

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Fall 2021

Professor: Joanna Kempner

Department of Sociology

Sociology 01:920:103:03

Monday Lecture: 3:55-5:15PM on Zoom, Recorded and Saved on Canvas

Wednesday Office Hours: 4PM-5:15PM, on Canvas, scheduled on Calendly:

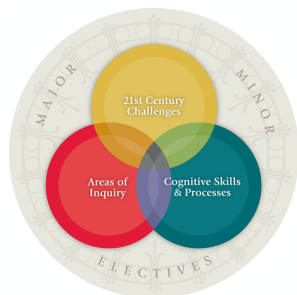
<https://calendly.com/app/availability/schedules>

Email: jkempner@sociology.rutgers.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We are asked to confront “social problems” every day: those issues, situations, behaviors and ideas, which are perceived and labeled as problematic and for which a solution is seen as possible and necessary. In this class, we will be learning about some of these social problems. But we will also be learning about what constitutes a social problem. Who, for example, defines what a social problem is? Why do some social problems receive so much attention, while others are ignored? And what are the impacts of defining social problems in a particular way? We will examine these questions drawing on case studies of contemporary issues, like inequality, racism, mass incarceration, health care, climate change, and of course, covid and the pandemic.

CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING GOALS



This course meets the following core curriculum requirements:

- Analyze contemporary issues of social justice.
- Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The best way to reach me is by email. Please write “Soc 103” in the subject line so that I recognize your email quickly. Don’t forget to sign your name in the email. If, for some reason, you do not hear back from me in 48 hours, please feel free to write again – sometimes my emails do get lost in the rush!

REQUIRED READINGS AND FILMS

This class uses low-cost or freely accessible materials. Please contact me if you have *any* trouble accessing materials.

- 1) Readings marked with an asterisk (*) can be located on the course website (Canvas) under Files. Links to readings can also be found in each Module.
- 2) Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 from A Sociology Experiment

Each chapter costs \$1 and can be purchased online. Register as a student on <https://www.sociologyexperiment.com>. Each chapter comes with an audio version and interactive study guides.

- 3) Sometimes, instead of readings, I have assigned a film to watch. I have provided links to the films. While all of these movies are available to stream from Rutgers' libraries, you may sometimes find it easier to use Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc.
- 4) Links to other interactive material can be found on the course syllabus. Please notify me if you are having trouble accessing the text.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Let's be flexible with each other.

Most of us are new to online learning and many of us didn't choose this format. Let me know if you are struggling. And given our constantly changing political, economic and social circumstances, I may make adjustments to the course as needed.

LECTURES & COURSE READINGS

Classrooms are always the most inspiring when there's room for interaction, debate and constructive engagement. Let's transform our digital classroom into a dialogue about the most pressing issues of our time.

Our dialogue begins with course material. We will read the occasional textbook, but we'll also read original research, longform journalism, and news excerpts detailing current events. I've also assigned documentaries, podcasts, games, and interactive tools. I'm providing a broad array of materials because I want to teach you the sociological tools and concepts that will help you understand social problems, but I also want to ensure you have a chance to practice your new skills.

Every Monday, please join me for a lecture/discussion during our regular class time (3:55-5:15PM). Lectures are designed to explain and complement the reading materials, but you will be tested on reading material even if we do not cover it in class. Assigned material must be read prior to class.

I do ask questions during these presentations. Please participate! Your questions and comments make the class work better for everyone.

Lectures will happen via Zoom and will be recorded and shared on course website for those who prefer to watch on your own time. Attendance is recommended, but not mandatory.

RESPONSE PAPERS

Response papers allow you an opportunity to reflect on course material. I have assigned three response papers, plus one group project in which you collectively complete a film guide. Each response paper has a different set of instructions. Some response papers ask you to think sociologically about an assigned video or a set of readings. Other response papers ask you to reflect on your experiences in class or your time during the pandemic. Response Papers should be concise—no longer than a page of text. I have provided detailed instructions and a rubric for each response paper.

MIDTERMS

There are three midterms. Midterms are designed to assess your basic understanding of content. I will not be testing rote memorization, but instead will be assessing whether you understand general concepts. I provide study guides. Midterms are not cumulative.

Assignment Schedule

Activity or Major Assignment	Due Date
Introduce Yourself!	1/24
Assignment 1: Modern Romance	2/14
Midterm 1	2/28
Assignment 2: What is Race?	3/7
Assignment 3: Study Guide or Movie	3/28
Midterm 2	4/2
Extra Credit Assignment	4/12
Assignment 4:	4/25

Pandemic Diary	
Midterm 3	5/12

GRADES

Your grade will be calculated from your performance on your Assignments (whether they are Discussion Forums) and Midterms.

