



# University of Pittsburgh

## *Social Problems (SOC 0007)*

### Spring 2014, 3 Credits

## *Course Syllabus*

Meets: Tuesdays 6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Instructor: DaShanne Stokes

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### **WELCOME TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS!**

Despite the considerable progress our society has made, many problems continue to confront us. Members of the LGBT community are still denied basic rights and services. Many Americans do not enjoy religious freedom. Women are not paid the same wages as men. And many people continue to be harassed and murdered for the color of their skin. Superficially, such events may seem unrelated, but they often have similar sources, and often prompt similar responses.

This course will introduce you to the sociological study of contemporary social problems in the United States. By taking this course, you will learn to examine social problems from a larger perspective and see how our personal lives are connected with larger social realities. The goal of the course is to develop your ability to make sense of social problems that confront our society. The course will help you develop your critical thinking and writing skills, and will challenge you to think through social problems to make informed arguments and find pragmatic solutions. Confronted with perplexing and often damaging social problems, we will ask questions like “How can I help myself and those I care about?”, “Why do some people turn out to be deeply prejudiced while others become egalitarian?”, and “Why do social problems persist, and what can we do about it?”

I am excited to be your instructor, and I am looking forward to our having many great discussions and debates. Welcome to our class!

### **COURSE RATIONALE**

*Students*      *Social Problems* is open to all undergraduate students and fulfills three elective credits required for completion of the undergraduate degree. The course seeks to combine

considerations of both theory and practice towards finding pragmatic solutions to real social problems. The course is designed primarily for students who have some prior coursework in sociology, though students also come to the course out of a general interest in social problems and from related disciplines like anthropology, psychology, philosophy, history, and political science.

*Workload* Many universities view 2-3 hours of study time for every hour spent inside class as a good rule of thumb in determining how much time to invest in studying. Note that this study time is *in addition* to time spent in class.

### **COURSE GOALS**

In addition to exposing you to a broad assortment of concepts, theories, and issues, this course is designed to sharpen your critical thinking and analytical abilities. Upon completing this course you will be able to:

- Understand* Identify sociological concepts and theories pertaining to social problems.
- Apply* Apply sociological principles to make sense of world events, public policies, and contribute to social debates and social change.
- Analyze* Compare and contrast different social problem theories and solutions; discover how social problems impact your daily life.
- Evaluate* Appraise the strengths and weaknesses of sociological theories and how they inter-relate.

### **CLASS CONTACTS**

The space below is provided for you to write down the contact information of two fellow classmates. If you are unsure whom to ask, simply check with the people seated around you. These are people to whom you may turn for help, such as to ask questions about textbook materials, to obtain lecture notes or announcements, to form study groups, etc. The names you place below do not have to be friends or people you already know (though you may well find in the person seated next to you a new friend or study partner). Please obtain names and e-mail addresses for *at least two* fellow classmates before you leave class today.

	Name	E-mail address
Classmate One:	_____	_____
Classmate Two:	_____	_____

### **CLASS POLICIES**

#### ***Attendance***

Students are expected and required to attend all classes. Failure to attend class does not excuse students from their responsibilities for in-class announcements or any changes to materials, readings, assignments,

exams, schedules, etc. Material presented in class may differ substantially from that in the readings. Exams will cover material from both class and the readings, and I may choose to give unannounced in-class pop-quizzes that cannot be made-up; therefore it is very much in your best interest to attend all classes. Attendance will be recorded.

### ***Participation***

Nobody, myself included, knows everything there is to know about the material we will be covering together. And, as Nobel laureate Dudley Herschbach once said, “You have to be confused before you can reach a new level of understanding anything.” As such, please consider our class as a place where it is safe to be confused, where you can join with myself and others who are similarly struggling to understand the world around us and the material we’ll be exploring together. This is a place where it is safe to ask questions, to share opinions, and to agree or disagree. Because each of us has very different backgrounds, talents, and experiences, we each have something unique and worthwhile to contribute. As such, we very much want to hear from everybody. We can do great things if we work together.

People from different cultures and with different life experiences naturally participate differently; I therefore encourage you to participate in a way that best suits your needs and background. This course is meant to provide a safe, fun, and engaging atmosphere in which everyone is invited to participate regardless of their opinions, backgrounds, or how well they know the material. It is expected that students will come to class prepared with questions, comments, and observations ready for discussion. You will get out of this class only as much as you put in; I therefore encourage you to participate because active participation is the only way to really learn anything worthwhile in the course.

