

Sociology 202
Constructing Social Problems
Bowling Green State University, Summer, 2005

Instructor: Dr. Robert Garot, Ph.D. UCLA
Office: 209 Williams Hall
Office Hours: 1-2 Monday-Thursday
Course Location/Time: 117 Hayes Hall, M-Th, 2:25-4:20

Course Objectives

The primary question for this course is not what counts as a social problem, but rather the process by which social problems are created. The issues which we may consider as “social problems” may or may not constitute what is truly problematic socially, yet we perceive what is good or bad about our society, or ourselves, in precisely such terms. This course will consider the *work* required to reify such constructions, towards helping us to become better informed, skeptical and efficacious public actors.

It is essential that you *wrestle* with the readings for each week, and *mull over* how they apply to your own experience. I hope to open new perspectives to you, and what transforms “information” into a “perspective” that opens up new ways of thinking is wrestling with what you encounter. For each reading, I hope that you work to understand not just *what* the author is saying, but *why*. What received wisdom is she or he trying to challenge? With what ideas might they be competing? What is their evidence? I hope that you will enhance for yourself the value of what you read through the paired (and perhaps literally opposed) habits of mind of skepticism (“Ought I really believe that?”) and suspended disbelief (“What if it were true?”).

The idea is to foster an intense, searching class discussion. A great deal of learning happens in discussion, when one=s new ideas, guesses, hunches, ideological convictions, and moral persuasions rub unexpectedly up against others=. I will assist this process through my questioning in class, and want you to have challenged each reading so that you, in turn, can be challenged by others in class.

Please feel free to discuss topics further with me before class, or after class by appointment. *Be sure to exchange phone numbers with two or three other students and form study groups.*

Required Readings

There are two required textbooks for the course:

- Loseke, Donileen R. 2003. Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (*Hereafter referred to as Text*)
- Loseke, Donileen R. and Joel Best. 2003. Social Problems: Constructionist Readings. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (*Hereafter referred to as Reader*)

These are available in the campus bookstore. Additional background readings are provided for students who wish to read further on the week's topic. Also, be sure to check the class website frequently for announcements.

Exams

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. All exams will be cumulative. Exams will be based on lectures and readings from the textbooks. No make-up exams will be given, so you must conform to the times as scheduled for the midterm and final. Further details about the midterm and final exams will be discussed in class.

Attendance and Reflection Questions

Attendance is important to maintain the momentum and morale of the class, especially in a quick, intense class such as this. In order to award those who attend, and to provide an incentive for those who might not, I will begin taking attendance the second day of class. Those who arrive late or leave early will not receive full credit. I also require that each student bring three questions to class based on the readings, for each day readings are assigned, except the first. These questions should be thoughtful and provocative, designed to stimulate discussion. Do not ask simple factual questions. If you wish to ask for clarification of the readings, do so in class or during my office hours, but do include this as one of your three questions. You may find that you will need more than one sentence, and often up to a paragraph, to write a good question.

The Final Paper

For the final paper, you will draw upon the ideas of this course to *either*: 1) design a campaign for a social problem, or 2) critically analyze the campaign to construct a social problem. In either case, *it does not matter what the actual issue is*; what matters is that you demonstrate your familiarity with the tools of constructing social problems. The paper must be typed and double-spaced. All pages must be stapled together, without special covers or folders. Include your name and P00# in the upper right corner, and center the title over the text on the first page. The written assignment will be accepted on or before the due date; for each day that the paper is late, one point will be deducted, unless a written excuse from a recognized authority figure, such as a doctor, a dean, or an athletic coach, is provided. *No electronic versions will be accepted*. I will be happy to discuss your paper, but I will not read preliminary drafts. Further details about the term paper will be discussed in class. You will present your paper during the last week in order to receive feedback from me and your peers.

Grading Policy

You will not be graded on a competitive basis, so in theory everyone can do well. However, to earn a top grade, you will be expected to achieve standards of excellence in your work. Points will be distributed as follows:

Mid-Term: 25%

Final: 25%

Attendance and Reflection Questions: 20%

Final Paper: 20%

Paper Presentation: 10%

A: 89.5-100 B: 79.5-89.49 C: 69.5-79.49 D: 55-69.49

Cheating/Plagiarism

Familiarize yourself with the BGSU Academic Honesty Policy on pages 18-27 of the Student Handbook. Any student who violates this policy will be referred directly to the academic dean.

