**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Over the course of the semester, we will analyze select contemporary social problems. Using an

intersectional framework, we will examine systems of power and inequality, such as classism and class, racism and race/ethnicity, sexism and gender, as well as heterosexism and sexuality. We will also analyze the structure of social institutions, including families, the mass media and popular culture, education, health care, the prison industrial complex, as well as physical/mental health care, drug/alcohol abuse, and war/terrorism.

Finally, we will “pull it all together” by discussing the social locations where context and social change take place. Our main text is written by highly respected scholar in the field of sociology and will be supplemented by popular prose and documentary films.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Learn to use an intersectional framework to understand the ways that social problems are shaped by (1) systems of power and inequality and (2) larger societal structures. Begin to apply an intersectional approach to race, class, and gender (alongside other important social factors) to understand (1) the social locations where social change and activism occur as well as (2) your own position and responsibilities in contemporary society.

**Student Learning Outcomes/Learning Objectives**

By the end of the semester, you should

•  Have an improved awareness and understanding of social problems and their possible solutions

•  Be able to converse knowledgeably about substantive issues involved in social problems

•  Be able to recognize and apply different sociological perspectives to social problems

•  Be able to identify assumptions that underlie different perspectives, including your own

•  Have a greater appreciation for the complexities of social change

**Text**

**Think Social Problems 2013** John D. Carl (Pearson)

**Course Format**

I will use a variety of formats to enhance your learning, including discussions, mini-lectures, guest speakers, group exercises, and films. Generally speaking, the topics addressed in this course will be examined through active learning. At the beginning of the class each day, I will signal you as to which format we will be using for the day: either some form of

structured dialogue (for example, think/pair/share) or free-form dialogue, group work, film watching then response to writing prompt, etc.

**Attendance**

I will take attendance by sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class. Each student is allowed three absences throughout the course of the semester (for illness, bereavement, emergency etc.). An e-mail helps me understand your situation rather than no-showing which impacts your grade. ***Since class participation is a part of your grade tardiness and absences will result in a 1 point reduction per class.***

Come visit me during office hours if you have any questions about the requirements, assignments, exams, or any other aspect of the course. I cannot help you if I am not aware of your particular circumstances, concerns, or needs.

In this course, we sometimes will touch on controversial topics. In class discussions, all students are expected to respect each other’s right to an opinion. I will guide discussions to make sure that we move forward and cover the appropriate material. Our goal is to examine social problems from a scientific perspective, not an ideological one.

Cheating and plagiarism (passing off someone else’s writing as your own) each will result in severe penalties, including a failing grade. Refer to your student handbook or the TRCC Catalog for the colleges standards for academic honesty and integrity

Make-up exams will be given only to those who make special arrangements in advance or who have medical excuses or personal catastrophes that are documented in writing. No show for an exam will result in an automatic zero with no make-up allowed.

If you disagree with the score I have given to your answer on an exam question or an assignment and you wish to challenge it, you may submit an appeal to me. The written appeal should be a paragraph that explains why you think you are correct and cites supporting materials presented in class or the readings.

Please make an appointment with me as soon as possible if you need accommodations for or adaptations to the course because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated. If you have any questions about the services available for special needs please call the Counseling/Testing Center.

You are responsible for all deadlines and other information in this syllabus and any changes that might be announced in class.

**Classroom Etiquette**

Respect and Dignity

We will discuss some controversial issues this semester. You may, and are certainly encouraged to, disagree with other students or your texts. When you do disagree, I ask that you do so in a respectful and open-minded fashion. This does not mean you have to employ “political correctness” in speech, but it does mean that all points of view must be expressed with

due respect for the differing perspectives of others. For example, it is very important that when you disagree with someone, you make it clear that you have a different idea or analysis, but that you are not attacking anyone personally. (Of course, this means that name-calling and/or accusations are never, ever appropriate.) In turn, if someone disagrees with your ideas and/

or analyses, please do not take it personally and remember that we are here to expand our own perspectives on contemporary social problems and our potential responses to them. Our differing ideas will allow us to clarify our own analyses, strengthen our understanding of the multiple perspectives on any issue, and build a greater store of knowledge that we all can access.

