**SO206 A: Social Problems**

**Goulet Hall 3101**

**M/W/F 11:30-12:20**

**Spring 2019**

Professor: Kevin Doran, Ph.D.

Email: [kdoran@anselm.edu](mailto:kdoran@anselm.edu)

Office: 5 Bradley House

Phone: 641-7122

Office Hours: Monday 1:00pm-2:30pm

Wednesday 3:00pm-4:30pm, and by appointment

**Course Description**

As active members of our society, we confront social problems on a daily basis (even more so as technology increases our access to information and interactions with people across the globe). This class introduces you to the sociological study of social problems (ex. crime, racism, sexism, terrorism, inequality). Beyond simply describing issues faced by our (and other) societies, our goal will be to understand: The social roots of these issues, the social processes behind how we understand and interpret these issues, and why it is that some social issues rise to prominence in our collective culture while others remain relatively ignored. To this end, we will adopt a “two pronged” approach to the class.

Prong 1 focusses on understanding the social production of “social problems” generally. Rather than focusing solely on particular social issues, we will learn to talk about the commonalities between issues and how we, as a society, come to define and understand social problems. In fact, as we will see, there is difficulty in even providing a single definition for what makes something a “social problem.” This portion of the class will draw on Joel Best’s *Social Problems* - which introduces a particular sociological perspective (the constructivist approach) to understanding “social problems” as a general phenomenon – and a selection of readings from Ira Silver’s “Reader”.

Prong 2 focusses on understanding particular social problems and applying Best’s perspective to these social issues. In this section, we will combine Best’s “constructivist” approach to what he calls the “objectivist” approach. We will be interested in the construction of the issue as a social problem and proposed responses, but also understanding exactly what the problem “looks like” on the ground. This portion of the class will draw on the Silver reader, other readings from academic sources, your own investigation into a social problem of your choice, and material that is introduced in the classroom.

**Required Texts**

Best, Joel. 2013. *Social Problems, 3rd Edition.* New York: Norton Publishing.

Silver, Ira. 2008. *Social Problems Readings*. New York: Norton Publishing**.**

**Other Selected Readings**

Available as PDFs on our course Canvas site under the Resources tab (indicated with a \* in the reading schedule)

**Assignments**

*Non-Service Learning*

*Final**Project* – We will divide the class into small groups (2-3 people). Each group will select a social problem of their choosing. The group will be responsible for presenting this problem to the class using the constructionist approach as well as informing the class on the objective conditions around this issue in contemporary society. That is, the group will be responsible for explaining how this issue came to be considered a social problem and how the society decided on policies to address the problem. While doing so, the group will present information about how prevalent the issue is, and discuss the different ways that we might try to measure this. (For instance, there are a number of ways that we could try to measure poverty: the official government poverty line, levels of malnourishment, access to particular material conditions, etc.) The paper should be **8-10 pages long** (not including citations) and the project will be worth **250 points (or 25% of your final grade)**.

Throughout the semester you will need to complete various tasks associated with this project according to the following timeline:

By Jan. 25: Decide who your group partners will be. Have one representative of the group email me with the names of all of your group members.

By Feb. 1: Determine the social problem your group will examine. In class we will have time for you to tell me the problem that your group has selected. At this time, we will also select a time that we can all meet in order to discuss your selection and how you plan to proceed with your study.

By Feb. 25: Your group will provide a list of 14 or 21 (7 per person in your group) citations of either academic or news articles (*you will need a combination of both and you should divide them evenly within the group so that one person is not only reading short news stories while another is reading only long academic pieces*) about the history and study of your social problem. EACH PERSON SHOULD SEND ME THEIR 7 CITATIONS INDIVIDUALLY.

By April 1: Turn in summaries for each of your citations provided previously (depending on the intensity of the article you are summarizing, these should be anywhere from less than a page, to 1.5 pages). The summaries should contain the major argument of the article [if it is not purely descriptive], how the social problem is measured [if an attempt of measuring is made], and the important details regarding the events, discourse, policies, and outcomes surrounding the problem discussed in the text.

By April 15: Turn in a timeline of the public discourse, major events, and policies surrounding your social problem and an outline of your final paper.

