

SO202 CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS
University of Guam
Sociology Program
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Professor: KIRK JOHNSON
Address: UOG-CLASS, UOG STATION
MANGILAO, GUAM 96923 USA
Email: kjohnson@triton.uog.edu

Main Office: HSS318D University of Guam
Telephone: 671-735-2856

Course Description

This course is a study of the nature and root causes of social problems. Topics include such problems as inequality, crime, population, environmental degradation and poverty. Students develop skills in critically analyzing their world and understand the causes and solutions to contemporary problems regionally and internationally.

Course Overview

Sociology – the scientific study of society and social behavior – provides a framework for understanding social problems. Most people think that a social problem is any condition that is harmful to society; but the matter is not so simple, for what might be seen as harmful to one is not necessarily seen as harmful to another. For example, the problem of air pollution might be a problem for some people while the automobile industry might see government regulation of free enterprise as the problem. This course is designed to help you understand what various social problems are, how to define them, how to evaluate the claims made about social problems and how do sociologists study social problems.



This picture is of Heather Garrido a sociology student during the 2019 Bali Field School component of the Community Development course in Sociology – Heather and her classmates visited a village school to learn about educational efforts in rural Indonesia and share some of the Guam culture with the students.

Social Problems is perhaps one of the most exciting courses. The topics are intrinsically fascinating – ranging from poverty and gender exploitation to war and environmental destruction. They encompass the whole range of human experiences – from such intensive personal concerns as abortion to matters of global prosperity, which center on social organization and international stratification.



Sociology students in Bali, Indonesia on their way to make offerings and pray at a sacred water temple early in the morning – 2019.

This course offers more than the usual benefits to students. This course enables you to gain a sociological understanding not only of the social problems we study but also an appreciation of the origins of our opinions. As the course progresses, the social forces that have shaped the social problems become more visible to us, as well as the factors that have shaped our own views of those problems.

That process of insight and of self-discovery is one of the most rewarding aspects of this course. And one of the most challenging is to approach the study of social problems objectively. To see, to understand and to feel through the eyes and hearts of each side of the debate – this is the challenge. We will explore the major research findings on a variety of social problems and their theoretical interpretations – and specify clearly the underlying assumptions and implications of these competing points of view.

Sociologists have been studying social problems since the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the twentieth century. Industrialization brought about massive social changes: the influence of religion declined; families became smaller and moved from traditional, rural communities to urban settings. These and other changes have been associated with increases in crime, pollution, divorce, suicide and juvenile delinquency. As these social problems became more widespread, the need to understand their origins and possible solutions became more urgent. The field of sociology developed in response to this urgency. Social problems provided the initial impetus for the development of the field of sociology and continue to be a major focus of the discipline.

There is no single agreed upon definition of what constitutes a social problem. Most sociologists agree, however, that all social problems share two important elements: an objective social condition and a subjective interpretation of that condition. Three major theoretical perspectives in sociology – structural-functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist – each has its own notion of the causes, consequences, and solutions of social problems. We will use these theoretical perspectives as the bedrock on which to analyze and understand a variety of social problems, both locally and internationally.

By analyzing current trends and issues in society, we must each strive to develop new insights into social phenomena and their role and impact in our lives and the impact we can have on those social forces.

It is important to note at the outset that we are all here to learn. Being aware of ones own opinions are important especially in this class when some topics and issues can be emotionally charged due to their very nature. Opinions rooted in knowledge are worth respecting (whether you agree with them or not), opinions rooted in ignorance are not. There are no stupid questions; there are only questions rooted in (degrees of) knowledge. It must be our aim, that in time our questions and answers are rooted in higher degrees of knowledge and understanding.

Required Materials

There are two required texts for this course – the first is provided free on moodle and the second will need to be purchased:

1. Social Problems of the Modern World: A Reader. By Fances V. Moulder (2000). Wadsworth. ISBN 0-534-56682-0 (THIS BOOK IS PROVIDED FREE ON MOODLE)

This book provides a variety of readings in all of the areas covered in a typical Social Problems course. The reader uses a global perspective, in order to help students understand that the social problems faced by people in the U.S. and around the world are increasingly shaped by our common fate in this interconnected world.



Benefits:

- The reader contains multiple theoretical perspectives, including functionalist, modernization, conflict, and interactionist.
- Each chapter contains readings that deal with major themes/topics usually contained in the standard Social Problems text, but focusing on the experience of other

nations or the U.S. in a global context.

