

SOCIOLOGY 302/CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS/FALL SEMESTER 2008
MWF 10-10:50 in Quigley 202

Instructor: Jen Dunn, Ph.D.

3428 Faner Hall

Office Hours: M 8:45-9:45, 11-12:00, W 8:45-9:45, F 8:45-9:45, 11-12:00, 1:30-2:30 and by appointment

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Content and Objectives of the Course

This course will introduce you to the definition and study of social problems. Rather than focusing on the conditions we ordinarily think of as social problems, in this course, we will learn and take a social constructionist analytical approach to examine how various actors come to define conditions as problematic, the claims-making and other strategies that take place in these definitional processes, and the outcomes of these processes for specific cases. How is it that a social phenomenon comes to be seen as a social issue? How do people decide what is or is not a social problem, and how do they organize to get others to agree? What is at stake in this process? We will examine and learn to apply concepts--such as "typification," "claims-making," "medicalization," "ownership," and "moral entrepreneur" to contemporary exemplars of social problems activities. In addition, students will have the opportunity to analyze a social problem of their choice during the semester. By the end of the semester you should be able to meet the following objectives:

- identify important constructionist thinkers in the sociology of social problems
- understand how social problems are constructed in everyday life
- critically assess claims about social problems
- use course concepts to analyze the social construction of a contemporary social problem, using data you have collected
- see improvements in your critical thinking

Required Texts

Loseke, Donileen. 2003. Second edition. Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (hereinafter, TSP)

Loseke, Donileen and Joel Best, editors. 2003. Social Problems: Constructionist Readings. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (hereinafter, SPCR)

Requirements and Grading

Participation and Attendance:

We will take attendance because the University sometimes needs to have documentation of the last day of class attendance. Attendance is **strongly** correlated with performance on exams and papers. During class, we will not only discuss the course concepts you will need to understand to pass the examinations and write your paper, but we will often be going over exactly how to do the assignments. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from another student. While attendance is not a formal percentage of your grade (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE GROUP MEETINGS, see below) we will take excellent attendance into account when we calculate your final grade and if you are within a few points of a higher grade, we will factor it in. If you participate regularly enough either in class or office hours that we get to know you, we will factor this in as well.

Unit exams (30% of course grade)

Unit exams are "open book," "open note" in-class essay examinations that require you to apply course concepts to your own data. Exams are always scheduled on FRIDAYS. Make-up exams are 5-7 page papers on the same topics, by **prior** arrangement with me.

Research presentation: (5%)

In November and December, you will work in groups to present your data to the class in panel discussions. The grade for this requirement is an INDIVIDUAL grade. One third of this grade is based on your attendance when group meetings are scheduled, and one third on your attendance and participation during the dates you are NOT assigned to present (i.e., on your performance as a member of the audience). The rest of this grade is based on how closely you adhere to the assignment guidelines (handed out prior to the start of presentations). Length: approximately 10 minutes. **Group meetings are scheduled for Sept. 22, October 27, and November 14. Presentations will be November 17-21 and December 1-5 (the last two weeks of class).**

Research paper: (55%)

This report is similar to a take-home exam, in that you will be given a list of questions to answer. Your answers to the question will formalize the analysis you practiced in your presentation, drawing upon the text, moderate library and/or internet research on the history of the social problem you have been assigned, and your data. Instructions for the library/internet research will be handed out early in the semester for those of you who want to get a jump on it. Instructions for the full paper will be handed out Nov. 7, one month prior to it's due date of Dec. 5 (the last day of class). Length: **10-12 pages**

Final exam: (10%) There will be a comprehensive, in-class, final exam based on all course materials including lectures, readings, and presentations. The format is T/F and multiple choice.

Emergency Procedures: Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and health environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, available on BERT's website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Safety's website www.dps.siu.edu (disaster drop down), and in Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.