Sociology 102: Current Social Problems
General Education Competency Area: Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing
Fall 2015
Tu/Th, 12:00-1:15, ACW 133

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Office hours: Tues./Thurs., 1:30-2:30 p.m., Wed., 10:30-11:30 a.m., and by appointment

Course summary

What constitutes a social problem? What are some of the most pressing social problems in contemporary U.S. society? How have social problems developed over time in the United States and globally? How do race, class, and gender inequalities contribute to and manifest as social problems? In this course, we will use our sociological imaginations to explore these and other questions concerning some of the most critical problems facing our society and the world. Readings, lectures, writing assignments, films, and discussions will provide the foundation from which we will expand and deepen our understanding of the sociological nature of current social problems.

General Education learning outcomes

This course is designed to help you develop the competencies stipulated by the Idaho State Board of Education for the Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing component of the General Education Core. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to do the following:

i. Demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of a particular Social Science discipline (sociology).

ii. Develop an understanding of self and the world by examining the dynamic interaction of individuals, groups, and societies as they shape and are shaped by history, culture, institutions, and ideas.

iii. Utilize Social Science approaches, such as research methods, inquiry, or problem solving, to examine the variety of perspectives about human experiences.

iv. Evaluate how reasoning, history, or culture informs and guides individual, civic, or global decisions.

v. Understand and appreciate similarities and differences among and between individuals, cultures, or societies across space and time.

Course-specific learning outcomes

This course aims to help you gain knowledge and develop skills that will aid you in becoming a critical thinker, a successful student, and an informed, engaged member of society. More specifically, in this course you will do the following, which are linked to the above General Education learning outcomes as noted in parentheses:
-learn how to interpret your and others’ behaviors and experiences using a sociological framework (i, ii, iv, v)
-gain an understanding of the structural roots of social problems (i, ii, iv, v)
-gain an understanding of the ways social class, race, gender, and nationality affect people’s life chances and the types of problems and challenges they face (i, ii, iv, v)
-discuss social issues in an informed, critical, and civil manner and in the process gain experience speaking to an audience of your peers (i, ii, iii, iv, v)
-write evidence-based essays in which you analyze specific social problems and apply sociological theories, concepts, and insights appropriately (i, ii, iii, iv, v)

Overall goal

I want you to learn something new in this class. Sounds simple, right? Well, in my experience, this isn’t always such an easy task. We all have so many taken for granted assumptions about how the world works, what constitutes reality, why people behave in certain ways, etc., that it is sometimes difficult for us to recognize when “what we’ve always known” is keeping us from knowing more. I think that all of us—teachers and students alike—need to continually challenge ourselves to learn more about the world in which we live. I believe the way to accomplish this is by questioning status quo interpretations of reality, seeking out information that will help us answer our questions, and understanding that we can always learn more about any given topic. You should do well in this class if you approach the material with this in mind.

Required readings

The following required book is available at the LCSC Bookstore and/or from various booksellers online:


The other required readings for the course include several book chapters/articles that are noted in the course schedule below and are available either online or on the LCSC Library’s Electronic Reserves system, which is accessible via the library’s homepage. (Go to www.lcsc.edu/library, click on “Course Reserves” under the “Library” heading on the right side of the page, and then find the readings by searching for “SOC 102” or “Earles.”)

Assignments and grading

Your grade in this course will be based on the following:

Pop quizzes - 10% (20 pts.) A pop quiz may await you in class on any given day. These quizzes are my way of ensuring that you are keeping up with the assigned readings, and they may also test your knowledge of previously covered lecture material.

Brief writing assignments and group activities - 10% (20 pts.) I will sometimes ask you to write a brief thought-piece on a particular issue in preparation for a class discussion, or I may ask you to summarize a key concept from the readings or restate an author’s main points in your own words. These writing assignments may be assigned at the end of class and be due at the start of the
following class period, and they may take place in class, as well. We will also sometimes have
small-group discussions and activities for which I will ask each group to provide a brief
summary/outline of your key thoughts/points.

**Papers - 30% (60 pts.)** You will write two formal, 3-5 page papers in which you exhibit your
understanding of and ability to critically reflect on the assigned readings, lectures, and films.
Specific instructions for these papers will be distributed and discussed in class. The first paper is
worth 10% of your grade, and the second is worth 20%.

**Midterm Exam - 25% (50 pts.)** The midterm examination will consist of a combination of
multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions on material covered during Weeks 1-7.