By April 29: Turn in your final paper.

*Exams*– We will have two exams: One midterm and one final exam. The midterm will be worth **275 points (or 27.5% of your final grade)**, and the final will be worth **275 points (or 27.5% of your final grade)**. We will discuss the specifics of the exams as they approach, but they will generally include some combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

*Examples of “claimsmaking” presentations* – On February 8th, you will give a group presentation on an example from the recent news that exemplifies an aspect of either chapter 3, 4, or 5 in the Best book. We will split into three groups: one focusing on activists as claimsmakers, one focusing on experts as claimsmakers, and one focusing on the role of the media in the claims process. Each group will pick one example from the recent news that they believe exemplifies the theoretical process laid out in the the chapter. Your goal will be to present a news clip through the constructivist lens that Best provides us. We will talk in more detail about these presentations as the date approaches.

These presentations will be worth **100 points (or 10% of your final grade)**. **50 points (or 5% of your final grade)** will be based on an evaluation by your peers. *If it is clear that you did not contribute to your group’s research and presentation, you will receive a* ***ZERO*** *for the assignment.*

*Attendance -* In accordance with the official policy of the College (page 8 of the student handbook), you are permitted to miss a total of 2 classes **for any reason**. Any absences beyond the allotted 2 will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation grade. If extraordinary circumstances arise, please inform both the college and I and we will discuss possible solutions.

*Participation -* Especially in small classes, it is vital that all students are active participants in the classroom. Beyond normal discussion, we may work on in-class activities/assignments. These will be factored into your participation grade as well. This includes not only completing the required readings and actively listening, but also raising questions and participating in the discussions. This requires that you **must complete the readings before** class in order to adequately participate. You should bring the readings with you to class, to reference during discussion if necessary. Active participation in the class is worth **100 points (or 10%** **of your final grade)**. Reading materials not relevant to the day’s content, sleeping, talking, texting, and otherwise violating the electronic devices policy laid out below will result in you being asked to leave class. If this occurs, you will be counted as absent for that day.

*Service Learning Option*

I believe that service-learning is a valuable experience and tool that allows students to observe the course concepts in the real world. Equally important, it provides you with the opportunity to use your time at Saint Anselm to meaningfully engage the local community. Students who opt into the service-learning option for this class will volunteer for a local non-profit organization. This will provide you with an introduction to how local organizations operate and seek to meet the needs of the local community and clients, and how the global system impacts the daily lives of local communities. It also helps bring the course material “to life.” If you decide to participate in the service-learning option, you will work directly with the Meelia Center in order to find a service site. You will be required to complete at least 20 volunteer hours. To participate, you **MUST** commit to this option by the date indicated in the handout from the Meelia Center.

*Learning Goals:*

* To explore and understand urgent social problems in our society and the ways in which your organization is impacted by, responds to, and contributes to the social dialogue around those social problems.
* To understand the larger structures that limit the range of choices and opportunities that individuals and groups have.
* To understand and stress the interconnectedness of different social problems.
* To interrogate systems of privilege, including our own compliance with these systems.
* To debate and carefully articulate the interlocking nature of social problems and some potential solutions.

Those completing the service-learning option will have a different set of requirements, which are outlined below.

*Reflection Journal* – Throughout the semester you should keep a service learning journal. After you volunteer at your site, you should jot down your thoughts about the day (anything memorable that happened) and note anything that resonates with what we talk about in class. This can be as short as a paragraph or up to a page per visit. You do not need to write it in full paragraph form, if you prefer bullet points or some other style, that is fine. When it comes time to write your reflection paper, this will help you remember your experiences and integrate them with the class material (since the journal process will have already started you on that process). The journal will be located on Canvas, where you can add a new entry after each visit**. Completing the journal will be worth 25 points (or 2.5% of your final grade).**

*Service Learning Logs* – In addition to keeping a journal, I will ask you to complete short service learning logs in which you answer a few short questions about your experience so far. This will allow me to monitor your progress through the service learning process and to identify any potential issues that are arising. These will also be located and completed on Canvas. **Adequately** **completing all of you service learning logs is worth 25 points (or 2.5% of your final grade).**

