



UC Santa Cruz

## Sociology 10 – Issues and Problems in American Society

### Instructor:

Megan McDrew – [mmcdrew@ucsc.edu](mailto:mmcdrew@ucsc.edu)

### Meeting Time and Location:

Tuesdays/Thursdays: 1:00pm-4:30pm; Soc Sci 2 165

### Office Hours:

Tuesday/Thursdays 11:30-12:30; Rachel Carson College 8, Room 332

*"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them" Albert Einstein*

*"The Occupy movements are the physical embodiment of hope. They returned us to a world where empathy is the primary attribute. They defied the profit-driven hierarchical structures of corporate capitalism. They know that hope has a cost, that it is not easy or comfortable, that it requires self-sacrifice and discomfort and finally faith." Chris Hedges*

*"Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages." Angela Davis*

**UCSC Course description and restrictions:** Exploration of nature, structure, and functionings of American society. Explores the following: social institutions and economic structure; the successes, failures, and intractabilities of institutions; general and distinctive features of American society; specific problems such as race, sex, and other inequalities; urban-rural differences. Fulfills lower-division major requirement.

### Instructor Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the sociological perspective on social problems, more specific to US society although we will also be taking a global perspective since the book we are using is a general social problems text. We will utilize a critical constructionist lens to study the definition, sources, distribution, consequences of and responses to social problems. Using a critical lens we will explore how various systemic inequalities (generally reflected in race, class, sexuality and gender) influence the social problems process. Combined with the constructionist perspective we are pushed to consider the subjective nature of social problems. That is, why do particular problems become a focus of concern in a given historical and social context? Why are some forms of drug use promoted while others are deplored? Why are we worried about teenage pregnancy in one year and runaway teens in another? Who decides what constitutes a social problem and worthy of attention and/or social intervention? Who is responsible for responding to social problems?

My goal within this course is for you to leave with more questions than answers...to become curious, engaged and maybe even enraged about the state of affairs in the United States. My hope is that you finish the semester with a new way of thinking and a desire for social change through imaginative action.

### **Academic Honesty:**

You are expected to follow the University guidelines for academic honesty. Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak to me before the assignment is due. For more information on penalties for plagiarism, see The Navigator (<http://reg.ucsc.edu/navigator/>) and the UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>).

### **Special Needs and Accommodations:**

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your "Accommodation Authorization Letter" from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, as early as possible in the academic quarter, preferably within 1 week. I also am open to and want to encourage you to discuss with me ways I/we can ensure your full participation in this course. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to learn more about the many services offered by the DRC. You can visit their website (<http://drc.ucsc.edu/index.html>), make an appointment, and meet in-person with a DRC staff member. The phone number is 831-459-2089 or email [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu).

### **Safety, Inclusion and Classroom Conduct:**

The Sociology Department affirms in the clearest and strongest terms that Sociology @ UCSC is committed to promoting and protecting an environment that values and supports every person in an atmosphere of civility, honesty, cooperation, professionalism and fairness. We are committed to the principles of cultivating an open, diverse, purposeful, caring, and just community. Sociology @ UCSC fosters safe and equitable learning environments and aims to support its community in its entirety. If the department can create a more inclusive, equitable, and just atmosphere, please let us know by completing this online form:

[https://docs.google.com/a/ucsc.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScPLrMP5mLOzqYLFejOJL\\_M\\_PlwqF5xsRFpkTdN99jORBKeQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/a/ucsc.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScPLrMP5mLOzqYLFejOJL_M_PlwqF5xsRFpkTdN99jORBKeQ/viewform).

Students [as well as faculty, teaching assistants and staff] are expected to be civil and to treat each other with dignity and respect. Basic courtesy is essential to a collaborative, learning environment. Differing opinions are part of free exchange as long as they remain respectful. As such, harassment, discrimination, and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. If you witness or have been a target of a hate or bias motivated incident on campus or while participating in a University sponsored activity, please report the incident to the campus Hate/Bias Response Team at:

<https://reporthathe.ucsc.edu/how-to-report/index.html>. Both reporting forms are linked to every page of the department website at: <https://sociology.ucsc.edu/index.html>.