**Final Exam - 25% (50 pts.)** The final is a comprehensive exam consisting of a combination of
multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions. It will test your knowledge of material covered
throughout the semester, but will emphasize Weeks 9-15

**Please keep in mind that any information from the readings is fair game for exams, whether or
not it is explicitly covered in class. Also, please note that lectures will often introduce material not
covered in the textbook, so good note taking is key to your success in this class.**

**Grading scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100%</td>
<td>(185-200 pts.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
<td>(179-184 pts.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87.5-89%</td>
<td>(175-178 pts.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82.5-87%</td>
<td>(165-174 pts.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
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<td>72.5-77%</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
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<td>(135-138 pts.)</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60-67%</td>
<td>(119-134 pts.)</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59% or below</td>
<td>(118 pts.)</td>
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*A note on grades: At any point during the semester, you can calculate your own grade by simply
adding up the number of points you’ve earned so far on quizzes, papers, and exams and dividing by
the total number of points possible at that point in time. I make my grading simple and transparent
so that YOU CAN KEEP TRACK OF YOUR OWN GRADE.

**Evaluation criteria**

Your papers will be graded according to the thoroughness with which you have addressed the
question(s) posed; the extent to which you offer a critical, sociological analysis/interpretation; the
extent to which you have integrated course readings, lectures, films, and discussions; and the clarity
and coherence of your writing (i.e. how well-written, organized, and logical your writing is). “A”s
are reserved for truly superior work that illustrates depth, breadth, and nuanced comprehension of
the course material and nearly flawless writing. “B”s are assigned to above average, well-written
work that answers the questions posed in a sociological manner. “C”s are an indication that more
detail and analysis are needed and/or your writing needs significant improvement. “D”s are a sign
that you did not adequately meet the requirements of the paper and/or your writing is unacceptable.
“F”s are an indication that you have not met the requirements of the paper and your writing is
unacceptable.
The brief writing assignments and group activities will be graded according to the degree to which your writing or your group’s work reflects adequate preparation (i.e., that you have done the assigned readings) and engagement with the activity (taking it seriously and giving it your best effort, including good writing).

The grading of quizzes and exams is straightforward with regard to the multiple choice and true/false questions. Answers are either correct or incorrect. For the essay portion of your exams, I expect references to the readings and lectures, the use of sociological terminology, and coherent writing.

**Attendance**

I believe very strongly in the benefits of regular class attendance. You will not do well in this course if you do not come to class on a regular basis. My advice? Come to every class. If you do miss a class, please do not ask me, “What did I miss?” or, my personal favorite, “Did I miss anything?” Instead, get the notes from a fellow classmate, keeping in mind that s/he may or may not be a good note taker. But why take that risk? Just come to every class.

**Policy on make-ups and late assignments**

*Pop quizzes cannot be made up.* You must be present in class to take a quiz. At the end of the semester, I will add three points to everyone’s quiz total to buffer the effects of a missed quiz or a lower than expected grade on a quiz. These additional three points also serve as extra credit for those who take all of the quizzes and do exceptionally well on them.

*Brief writing assignments and group activities cannot be made up or turned in late.* You must be present in class when we are doing these assignments and activities in order to earn credit for them, because they are de facto participation points. In the case of any brief writing assignments that I announce at the end of a class period to be turned in at the start of the following class, if you are not in class but find out from a classmate what the assignment is and then turn it in at the beginning of the next class period along with everyone else, that is perfectly fine, since that is when the assignment is due (not to mention that it shows initiative on your part in finding out what you missed when you were absent), but you may not turn in a writing assignment that was completed in a class period that you missed.

*Make-up exams will be given in very rare circumstances* for students with legitimate reasons who make arrangements with me well in advance. Emergency situations may also warrant an exam make-up. **You must contact me prior to class on the exam day in order for me to consider a request for a make-up.** Vacations and other optional absences are not legitimate reasons for rescheduling an exam.

*Except for in extenuating circumstances, papers not turned in at the start of class on the due dates (noted in the Course Schedule) will receive an automatic 10% deduction.* Papers not turned in by 5:00 on the due date will receive a 20% deduction; and papers not turned in by 5:00 on the day after they are due will receive a ZERO. If you think you have an extenuating circumstance, you must contact me prior to the class period in which papers are due. I will handle such claims on a case-by-case basis. **If you do turn in a paper late, you must email it to me as a Word document, and I must receive it by 5:00 on the day after it is due.** Under no circumstances should papers be slid under my office door or put in my mailbox. **Please note that any paper received via email will**
be considered a late paper even if it is sent before or during the regular class time, unless you have made arrangements with me in advance and I have given you permission to email me your paper instead of turning it in person at the start of class. Please also note that we live in a day and age in which emails do not get “lost.” If you send an email to me at the correct address (leearles@lcsu.edu), I will receive it. Therefore, an excuse of “I don’t know what happened; I sent it yesterday” doesn’t fly.

