

SOC 270: Social Problems

Autumn 2018 • University of Washington

Instructor: Alexes Harris

Overview

In this course, students will be introduced to the topic of social and cultural problems. We will discuss what constitutes a social problem (what weâ€™ll call â€œnamingâ€•) and how a social issue is constructed as a social problem (what weâ€™ll call â€œframingâ€•). You will be exposed to a variety of societal issues that are defined as problems, ranging from problems in the environment, education, crime and deviance, to race, class and gender inequality. While the primary focus of this course is on contemporary American society, we will explore the ways these problems manifest themselves in the greater Seattle area. As a part of this class, we will discuss citizen engagement strategies that can be used to discover local solutions to common problems.

The major theme of this course is determining what kind of society American society is. We will argue that our society is based in a type of capitalism, dominated by giant corporations, with weak unions, and relatively weak regulated markets that exist in an increasingly globalized system of economic interactions (p. 13). How this type of society has reshaped our notions of race, gender and class inequality as well as our notions and beliefs in democratic participation will be explored in four major sections.

Role of Service-Learning in the Course

I have chosen to have the service learning option for this course because my overall aim in teaching this class, other than introducing students to sociology, is for students to become aware of social problems and to be able to develop tools to critically evaluate these issues. By being able to connect the research and theoretical perspectives learned in class with hands on experience with government and/or community-based organizations managing these problems on a daily basis, students' educational experience is not only enhanced, but hopefully their insight and desire to affect positive change is increased.

Students will not receive any extra credit or course credit for participation in this program. Instead this is a great opportunity to link what we are learning in the classroom with real life experience in the Seattle community.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

If students choose this option, instead of writing a final paper on a research topic, they will focus on their experience at the public service location. The final course paper will focus on: the organization's definition of the social problem; the organization's perspective towards the social problem; and how the organization attempts to manage or solve the social problem. Students involved in the service learning program will keep a journal of their experiences in the selected community program, and at the end of the quarter will submit a summary paper demonstrating how their experiences related to important class topics, research and theoretical perspectives. During their experience they will keep a weekly journal outlining their performed duties, any issues, ideas, or questions that come up during interactions in the setting, and running ideas about how their experiences relate to or do not relate to what we have been discussing and learning in class. Students will use this journal as evidence for the final course paper. Students are encouraged to meet with me at least twice during the quarter to briefly discuss the progress of their learning experience. The paper page requirement will be shorter (4-6 pages). In addition, if students attend their volunteer sessions regularly they will receive the full course participation points (10 points).

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