

Social Problems (Credits: 4)

Sociology 103 Spring 2024; M/W/F 9:05-9:55a; Location: Thompson 104

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Weekly student hours (934 Thompson): to be arranged at class

Overview/learning objectives: This course is a general introduction to the discipline of Sociology through the lens of contemporary social problems. Your job as a member of the class is to be relentlessly curious about how the social world “works” (and doesn’t work!). This term we have the following goals:

1. Introduce you to sociological practice through an examination of both methods of observation and analysis and prominent theoretical explanations.
2. Introduce you to a series of contemporary social problems with an introduction to past sociological research on the substantive topic and contemporary debates.
3. Introduce you to contemporary theory and evidence around core topics of diversity, including at least race, gender, sexuality and class in the US and globally.
4. You will learn social science theories and knowledge necessary to comprehend diverse social, cultural, and political experiences and perspectives.
5. You will develop the ability to explain and analyze diverse social, cultural, and political perspectives, particularly those that are not your own.
6. You will demonstrate an awareness of how individual perspectives and biases influence your own and others’ behavior.
7. You will gain knowledge of structural and cultural forces that shape or have shaped discrimination based on multiple social statuses, such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, or gender.

Bonus goals: You should leave this course with an ability to think critically about how the social world that surrounds us affects your life – and how you affect the life of others in the tapestry of society that we’re continually weaving together. Equally important is to develop skills *that transfer beyond this course*: a) evaluating evidence about scientific claims, b) interpreting many kinds of data c) writing & reflecting about social science research, and d) engaging with viewpoints you may not agree with.

Grading. This course uses Canvas, and it will reward consistent engagement with the material and with your classmates. Letter grades will be used (A: 93-100, A-: 90-92.9, B+: 87-89.9, B: 83-86.9; B-: 80-82.9; C+: 77-79.9; C: 73-76.9; C-: 70-72.9; D+: 67-69.9, D: 60-66.9, F: 0-59.9). You have multiple ways to excel; the grade consists of: 20% weekly quizzes & “notecards”; 40% exams; 30% written assignments; 10% online forum responses. For written assignments, a full number grade (0-10) will be deducted for every day it’s turned in late. There is no grading curve.

Prerequisites. You are expected to come to class *having read* the material so we can talk about it. There are no formal prereqs besides an active curiosity for the topics; a willingness to read material across the social sciences (mostly sociology); and a willingness to engage with data presented in a variety of ways. You’ll encounter a variety of data and diverse kinds of (hopefully) interesting material.

Brief check-in. Every student will have a zoom meeting with one of the teaching staff on Friday 2/16 *during class time* (there will be no lecture that day). During this meeting, we’re going to want to know why you picked this class at this time in your college career, and what you hope to get out of it. This is a big class and we hope to get to know each of you more. It helps us be better instructors if we can put names with faces, learn more about your interests, and most of all, if there are ways that we can help you learn. The Zoom links for this session will be posted in a spreadsheet linked at the top of the Canvas course page during Week 3.

Readings/Media. The material has been selected to be accessible but thought-provoking – staying on top of the readings and engaging in class will help you get the most out of class. PDFs of readings and links to media are available on Canvas.

(1) REQUIRED BOOK (online).

- A *Sociology Experiment*. Chapters are \$1/chapter; we'll read 15 of them. Link [here – be sure to download and read Chapter 1 \('Introduction'\) in advance of the first class!](#)

(2) REQUIRED READINGS/MEDIA (on Canvas):

- Each week there will typically be 1-2 additional sources (from a scientific journal, newspaper, movie, or podcast) for you to read that complements and helps to apply some of the key themes in the book chapter. These won't be long and are intended to help you apply some of the themes you're exposed to in the textbook chapters.
- *Strong encouragement:* the textbook is online-only, but do yourself a favor and make a course-pack by printing out .PDFs of any other short readings so that you can mark up and highlight them. These annotations tend to be easier to retrieve, to bring to class, and will likely serve your learning processes better than digitally marking up a .pdf. (Do you want to be staring at a screen more than you absolutely have to?)

What we expect of you:

Attendance. Attendance is expected. We will not be grading for attendance, but know that all material covered in lectures will be on the exams. It's *your* responsibility to obtain notes/material from a classmate. We'll also post slides on Canvas at week's end, but make a few friends as well. Get in touch if you have extenuating circumstances that make attendance difficult, and we can try to find a solution.

