specific, the course is content variable. This year the course will be focused on the topic of 'social problems'. We will begin by considering various definitions of what consists of a 'social problem', problematizing the notion. We will then explore how sociology as a discipline has theorized and approached 'social problems', considering and comparing key perspectives. We will examine various factors that contribute to social problems discourses. Finally, we will look at how 'social problems' are addressed, considering various social problem-solving initiatives. The course is organized around a major research essay, in which students will explore a particular social problem, considering how it is understood and addressed, drawing on both primary (interview) and secondary data. Throughout, we will pay attention to the ways in which struggles to define social problems, and social problem-solving efforts are shaped by different interests and power relations, involving complex intersections of class, ethnicity or gender.

### **Course Objectives**

- To introduce students to key perspectives and theoretical debates on the theme of social problems
- To provide an opportunity for substantive study of a specific social problem topic
- To develop students' critical thinking and writing skills through seminar participation, discussion, and assignments
- To develop students' ability to communicate orally through class discussion, the opportunity to lead seminars and presentations
- To develop students' research skills through applied research, including preparation of an ethics application and qualitative interviewing

## **Required Readings – see schedule**

- Most readings are available on reserve in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library.
- Some supplementary readings can be downloaded directly.

## **Assessment**

### Synthesis Paper

- Students are required to write a short synthesis of 1800 words (approximately 7 pages). It will focus on the theoretical issues and debates associated with the study of social problems. Students will be provided with more detailed information about the assignment in class. The paper will require demonstration of a solid understanding of the theory and ability to critically engage with the information.

### Presentation No. 1: Situating Research Topic

- Students will make a 10 - 15 minute presentation. The presentation will identify the selected social problem topic and will explore its relationship to the literature theorizing social problems.

### Research Essay

- Students are required to submit a research paper of 4000 words (approximately 14-16 pages) on a social problem topic of their choice. This paper will bring together a theoretical understanding of social problems with empirical material, including a discussion of the content from two original interviews with a representative of a social problem solving organization. More detailed information on this assignment will be provided in class. 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 20 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, including a discussion of interview data.

### 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). Students must *actively participate*. Effective seminars are the product of group interaction. In 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 brief overview of the key ideas, summarized by a designated student. We will then go over 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. Students will rely on each other in their learning. As a seminar, learning in this course will happen through mutual engagement. The mark for this component will be based on evaluations of your preparation for, and participation in, the weekly seminar – including peer assessments of your contribution.

## Composition of Final Grade

Requirement	Mark	Due Date
Synthesis Paper	25%	November 1, 2012
Presentation #1	10%	Variable
Presentation #2	10%	Variable
Research Essay	40%	December 4, 2012
Seminar Participation	15%	Each class

## 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' and 'Examinations: Personations' 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 14, 2012.***

## **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.