Classroom etiquette

By coming to class, you are agreeing to abide by the following basic norms of courtesy, which are aimed at ensuring a productive learning environment for all students:

- Be on time, and do not leave early. Coming in late or leaving early (even by just a few minutes) can be highly disruptive. If you know that you need to leave early one day for a legitimate reason, let me know at the start of class, but this should not be a regular occurrence.

- Please do not interrupt others or talk to your neighbor while others are speaking.

- Address your fellow classmates respectfully, whether or not you agree with them.

- Turn off cell phones and any other little beeping, buzzing, or music-making devices before you come to class. If you are a parent or otherwise need to be available for family members, please put your phone on vibrate mode.

- Don’t even think about texting in class. You may think you can multi-task well, but trust me, you can’t. None of us can. You are not encoding and retaining information if you are texting while I’m lecturing or while you’re engaging in a group activity. Plus, it’s distracting to everyone around you when you’re poking at your phone. Please simply refrain from doing it.

- Do not read the newspaper, work on an assignment for another class, or otherwise be disengaged from what is going on in the classroom.

- Finally, no internet use in class. Despite the fact that that cute man/woman you’ve been obsessing over has just IM’d you or sent you a message on Facebook, please do not read or respond to emails in class, all the while pretending to take notes. If you use a laptop computer for note taking, you will need to sit in the front row of the classroom.

Academic integrity

Any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be dealt with in a manner that is unpleasant for all involved. Specifically, if you plagiarize or otherwise cheat on an exam, paper, or assignment, you will automatically receive a zero on that exam/paper/assignment, which will lower your overall grade substantially, and I will also report the incident to the Dean of Student Affairs. I also reserve the right to assign you a failing grade for the course in especially egregious cases, such as copying full sentences directly from a website, the
textbook, or other sources and presenting them as your own. Please do not ruin your academic future by engaging in such foolish behavior.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of the preceding paragraph. *If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, please ask me for an explanation or clarification.*

**Additional notes**

**Documented disabilities**

If you have a documented disability or other issue that may affect your performance in this course, please let me know during the first week of the semester, and we will work together to figure out appropriate accommodations.

**Audio/video recording**

Any type of picture taking or audio/video recording of this class is prohibited. We cover sensitive and controversial issues in this course, and everyone should feel free to discuss such issues in an open manner without fear that their words will be taken out of context. Any type of recording, even for seemingly benign note-taking purposes, has the potential to diminish the classroom experience. If you have trouble listening and taking notes at the same time, we can find a solution through a combination of practice/skill-building on your part and supplemental notes from another student if necessary.

**Contacting me**

If you have questions about the course material and/or would like to further discuss any of the topics we are covering, please come chat with me during my office hours. If you need to contact me otherwise, the best way to reach me is via email at leearles@lsc.edu. I check email most weekdays. You can also try calling my office phone during office hours. Please be aware, however, that if you leave a message at any other time on my office phone, I may not get it until the following office hour, so if you need to be in touch with me in a timely manner, use email. If/when you email me, please include a phone number where you can be reached if your question requires more than a very brief response, so I can call you if necessary. Also, please compose your email as you would to any other professional contact. In other words, include a subject line, a proper salutation (e.g. “Dear Professor Earles”), and use good grammar. An email that starts with something along the lines of “hey i have a question for you,” will not be received well and may not garner a response. All this being said, please use email sparingly. I would much rather talk with you in person during my office hours and/or after class.
Course schedule

The following course schedule is subject to change depending on our progress in covering the material. Any changes will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to know what is announced in class, whether or not you are present when it is announced.

Your active engagement with each week’s assigned readings is key to your success in this class. **The readings for each week should be completed prior to class that week** so that you are able to engage in informed discussions about the readings with your fellow classmates and respond to any questions that I might ask you about the material. The readings listed for each week include chapters from your textbook (by Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith), and, for some weeks, individual selections that are available via the LCSC library’s electronic reserves and/or online. These selections are noted by author and title. Additional e-reserve or online readings may be added over the course of the semester. These additional readings will be announced in class.