*Reflection**Paper* – In lieu of completing a group project on a particular social problem, you will write a reflection paper in which you relate your experience working for your community organization to our class material. In your paper, you should address the first service-learning “learning goal” (listed above), as well as at least two others that best fit with your experience. **This paper will be 5-6 pages long and is due on April 29th by the start of class.** You will also provide a brief presentation on your experience and reflections to the class**. Your reflection paper and presentation are worth 200 points (or 20% of your grade).**

*Research in Support of Community Option –* If you would like to engage in service, but not through volunteering, there is an option to complete a Research in Support of Community project. This will require you to spend the 20 hours researching a question that a community partner would like to have answered. Then, formally presenting your results to the community partner and me. If you are interested in this option, let me know and we will discuss how to proceed with the Meelia Center.

*Exams* – Same as non-service learning option.

*Claimsmaking Group Presentations* – Same as non-service learning option.

*Attendance* – Same as non-service learning option.

*Participation* – Same as non-service learning option.

**Grading**

Your grade will be based on the above requirements in the following manner:

*Non-Service Learning Option*

Requirement Points

Midterm Exam 275

Claimsmaking Group Presentations 100

Final Project 250

Final Exam 275

Participation & Attendance 100

Total 1000

*Service-Learning Option*

Requirement Points

Midterm Exam 275

Claimsmaking Group Presentations 100

Final Paper + Presentation 200

Reflection Journal 25

Service Learning Logs 25

Final Exam 275

Participation & Attendance 100

Total 1000

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | 100-95% | (1000-950) |  | C | 76.9-73% | (769-730) |
| A- | 94.9-90% | (949-900) |  | C- | 72.9-70% | (729-700) |
| B+ | 89.9-87% | (899-870) |  | D+ | 69.9-67% | (699-670) |
| B | 86.9-83% | (869-830) |  | D | 66.9-63% | (699-630) |
| B- | 82.9-80% | (829-800) |  | D- | 62.9-60% | (629-600) |
| C+ | 79.9-77% | (799-770) |  | F | <60% | (<600) |

**Additional Policies**

*­Makeup Policy* **-** In almost all instances, **there will be no makeup exams**. Make up exams will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances. If you **absolutely** **have to** miss an exam, **you need to notify me at least one week in advance** via email, and to provide proper documentation. If an emergency occurs on the day of an exam, you must email me before the exam and provide me with documentation immediately. Questions on any makeup exams will reflect the fact that students had additional time to prepare.

Similarly, there are no makeup options for failure to complete service-learning journal, service-learning logs or the various components of the final project that are due throughout the semester except under extraordinary circumstances.

Work that is turned in late will be subject to the following procedure. Work that is turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a **ten percentage point reduction** in the score. **An additional ten percentage point reduction** will be applied for each additional day that the work is late.

*Academic Integrity/Plagiarism -* Plagiarism will absolutely not be tolerated in this class. All work in assignments and exams MUST be your own. In your written work, if you are presenting the ideas of someone else or providing a quotation, you must properly cite the author using a consistent format (ASA, APA etc.). Presenting the work of someone else as your own or cheating on an exam will result in a failing grade (potentially for the course depending on the severity) and potential recourse by the college. (See page 11 of the Student Handbook). For more information on Saint Anselm’s policy on academic integrity see the following link:

http://www.anselm.edu/Library/Research-Help/Research-Tutorials/Academic-Integrity.htm

*Student Disabilities -* Saint Anselm College is committed to meeting the needs of students disclosing physical, sensory, psychiatric, and/or learning disabilities. To disclose a disability and request accommodations, please see Kenneth Walker, the College’s disability services provider, in the Academic Resource Center (ARC) in Lower Cushing, who will assist you in making contact with appropriate faculty members and arranging support services and accommodations available within the ARC or elsewhere. To ensure that accommodations are arranged in a timely manner, you are encouraged to make your request at the beginning of each semester.