Weekly quizzes (10%) and Notecards (10%). There will be one two-question quiz in class per week (randomly, one of our three sessions), and one review notecard due per week (your choice of day). Preparing a review notecard for yourself which you then upload to Canvas is intended to help you organize and summarize your thinking on each week's themes. Notecard grading: Missing (0), Not satisfactory (1) / Satisfactory (2) / Outstanding (3).

Response Papers (30%). There will be three of these guided responses spread throughout the term (due Fr 2/23; Fr 3/29; Mon 4/29). Details will be provided during class. Your task will be to write a short (800-word, double spaced, 12pt font) response statement that reacts to a prompt that we give you. Your response should draw upon material from class (a chapter/ article/ podcast/ other media source) and offers some of your original thoughts. Typically, you will be asked to take a position and back it up with evidence. Additionally, you may wish to comment about what challenged your previous thinking on the topic? What points do you agree/disagree with the author(s) on? Does this connect to ideas you learned elsewhere? You have flexibility here. Graded 0-10 on four criteria: argument, organization, evidence, addressing the prompt.

Exams (30%).

- a) Exam 1 (15%). This 50m in-class exam on Friday, March 15 will be multiple-choice and short answers intended to test your grasp of key ideas from lectures/readings during the 1st part. Graded 0-100.
- b) Exam 2 (15%) on Monday 5/13 (8-10a, Thompson 104) will be weighted towards material from the 2nd half lectures & readings, though some fundamentals from the first half will also be included. Graded 0-100.

Online engagement (20%). During the semester, there are 4 online activities to take part in; you are expected to do so 4 times. Graded: Missing (0), Not satisfactory (1) / Satisfactory (2) / Outstanding (3).

Make-up quizzes, exams, and written assignments are only available if you produce a valid excuse to your TA (illness, family emergency, excused university absence). If you have to miss an exam due to a family crisis or personal emergency, please contact the Dean of Students' office first (413-545-2684). Consult with your TA immediately if you want to request a make-up assignment.

Class norms: Can we take a break from screens to reconnect? Our sessions together have been designed as interactive, discussion-based lectures. It sounds old-fashioned, but taking notes, asking questions, and reviewing notes in preparation for exams are the best predictors of *deep learning* in college coursework. We're happy to point you toward numerous pieces of research that show this to be the case.

What you can expect from the teaching staff:

To help co-create a constructive learning environment. This means being knowledgeable, prepared, and willing to puzzle through questions prompted by the material. It means helping us to take stock of where we've been each week, and where we're headed the following week. It also means being as responsive to your concerns as we can.

To be available to you outside of class. We've spread student office hours across the week, and I'll take a short poll during the first week to set my student office hours according to what works best for **your** schedules. *This is because I want this time to be helpful for you*. Sometimes I'll hold them at my office, and other times around campus; I'll update the class on where I'll be that week on Monday in lecture. If you email, you can usually expect a response within 24h. I check email about 2x/day during the week.

To be transparent and clear about how you are being evaluated during the term. We want you to be apprised at all times about how you're doing in the class. This syllabus gives you an overview of how your grade is calculated, and we update the gradebook weekly. You can check your grade at any time on the Canvas website. If you prefer, you can also use a grade calculator spreadsheet in the "class documents" folder on Canvas so you can forecast what your grade will be if you were to get a [X] grade on assignment [Y].

Teaching Assistants

Tamanna Rashid / trashid@umass.edu
Office Hours: email for day/time/location
808

Aaron Yates / aryates@umass.edu
Office Hours: Wed, 8-9a & 10-11a / Thompson Rm

Student last names Aboyan – Gourde

Student last names Patel - Zhang

Lyndsey Saunders / lsaunders@umass.edu
Office Hours: Tues 10:30a-12:30p / email for location
Student last names Gratton – Partaledis

We prefer email contact for routine questions, and to use office hours for more in-depth conversations. Email contacts should be made to your assigned Teaching Assistant.

Spring 2024 Sociology 103

Feb. 2 Week 1. Why (and how) do sociologists do what we do?

