This course will discuss and analyze social problems from a critical perspective, rather than merely “blaming the victim”. We will examine the definition(s) of social problems, including how and why some issues are socially constructed and defined as social problems, while others are not. Some of the topics to be studied and discussed will be racism, sexism, poverty, homophobia, and other issues related to discrimination and diversity, in addition to environmental degradation, healthcare, demographic changes, education, power, the mass media, cities, corporate behavior, governmental policies, globalization, and other social, political, and economic issues of the day. We will also explore some emergent social problems. In doing so, we will introduce and apply some core sociological theories and concepts to better contextualize and understand social problems, to further develop our sociological imaginations, and to discuss and devise social solutions.

**Required Reading:**
Stanley Eitzen et al., *Social Problems* (11th, 12th, or 13th Ed.)

**Learning Objectives:**
Learning Objective 1: Students shall be able to identify and analyze the social dimension of society as a context for human life, the processes of social change and social continuity, the role
of human agency in those social processes, and the forces that engender social cohesion and fragmentation.

In-class small and large group discussions; Discussion of current events; Course Project; Exams; Films & Film Reflections

Learning Objective 2: Students will be able to place contemporary developments in cultural, historical, environmental, and spatial contexts.

In-class small and large group discussions; Discussion of current events; Course Project; Exams

Learning Objective 3: Students will be able to identify the dynamics of ethnic, cultural, gender/sexual, age-based, class, regional, national, transnational, and global identities and the similarities, differences, linkages, and interactions between them.

In-class small and large group discussions; Course Project; Exams; Films & Film Reflections; Listserv; Discussions of current events

Learning Objective 4: Students will be able to evaluate social science information, draw on different points of view, and formulate applications appropriate to contemporary social issues.

In-class small and large group discussions; Course Project; Exams

Learning Objective 5: Students will be able to apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels.

In-class small and large group discussions; Course Project; Final Exam; Films & Film Reflections

Course Organization:
This course is designed to be more of a mosaic than a narrative. There are an infinite number of ways this (or any other) course could be designed, all of which would be subjective and incomplete. We will do our best, however, to learn a great deal about social problems and to make doing so interesting, relevant, and fun. Therefore, at the end of the course, we may still not have “conclusions” or all of the “answers”, but we will certainly have a better understanding, and perhaps better questions, regarding sociology and social problems. In my opinion, as with any organization, the university should be a “collaboratory”, and education should be a conspiracy, where people actively and cooperatively work together. We will strive to do so.

Class meetings may include lectures, small-group and large-group discussions, thought experiments, cultural conundrums, presentations, case studies, current events, visuals, and videos—a variety of activities, for a variety of students and learning styles, designed to encourage critical thinking, social understanding, active participation, political change, life-long learning, and personal enjoyment.

Prerequisites:
Willingness to think critically and willingness to participate in class!
Requirements:
You are responsible for the information in this syllabus. According to the SJSU Catalog, Soc 80 fulfills the Core GE in Area D3 (Social Sciences – Social Issues) requirement, meaning “students will be able to apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels”. Core GE courses require students to write a minimum of “1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline” for course assignments during the semester.

Satisfactory completion of each and every major requirement is necessary for a passing grade for the course. Late assignments will be penalized unless prior approval is given.

Listserv:
Parallel to our actual class sessions, we will also have a “virtual classroom” consisting of online messages via our class e-mail listserv. It is required that you subscribe to this free listserv for our class. You can do so by e-mailing socialproblems-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and then replying to the confirmation message (if you haven’t already done so, you need to register for a free Yahoo account, though you do not need to have a Yahoo e-mail address) (if you do not see the confirmation message, be sure you spelled the address correctly and check your spam/junk/bulk folder). Messages sent to socialproblems@yahoogroups.com will be received by everyone who subscribes and will be archived on the web at groups.yahoo.com/group/socialproblems. You may be responsible for information posted on this required listserv. All students are required to post to it with a substantive message as a form of class participation. If you have any trouble subscribing or with the listserv otherwise, please contact someone at the computer center.

Exams:
There will be a midterm and a final essay examination. Each exam will be worth approximately 30% of the course grade. For these essay exams, study guidelines and study questions will be provided at least a week in advance.

