

Spring 2015

HTS 2016
Social Issues and Public Policy
T/Th 12:05 - 1:25 PM
Architecture East, Room 107

Dr. Amy V. D'Unger

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Introduction:

This course will examine a variety of issues considered to be “social problems.” In order to do so, we must first understand how particular issues come to be considered “problems” in the first place, while other issues do not. We will begin with the constructionist perspective, which centers around one question: why do we recognize some social conditions as “problems” while simultaneously ignoring other conditions? Additionally, why do we recognize some social conditions as problems at one time, while during a later period we do not consider them problems?

After examining how things become social problems, we will be considering a variety of social issues in detail, including social and economic inequality, changes in the American family, crime, drug use, and incarceration, and problems with the environment. In particular, we will be looking at the intersection of these issues and how they impact specific populations of people in the United States and around the world.

Area E Approved Learning Outcome:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Explain how the course satisfies the learning outcome:

This course will focus on how problems are socially constructed, how power and stratification impact which issues come to be recognized as problems, and a series of current social problems. Students will learn how social, political, and economic forces influence social behavior through an examination of such subjects as inequality; changes in the American family; crime; and problems with the environment. Students will demonstrate that they have met the Area E learning outcome through completing two written examinations (a midterm and a final) and writing two short (4 – 6 pages) reflection papers that integrate course concepts and materials from the readings.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Students will gain an enhanced understanding of how problems are socially constructed.
- Students will become familiar with major social and economic issues impacting the United States, such as poverty and crime.
- Students will strengthen their skills in critical thinking and writing.

Texts: There are two *REQUIRED* books for this class.

- Heiner, Robert. 2010. *Conflicting Interests: Readings in Social Problems and Inequality*.
- Heiner, Robert. 2013. *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism*.

These books are all available at the ENGINEER'S BOOKSTORE, located at 748 Marietta Street, and the BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE in Tech Square. *You can also purchase them online, but please make sure to get the correct publication year (see above).*

In addition, there are readings throughout the semester that are not in the books. They are indicated with an asterisk and a bibliographic entry for the reading. You can access these readings via the T-Square site for this class. Go to "Resources" and the folder "Readings for HTS 2016"

Course Requirements:

(1) Writing Assignments: Students will complete two short written assignments, with due dates noted on the syllabus. Each paper is to be approximately 4 – 6 pages long and will be posted on T-Square. **Late assignments will not be accepted.** The assignments will cumulatively count for **40%** of your grade.

Assignment #1: Due January 27th (20%)

Assignment #2: Due March 26th (20%)

(2) Examinations: There will be two examinations for this course. The midterm exam is scheduled for Tuesday, February 24th in class and the final exam is scheduled for Thursday, April 30th from 11.30 AM – 2.20 PM. Each of these exams will consist of essay and short answer questions, which will require students to draw on *course readings, lectures, and discussions*. The midterm examination will count for **25%** of your grade and the final examination will count for **30%** of your grade (**EXAMS = 55% TOTAL**).

(3) Attendance and Class Participation: On the following pages is a schedule of the readings required for the course. **You are expected to have read the assigned material prior to the class.** Discussion will correspond to the material in the readings, but may not review it in detail, so both reading and class attendance are important. "Class participation" includes two elements: **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSION**.

I will take attendance most class periods. Excused absences will not be counted against you. Excused absences will be granted if there is documentation of attendance at an academic event, participation in an athletic event, illness, or family emergency. *Other excused absences will be granted at my discretion.*

In addition to attending class, you must participate in class discussion. Using attendance as the baseline grade (e.g., a student who attends 75% of the class sessions will have a 75% base grade), class discussion can adjust the final participation grade either up or down. The final class participation grade (attendance + class discussion) will count for **5%** of your final grade.

Accommodating Disabilities:

If you have or acquire any sort of condition that may require special accommodation(s), please inform me AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (e.g., not the day of an exam) so that we may make the appropriate arrangements. Proper documentation from the ADAPTS Office will be required. Please contact them to get more information on available services and accommodations, as well as documentation requirements. They can be reached via the web at www.adapts.gatech.edu. **Please note that there are no retroactive accommodations.**

Academic Conduct:

All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the policies of the Georgia Tech Honor Code with respect to conduct and academic honesty. Anyone engaging in acts that violate these policies, such as plagiarism or cheating, will be penalized. For more information on the Honor Code, see www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18b.php. **If you are not familiar with what constitute plagiarism, ASK! Being uninformed of the policies does not absolve you from the responsibility of following them!**

Make-Up Policy:

My permission is needed to make-up assignments. (Having work/exams in another class will not get you my permission.) If you are going to miss an assignment, please make every effort to **notify me before the missed class** and to gather appropriate material to justify your absence (e.g., a note from your physician if you are ill). If you are unable to notify me before the class/due date, please try to have a friend, roommate, etc. contact me via e-mail and inform me of your absence. A mutually convenient time will be arranged for you to make up the assignment. Make up assignments will **only** be allowed in a situation of an excused absence (e.g., illness, family emergency, etc.).

The use of phones, laptops, and tablets is not permitted in this class, unless you have a need that is documented with ADAPTS. Please turn OFF your devices before entering the classroom. If you have a documented need to use a laptop during class, please come to speak to me. Those who violate this policy will be asked to leave the class for the day.

How Can I Succeed in This Course?