*Special Note:* Some of the material we cover may arouse strong emotions and reactions. It is expected that students will show the utmost respect to their colleagues as we discuss what may be highly sensitive topics and controversial issues. We will approach controversial and sensitive topics from a place of empowerment, acceptance, and understanding. However, students who feel uncomfortable or who wish to step out of a class discussion or activity due to the sensitive nature of the topic may do so without penalty.

### ***Readings***

The field of social problems is broad and deep; therefore our topical coverage will necessarily be uneven and incomplete. As such, our readings have been chosen to not only help you grapple with a number of issues commonly encountered in our daily lives, but to also raise your awareness regarding topics you may not have heard much about. As we will see in our time together, many social problems inter-relate, overlap, and raise yet important problems we might not have anticipated.

Readings will form the foundation for this course, and students are expected to complete all readings for the upcoming week *before* coming to class. As with most courses, the majority of student learning will take place *outside* the classroom as students critically engage the assigned readings. Students are strongly encouraged to apply sociological concepts and theories to make sense of the social problems we will be covering. Students are also encouraged to think about the problems we cover critically with an eye towards finding pragmatic solutions.

### ***Activities & Discussions***

Many of our classes will draw upon a range of discussions and other activities. These discussions and activities have been crafted to help you to engage real world social problems thoughtfully and critically, to help you see how some of the material we cover might apply to world events, and to help make

otherwise abstract concepts and theories more concrete. Attendance and participation in our discussions and activities is therefore in your best interest and will help you get the most out of the class.

### ***Open-Door Policy***

My goal as is to help you learn and grow in any way I can; therefore I maintain an open door policy. I encourage and welcome you to email me or stop by my office to say hello, to ask questions, to make comments or suggestions about the course, to learn about research opportunities, or to discuss your work, general direction, or plan of study. I enjoy getting to know students of all backgrounds and look at visits as an opportunity to learn, have fun, and be of greater service. If you are unable to attend my regular office hours, please contact me to make other arrangements.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

Required:

Stokes, DaShanne. 2013. *The Unfinished Dream: A Discussion on Rights, Equality, and Inclusivity*.

NOTE: *The Unfinished Dream* is available in hardcopy at The University Store on Fifth, but a free e-book version is also available online through Goodreads (<http://www.goodreads.com/DaShanneStokes>) and Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com/DaShanneStokes>). Note that I have waived all royalties for the book and I do not receive any compensation for copies purchased at the bookstore.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES**

### ***Problem Solving Papers*            50%**

In our time together, you will be given the opportunity to work on a real world social problem in the form of a short, formal paper. For this, please choose one of the thematic areas we will be covering (i.e., race and racism, children's rights, adoption and adoptee rights, LGBT Rights and Equality, religious freedom, or women's rights and equality) and write a five page paper that explores how the problem might be improved upon in some way. Please choose a topic that is important to you personally, that has personal relevance, or is in an area that strongly interests you.

In conceptualizing your paper, please consider the stakes involved. Why, for example, should anyone care about what's happening? What is the nature of the problem? Who does it affect, and how do you know? Are there sociological concepts or theories that might help us make sense of the problem? Are there theories that might, despite their limits, suggest some practical solutions? Once you've thought about some potential solutions, consider the alternatives. Are there other ways of looking at the problem and finding a solution? What are the strengths and limits of your solution?

For your paper, be sure to make use of readings used in class (especially relevant sociological theories and concepts), and draw on at least five additional outside sources (i.e., books, journal articles, news articles, etc., but not websites unless the news or journal article you are accessing is online) that have not been covered in class.

Because this is a large class, page limits will be strictly enforced. Papers less than five pages in length will receive deductions and material beyond five pages will not be graded. Also note that the length

requirement does NOT include your cover page or your list of references (which are to be included on separate pages). As you will have little space in which to write, it is important that you be clear and concise. Towards this end, you may wish to write relatively short sentences and short paragraphs, and to move quickly (though clearly and convincingly) from one idea or paragraph to the next. Give just enough background so that your reader can understand the problem and context (maybe about a page or so, at most), but focus your paper on developing your analysis and proposed solution.