Course Project & Proposal:
There are various options for your course project. Any project chosen must be preceded by a brief (and approved) project proposal, clearly and concisely explaining (1) what you plan to do, (2) how it relates to social problems, and (3) why you are choosing this particular project. If you want to switch topics or options, you need to submit a new proposal and get it approved. If you engage in a group project, each student’s contribution should exceed the minimum requirements, each student’s contribution should be at least equivalent to those of other options, and each student should delineate in writing their specific contributions to the group project. Project proposals are due no later than the fifth week of the course (see course schedule below), though earlier is welcome. The course project is worth approximately 30% of the course grade.

Option 1: Experiential Learning Project
This is the preferred option. Students may engage in a minimum of two hours per week for a minimum of ten weeks this semester toward an experiential learning project (also known as service learning or community-based learning) related to one or more social problems of the student’s choosing (10 weeks x 2 hours/week = 20 hours/semester).
You can join or start a group, do individual work, and/or work with others in or out of the class, whether as a volunteer or for pay, engaging in social service, social advocacy, and/or social action, doing one or more activities of your choosing throughout this semester. It’s your choice. Students will maintain and submit a typed journal of their experiences, briefly listing date, time, location, and activity, as well as discussing the sociological significance and your personal reflections about your experiences. There should also be a final cumulative reflection on your project, summarizing your experience, for a total of 11 journal reflections. These projects should rarely, if ever, conflict with class time. Each week’s entry should be no less than a full page of typed text, preferably more, usually 1-2 pages. Due during the second to last week of class (see course schedule below).

For lots of ideas, check bapd.org with its list of about 1200 organizations; also check hoba.org, volunteermatch.org, onebrick.org, and care2.com/volunteer. On campus, check the Center for Community Service and Leadership (Clark Hall 203 & 126A, 408-924-3540); SJSU’s service learning center can assist you with all your service/experiential learning needs. Also visit the related Cesar Chavez Community Action Center (AS House 105, 408-924-4144, cccac@asjsu.edu, as.sjsu.edu/cccac) for service learning ideas and community involvement opportunities. The Environmental Resource Center (WSQ 115, 408-924-5467, erc@email.sjsu.edu, erc.thinkhost.net) is green central for SJSU. Women’s Resource Center (Mod. B, 408-924-6500, www.sjsu.edu/wrc) is “a multi-cultural group dedicated to the promotion of women’s issues and social change”. MOSAIC Cross Cultural Center (408-924-6255, sa.sjsu.edu/mosaic) supports, advocates, and celebrates diversity, equity, and social justice. Journals are due Week 15. You need to submit a proposal and get it approved (see above).

Option 2: Academic Research Paper
An original academic research paper on a relevant topic of your choosing (within certain constraints and after consultation with the instructor) may constitute the final project. This will give students the opportunity to explore in depth a facet of the subject matter that fits with their personal interests. Be sure to explain, not just assert, how the chosen topic illustrates something about one or more social problems.

The paper must be a minimum of 3000 words of text (typewritten, numbered, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font and, preferably, double-sided), utilizing a minimum of ten outside sources (at least 5 books and at least 5 articles), in addition to citing the course text for a minimum total of 11 sources. Each of the 11 minimum sources must be annotated with a brief single-spaced summary or explanation of that source; additional sources can be annotated, but they do not have to be. There should also be an abstract, or author’s summary, at the beginning of the paper and a word count and certification statement (see below) on the cover page (the first page of your actual paper is page 1 and you should start at the top of it without repeating any information from the cover page).

All facts and ideas not your own (e.g. concepts, quotes, paraphrases, statistics, stories) must be properly cited with any academically-recognized citation method. The paper should be given a good title and wrapped with a cover page at the beginning and the annotated bibliography at the end.

The paper can employ any social science methodology, any ideology, and any perspective. These are research papers and should not simply be book reports, literature reviews, personal reflections, or the like. Feel free to take a strong position. What is important, however, is how clearly you present the information, how you support and defend your argument(s), and how you
incorporate your own analysis.