Inherent in the building of a vibrant learning community is the need for all students to listen to the ideas and analyses of their classmates. If you are talking while a classmate is speaking in class, I will address that violation immediately. In addition, I do not expect you to talk, write notes, or send text messages while I am teaching or at any point during class. I find these sorts of displays to be near the top of the list of disrespectful behaviors!

(Name-calling and personal accusations are at the top of that list.)

Finally, because we will be creating a vibrant learning community together, it is important that everyone in the class has the space to air their ideas and analyses. What this means is that if you would like to speak, I want you to notice whether or not others in the class would also like to speak, and make community space for everyone to share their ideas. Sometimes you will have a burning point to make, but you will have to wait your turn. Sometimes your classmates will be reluctant to start a controversial discussion, and you may have to be the brave person who starts that dialogue. Every person’s perspective will play an important role in all of our learning processes, so sometimes I will stop the class and facilitate a meta-discussion on how we might enhance the participation of all class members. Please have the entire learning community in mind when you make an argument in class, and make sure that others have a safe space in which to share their ideas in turn. These structures, I find, allow us to create a safe, vibrant learning environment that helps everyone to achieve, succeed, and participate in shared inquiry.

\*\*\*The sharing of personal experiences is encouraged however: one must evaluate his/her motivation when sharing such information. The disclosure should be brief, appropriate, and relevant to the topic being discussed.

Cell Phones

Please turn off your cell phones when you come into class. If you have a

personal or work emergency for which you need to keep your phone on, please turn it to vibrate or speak to me before class starts to notify me that you will need to keep your ringer on.

Tardiness

Please make every effort to be on time for class. I find it very disruptive to have students walking in late after class has started, so if you foresee difficulty in getting to class promptly, notify me ahead of time.

**Grading**

25% Writing Assignments, Class Participation, Group Work

25% Midterm

25% Final

25% Presentation—Usually begins in the final two weeks of the semester.

25% Writing Assignments/Class Participation/Group Work: You will be assigned either in-class writing assignments or homework based on the subject. **Class Participation:** ***Is the cornerstone of this course***. You will be challenged to expand on your ideas, beliefs, and values. You earn credit by engaging with the course material, and participating in large/small group discussions. Finally, there will be group assignments through-out the semester which I will discuss as the semester progresses.

25% Two examinations (one midterm and one final 25% each ) will be given in this course. These exams will contain multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions, and they may cover class readings, lectures, discussions, small group exercises, guest speakers, and films. I will give a study guide before each exam, which students are welcome to (but not required to)

use for exam preparation. No make-up exams will be given except in the case of an extreme circumstance, and arrangements must be made with me PRIOR to the regularly scheduled exam unless this is absolutely impossible. Warning: An unexcused absence for an examination will cause a “0” to be recorded for that exam grade.

25% Presentation. You are required to present a 15 minute presentation as a part of your grade. The purpose of this is for you to become a subject matter expert on your topic. Your subject must focus on a subject discussed in the text book. You may use either a PowerPoint presentation or 3 panel poster board. A 1 page summary is also require with a minimum of 5 references. Upon completion of your presentation I require a paper copy of both your summary and PowerPoint presentation. The presentations will begin after the mid-term and a sign-up sheet will be distributed to the class. You are responsible for presenting on the date that you have signed –up for.

**Reading Schedule/ Social Problems**

Tentative Schedule of Readings\*

Throughout the semester I will have articles and show brief videos to enhance you learning of the material.

Week 1 The Study of Social Problems Chapter 1

Week 2 Inequality: Poverty and Wealth Chapter 2

Week 3 Race and Immigration Chapter 3

Week 4 Gender Chapter 4

Week 5 Aging ; Social Problems of Growing Old Chapter 5

Week 6 Media and Technology Chapter 6

Week 7 Economy and Work Chapter 7

Week 8 Problems in Education Chapter 9—Midterm

Week 9 Physical and Mental Health Care/ Drug and Alcohol Abuse Chapter 10/11

Week 10 Crime and Criminal Justice Chapters 13/14

Week 11 Urbanization Chapter 16

Week 12 Population Problems Chapter 18

Week 13 Environment Chapter 19

Week 14 War on Terrorism Chapter 20

Week 15 Final Exam