**All electronic devices must be turned off during class time - no texting or messaging during class. I will give you one warning if I see you on your phone. If I see it again during the same class session, I will ask you to leave the class as it appears what is going on in your phone or tablet is more important than what you are learning in class. It is a privilege to be in this classroom – treat it as such.**

Remember to always be respectful of others, to arrive on time, and to not talk when others (including the instructors) are talking or presenting. Feel free to email your instructors if you wish to schedule an appointment if you cannot make office hours, or to ask brief questions. Allow at least 24 hours for a response to your messages; 48 hours on weekends. In order to discuss lengthier questions about drafts of your paper or your presentation, please stop by office hours or arrange an appointment.

### **Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment:**

Please be aware that under the UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment, faculty and student employees (including Teaching Assistants, Readers, Tutors, etc.) are “responsible employees” and are required to notify the Title IX Officer of any reports of incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, stalking, etc.) involving students. Academic freedom exceptions exist for disclosures made within a class discussion or assignment related to course content; under those conditions only, a report to the Title IX Officer is not required. The Campus Advocacy Resources and Education (CARE) Office (831) 502-2273, [care@ucsc.edu](mailto:care@ucsc.edu) can provide confidential support, resources, and assist with academic accommodations. Report a possible Title IX incident, by calling (831) 459-2462 or fill out this online form at: [https://ucsc-gme-advocate.symplcity.com/public\\_report/index.php/pid966750](https://ucsc-gme-advocate.symplcity.com/public_report/index.php/pid966750).

### **Course Readings:**

There are three required texts for this course. The first three books are available at Literary Guillotine although I do recommend looking for the Davis and Hegdes/Sacco books online as you will find them quite affordable, especially if buying used copies. You will find the Kilgore book only on Amazon as this is a last minute addition.

- Trevino, Javier – Investigating Social Problems  
ISBN: 978-1-4522-4203-3
- Hedge, Chris and Joe Sacco – Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt
- Davis, Angela – Are Prisons Obsolete?
- Kilgore, Ivan – Domestic Genocide

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **Class participation/Attendance:**

Attendance (15 pts.): Attendance will be checked at the beginning of class and after the last break. Your presence in class is an essential part of your work in this course. Missing one single class session is the equivalent of missing an entire week of class during the year. If you come more than 15 minutes late or leave early, that will not count as full attendance for the session. You must stay the entire class time to receive full attendance credit. If you have any extenuating circumstances, medical or otherwise, please email me before class or soon afterwards. 3 or more unexcused absences warrant a No Pass for the

course. Attendance is also evaluated by intellectual participation and engagement in class discussion and exercises as this course deals with a lot of material processed in a variety of ways. Structured interactions, group processes, guided discussion of readings, and in-class group exercises will be part of the course. Students are expected to have read assigned readings by the date indicated in the syllabus, and should be prepared to discuss readings individually or in groups.

I will only accept assignments if you are IN-CLASS. If you are absent when an assignment is due or when there is an exam, in order to take the exam at a later date or turn in the assignment, you **MUST** submit proof of excused absence AND notify me before or on the same day of the missed class. Even if an assignment is due on Canvas, I will only grade the assignment if you were in class the day it is due. That is my firm policy. If for whatever reason you find that you are missing classes, please come talk to me as I can assist in helping you find the resources you need. Please don't just go "MIA." ☺

### **Assignments:**

You will be turning in a 2-3 page essays for each chapter in the Hedges/Sacco book based on questions that I provide via Canvas (5 reading responses). In addition, you will have a 3-5 page essay due on the Davis book. Lastly, you will turn in a weekly news reflection. Assignments will be posted on Canvas and deadline dates are listed on the syllabus. Each assignment is worth 20 points towards your course grade. Worth 200 points.

### **Group Presentation:**

Because I am structuring this course as a general social problems course with an emphasis on US issues, using the Hedges and Sacco, Davis and Kilgore book to do that, I am asking the students choose a social problem unique to American society and create a presentation on that. So, with that said, group presentations are designed this way for a number of reasons: 1) allow us to cover more material than we could normally cover through lectures and readings, 2) provide you with a greater variety of viewpoints, and 3) afford you the opportunity to experience working on a group project that includes public speaking.