It is highly recommended that you start the paper relatively early: begin by thinking about and then choosing a topic, doing preliminary research, formulating some ideas, and making some notes. Remember, good writing (and a good grade!) often requires cycles of thinking, researching, outlining, writing, editing, and proofreading.

Your paper should have a thesis statement (or main argument) on the first page; you should also state here what your paper will cover. Correspondingly, your paper should end with a conclusion, one that ties the paper together and wraps up your main idea(s), bringing closure. Between the introduction and conclusion should be the story, e.g. support and defense of your arguments, evidence, examples, anecdotes, history, comparisons and contrasts, etc. Personal commentary and autobiography are only appropriate when accompanied by critical analysis and/or thoughtful synthesis, which can include linking it to the literature on your topic and/or placing it in a comparative or historical context.

Besides the substance of the paper, organization, grammar/spelling, and clarity are also important. Difficulties with writing can be brought to the writing center on campus and/or to others who can help you clarify your ideas and how you convey them. Some widely used and recommended books for help with writing are: Strunk & White’s The Elements of Style <www.bartleby.com/141>; Howard S. Becker’s Writing for Social Scientists; The Guide for Writing Research Papers <cctc.commnet.edu/mla.htm>; and various manuals of style. There are many other good sources for writing, both in the library and on the Web. Due during the third to last week of class (see course schedule below).

Research papers are due Week 12. You need to submit a proposal and get it approved (see above).

On your cover page, please prominently place and sign the following certification statement with a word count (not less than 1500) and the number of pages (not less than 8):

“I certify that this paper complies with academic integrity standards, does not contain plagiarized content, and exceeds the minimum length and sourcing requirements.”

**Option 3: Infinity Option**

Students who would like to pursue other equivalent alternatives should think of one and then can speak with me about this possibility (e.g., a combination of options; art; music; audio or video documentary; web site; blog; zine; museum exhibition; photojournalism; newspaper or magazine). Option 3 projects should, at a minimum, be roughly equivalent to Options 1 or 2 in terms of your time and effort put into the project as well as comprising at least 1500 words to satisfy the GE requirement. Alternative projects are due Week 14. You need to submit a proposal and get it approved (see above).

**Academic Integrity:**

Academic honesty (i.e., doing your own work and presenting your own ideas while crediting others for theirs) is important and will be enforced; academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, other forms of cheating, etc.) is unacceptable. Please read and review Earl Babbie’s “How to Avoid Plagiarism” at www.csub.edu/ssric-trd/howto/plagiarism.htm.
According to SJSU’s Academic Integrity Policy, “cheating is the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work [or helping another to do so] through the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means”. Plagiarism is “the act of representing the work of another as one’s own without appropriate credit, regardless of how that work was obtained”. “Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy, requires you to be honest in all your academic course work.” I take this very seriously as should you.

Please visit the article above and write a review of plagiarism, consisting of at least 350 words, due the second week of the course.

There should not be any plagiarism on any assignments, whether small or large, draft or final. As a first step, when plagiarism is suspected or detected, I will stop reading the assignment and assign no credit; further steps will be taken afterwards. If you are ever unsure what plagiarism is or isn’t, it’s your responsibility to investigate and find out. Make sure it doesn’t happen.

On the cover page of your course project, please prominently place and sign the following certification statement:

“I certify that this project complies with academic integrity standards, does not contain plagiarized content, and exceeds the minimum length requirement.”

**Classroom Protocol (Attendance / Class Participation / Classroom Behavior):**

Sociology should be a “contact” activity, for participant-observers, not one simply for spectators or audience members. This is a seminar and, therefore, a discussion class in which the dialogues and exchanges between instructor and students, and among the students themselves, are essential for the full functioning of the “mini-society” of the classroom. Spirited, but friendly, debate, as well as active listening, is absolutely essential for critical analysis, intellectual development, mutual respect, human creativity, political pluralism, and civic participation in a democratic society. There will be an emphasis in this class on discussion and interactivity.

The purpose of discussion in our course is to provide a forum in which students can safely and supportively ask questions, present and debate their ideas, receive and interpret new information and perspectives, and develop and clarify their thinking and communication skills. Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate in discussions as actively as possible. Therefore, both attendance and participation are vitally important. Students are also strongly encouraged to share relevant items/stories/miscellanea as another form of class participation.

