

This is a sample syllabus only. The instructor may make changes to the syllabus in future courses.

**Contemporary Social Problems
Sociology 245**

Instructor: Chris Biga, PhD
Phone: 205-934-8408
Email: cbiga@uab.edu

Office: Heritage Hall 460J
Office Hours: _____
and by appointment

Course Texts:

Best, Joel. 2013. *Social Problems. 2nd edition*. New York: WW Norton. (ISBN: 978-0-393-91863-2)

Silver, Ira. 2008. *Social Problems Readings*. New York: WW Norton. (ISBN: 978-0-393-92932-4)

Course Description:

How certain social conditions or behaviors come to be seen as social problems, why they persist and how they can be changed. Emphasis on understanding contemporary issues, and how diverse social groups are impacted by them (UAB Undergraduate Catalog 2014-2015).

Course Objective:

It has been suggested that the world is plagued with social problems. But what is a social problem? Is a social problem a social condition that has been deemed undesirable to a specific group of people? If so, what may be considered a social problem to one group of individuals may not be seen as problematic for another group of people? Or, is a social problem a social condition that causes inequality in the allocation of resources (psychological, cultural, economic, or material) leading to suffering for some segment of the population? What set of values labels a social condition a social problem?

The objective of this course will be to discuss and evaluate the different stages in the social problem process.

Course Requirements:

This course has been set up into four sections: 1) The Social Problem Process, 2) Making Claims, 3) The Audience, and 4) Policy and the Future. For each section, a comprehensive exam will evaluate the student's understanding of the material covered in that section. Within each section, there are two to four chapters from the Best text. For each chapter, a practice quiz will assess the student's understanding of the chapter. Within each chapter there are several opportunities for student learning and 'online classroom' discussion, using critical writing assignments and 10 assignments that will come together for a final project.

The course Canvas site is organized by section and chapter. For each chapter, students will be guided through the reading requirements, a power point presentation, assignments, critical writing opportunity, and finally a practice quiz. At the end of each section, a comprehensive exam over the section will be given in class. Below are outlines of, and directions for, each component of each chapter (assignment, critical commentary, and practice quiz) and section (exam).

Critical Writing: There are 10 critical writing opportunities on PBS FRONTLINE videos we will watch throughout the semester. You will be required to complete 3 critical writings. You are encouraged to write

about topics/chapters you find most interesting. Critical writings are due the **each Friday at 11:59pm** the week they are assigned (but you are encouraged to turn them in early) and can only be written on videos that were assigned for that day/chapter.

The **FIRST** writing must be completed on *or before* _____
The **SECOND** writing must be completed on *or before* _____
The **Third** writing must be completed on *or before* _____.

Each commentary is worth 33.33 points. The purpose of the writing activities is to apply critical thinking skills to address the social problem addressed in the film.

Directions: Within each chapter, there will be link to a critical writing assignment. The critical writings provide students with the opportunity to articulate an academic argument, or take a well-thought out position on the week's film selection AND relating this back to the class reading material. The paper should be a well-written 2-page (double spaced, 1" margins, 11 pt. Cambria font) essay discussing a point/perspective integrating the week's chapter reading material with the film. A superb paper would be well organized and focused. Remember you have limited space to make your argument, so being concise is paramount. A stupendous paper would also synthesize information from various sources (chapter readings, the discussion board, and outside readings).

Assignments (Social Problems Portfolio): There are 10 assignments that coincide with each of the 10 chapters of the Social Problems text. Each assignment will build on past assignment to produce a complete **Social Problems Portfolio**, due at the end of the semester. Students will assemble the portfolios in groups. You will be asked to track a specific social problem through the multiple stages of the social problems process, creating a detailed critical understanding of how your chosen problem might progress through the different stages. Each assignment is worth 20pts (for a total of 200pts), with the final consolidated Social Problem Portfolio is worth 50pts. While each assignment is worth 20pts, 25% of the assignment is based on group assessments.

Directions: Within each chapter/section there will be a link to each assignment. Follow the directions for each assignment and turn in the assignment on the due dates outlined in the calendar. The professor will grade all assignments the following day, and return comments to you as promptly as possible. Please use the professor's comments to better each assignment (both past and future), so the final portfolio is more complete (higher quality) than the sum of the 10 assignments.

Quizzes: There are 10 time-limited practice quizzes. Each quiz consists of multiple choice and short answer (1-2 sentences) questions. Students will be encouraged to complete all 10 quizzes, but they **DO NOT** count towards the final grade. The purpose of the quizzes is to test your conceptual and factual knowledge about the materials that we have cover in each chapter. Quizzes are for practice.

Section Exams: There will be four (4) section exams during the semester. Each exam will cover 2 to 4 chapters. Each exam consists of multiple choice and essay questions (MC=2pt, ES=10pts). The purpose of the section exam is to test your conceptual and factual knowledge about the section material covered.

- Exam I: covers Part I - chapters 1, 2 (50pts)
- Exam II: covers Part II - chapters 3 and 4 (50pts)
- Exam III: covers Part III - chapters 5 and 6 (50pts)
- Exam IV: covers Part IV – chapter 7, 8, 9, and 10 (100pts)

Points:

Critical Writings	3 graded x 3.33pts each	= 100pts
Assignments	10 graded x 20pts each	= 200pts
Social Problem Portfolio		= 50pts
<u>Exams</u>	<u>4 exams x 50-100 each</u>	<u>= 250pts</u>
Total		600pts

LETTER GRADES:

537-600 = A
477-536 = B
417-476 = C
357-416 = D
0-356 = F

Communications:

All official correspondence will be sent **ONLY** to the @uab.edu address. All students are responsible for ensuring that the correct e-mail address is listed in Canvas by the beginning of Week 1. UAB E-mail is the only method I will use to electronically communicate with students. It is your responsibility to make sure a valid email UAB address is provided. Failure on your part to do so can result in you missing important information that could affect your grade.

Drop/Add:

According to UAB policy _____ is the last day to drop this course. The last day to withdraw from this course with a grade of "W" is _____. Students registering late will be able to make up all class material.

Accommodation of Religious Beliefs:

Religious beliefs shall be reasonably accommodated with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements. Please notify me in advance if there is a conflict.

Reasonable Accommodations:

Any students who need reasonable accommodations are invited to share these concerns or requests with myself. All accommodations must be approved by Disability Support Services (DSS). If you have a disability but have not contacted DSS, please email dss@uab.edu, call 934-4205, or visit DSS at 9th Ave. Office Building (1701 2nd Ave. S).

Academic Honest Policy:

UAB Faculty expects all members of its academic community to function according to the highest ethical and professional standards. Academic dishonesty and misconduct includes, but is not limited to, acts of abetting, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and misrepresentation. Candidates are expected to honor the UAB Academic Honor Code. Please consult this resource for additional information regarding the specific procedures to be undertaken when a student violates the UAB Academic Honor Code.

<https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code>

Let me make it clear: if you cheat or plagiarize you will **fail** the course and your name will be forwarded to the University Compliance Office.

Make-up Policy:

If you must miss a commentary, assignment, or exam, you will need to schedule a time to make-up the assignment *before* your absence. Only in extreme cases will this policy be modified.

Etiquette:

Respect fellow students and myself. Topics in this class can become sensitive and someone (including myself) may say something with which you disagree. Critical discussion is encouraged, but respect differences of theoretical perspective. All class discussions must be sociological in nature.

Reservation:

I reserve the right to make changes in this syllabus to better serve the class's needs. Any changes will be announced in class in advance.

SAMPLE