If you make use of quotes, be sure that the quotes are accompanied by appropriate in-text citations, which generally take the form of author last name, year, and page number, like this: (Name, Year: Page). Quotes should be integrated into your paper and should *significantly* contribute to your larger argument. Do NOT use quotes to beef-up or pad your paper to make it reach the required length. Please also make use of proper grammar and formal writing style. Assume that the audience you are writing for is an educated colleague who has trouble understanding your argument and needs you to clearly (and convincingly) illustrate what you mean.

Papers are to be typed, double-spaced, 12 point, Times Roman font, single-sided, have one inch margins on all sides, and have uniform spacing between lines and paragraphs (you may wish to view this document I've put together about formatting for a visual example about spacing: <http://www.dashannestokes.com/pdfs/FormatMSWord2007.pdf>). On a cover page, please include your full name, the title of your piece, the course name, and date. On a separate page at the end of your paper, please include a list of references. Papers should use ASA format (A quick guide can be found here: <http://www.asanet.org/students/Quick%20Style%20guide.pdf>). Please be sure to staple your paper before turning it in, and to include your name on a title or cover page. I will not be responsible for lost pages of papers that are not stapled, and papers without a name are not guaranteed to receive a grade. Papers will be graded relative to others in class based on the criteria outlined above. **Papers are to be submitted to me in hardcopy in class on April 1<sup>st</sup>.** Papers should NOT be submitted to my box in the sociology department without prior notification and approval. Papers may be submitted earlier than the deadline, but be aware that extensions will not be granted and papers received late or by email will NOT be accepted, so please plan accordingly.

**Timeline:** This is a relatively short paper, but please do not let that fool you into thinking that a well-supported and carefully thought-out paper can be written at the last minute. I can't give as much help as I would like if I'm approached at the last minute, so I strongly encourage you to get started quickly and to see me with questions early on. As a general guideline, it is advisable to start working on your paper no later than the second week of class, to have a rough draft by the end of February, and to have a final draft ready at least two weeks before the papers are due. This timeline will help ensure that your paper is ready on time, that you are able to weather any unexpected problems you might face, and that you have time to have a colleague review your work and to make final edits before handing it in.

The university's Writing Center (<http://www.composition.pitt.edu/writingcenter/>) is an excellent resource to use in developing and fine-tuning your work. While I cannot help with proofreading or editing your paper, you are welcome to bring your paper to my office hours if you'd like some preliminary or general feedback. Please note that as we have a very large class, I may need to ask you to wait so that I can assist other students with their questions before I can help you with your paper. Please also note that revising a paper can take considerable time, so it is in your best interest to get started early and see me with any questions you have well in advance of the due date.

**\*\*Special Notes:** Please be advised that I grade papers and exams relative to others in class, and with an eye towards being understanding and helpful. Please also be aware that how you may have performed in other classes or disciplines is not an indicator of the kind of grades you should necessarily expect to receive in this course. Also, it is not the amount of time put into a paper that determines the grade, but

rather the quality of the final product. Therefore, before you submit your paper, please take some time to review your work. Do a spelling and grammar check. Pay particular attention to your line of reasoning, the accuracy of your use of theories and concepts, your paper's organization and grammar, and how clearly and convincingly you support and illustrate your argument. Have one or two people from class take a look at your paper and offer constructive feedback. Also, before submitting your paper, ask yourself if the quality of work is something you would want to put your name on. If not, you know what to do.

***Problem Solving Exams***                      **50%**

During the course of the semester there will be two short take-home exams requiring careful consideration of one or more social problems discussed in class and in the readings. The tests will be primarily *applied* and *conceptual* and require you to demonstrate your *comprehension* of the issues we cover. This means you will not be tested simply on your ability to recall various names, facts, figures, or definitions, but rather you will be asked to demonstrate your larger *understanding* of themes, arguments, concepts, theories, and approaches as well as how they *inter-relate*, their *strengths and weaknesses*, and how they may or may not *apply* to solving real world problems. As this is not a life or physical sciences course, students should expect to grapple with problems that may not have a single or clear-cut solution. Towards this end, it will be imperative that you clearly and convincingly support your claims.