- The reader combines articles written by sociologists with first-hand accounts.
- The articles represent a diversity of voices from different nationalities and backgrounds to help you develop a more connected, empathetic knowledge of world problems.
- Many of the articles focus on social change and solutions to problems.
- Four unique chapters cover "The Global Media as a Social Problem," "The Cultural Survival of Indigenous People," "Racial/Ethnic Conflicts and the Danger of Genocide," and "The Problems of Migrants and Refugees."
- A section called "For Additional Research" at the end of each chapter includes books, organization names and addresses, and action plans.

2. The second text we will be using in this course is by David Khorram and it is titled, "World Peace, a Blind Wife, and Gecko Tails" and can be purchased online or in the Bestseller Book stores on Guam or better yet try finding a used book on Guam (there are probably thousands from former students – so check the used bookstores and online too).

Course Objectives

AT THE COMPLETION OF THIS COURSE STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- a) Demonstrate an understanding of a wide range of social problems from a sociological perspective.
- b) Demonstrate critical thinking and analysis of these problems,
- c) Stimulate students to significantly improve their abilities and skills in observation, reading, listening, and articulating themselves both verbally and in writing.
- d) Demonstrate an understanding of social theory as it relates to social processes, systems, and problems.

Format of Course

The course will be structured along a **module type system** where you will be required to complete assigned readings and exercises and well as write a **module summary and reflection paper** prior to moving on to the next module. THERE ARE NO EXAMS OR TESTS IN THIS COURSE.

- **This course will be divided into FIVE modules** (each module is worth 12% points = 60%) – Instructions on the module papers are provided below.
- **There will be TWO Discussion Forums** (Each forum is worth 10% points = 15%). In each Discussion Forum you will be required to post one original post and respond to at least two posts by fellow classmates within each Module. The original post will be a reflection on insights gained in the section covered. The reflection is not so much a summary but your effort to capture learning, insight, and advancing understanding around key concepts and themes.
- **There will also be a Reflection Paper that each student will write** on Dr. David Khorram's book titled, "World Peach, A Blind Wife and Gecko Tails". This book can be purchased through the UOG Triton's Bookstore on Campus or at the Bestsellers Bookstore on Guam (Micronesian Mall or GPO). You can also purchase this online through facebook where students are selling old books or you can buy it on amazon.



General Policies

A. ADA Compliance

Students requiring accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act must notify the Office of Student Affairs (who will then contact the instructor) regarding any necessary accommodations. Information on UOG's ADA compliance can be reviewed at <http://www.uog.edu/administration/office-of-the-president/eoadatitle-ix-office>

B. Incompletes

The instructor is under no obligation to grant an incomplete. It is the responsibility of the student to request an incomplete and one may be given if:

- the student at the time of his/her request has a passing grade.
- The student can demonstrate extreme hardship, eg. long hospitalization, etc.
- The request for the incomplete is made at least two weeks prior to the beginning of finals week.

If the instructor agrees to give an incomplete the instructor will send the requirements and the deadline for completing the course to the student and copy it to the chair. Generally, Incompletes should be finished in the semester immediately following semester in which the incomplete was received.

It is the responsibility of any student receiving an incomplete to plan a timetable with the instructor for the completion of the work no later than the first week of the semester in which the work is being completed.

IT IS THE POLICY OF THIS COURSE THAT TO CONSIDER AN INCOMPLETE REQUEST AT LEAST 80% OF THE COURSE ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED

C. Academic Honesty

If a student does not properly cite the creator/s of a work he/she has committed plagiarism and therefore violated UOG's Academic Dishonesty Policy, which could result in the failure of the course or possible suspension/ dismissal from the university. Plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance to the Student Handbook. The UOG Student Handbook p. 49 defines plagiarism as: "The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to the use by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials." Please refer to your Student Handbook for more information as well as for the Code of Honor at UOG https://www.uog.edu/resources/files/student_handbook_10.7.16.pdf

D. Instructor Contact

Students can contact the professor via email (kjohnson@triton.uog.edu) and generally during the workweek, a response to a student inquiry within 24 hours is appropriate. The professor can also be available to skype or zoom or talk on the phone if a student would like to request such an interaction at any time.

E. Course Evaluation

In order to ensure quality in the courses offered, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences will ask each student to submit an evaluation of each course taken. The evaluations will be requested toward the end of the semester.