Documentaries and other film clips will be integrated with the lectures and class discussions throughout the semester.

**Week 1 (8/25, 8/27): Introduction to the course**

Readings: Start reading Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 1

**Week 2 (9/1, 9/3): The sociological approach to the study of social problems**

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 1

**Week 3 (9/8, 9/10): Systemic bias: Wealth and power**

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 2; Domhoff, “Wealth, Income, and Power” (online: http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html)

**Week 4 (9/15, 9/17): The global, systemic roots of environmental problems**

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 3, and Foster, “The Ecological Crisis” (e-reserves)

*Guest speaker, Dr. Kari Norgaard, on Thursday, 9/17. Class will be held in the WCC that day.*

**Week 5 (9/22, 9/24): Environmental problems (continued…)**

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 4
Week 6 (9/29, 10/1): Poverty and work in the U.S. and beyond

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Chs. 7

*First paper due in class on Thursday, October 1st*

Week 7 (10/6, 10/8): Poverty and work (continued…)


Week 8 (10/13, 10/15): Midterm exam

Readings: Catch up and review previous readings.

*Exam on Thursday, October 15th*

Week 9 (10/20, 10/22): Racial and ethnic inequality

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 8

Week 10 (10/27, 10/29): Gender inequality


Week 11 (11/3, 11/5): Gender (continued) and domestic violence


Week 12 (11/10, 11/12): Crime, deviance, and the criminal justice system

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 12
Week 13 (11/17, 11/19): The criminal justice system (continued) and drugs

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith, Ch. 13

***Thanksgiving Break (11/23-11/27)***

Week 14 (12/1, 12/3): Health inequalities and problems in the U.S. health care system

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith Ch. 17

Week 15 (12/8, 12/10): Course wrap-up: Possible solutions to systemic problems?

Readings: Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith Ch. 19

*Second paper due in class on Thursday, December 10th*

Finals Week (12/17): Comprehensive final exam

*Exam on Thursday, Dec. 17th, at noon*
Syllabus Addendum

Consumer Information
In 2008, the federal government required all post-secondary institutions offering federal financial aid programs to provide key data to both prospective and current students. To comply with this requirement, Lewis-Clark State College has developed a consumer information page, which may be accessed at http://www.lcsc.edu/student-consumer-information/

Disability Accommodations
Students requiring special accommodations or course adaptations due to a disability and/or a health-related issue should consult their course instructors and the LCSC Student Counseling Center immediately (RCH 111, 792-2211). Official documentation may be required in order to provide an accommodation and/or adaptation.

Student Rights and Responsibilities
Students have the responsibility for knowing their program requirements, course requirements, and other information associated with their enrollment at LCSC. Students should review the LCSC General Catalog (http://webdev.lcsc.edu/catalog and the LCSC Student Handbook (http://www.lcsc.edu/media/1152314/13-14-Student-Handbook-Revised.pdf) for more information.

Accidents/Student Insurance
Students participating in LCSC classes normally must look to their personal health insurance policy (Student Health Insurance Plan or comparable private coverage) should an accident occur. In the event of an accident, please seek medical help, if necessary, and report the incident to LCSC Security (792-2226). Fieldtrips or other special student activities may also require students to submit a signed participation waiver (forms can be obtained from the supporting Division Office).

Enrollment Verification/Attendance
Students who are not actively pursuing their classes may have to repay part or all of their financial aid awards depending upon the circumstances.

Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty, which includes cheating and plagiarism, is not tolerated at LCSC. Individual faculty members will impose their own policies and sanctions regarding academic dishonesty. Students who are accused of being academically dishonest may be referred to the VP for Student Affairs for official disciplinary action.

Illegal File Sharing
Students using LCSC’s computers and/or computer network must comply with the college’s appropriate use policies and are prohibited from illegally downloading or sharing data files of any kind. Specific information about the college’s technology policies and its protocols for combating illegal file sharing may be found on the VP for Student Affairs’ web page (http://www.lcsc.edu/student-affairs/student-code-of-conduct/).

Diversity Vision Statement
Regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation, you will be treated and respected as a human being.

Disclosures
During this course, if you elect to discuss information with me that you consider to be sensitive or personal in nature and not to be shared with others, please state this clearly. Your confidentiality in these circumstances will be respected unless upholding that confidentiality could reasonably put you, other students, other members of the campus community, or me in danger. In those cases or when I am bound by law to report what you have told me, such as incidents involving sexual assault or other violent acts, I will submit a report to appropriate campus authorities.