On the first day of class, we will form groups with each group being responsible for reporting on a social problem of interest to the group and class. Each group will have 30-45 minutes (including time for questions and answers) to report on an American social problem. The group should not try to cover all aspects of the social problem but focus, instead, on a few of the most pertinent points, serving as the "professors for the day," and emphasizing what it thinks the students should learn. Depending on how you wish to budget your 30-45 minutes, all members of the group must speak. All students in the group will receive the same grade (with the rare exception of students who refuse to participate, or contribute their fair share to the group process--such students will receive a zero for the assignment).

You might consider organizing your presentation along these lines: 1) introduction of the social problem (definition and explanation) 2) history/beginnings of the problem 3) who is involved – what group/s of people are dispossessed/oppressed and who is/are the oppressors? Who is most/least affected by the problem? 4) What are the effects of the problem currently? In the future and for future generations? 5) Have any policies been created to help alleviate the problem? Are they effective, misguided or excessive? What more/or less needs to be done? Please identify a local organization that is working to alleviate the problem and discuss what they are doing and the effects – it is a good idea to include an interview! Lastly, create an activity for the class to become involved and save 5 minutes for questions at the end. On the day of the group presentation, each group must submit an outline of its presentation detailing what is being covered.

It has been my experience that the best presentations are those that involve the following:

**Solid preparation:** All group members should be equally prepared for the presentation. This usually necessitates a clear delineation of member roles in preparing for and conducting the presentation. In addition, many of the best presentations involve outside research or activity. For example, one group visited a federal prison to gather information about prison conditions and attempts at prison reform. Another group used part of their presentation to put on a skit dealing with AIDS awareness. Still another group went around campus interviewing males and females about their attitudes on sexual harassment, videotaped the interviews, and showed the videotape as part of their presentation. The bottom line is that the format is up to each group. There are only two limitations: that the presentation take no more than 30-45 minutes, and that the presentation is tied to a current social problem.

**Class activity and/or handouts:** Having the class take an active role in at least part of the presentation (through handouts, posters, transparencies, games, videos, or any other audio or visual aids that the group deems useful) often results in better class attention and discussions. In presenting your material, strive to be informative, engaging, and creative. Try to think of different ways of involving the class into your presentation so they stay interested.

**Introduction of the panel members:** You can make the group presentation more personal by introducing yourselves at the beginning of your presentation. This helps to lessen the “intimidation factor”, and to create an atmosphere more conducive to audience participation. Furthermore, try not to forget to establish eye contact with members of the audience, and to smile from time to time. If you can, also try to avoid reading from your notes or cue cards.

**Careful time budgeting:** Use your time wisely. 30-45 minutes is not very long for a presentation that has 5 group members. While you should be prepared to use the entire time for your presentation, this does not mean that you should try to cram as much information or activities as possible into your presentation. It is better to cover a few well-developed points about a topic than to zip through ten confused and disjointed points.

**Expectations about audience participation:** Of course you will do the best you can to encourage participation and discussion from the class. However, the burden of responsibility is not entirely yours. The rest of the class is also responsible for ensuring that the group presentations are an engaging and rewarding experience for everyone involved. This entails: 1) listening attentively (showing respect for speakers), 2) taking part in the discussion and/or activity, and 3) preparing at least one question or comment to share with the class during the question and answer period.

**Grading:** As previously mentioned, each member in the group receives the same grade. The grades for the group presentations will be based on the following criteria: 1) substance or content, 2) creativity and resourcefulness (use of materials, exercises, activities, etc.), and 3) form and style (articulation, length, organization, preparedness, etc.).

**Having fun:** Education does not always have to be a chore. In addition to learning new material, this is an opportunity to develop public speaking skills, gain self-confidence, make new friends, and have some fun. This is your time to teach and to reach. Go for it!