Each exam response is to be one page, or about 500 to 600 words in length (single-spaced, Times New Roman and 12 point font). Material beyond this length will not be graded, so please keep within the specified guidelines. Please indent paragraphs and do not insert extra space between paragraphs. Your response does not require a formal introduction / introductory paragraph, nor does it require a formal conclusion or concluding paragraph. Instead, dive right into your analysis of the problem(s) presented to you. Exam question will be posted online to our CourseWeb, as described in the schedule below. Your name should be typed on the back side of your exam response. In composing your response, you may draw upon your notes, lecture materials, and the assigned readings. You may NOT work together or consult with others. As you will have little space in which to write, it is important that you be clear, concise, and to the point. Towards this end, you are encouraged to write short sentences and short paragraphs, and to move quickly (though clearly and convincingly) from one idea or paragraph to the next. There will be two exams, and each is worth 25% of your final grade. **Exam responses that are late or submitted by email will not be graded and will receive a score of zero**, so please plan accordingly.

***Grading***

Paper	50 points
Exam 1	25 points
Exam 2	25 points
<i>Total</i>	<i>100 points</i>

Using the University's grading scheme, grades will be determined as follows:

<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	
98-100	A+	73-77 C
93-97	A	70-72 C-
90-92	A-	69-69 D+

88-89	B+	63-67	D
83-87	B	60-62	D-
80-82	B-	0-59	F
78-79	C+		

Note that the grading criteria above apply to most, but not all students. Students taking the class with the grade option of Satisfactory/ No Credit (S/NC), must obtain a C or better to obtain a satisfactory "S" grade. If the student receives a C- or below they receive a No Credit "NC" grade.

Students frequently inquire about the possibility of earning extra points or extra credit by taking on additional work, projects, assignments, etc. in order to raise their grades. Please note that extra credit will not be given because it would not be fair to the rest of the class.

## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (<http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

### **Disabilities**

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 216 William Pitt Union ( See also: <http://www.drs.pitt.edu/policies.html>)

### **Email Policy**

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by your instructors and the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to these University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

Please be sure to add my email address to your “safe” list so that it is not lost. Please also be sure to regularly check your “junk” folder as emails can sometimes get routed to such folders and students are not exempt from the content of emails due to their being routed to junk folders. As a general rule, I try to

answer emails as quickly as possible. If, however, you send me an email and you do not hear back from me within three days, please assume that I did not receive your email, and please try to contact me directly at my office or in person after class.

### **Cell Phones, Laptops, Audio, and Mobile Device Policy**

The ringing or use of cell phones for talking or texting in class is highly disruptive. Each student is expected to turn off the volume of his or her cell phone prior to the beginning of each class and to not use the device (e.g., no texting) during class. Laptop computers may be used, but only with volume turned off. Ipods, cd players, walkmans, and other devices not required for medical or learning purposes should also be turned off and put away prior to the beginning of class.

### **Other Information**

Students frequently spend a lot of time trying to decipher and orient themselves to instructor expectations and teaching methods. Becoming familiar with an instructor's teaching philosophy, which describes some of the rationale or the "how" and "why" of an instructor's approach, can be helpful. It is not required reading, but for those who are interested, a copy of my teaching philosophy and other useful materials can be found on my website at [www.dashannestokes.com/academia.html](http://www.dashannestokes.com/academia.html).

Also note that I reserve the right to change the syllabus, course schedule, learning activities, course policies, materials, readings, etc. as needed in order to best help the class. Any changes will be announced ahead of time.

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

*The Unfinished Dream* is available online and at The University Store on Fifth, as described above. All readings listed below, including the syllabus, are required. Book chapters and journal articles will be posted on CourseWeb. Articles found online have links copied below. Note that I may post discussion questions to accompany readings. These questions, when posted, will be available on CourseWeb under the week for which they are assigned.

### **Week One (Jan. 7): Race and Racism**

Introduction to the course

Read: Course Syllabus

Film and Discussion: *Prom Night in Mississippi*

### **Week Two (Jan. 14): Race and Racism**

Read: Preface-p. 50 of Desmond, Matthew and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2010. *Racial Domination, Racial Progress: The Sociology of Race in America*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

### **Week Three (Jan. 21): Race and Racism**



Read: p. 501-543 of Desmond, Matthew and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2010. *Racial Domination, Racial Progress: The Sociology of Race in America*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Read: p. 1-15 of Stokes, DaShanne. 2013. *The Unfinished Dream: A Discussion on Rights, Equality, and Inclusivity*.