Feb 5/7/9 Week 2. Research Methods

Feb 12/14/16 Week 3. Social Structure and the Individual

Feb 21/23 Week 4. Status & class

(*no class Monday, 2/19 – President's Day)

Response paper #1 due in class Friday 2/23

Feb 26/28/March 1 Week 5. Culture

March 4/6/8 Week 6. Gender & Sexuality

March 11/13/15 Week 7. Race & Ethnicity (M/W), Exam 1 (F)

March 18/20/22 (Week 8. *SPRING BREAK – no class.*)

March 25/27/29 Week 9. Sociology of Families & Religion

Response paper #2 due in class Friday 3/29

April 1/3/5 Week 10. Sociology of Education

April 8/10/12 Week 11. Political Sociology

(*Friday 4/12 follows a Monday schedule)

April 17/19 Week 12. Immigration & Urbanization

(*no class Monday 4/15 – Patriot's Day)

April 22/24/26 Week 13. Deviance, Crime, & Violence

April 29, May 1/3 Week 14. Economic Sociology

Response paper #3 due in class Monday 4/29

May 6/8/10 Week 15. Health & Illness

May 13 (8-10am, Thompson Hall 104) - Final exam during finals week

Weekly Readings/Videos/Media

Week	Theme	For Monday (overview of theme)	For Wednesday (application of theme)	For Friday (application of theme)
1	Introduction	-	-	<i>ASE chapter</i>
2	Research Methods	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Podcast: The data vigilantes (Unexplainable, Vox Media)	“More than Medical Mistrust.” (2020, Kimberley D. Manning, Lancet)
3	Social structure/individual	<i>ASE chapter</i>	<i>Gentrification, Social Networks, and COVID-19</i> (2020, Contexts)	Online activity #1: <i>Meet & greet zoom meeting with your TA</i>
4	Social Status & Class	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Podcast: “ Are Rich People Bad? ” (Ep. 1 of <i>Classy</i> ” by Jonathan Menjivar, 48m)	Film: The Divide (2015, Kanopy streaming via UMass library, 1h20m)
5	Culture	<i>ASE chapter</i>	<i>Introduction: Culture and Cultural Sociology</i> (Spillman, 2002, on Canvas)	The Data Visualizations of W.E.B. Du Bois.
6	Gender & sexuality	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Video on gender wage gaps: Black Women’s ‘Double Gap’ in Wages. (15m, Institute for New Economic Thinking)	<i>Socioeconomic patterns Among Sexual Minorities</i> (2021, Contexts)
7	Race & ethnicity	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Short opinion pieces: “ The Claudine Gay Debacle Was Never About Merit. ” (Tressie McMillan Cottom, 1/4/24) and “ Claudine Gay Was Not Driven Out Because She Is Black ” (John McWhorter, 1/8/24) both on Canvas	Exam 1 (in-class)
8	<i>Spring break no class</i>			
9	Families & Religion	<i>ASE chapter (Families)</i>	Online activity #2 on family and religion	<i>ASE chapter (Religion)</i>
10	Education	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Hua Hsu. (9/02/19). “ Student Debt is Transforming the American Family. ” The New Yorker.	Movie: Separate and Unequal (27m/PBS Frontline)
11	Political sociology	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Film: “ Day of Rage: How Trump Supporters Took the U.S. Capitol ” (2021, NYTimes, 40m)	No class - online activity #3 on political polarization during class time!

12	Immigration & urbanization	<i>ASE chapter</i>	<i>Life after Deportation</i> (Tanya Golash-Boza & Yajaira Cecliiano-Navarro, 2019, Contexts)	Film: Border South (2020, DocuSeek , via UMass Library, 1h22m)
13	Deviance, crime, violence	<i>ASE chapter</i>	<i>Reimagining Policing in America</i> (Clark Neily, 2021, Contexts) AND <i>Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery</i> (Bryan Stevenson, The 1619 Project /NYTimes, 2019)	No class: online activity #4 during class time!
14	Economic sociology	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Podcast: The Life-Altering Differences Between White and Black Debt (NYTimes: Louise Seamster/Tressie McMillan Cottom)	-
15	Health & Illness	<i>ASE chapter</i>	Video: The problem with race-based medicine (Dorothy Roberts, 2015, TedMED)	<i>The Privilege of Social Distancing</i> (Kimberly Higuera, 2020, Contexts)

We want you to succeed in this course! See below for additional resources.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Relationship Violence at UMass

As a faculty member I am a *mandatory referrer* – this means that I have a responsibility to all students to provide resources and assistance to anyone who wishes to disclose potential sexual misconduct. I am not a *mandatory reporter* – this allows students to approach me confidentially if they wish. Students can also contact the Title IX office directly at eod@admin.umass.edu if they want to make a report, file a complaint, find out about resources and/or accommodations. Other resources include the Title IX webpage: <http://www.umass.edu/titleix/> and the Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Interpersonal Violence: <https://www.umass.edu/equalopportunity/titleix>

UMass Amherst Office of Disability Services <http://www.umass.edu/disability/students>

Accommodations and Services For Students: Disability Services provides a wide variety of services to students with disabilities. Our office promotes the empowerment of people with disabilities and their full integration into campus life and the community.