If you miss any classes, be sure to get notes and information about missed information and assignments, if any, from another student, as you are responsible for whatever happens in class, whether you are present or absent for any reason.

I expect students to be on time to class, to silence their electronics (e.g., computers, phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) while in the classroom, to only use them for course purposes, and to be otherwise respectful of the learning environment and fellow students. Coming to class late, leaving early, texting, checking one’s phone too often, using a phone or computer for non-class
activities, listening to earbuds/headphones, side conversations, and other distracting or disruptive activities are negative forms of class participation.

Participation is worth about 10% of the course grade.

**Backup:**
All written work for the course (required), as well as any other files that are important to you (recommended), should be saved or backed up in more than one way (e.g., on a flash drive or other external hard drive, on a web-based e-mail account or otherwise online, with Carbonite.com, and/or, if necessary, burned to a CD or printed out as a hard copy). If you do this and something unexpected happens before an assignment is due, you will still have a copy of your work.

**Accommodation, Inclusion, Civil Rights, & Cooperation:**
Respect for diversity, both of people and perspectives, is expected and encouraged in this class. All students are welcome, should feel safe, and should have equal access and opportunity for optimal learning in this course, department, university, and society, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, home language, sex, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity, religion, creed, ideology, ability or disability, appearance, socio-economic class, marital or parental status, housing status, veteran status, political or other affiliation, or any other similar or equivalent quality, identity, or status.

Any student who has any sort of disability, special need, condition, situation, or circumstance, whether permanent or temporary, which requires “reasonable accommodations” or assistance of any kind should contact the campus Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Resource Center) (Admin Bldg 110, tel: 408-924-6000, TTY: 408-924-5990, fax: 408-924-5999, aec-info@sjsu.edu, www.sjsu.edu/aec) and/or speak with me directly. Everyone deserves the support and resources they need to succeed.

Students are encouraged to use the methods of “legitimate cheating”, which include, but are not limited to: studying, working, playing, and plotting together; consulting with the writing center and reference librarians; getting a tutor; searching the web (especially the many social science, sociology, and writing sites); as well as brainstorming and discussing issues and ideas with students, friends, family, teachers, coaches, workers, managers, leaders, organizers, activists, and others, both on and off campus. And, of course, I’m available in my office and via e-mail, as well as before, during, and after class. When writing to me by e-mail, please put something identifying in the subject line.

**Campus and Other Resources:**
The Academic Success Center (Clark Hall First Floor, 408-924-3322, www.sjsu.edu/asc) has all sorts of services, including peer mentoring, writing, tutoring, computers, and more.

The Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC) (SSC 600, 408-924-2587, www.sjsu.edu/larc) offers academic support in the form of tutoring as well as reading, writing, study, and selected software skills to ensure academic success.
The Writing Center (Clark Hall 126, 408-924-2308, www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter) offers tutoring, workshops, and other services for all students, all disciplines, and all levels of writing.

There is a Sociology Reference Librarian in King Library. Library tutorials can be found at tutorials.sjlibrary.org/tutorial.

The Student Computer Service (SCS) (King Library L67, 408-808-2470, LibrarySCS@sjsu.edu) is available for computer help; there’s also the AS Computer Services Center (Student Union, 408-924-6976, ascsc@as.sjsu.edu). Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center (1st floor of Clark Hall) and on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Computers are also available in King Library. Additional computer labs are available in some departments.

Media Services (IRC 112) has a wide variety of audio-visual and computer equipment available for checkout.

Student Health Center (Health Bldg 106, 408-924-6122, www.sjsu.edu/studenthealth) offers medical care with a pharmacy, family planning, physical therapy, x-rays, and more. Peer Health Education runs a Condom Co-op (Health Bldg 209, 408-924-6203).

If you get the flu or any other illness that may be contagious, please do not attend class. For comprehensive info about the flu, check out flu.gov (also available in Spanish) for “know[ing] what to do about the flu”: get vaccinated; cover coughs and sneezes; wash hands frequently; avoid people who are ill; and stay home if sick.