 F**or questions concerning support services, documentation guidelines, or disability issues contact:**

Office of Disability Services  
Academic Resource Center (ARC)  
Kenneth J. Walker, Director  
Lower Cushing  
Tel. (603) 641-7193  
kwalker@anselm.edu

**For additional information on documentation guidelines:**

http://www.anselm.edu/Current-Students/Academic-Resources/Disability-Services.htm

*Electronic Devices -* “As a member of the learning community, each student has a responsibility to other students who are members of the community. When cell phones or pages ring and students respond in class or leave class to respond, it disrupts the class. Therefore, the Office of the Dean prohibits the use by students of cell phones, pagers, PDA’s, or similar communication devices during scheduled classes. Text messaging or accessing information on these devices is likewise forbidden. All such devices must be put in a silent (vibrate) mode and ordinarily should not be taken out during class. Given the fact that these same communication devices are an integral part of the College’s emergency notification system, an exception to this policy would occur when numerous devices activate simultaneously. When this occurs, students may consult their devices to determine if a college emergency exists. If that is not the case, the devices should be immediately put away. Other exceptions to this policy may be granted at the discretion of the instructor” (Student Handbook, p.13).

*Communication -* The best way to contact me is through email. I will check my email at least twice per day (once in the morning and once in the evening) and will respond to most emails within 24 hours. I will use email as the primary means of communication with you outside of the classroom, and will do so with the assumption that you will check your email at least once per day.

**Tentative Class Schedule**

M – Jan 14: Introduction and Syllabus

W – Jan 16: Introducing Social Problems as a Concept

Best – A Note to the Reader & Chapter 1

F – Jan 18: Introducing Social Problems as a Concept

Silver - Reading 5: Making Road Dangers Invisible

Silver - Reading 26: Black Men as Criminals and as Victims

M – Jan 21: No Class – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Honor by engaging in service)

W – Jan 23: Claims and the Social Problem Process

Best – Chapter 2

F – Jan 25: Claims and the Social Problem Process

Silver – Reading 20

Silver – Reading 22

M – Jan 28: Claims and the Social Problem Process: Activists as Claimsmakers

Best – Chapter 3

W – Jan 30: Claims and the Social Problem Process: Experts as Claimsmakers

Best – Chapter 4

F – Feb 1: Claims and the Social Problem Process: The Media and Claims

Best – Chapter 5

M – Feb 4: Claims and the Social Problem Process: Examples

Silver – Reading 9

Silver – Reading 6

Silver – Reading 18

W – Feb 6: Claims and the Social Problem Process: Examples (and Group Work Time)

Silver – Reading 1

Work on your group presentations (bring laptops, etc.)

F – Feb 8: Claims and the Social Problem Process: Recent Examples in the News

Group Presentations

M – Feb 11: Public Reactions

Best – Chapter 6

W – Feb 13: Policy Process

Best – Chapter 7

F – Feb 15: Reactions and Policy

Silver – Reading 27

Silver – Reading 23

M – Feb 18: Social Problems Work

Best – Chapter 8

W – Feb 20: Policy Outcomes

Best – Chapter 9

F – Feb 22: Social Problems Work and Policy Outcomes examples

Silver – Reading 25

Silver – Reading 30

M – Feb 25: Complicating the Claimsmaking Process

Best – Chapter 10

W – Feb 27: Review for midterm

F – Mar 1: Midterm exam

M – Mar 4: No Class – Mid Semester Break

W – Mar 6: No Class – Mid Semester Break

F – Mar 8: No Class – Mid Semester Break

M – Mar 11: The content for March 11th - the end of the semester will be determined based on student interest. Early in the semester, we will spend class time voting on social problems that you want to learn about in the course. I will use this to determine the readings and structure for the rest of the class.

W – Mar 13: Documentary - TBD

F – Mar 15: Documentary - TBD

M – Mar 18:

W – Mar 20:

F – Mar 22:

M – Mar 25:

W – Mar 27:

F – Mar 29:

M – Apr 1:

W – Apr 3:

F – Apr 5:

M – Apr 8:

W – Apr 10:

F – Apr 12:

M – Apr 15:

W – Apr 17:

F – Apr 19: No Class – Easter Break

M – Apr 22: No Class – Easter Break

W – Apr 24:

F – Apr 26:

M – Apr 29: Presentations/review

W – May 1: Presentations/review

F – May 3: Reading Day

W – May 8: Final Exam @ 1:00pm