Accommodations: An accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, job, activity, or facility that enables a qualified student or employee with a disability to participate equally in a program, service, activity, or employment at the University. A “reasonable” accommodation refers to an accommodation that is appropriate as well as effective and efficient, and is agreed upon by the University and the consumer with a disability. Many accommodations are available at the University to ensure that students with disabilities participate fully in academic and student life. They provide a student with a disability equal access to the educational and co-curricular process, without compromising essential components of the curriculum. Accommodations are determined on an individual basis, based on the student’s documentation. For accommodations to be timely, they must be arranged in advance. *Students are responsible for contacting Disability Services at the beginning of each semester so that reasonable accommodations can be made in a timely manner (first two weeks of classes).*

Common Accommodations For Students: most frequently provided include, but are not limited to:
Additional time to complete assignments / Alternate Formats for Printed Course Materials
Alternate Types of Exams / Assistive Technology /Captioning Services / ^[L]_{SEP} Classroom Access Assistants
Document Conversion / Extended Time on Exams / Extension of Statute of Limitations
Exam Proctoring / Learning Specialists / Modification of Graduation Requirements
Note-Taking Services / Paratransit Services / Prepared Materials Before Class
Reduced Course Load / Sign Language Interpreters and Oral Transliterators /Tape Recorders

Note (Update 1/31/24 from Office of Disability Services): just because a student has requested and are entitled to accommodations, that student still needs to coordinate with teaching staff and be proactive in communication if they will be making use of an accommodation for a given assignment.
Accommodations are not intended to be applied retroactively.

Department of Sociology Statement of Values

The Department of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable department. We ask that all members of the Sociology community -- faculty, staff, and students -- be mindful of our responsibility to create an environment that is welcoming to all, and where each person feels accepted, included, seen, heard, valued, and safe. We recognize that learning how to be inclusive and respectful is an iterative process and sometimes we all act in imperfect ways. As sociologists, we are aware that we are all inheritors of systems of inequality, whether to our advantage or our disadvantage. We also acknowledge that we each are privileged in various ways. We strive to create safe spaces to encourage productive dialogue with the goal of learning from our mistakes and changing for the better.

We strive for excellence in all we do. True excellence requires each individual to be able to work and learn in an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and acceptance. Our commitment to equity and inclusion requires each of us to continuously ensure that our interactions are respectful. We recognize that marginalized groups of people have unique experiences in the Pioneer Valley and within the larger society. We are committed to making our department a place that counteracts, to the best of our abilities, those processes of marginalization, and that inspires academic freedom and creativity.

Whenever and wherever possible, our department will affirm this commitment to values that oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, and hatred based on religious identity publicly and explicitly. As a department dedicated to social justice, we will take very seriously reports, formal or informal, of harassment and discrimination. We will make every effort to ensure that this commitment manifests in our department's policies, programs, and practices.

In the Department of Sociology, we:

- Value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.
- Insist on a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter. The absence of action and words also matter.
- Encourage respectful expression of ideas and perspectives.
- Will not tolerate sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination.
- Share in the responsibility to create a positive culture and to safeguard equity, inclusion, dignity, respect, and safety for all. Each member of our community - faculty, staff, and students - should be a role model for others.
- Will take action when we observe people being treated unfairly or in a demeaning manner.
- Envision and strive to foster an inclusive, welcoming department.

UMass Amherst statement on academic honesty

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/academic_policy

All members of the University community must participate in the development of a climate conducive to academic honesty. While the faculty, because of their unique role in the educational process, have the responsibility for defining, encouraging, fostering, and upholding the ethic of academic honesty, students have the responsibility of conforming in all respects to that ethic. Intellectual honesty requires that students demonstrate their own learning during examinations and other academic exercises, and that other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited. Scholarship depends upon the reliability of information and reference in the work of others. Student work in this class may be analyzed for originality of content, electronically or by other means. No form of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating of dishonesty will be condoned in the University community. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, facilitating dishonesty among others.

In terms of the above clause that “other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited”, please be advised that AI-generated content is severely frowned upon in this course, though there is a rich debate about its place in our society that we will explore together. Here’s the ultimate position of this course: (a) your engagement with and understanding of the material is one of the primary ways for you to learn about the world; circumventing this with AI will slow your intellectual growth; (b) a major objective of college is to help you to get better at writing so that when you enter the workforce, you’re equipped to succeed. For most of us, this will involve making mistakes and learning from them.