Academic Assistance

Your first source of assistance should be other students in class. Be sure to exchange phone numbers with others, and form study groups. Secondly, come see me during office hours, or contact me with your questions via email. In addition to me, following are some of the resources available on campus to assist you:

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Phone</u>
Writers Laboratory	303 Mosley Hall	22221
Study Skills Laboratory	213 Mosley Hall	28840
Office of Academic Enhancement,	101 University Hall	28943
Counseling Center	320 Saddlemire Student Services Bldg.	22081

Etiquette

Attendance and participation in lecture are integral to this course. Because we will discuss materials not included in the readings, it is essential that you attend every class meeting. Lecture notes will not be available. I will encourage you to participate in multiple ways during lectures, so come prepared. If you choose to disrupt the class, I will stop the class and wait for you to leave as a courtesy to the other students. This applies especially to the use of cellular phones.

Calendar

Please note that the following schedule is tentative, and may change based on how quickly we cover the material. **Be sure to read the assigned materials prior to the day when they are assigned.**

Week 1: Issues in Studying Social Problems

Monday, May 16th

Text: Preface, Chapter 1, pp. 3-7

Reader: pp. 3-12, Spanking

Tuesday, May 17th

Text: Chapter 1, pp. 7-19

Reader: pp. 13-20, Bullying

Wednesday, May 18th

Text: Chapter 1, pp. 19-22

Reader: pp. 21-38, Earthquakes and Reality TV

Thursday, May 19th

Text: Chapter 2: pp. 25-37

Reader: pp. 39-58, Statistics and Hate Crime

Week 2:

Monday, May 23rd

Text: Chapter 2: pp. 37-45

Reader: pp. 59-76, Homosexuality and TV Talk Shows

Tuesday, May 24th

Text: Chapter 3, pp. 51-73

Reader: NA

Wednesday, May 25th

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 77-108, Smoking Problems in Japan, Crime Frames, Father's Rights, and Factory Farming

Thursday, May 26th

Text: Chapter 4, pp. 75-96

Reader: NA

Week 3:

Monday, May 30th: Holiday, no class

Tuesday, May 31st

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 109-142, Random Violence, Prostitutes and AIDS, Science and PMS, and Multicultural Education

Wednesday, June 1st

Text: Chapter 5, pp. 97-121

Reader: NA

Thursday, June 2nd

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 143-176, Homeless Mentally Ill, The War on Drugs, Urine Testing, Size Acceptance

Week 4:

Monday, June 6th

Review for Mid-Term

Tuesday, June 7th

Mid-Term Exam

Wednesday, June 8th

Text: Chapter 6, pp. 121-138

Reader: NA

Thursday, June 9th

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 177-195, Low Fat Food and Pregnant Women

Week 5:

Monday, June 13th

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 196-214, Sexually Marginalized Catholics and Recovery Religion

Tuesday, June 14th

Text: Chapter 7, Social Problems and Troubled People, pp. 139-162

Reader: NA

Wednesday, June 15th

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 215-250, Medicalizing Childhood, Gifted Children, Insanity, and Battered Women

Thursday, June 16th

Text: Chapter 8 and Appendix, pp. 163-203

Reader: NA

Week 6:

Monday, June 20th

Paper Presentations

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 251-267, Crack Babies and Pedophile Priests

Tuesday, June 21st

Paper Presentations

Text: NA

Reader: pp. 267-277, Child Abuse and Nazi Germany

Wednesday, June 22nd

Paper Presentations

Review for Final

Thursday, June 23rd

Final Exam

Final Paper Due

General Writing Guidelines*

Format and Presentation

Do not skip lines between paragraphs (like I'm doing here). Use Times New Roman or CG Times as your font, 12-point size. Papers must be typewritten, double-spaced with approximately 1" margins. Number all pages. Papers must be stapled. This means no plastic

binders, no folding the edges together and no paper clips. Do not use a cover page. Include your name and P00# on the upper right-hand corner of the first page, followed by the title, centered. A bibliography is a necessary part of a research paper (see Citation, below), and should be attached at the end. Papers which egregiously fail to follow these guidelines will be returned to the authors without a grade.

Citation

This is sometimes tricky, but by this point in your academic career, it is essential that you do it correctly. It is expected that you will use material from the texts and lecture to analyze your subject. Thus, whether you use direct quotes or paraphrases, you must give credit to the authors of those words, when they are not your own.

If you cite a lecture, do it this way: (Lecture, 5/31/05). However, relying solely on lecture citations for material that is also in the readings reveals to me that your familiarity with the readings is inadequate. So you should be sure to prioritize. Where appropriate, always cite the original source and not my delivery of it in lecture.

In the text, directly quoted course materials from the textbook should be cited in one of the following ways:

“The stereotypes that we learn not only justify prejudice and discrimination but also can produce the behavior depicted in the stereotype” (Henslin, 2001:331).

Or alternately:

James Henslin (2001:331) suggests that, “The stereotypes that we learn not only justify prejudice and discrimination but also can produce the behavior depicted in the stereotype.”

