SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines critical American social problems that threaten the very fabric of our collective life as a nation. These include problems in the economy and political system, social class and income inequality, racial/ethnic inequality, gender inequality and heterosexism, problems in education, and problems of illness and health care. The course has three main objectives. One involves providing students with the theoretical and methodological tools needed to critically analyze these problems from a sociological perspective. A second involves providing students with current data and other information documenting the seriousness of these problems. The final objective focuses on evaluating social policies addressing these problems (e.g., affirmative action, welfare-to-work programs, pay equity legislation), with special reference to questions of social justice, the common good, as well as public and individual responsibility. Class format will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, with a very strong emphasis upon the latter.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Attendance: Regular attendance and punctuality are expected. You’re allowed three non-penalized absences during the semester, excluding our introductory class meeting on August 25th. Students who miss more than three classes, regardless of the reason for the absences, will have their semester grades reduced by one full percentage point for each absence beyond the three allowed. In accordance with University policy, the one exception to my attendance policy concerns absences for religious reasons, assuming that advance, written notification is given.

Role will be taken regularly, typically daily. If you’re late to class, it’s your responsibility to touch base with me after that class to make sure you’re counted as present. It’s also your responsibility to keep track of your absences. You’re free to leave class if I haven’t arrived by 9:15, unless other arrangements are announced prior to that time.

GRADING:

a) Class Participation: You’re expected to come to class prepared to answer questions about and discuss the assigned readings. You’re encouraged to share with the class newspaper clippings or other materials that are relevant to what we’re reading and talking about. Class participation will count for 15% of your semester grade.

b) Papers: You’ll write papers on four of the seven substantive topics covered in the course. Papers will run 3-4 double-spaced pages in length. They must be typed or computer generated, with one inch margins all around. Papers will be evaluated in terms of quality of research, depth of thought, strength of argument, and clarity of expression (i.e., writing style). You’ll revise two of your papers in line with my comments and resubmit them for a final grade. Because of time constraints, you will not have the option of revising your health care paper, should you choose to write on that subject. Late papers are penalized at a rate of one point per day, regardless of why they’re late. Papers are considered late until I receive them. I cap late points at 20. The average of your four papers will count for 60% of your semester grade.
c) **Written Critique of Student Paper**: You’ll read and critique another student’s paper during the semester. Your critique will be turned in both to me and to the student whose paper you’ve read. Critiques will run between 1-2 double spaced pages and will focus on quality of research, depth of thought, strength of argument, and clarity of expression (i.e., writing style). Late critiques are penalized at the rate of one point per day, regardless of why they’re late. Your critique will count for 5% of your semester grade.

d) **Pop Quizzes**: There will be an unspecified number of pop quizzes given during the semester. They will cover the previous day's discussion and/or the current reading assignment, typically both. **Makeups will not be given for missed quizzes, regardless of why they were missed, but your lowest quiz grade will be dropped**. There is one exception to this policy. In accordance with university regulations, anyone who misses a quiz for religious reasons will be allowed to makeup the quiz, assuming advance, written notification is given. The average of your pop quizzes will count for 20% of your final grade.

e) **Grading Scale**:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DEADLINES:**

**Friday, September 10th** is the last day to drop a course for a possible refund. **Wednesday, September 22nd** is the last day to drop this or any other course without possible academic penalty. **Wednesday, October 20th** is the last day to change registration in a course to or from the pass/fail basis. It is also the last day that a student can, with the Dean’s approval, drop a course or withdraw from the university, except for urgent, substantiated, non-academic reasons. (See General Information, Chapter Four for qualifications concerning these deadlines).

**SUGGESTIONS AND MATTERS OF POLICY:**

a) If you run across a word you don't know, look it up. I strongly encourage using dictionaries.

b) You need to take good notes. These will help you when writing your papers.

c) There's no such thing as a stupid or inappropriate question.

d) If you miss class, make arrangements to copy another student's notes. I'll be happy to go over them with you and answer any questions you may have.

e) You’re responsible for any material covered, as well as any assignments or announcements made during your absences.

f) Only one person talks at a time. Whoever "has the floor" deserves the attention of the entire class.

g) Cheating is considered a very serious matter and will be dealt with accordingly. You can view the UT Honor Code at [http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html](http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html).

h) If you currently have a disability requiring accommodations, please let me know not later than **Wednesday, September 1st**. Be prepared at that time, or shortly thereafter, to provide appropriate documentation. Otherwise, you’ll be evaluated like everyone else. You may request accommodations from Services for Students with Disabilities (471-6259, [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/)).
i) If class is canceled unexpectedly, the scheduled activity (e.g., reading assignment, exam) will automatically carry over to the next day of class, unless I inform you otherwise via email.

j) Make backup copies of any work done on the computer.

k) Please turn your cell phone off during class, unless you have a very compelling reason to keep it on.

l) If you tell me that you’re going to be absent on a particular date, I’ll acknowledge what you tell me. Please understand, however, that this acknowledgement does not excuse the absence. It will count, assuming that it is not for religious reasons.

**REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:**

**Required:** A small packet of prepared readings to be purchased from Paradigm at 407 W. 24th.

A three-ring binder

Most of your required readings will be assigned off Blackboard.

**Note:** Class discussions will focus on the assigned readings for the day. The specific topics covered in the discussions will be guided by student interest.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

**August**

25  I. Course Introduction

II. Studying Social Problems

27  (no assigned reading) (lecture: What is a social problem?)

III. The Economy

30 (no assigned reading) (lecture: shift from a manufacturing to a service based economy)

**September**

1   #1
3   #2-6
8   #7-12
10  #13

IV. Inequality, Social Class, and Poverty  (economic paper due)

13  #13
15  #14-21
17  #22-26
20  #27-28
22  #29-31
24  #37-41
27  #42-44
V. Politics (inequality paper due; revised economic papers due)

29 #45
1 #46-50
4 #51-54
6 #55-58
8 #59-64
11 #65

VI. Racial and Ethnic Inequality (politics paper due; revised inequality papers due)

13 #66
15 #67-68
18 #69-71
20 #72-74
22 #75
25 #76

VII. Gender Inequality and Heterosexism (race/ethnicity paper due; revised politics papers due)

27 #77-79
29 #80-83
November
1 #84-87
3 #88
5 #89-93

VIII. Problems in Education (gender/heterosexism paper due; revised race/ethnicity papers due)

8 #94
10 #95-97
12 #98-100
15 #101-102
17 #103-104

IX. Problems of Illness and Health Care (education paper due; revised gender/heterosexism paper due)

19 #105-110
22 #111-115
29 #116-117
December
1 #118
3 #119

8 (health care paper due by 4:00 PM) Late papers must be emailed to me as an attachment in Microsoft Word or PDF format.
Assigned Readings