#### **Week Four (Jan. 28): Children's Rights**

Read p. 3-42 of Walker, Brooks, and Wrightsman. 1999. *Children's Rights in the United States: In Search of a National Policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

#### **Week Five (Feb. 4): Children's Rights**

Read: R.E. Ladd. 2002. "Rights of the Child: A Philosophical Approach." Pp. 89-101 of Alaimo and Klug, *Children as Equals: Exploring the Rights of the Child*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Read: p. 103-139 of Walker, Brooks, and Wrightsman. 1999. *Children's Rights in the United States: In Search of a National Policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

#### **Week Six (Feb. 11): Adoption and Adoptee Rights**

Read: "The Child Exchange: Inside America's Underground market for Adopted Children."

#### **Week Seven (Feb. 18): Adoption and Adoptee Rights**

Read: Fisher, Allen P. 2003. "Still 'Not Quite as Good as Having Your Own'?: Toward a Sociology of Adoption." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 335-357.

Read: Smith, Darron T., Juarez, Brenda G., and Cardell K. Jacobson. 2011. "White on Black: Can White Parents Teach Black Adoptive Children How to Understand and Cope With Racism?" *Journal of Black Studies* 42: 1195-1230.

#### **Week Eight (Feb. 25): LGBT Rights and Equality**

Read: "Sexual Orientation." Pp. 241-263 in Eitzen, D. Stanley, Maxine B. Zinn, and Kelly E. Smith. *Social Problems*. 13<sup>th</sup> ed. 2014. New York, NY: Pearson.

Read: Stokes p. 34-37

Read: <http://www.fightenda.org/> (read only the front page, especially the petition and the section on "What is ENDA?")

Read: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/27/phil-robertson-back-duck-dynasty\\_n\\_4509697.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/27/phil-robertson-back-duck-dynasty_n_4509697.html)

Read: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/pope-francis-gays\\_n\\_3669635.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/pope-francis-gays_n_3669635.html)

*Exam One will be posted on Thursday, Feb. 27 and is due in class on Mar. 4.*

**Week Nine (Mar. 4): LGBT Rights and Equality**

Exam One responses due today (Mar. 4) in class.

Film and Discussion: Boys Don't Cry

**Week Ten (Mar. 11):**

- NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK! HAVE A GREAT TIME!

**Week Eleven (Mar. 18): LGBT Rights and Equality**

Read: Bow, Leslie. 2009. "Transracial/Transgender: Analogies of Difference in Mai's America." *Signs* 35 (1): 75-103.

Read: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/27/trans-murder-rates\\_n\\_3824273.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/27/trans-murder-rates_n_3824273.html)

**Week Twelve (Mar. 25): Religious Freedom**

Read: Preface – p.60 of Grim, Brian J. and Roger Finke. 2011. *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

**Week Thirteen (Apr. 1): Religious Freedom**

Read: p. 60-87 of Grim, Brian J. and Roger Finke. 2011. *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Read: Stokes, p. 9-15, 15-22, 28-33, 38-45

Papers are due today (Apr. 1) in class.

**Week Fourteen (Apr. 8): Women's Rights & Equality**

Film and Discussion: TBA

**Week Fifteen (Apr. 15) : Women's Rights & Equality**

Read: Hartman, Heidi. 1976. "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and the Subordination of Women." Pp. 183-193 in Levine, Rhonda F., ed. *Social Class and Stratification: Classical Statements and Theoretical Debates*.

Read: Zinn, Maxine B. and Bonnie T. Dill. 1997. "Theorizing Difference From Multiracial Feminism." Pp. 193-203 in Levine, Rhonda F., ed. *Social Class and Stratification: Classical Statements and Theoretical Debates*.

Read: Collins, Patricia H. 1993. "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection." Pp. 243-258 in Levine, Rhonda F., ed. *Social Class and Stratification: Classical Statements and Theoretical Debates*.

Exam Two will be posted on Thursday, Apr. 17, and is due in my mailbox in the sociology department no later than 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, Apr. 23<sup>rd</sup>.