Also, be sure to cite any ideas that you borrow, not just quoted text. For instance:

Many analysts have noted how stereotypes may produce the behavior they depict (Henslin, 2001:331).

Any direct quotation that is longer than three lines needs to be set off from the body of the paper by indenting and single-spacing. Since your papers will be double-spaced and indented only to begin paragraphs, you will see the contrast. Be careful to differentiate between what the textbook authors are saying themselves, and the other authors that they may in turn quote. Cite accordingly. Do not string quotes together without putting them in context with your own prose. When you use a direct quote, place it in the context of a sentence that includes an explanation of what the quote means and why it is useful in service of the point you are making.

A full reference, including the author’s name, book or article title, publishing information and page numbers will appear in a separate, alphabetically organized bibliography at the end of the paper, under the heading, “References”. Below is an example of a reference from the reader and from Henslin.

Anderson, Elijah. 1996. "The Code of the Streets." Pp. 62-73 in Susan J. Ferguson (Ed.) Mapping the Social Landscape. London: Mayfield.

Henslin, James. 2001. Mapping the Social Landscape. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Style

In general, write as simply as possible. Never use a big word, when a little one will do. Big words don't necessarily convey intellectual prowess, especially when they are awkwardly used. Your word choice should be appropriate to formal writing: no slang, and no contractions ("can't", "don't"), unless you are quoting others or it somehow improves your point. You must use words that actually exist, and words must be used correctly. Look up definitions and spellings if you are unsure. Spell check often misses words.

Avoid using the indefinite "you." You will notice that I am addressing these instructions to you; that is, I am using the second person. That is because I am giving these instructions to a definite person or set of persons. In your papers, unless you mean to address the reader directly, do not use "you" when you mean to use "one" or "we." Refer to yourself as "I" in describing your experience, and as "we" in your analysis. It is perfectly acceptable to use the first person singular in papers – it is not too informal. Use "we" for the author and the reader together: "We have seen how breaching experiments disturb our taken-for-granted notions about reality."

Avoid "a lot" (and by the way it's not spelled "alot"), and "very." Hemingway and Morrison do not need them, and neither do you. Don't confuse "their/there/they're" or "it's/its", or "to/two/too", or "were/we're/where", etc. Also please differentiate between "suppose" and "supposed." These are not interchangeable, and are almost always improperly applied. These are sets of words that give students trouble, so please be careful.

Try to avoid using "he", "his", or "mankind" to mean anyone or all in general. If for some reason you have a strong ideological commitment to using "he" as the generic, you may do so, but it is not accurate, and there are other options available.

Make sure that nouns and verbs agree in number. Avoid sentence fragments. Make sure that the sentences you write have subjects and predicates. Verbs are also necessary. Do not leave a clause hanging without these necessary components. Avoid run-on sentences. Make sure that if you link things together in a sentence that you do so by using the proper connective words or punctuation marks. These kinds of mistakes can often be caught by reading your paper aloud. If it sounds wrong, it probably is.

Always follow the parsimony principle. That is, use as few words as possible to make your point. Never refer to "society" as an active agent (that's my pet peeve), as in, "Society requires that people follow norms."

Process

One way to start is by saying your ideas out loud, and writing them down. Just get the words out of your head and onto the page where you will be able to work with them more easily. I strongly

suggest that you write more than one draft of your paper. Most successful papers are begun well in advance of the night before the assignment is due. The best way to start is to just spew out a messy first draft, getting all of your ideas and facts down on paper (if you write long-hand) or your computer screen (if you prefer to word process). Then, a second draft will help you to organize the sections, focus your argument, and refine the content and style.

You must be at this point before you come to see me about your paper. Although I will be unable to read entire drafts, I may be able to discuss specific parts of your thesis or analysis, and/or help you with difficulties in transitions between ideas or sections of your argument. Be sure that all spelling and grammatical errors, and the formatting the paper are correct in the final draft. You must proofread your own paper. It is not acceptable to turn in a paper with typographical errors, misspellings, nouns and verbs that do not agree, misused words, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, etc. You may want to rewrite the beginning or end of your paper in the last draft. Often in composing your paper, you will have changed your focus or ideas somewhat by the time you finish. You will want to make sure that these changes are reflected in a new version of your introduction or conclusion.

Finally, re-read your own paper and imagine that someone else wrote it. Does it make sense? Fix it, if it doesn't. You may also want to get someone else to read your paper and give you comments. It is often hard to be objective when you are so close in the writing process. If you have trouble with your writing, get help. I am happy to help you in office hours or by appointment, and the campus has a variety of tutoring services available to you.

Good luck, and start writing now!

*This document adapted with thanks from Dr. Kerry Ferris' Case Study Essay Guidelines.