Groups should include between 2-3 people (depending on class size). You will choose a social problem and create a presentation based on your choice. Here are some examples of social problems more specific to the

United States: Opioid addiction, Homelessness, Prison Industrial Complex, Current Political Issues, Immigration, Inequalities in Education, Domestic Terrorism, Environmental Issues, Technology and Society, Sex Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Corporate America, School Shootings, Hate Crimes...there are many more! We will brainstorm ideas together as a class and you will then divide into groups.

### **Quizzes:**

There will be approximately 4-6 quizzes in this class based on the Trevino book. These will be “pop quizzes” so you will need to come prepared to every class in order to pass the quiz – I am not scheduling these ahead of time but rather, I will give a quiz when I feel it is necessary to test your progress and knowledge of the material. No make-up quizzes except in cases of extreme documented emergencies. The quizzes will be given at the beginning of class so it is important to show up on time. Worth 10-20 points each.

### **Final Project:**

#### **Change.org Petition**

For this assignment, you will choose an issue that we have covered or something that we have not covered but that you are greatly interested in and that you would like to see change. You can read petitions on [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) to get a sense of the structure of online petitions.

For the project, you will draft a change.org style petition that explains an issue that you think should change, why you care/why others should care about this issue and what change you are proposing. Follow change.org instructions at [www.change.org/start-a-petition](http://www.change.org/start-a-petition). You do not write it on the change.org website although you are welcome to post it if you think you would like to circulate the petition once the class ends. I have seen many change.org petitions go viral and change many negative aspects of society. Your petition must clearly state the specific change you are asking for and from whom. A reader should not have questions about what exactly your proposed change is. Your petition should be well-polished (no grammar or spelling errors), organized and at least 400 words.

In addition, you need to write a 3-5 page essay detailing why you chose the issue you did. Discuss the history of the problem, who is involved, how the media has covered it and how, if at all, has the public reacted. Why is the issue important to you and what do you think the changes you proposed would do? Consider intended as well as unintended consequences. I recommend incorporating an interview with someone who is intimately tied to the issue if possible. You are required to tie in 3-5 concepts from class lectures and texts. Please **BOLD** or UNDERLINE these so I can clearly see them. On the last day of class you are required to present your petition to the class in a 5 minute presentation. Petitions and essays are worth 40 points, presentation is 20 points – 60 points total.

## **Lecture/Discussion Topics + Scheduled Readings & Assignments:**

### ***Week 1:***

**June 26:** Introduction to the course, syllabus, readings, Canvas page, instructor/student introductions, class activity, get into groups.

**Readings:** Hedges and Sacco Introduction, Trevino, Chapter 1.

**June 28:** Read: Trevino Chapters 2 & 3 + Group Presentation #1

**Due:** News Reflection #1

### ***Week 2:***

**July 3:** Read: Trevino Chapter 4 & 5 + Hedges and Sacco Chapter 1 + GP #2

**Due:** H & S Reading Response Chapter 1

**July 5:** Read: Trevino Chapter 6 + Hedges and Sacco Chapter 2 + GP #3

**Due:** H & S Reading Response Chapter 2

### ***Week 3:***

**July 10:** Read: Trevino Chapters 7+ 8 + GP #4

**Due:** News Reflection #2

**July 12:** Read: Trevino Chapter 9 + H & S Chapter 3 + GP #4

\* Guest Speaker – CRMW Director

**Due:** H & S Reading Response Chapter 3

### ***Week 4:***

**July 17:** Read: Trevino Chapter 10 + 11 + H & S Chapter 4 + GP #5

\* Guest Speaker – CIW Director

**Due:** H & S Reading Response Chapter 4

**July 19:** Read: Trevino Chapter 12 + 13 + H & S Chapter 5 + GP #6

**Due:** H & S Reading Response Chapter 5

### ***Week 5:***

**July 24:** Read: Trevino Chapter 14 + Angela Davis – Are Prisons Obsolete?

**Due:** Are Prisons Obsolete Book Review

**July 26:** Guest Speaker – Ivan Kilgore

Student Petition Presentations (must include visual aid – 5 minutes per student)

**Read:** Domestic Genocide – Chapters 8 & 9 + website excerpts

**Due:** Change.Org Petitions DUE