Grades will be weighted:

Assignments=50%

Midterm Exams=50%

I am offering an additional Response Paper for Extra Credit → 2% added to final grade

Grades (as a percentage)

- A 90-100
- B+ 86<90
- B 80<86
- C+ 76<80
- C 70<76
- D 60<70
- F <60

Final grades are *non-negotiable*.

CLASS CONDUCT AND GROUND RULES

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. The University Code of Student Conduct is at <http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/disciplinary-processes/university-code-of-student-conduct/>

Social problems are often controversial and inevitably somebody will voice an opinion that you find disagreeable or even offensive. In this classroom, we will agree to respect each other, even if we don't like what each other has to say about the world. That means that we can disagree, but we must do so respectfully. You are encouraged to comment, question, or critique an idea, but you are not to attack an individual.

In addition, the Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological

perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances. Working as a community of learners, we can build a polite and respectful course community.

At times this semester we will be discussing events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have about material that may be particularly challenging for you. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork.

WELLNESS STATEMENT

As your sociology professor, I very much want to see you learn about the social world and healthcare. But more than anything else, I want to make sure that you are taking care of yourself. Yes, you need to do well in college, but I recognize that you have multiple competing pressures in your life – especially those of you who work long hours to afford this education.

I plan to challenge you in this class. I am assigning rigorous readings and regular writing assignments that will challenge your thinking. By the end of the semester, you should feel proud of all we accomplished here. But this work cannot come at the expense of your wellbeing. Working until exhaustion is not a badge of honor. Research shows that it's usually the students with the most cultural capital (i.e., the students who probably need the least amount of help) who talk to their professors when their lives get difficult. If you are struggling—for whatever reason—come talk to me. Let's get on top of whatever's ailing you before it's all too much. We got this.

Intellectual Property Statement

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. In the event that I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Rutgers Learning Centers

<https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>

The Learning Centers provide centralized academic support services to cultivate students' skills, strategies, and behaviors that lead to academic persistence and lasting success. (Including test-taking skills!)

- **Accommodating Special Circumstances:** I will receive copies of any letters of accommodation from the Office of Disability Services, but you are free to consult with me directly if you feel comfortable. You can also reach out to me if you have any special needs (defined broadly) that may make participation in the class difficult—this can include learning disabilities, parenthood, athletic obligations, employment, traumatic experiences etc. I am also open to suggestions to make our class more accessible. Here's the contact information for the Office of Disability Services:

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/> The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

On Mental Health and Wellbeing: This class should be hard on your intellect, but not on your emotional health! Here are some campus resources to help cope with the pressure and stresses you might be experiencing:

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e> Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ rhscaps.rutgers.edu/ CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community.

Scarlet Listeners (732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

- If you need help navigating violence in a relationship, or if you have found yourself dealing with other forms of sexual or relationship violence or stalking, please know that the Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance Office is here to help you.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I follow the Rutgers University's policy on academic integrity. You can familiarize yourself with this policy at this website:

http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated and I am obligated to report such conduct and violations of this policy to the Undergraduate Director of the Sociology Department and the Dean of your college.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

Module 1: Course Introduction, Week of January 20th

Category	Description
Meeting	Live class won't be held until Monday, January 25 th , so take this time to familiarize yourself with the Canvas site
Core Topic(s)	Introduction to the Course
Readings/Media	Watch: Introductory video Familiarize yourself with the Canvas site
Assignment Due 1/24 th	Discussion Forum (Ungraded): Introduce yourself to each other online using an animal haiku

Module 2: Thinking Like a Sociologist - Week of January 25th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, January 25 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	What is Sociology? An Introduction to thinking about Social Problems in a Sociological Way
Readings/Media	Read: *Weitz, pp. 4-10

Module 3: Structure vs Agency--Week of February 1st

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, February 1st from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Structure vs Agency
Readings/Media	Read: Judith Halasz and Peter Kaufman, "Social Structure and the Individual," Chapter 3. Purchase for \$1 here: https://www.sociologyexperiment.com Watch: A Sociological Imagination

Module 4: The Social Construction of Social Problems--Week of February 8th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, February 8 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	The Social Construction of Social Problems
Readings/Media	Read: Joel Best, Chapter 1, pp. 3-14 *Stefanie Mollborn, "Children" having Children
Assignment 1	Response Paper 1: Modern Romance

Category	Description
Due Date 2/14	

Module 5: Social Problems as Claims--Week of February 15th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, February 15 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Social Problems as Claims
Readings/Media	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Joel Best, Chapter 2 *Barbara Ehrenreich, <i>Nickel & Dimed</i> on the working poor * Ben Casselman. (12/8/16). "Inequality Is Killing the American Dream." FiveThirtyEight. <p>Watch: Mini-Lecture, posted on Canvas</p> <p>Poverty as a Childhood Disease, <i>New York Times</i></p> <p>Life at the Top isn't Just Better, it's Longer, <i>New York Times</i></p>

Module 6: Social Class, Inequality, and Poverty--Week of February 22nd

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on February 22nd from 3:55-5:15pm.