2. “Worked Over and Over Worked” by Steven Greenhouse (from The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker, Knopf) (BB)
3. “Forced to Work Off the Clock, Some Fight Back” NYT (BB)
5. “Real Wages Fail to Match a Rise in Productivity” NYT (BB)
6. “Low Wage Workers are Often Cheated, Study Says” NYT (BB)
7. “Trade, Jobs and Wages” EPI (BB)
8. “Jobs Picture” EPI (BB)
9. “Jobless Rate at Five Year High” EPI (BB)
10. “Young Workers” EPI (BB)
11. “In Unemployment Report, Signs of a Jobless Recovery” NYT (BB)
12. “For Young College Grads, Employment Levels Still Recovering as Wages Erode” EPI (BB)
13. “Renewing U.S. Manufacturing” EPI (BB)
14. “Pulling Apart” Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP)/EPI (BB)
15. “Income Inequality Hits Record Levels” CBPP (BB)
16. “Average Income in 2006 Up $60,000 for Top 1 Percent” CBPP (BB)
17. “Income Inequality” EPI (BB)
18. “Income Gap is Widening, Data Shows” NYT (BB)
19. “Income” EPI (BB)
20. “Wealth” EPI (BB)
21. “Income Mobility” EPI (BB)
22. “CEO Pay” EPI (BB)
23. “Off to the Races Again, Leaving Many Behind” NYT (BB)
24. “Wages” EPI (BB)
26. “Rich Benefit Most From Tax Cuts” NYT (BB)
27. “Selling in Minnesota” by Barbara Ehrenreich (from Nickel and Dimed, Metropolitan Books) (pp. 125-160 in packet)
28. “Across the Nation, Housing Costs Rise as Burden” NYT (BB)
29. “Given a Shovel, Americans Dig Deeper Into Debt” NYT (BB)
30. “Seductively Easy, Payday Loans Often Snowball” NYT (BB)
31. “As Bills Mount, Debts on Homes Rise for Elderly” NYT (BB)
32. “Last Year’s Poverty Rate Was Highest in 12 Years” NYT (BB)
33. “Poverty and Hardship Affect Tens of Millions of Americans” CBPP (BB)
34. “Poverty” EPI (BB)
35. “Hunger, Crowding and Other Hardships are Widespread Among Families in Poverty” CBPP (pp. 47-53 in packet)
38. “What a New Federal Minimum Wage Means for the States” EPI (BB)
40. “Low Income Hispanic Families Least Likely to Know About or Receive Earned Income Tax Credit” The Urban Institute (p. 59 in packet)
41. “Two cheers for the Earned Income Tax Credit” by Jared Bernstein. The American Prospect Online (pp. 61-64 in packet)
42. “U.S. and the World” (from The State of Working America, 2004-2005) EPI (pp. 65-66 in packet)
45. “Rescuing Politics From Money” by Ellen S. Miller, Ernesto Cortez, Jr., Cass R. Sunstein, and Miles Rapoport. The American Prospect Online.
47. “Energy Bill: A Special Interests Triumph” The Boston Globe (BB)
49. “Vague Law and Hard Lobbying Add Up to Billions for Big Oil” NYT (BB)
50. “Big Financiers Start Lobbying for Wider Aid” NYT (BB)
51. “Statement of Principles” Project for the New American Century (BB, “external link”)
52. “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” Project for the New American Century (through p. 13 in the original) (BB)
54. “Where Do Our Tax Dollars Go?” CBPP (BB)
55. “Bagdad Bonanza” The Center for Public Integrity (BB)
56. “Privatizing Combat: The New World Order” The Center for Public Integrity (pp. 79-88 in packet)
57. “U.S. Contractor Banned by Iraq Over Shootings” NYT (BB)
58. “Blackwater Case Highlights Legal Uncertainties” NYT (BB)
59. “How the USA Patriot Act Redefines ‘Domestic Terrorism’” American Civil Liberties Union (pp. 89-91 in packet)
60. “The New McCarthyism” by Matthew Rothschild. The Progressive. (pp. 97-105 in packet)
61. “Court Opens Door to Searches Without Warrants” Channel 6 News, New Orleans (BB)
62. “West Virginia Woman Questioned by Secret Service” West Virginia Gazette (BB)
63. “Students: FBI Lecture Displays Watch List” The Daily Texan (BB)
64. “Firefighters Take on New Role as Anti-Terrorism Eyes of Government” Associated Press (BB)
65. “The Age of Political Segregation” and “The Politics of Migration” by Bill Bishop (from The Big Sort, Houghton Mifflin) (pp. 107-127 in packet)
66. “Defining Racism: Can We Talk?” by Beverley Daniels Tatum (from Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, Worth Publishers) (pp. 129-132 in packet)
67. “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (from Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, Worth Publishers) (pp. 133-136 in packet)
68. “Study Says White Families Wealth Advantage Has Grown” NYT (pp. 137-138 in packet)
69. “African Americans: Facts and Figures” EPI (BB)
70. “The Unrealized American Dream” Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) (BB)
71. “Plight Deepens for Black Men” NYT (BB)
72. “Hispanics: Facts and Figures” EPI (BB)
73. “Border Crossings” IPS (BB)
74. “Getting Immigration Reform Right” by Ray Marshall, EPI (BB)
75. “A Different Mirror” by Ronald T. Takaki (from Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology, Wadsworth) (pp. 163-177 in packet)
76. “When to Campaign with Color” by Timothy Egan (from How Race is Lived in America, Times Books) (pp. 180-197 in packet)
78. “Slowdown in Male Earnings Leads to Smaller Gender Wage Gap” EPI (pp 201-202 in packet)
79. “Gender Pay Gap, Once Narrowing, is Stuck in Place” NYT (BB)
80. “Maternity leave among OECD Countries” EPI (p. 200 in packet)
81. “Shaping the Brains of Tomorrow” by Ross A. Thompson. The American Prospect Online (pp. 203-205 in packet)
82. “Starting Right” by Joan Lombardi. The American Prospect Online (pp. 207-208 in packet)
83. “The European Model” by Marcia K. Meyers and Janet C. Gornick. The American Prospect Online (pp. 209-210 in packet)
84. “Work Hours: Facts and Figures” EPI (BB)
85. “Vacations are Good for You, Medically Speaking” NYT (BB)
86. “Rich Man’s Burden” NYT (BB)
87. Pp. 60-66 in “A Plan to Revive the American Economy” EPI (BB)
88. “House Approves Broad Protections for Gay Workers” NYT (BB)
89. “50- State Rundown on Gay Marriage Laws” Stateline.org (pp. 211-219 in packet)
90. “President Calls for Constitutional Amendment Protecting Marriage” The White House (pp. 221-222 in packet)
91. “The High Price of Being a Gay Couple” NYT (BB)
92. “Court Rejects Same-Sex Marriage Ban in California” NYT (BB)
93. “Judge Topples U.S. Rejection of Gay Unions” NYT (BB)

94. “Highlights From TIMSS 2007” National Center for Education Statistics (BB)

95. “How Selective Colleges Heighten Inequality” by Robert B. Reich. The American Prospect Online (pp. 225-228 in packet)

96. “A Great Year for Ivy League Schools, But Not So Good For Applicants to Them” NYT (BB)

97. “High Anxiety of Getting Into College” NYT (BB)

98. “And the Rich Get Smarter” NYT (BB)


100. “Lenders Sought Edge Against U.S. in Student Loans” NYT (BB)

101. “America in the Global Economy” National Center on Education and the Economy (BB)

102. “Colleges are Failing in Graduation Rates” NYT (BB)


104. “Response to Marc Tucker” EPI (BB)


106. “Even the Insured Feel the Strain of Health Costs” NYT (BB)

107. “The Erosion of Employment Based Insurance” EPI (BB)


109. “Health Insurance Coverage of Young Adults” The Urban Institute (BB)


111. “For a Retainer, Lavish Care by ‘Boutique Doctors’” NYT (BB)

112. “GAO Study Again Confirms Health Savings Accounts Primarily Benefit High-Income Individuals” CBPP (BB)

113. “Attention Shoppers: Low Prices on Shots in Clinic” NYT (BB)

114. “Hospitals Try Free Basic Care for Uninsured” NYT (BB)

115. “Company Clinics Cut Health Costs” NYT (BB)