(1) Attend class and be on time—there is nothing more disruptive to your learning than missing class and there is nothing more disruptive to other students than individuals who come in late and interrupt the lecture and class discussion.


(2) Do the reading!!! It will help you to participate in class and write quality papers, and it ESSENTIAL for your success on the exams.

(3) Notes, notes, notes. Take notes on each of the readings. What is the main point of the article/chapter? What is the theory trying to explain? How can this be integrated with other material discussed in class and the texts? etc. etc. *These notes will be valuable study tools for the exams.* Also, study in groups--other may pick up on material that you overlooked, and vice-versa.

(4) The reading load varies for each class. Anticipate days with heavy reading and START EARLY.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS (SUBJECT TO REVISIONS)

Part I: The Construction of Social “Problems”

January 6	 Welcome Introduction and Welcome	READ AND UNDERSTAND THE SYLLABUS! (YES, SERIOUSLY...)
January 8	Sociology and Social Problems	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 3 – 10) <i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 1 – 14)
January 13	The Social Construction of Problems: How Does it Happen?	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 11 – 18)
January 15	The Social Construction of Problems: Who Plays a Role?	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 30 – 42) <i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 14 – 23)

January 20

Moral Panics, Crime Waves, and Statistics

Social Problems
(pp. 141 – 153)

*****T-Square:** Chambliss, William J. “Marketing Crime: The Politics of Crime Statistics,” pp. 32 – 63 in *Power, Politics, and Crime*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Part II: Stratification and Inequality

January 22

Inequality and Stratification

*****T-Square:** Massey, Douglas S. 2009. “How Stratification Works: The American Stratification System,” pp. 70 – 74 in *Annual Editions: Social Problems*, edited by Kurt Finsterbusch. New York: McGraw Hill.



January 27

Inequality and Economic Systems
ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

Social Problems
(pp. 24 – 51)

January 29

Poverty Amongst Plenty in the US

Social Problems
(pp. 51 – 59)

February 3

Social Class and Mobility

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 47 – 79)

February 5

Inequality Around the World

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 80 – 100)
Social Problems
(pp. 59 – 64)

February 10

Inequality and Race

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 118 – 124)
Social Problems
(pp. 70 – 78)

February 12

Inequality and Gender

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 103 – 117)
Social Problems
(pp. 78 – 85)

February 17

Inequality and Education

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 125 – 130)
Social Problems
(pp. 85 – 89)

February 19

Inequality and Healthcare

Conflicting Interests
(pp. 131 – 139)
Social Problems
(pp. 89 – 94)



February 24

MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Part III: The American Family in Crisis?

February 26 What is a Family? *Conflicting Interests*
(pp. 143 – 158)
Social Problems
(pp. 100 – 106)

February 27th is the last day to drop an individual class and receive a “W” on your transcript. March 12th is the deadline for withdrawing from the semester.

March 3 Putting Families First? *Conflicting Interests*
(pp. 177 – 182)
Social Problems
(pp. 107 – 111)

March 5 Families and the Fate of Children *Conflicting Interests*
(pp. 159 – 176)
(pp. 183 – 187)
Social Problems
(pp. 111 – 123)

March 10 Same Sex Marriage *Social Problems*
(pp. 123 – 126)

***T-Square: Graff, E.J. 2004. “What is Marriage For?” *New England Law Review*. 38(541).


Part IV: Crime and Deviance

March 12 What is Considered a “Crime” and Why? *Social Problems*
(pp. 134 – 141)

***T-Square: Hagan, John. 1985. Excerpt from “Defining Crime: An Issue of Morality,” pp. 33-61 in *Modern Criminology: Crime, Criminal Behavior, and its Control*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

March 17 & 19  **NO CLASS- Spring Break**

March 24 Ideology and Crime: Who is to Blame? *Conflicting Interests*
(pp. 191 – 200)

March 26  Street Crime
ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE *Social Problems*
(pp. 153 – 161)

March 31 The Race to Incarcerate

***T-Square: Schlosser, Eric. December, 1998. “The Prison-Industrial Complex,” pp. 51-77 in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

April 2 The Race to Incarcerate, Part II *Conflicting Interests*
(pp. 201 – 218)
Social Problems
(pp. 161 – 172)

April 7	Drugs and Addiction	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 219 – 233)
April 9	The Medicalization of Deviance	<i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 172 – 177)

Part V: The Environment

April 14	The Environment	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 237 – 252) <i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 183 – 187)
April 16	Corporations and Consumers	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 253 – 264) <i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 187 – 205)
April 21	Environmental Inequality	<i>Conflicting Interests</i> (pp. 265 – 300) <i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 205 – 220)
April 23	Wrapping Up	<i>Social Problems</i> (pp. 221 – 230)



April 30 In-Class Final Exam

*****The final exam will be held in-class on Thursday, April 30th from 11.30 AM – 2.20 PM. This is the time slot assigned by the Registrar’s Office. Please notify me if you have any conflicts. You can see the full exam schedule at www.registrar.gatech.edu/students/exams.php.**

How the Final Grade Will be Determined:***

Written Assignments	40%	A	90 – 100
Midterm Exam	25%	B	80 – 89
Final Exam	30%	C	70 – 79
Attendance	+ 5%	D	60 – 69
	100%	F	0 – 59

*****Note: I do not round up. An 89.9 is a B. No ifs, ands, buts, or “I’ll fail out of Georgia Tech if you don’t give me a B” stories, please! If you need a B, earn one!**