Category	Description
	These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Social Class, Inequality, and Poverty
Readings/Media	<p>Read:</p> <p>Peter Kaufman, and Paltz Todd Schoepflin, Social Class, Inequality and Poverty.</p> <p>Purchase for \$1 here: https://www.sociologyexperiment.com</p> <p>*David Leonhardt. (12/8/16). “ The American Dream, Quantified At Last.” The New York Times.</p> <p>Play: http://playspent.org/html/</p>
<p>Assessment</p> <p>Due 2/28</p>	Midterm 1

Module 7: Race in America--Week of March 1st

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, March 1 st from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Race in America
Readings/Media	<p>Read:</p> <p>Rayshawn Ray, Patrick Sharkey, "Race and Ethnicity," Chapter 7.</p> <p>Purchase for \$1 here: https://www.sociologyexperiment.com</p> <p>*Bonilla-Silva, "Racism without Racists"</p> <p>*Chris Mooney, "Across America, Whites are Biased and they Don't Even Know It."</p> <p>Do: Take the demonstration test called "Race ('Black – White' IAT)." Next take the "Arab-Muslim" IAT.</p> <p>https://implicit.harvard.edu/</p> <p>Do: Record your results from both IAT tests on Canvas by October 14th, 10pm.</p>
Assignment 2 Due Date Due 3/7	Assignment 2: What is Race?

Module 8: Gender Discrimination--Week of March 8th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on March 8 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Gender Discrimination
Readings/Media	<p>Read:</p> <p>Angela Barian, Todd Schoepflin, "Gender & Sexuality," Chapter 6. Pp. 1-27</p> <p>Purchase for \$1 here: https://www.sociologyexperiment.com</p> <p>*AAUW, "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap"</p>

Spring break!!

Module 9: Social Movements--Week of March 22nd

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on March 22 nd from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Social Movements
Readings/Media	Read: *Best, Chapter 3 Watch: "How to Survive a Plague" Available to stream from Rutgers Library
Assignment 3 Due Date March 28th	Assignment 3: Study Guide for Movie. Check-in with group early. Complete Guide due March 28th

Module 10: Week of March 29th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, March 29 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Black Lives Matter
Readings/Media	<p>Read:</p> <p>*Jill Lepore, "The Invention of the Police," <i>The New Yorker</i>. You may also choose to listen to this: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-invention-of-the-police</p> <p>*Bruce Western – Inequality, Crime, and the Prison Boom (34-51)</p> <p>*Deadly Force in Black and White</p> <p>Join: Lecture/Discussion on October 26th</p> <p>Watch: NYTimes – The Scars of Stop and Frisk https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000001601732/the-scars-of-stop-and-frisk.html</p> <p>Listen: Michelle Alexander: "Jim Crow Still Exists in America" https://www.npr.org/2012/01/16/145175694/legal-scholar-jim-crow-still-exists-in-america</p>
Assessment Due April 4th	Midterm 2

Module 11: Gratitude--Week of April 5th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, April 5 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Gratitude
Readings/Media	Read: Read: *How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain *The Neuroscience Behind Gratitude
Assessment 4/12	Extra Credit Assignment: Gratitude

Module 12: Week of April 13th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, April 13 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	American Healthcare in Crisis
Readings/Media	Read: *Kant Patel, Healthcare Politics and Policy in America, 4 th Edition, pp. 355-

Module 13: Week of April 19^h

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, April 19th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Health and Inequality
Readings/Media	<p>Watch: Unnatural Causes, Episode One http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/episode_descriptions.php Available to stream from Rutgers Library</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>*Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “The Black Plague,” The New Yorker You can also choose to listen to this article here: https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-black-plague</p> <p>*Katherine J. Wu, “Study of 17 Million Identifies Crucial Risk Factors for Coronavirus Deaths”</p>
Assessment Due April 25th	Assignment 4: Pandemic Diary

Module 14: Week of April 26th

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, April 26 th from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Contentious Policies – Climate Change and Vaccines
Readings/Media	Read: *Joel Best, Experts as Claimsmakers Watch: “Merchants of Doubt” http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3675568/?ref =nv_sr_1 Available to stream from Rutgers Library

Module 15: Week of May 3rd

Category	Description
Meeting	Class will be held live on Monday, May 3 rd from 3:55-5:15pm. These sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend in person.
Core Topic(s)	Homelessness
Readings/Media	Read: *Malcolm Gladwell, Giving Homes to the Homeless
Assessment	Midterm 3