Counseling Services (Admin 201, 408-924-5910, counseling.services@sjsu.edu, www.sjsu.edu/counseling) provides individual or group psychological support to help resolve difficult problems that may interfere with academic issues. The Peer Mentor Center (Clark Hall, ASC, 1st floor, 408-924-2198, www.sjsu.edu/muse/peermentor) is also useful and has services that are free and available on a drop-in basis with no appointment required.

Women’s Resource Center (Mod. B, 408-924-6500, www.sjsu.edu/wrc) is “a multi-cultural group dedicated to the promotion of women’s issues and social change”.

MOSAIC Cross Cultural Center (408-924-6255, sa.sjsu.edu/mosaic) supports, advocates, and celebrates diversity, equity, and social justice.

Center for Community Service and Leadership (Clark Hall 203 & 126A, 408-924-3540), SJSU’s service learning center, can assist you with all your service learning needs. Also visit the related Cesar Chavez Community Action Center (AS House 105, 408-924-4144, cccac@asjsu.edu, as.sjsu.edu/cccac) for service learning ideas and opportunities.

The Environmental Resource Center (WSQ 115, 408-924-5467, erc@e-mail.sjsu.edu, erc.thinkhost.net) is green central for SJSU.
The SJSU Career Center (Admin 154, 408-924-6031) helps students find internships and jobs. For practice in finding jobs, they move the Career Center periodically.

15 Secrets of Getting Good Grades in College:


A listing of student resources is available at /slisweb.sjsu.edu/current-students/student-resources.

National Resources:
The National Suicide Prevention Hotline is available anytime, 24/7/365, toll-free at 1-800-SUICIDE (there are also warmlines, textlines, etc.); my article on suicide is at tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2013/10/22/suicide. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available anytime, 24/7/365, toll-free at 1-800-799-7233. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (1-800-662=HELP) offers referrals 24/7/365.

Web Sources:
Excellent web sites for news and views include news.google.com for mostly mainstream news links and www.commondreams.org and www.alternet.org for mostly progressive ones, along with many links; www.zmag.org is also quite useful and interesting. There are many other sources on (and off) the world wide web that would be interesting, useful, and relevant, as well.

Grading Criteria:
Assignments are graded holistically based on the following qualitative rubric:

“A” level work consists of cogent, well-articulated, and well-developed written and oral presentation, demonstrating insight, originality, and complexity in both form (e.g., language, expression, organization) and substance (e.g., logical argumentation, factual accuracy, and appropriate examples); critical thinking skills are amply demonstrated; sociological imagination is highly active; tasks are completed on time and according to the guidelines, often going “above and beyond”. “A” level work is considered excellent.

“B” level work may be thoughtful and developed, but may not be original, particularly insightful, or precise. While ideas might be clear, focused, and organized, they are less likely to be comprehensive or dialectical. Critical thinking skills are satisfactory; sociological imagination is active. “B” level work is considered good.

“C” level work is reasonably competent, yet may be unclear, inconsistent, and minimally inadequate in form and/or content. Critical thinking skills are minimal; sociological imagination is weak. “C” level work is considered mediocre and barely adequate.

“D” level work is not competent, appropriate, relevant, complete, and/or adequate in form and/or content, thereby not fully meeting the minimum requirements. Critical thinking skills are largely absent; likewise with sociological imagination.

“F” level work is generally not enough work, often missing assignments or parts thereof, doing work below the minimum requirements, not demonstrating critical thinking skills or sociological imagination, engaging in plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, or is otherwise unacceptable for credit. “F” level work is failing.
Miscellaneous:
*** If you have ANY concerns, questions, problems, or issues regarding ANY aspect of the course (or anything else) that isn’t addressed during class or isn’t clear enough to you, please make sure to speak to me either in or out of class, either personally or through e-mail.***

Course Schedule & Class Assignments:
SJSU Spring 2015 Calendar: [www.sjsu.edu/registrar/calendar/2152](http://www.sjsu.edu/registrar/calendar/2152)

Readings should generally be done by the week for which they are assigned. Web sites are usually optional (though encouraged), but are required when there is no book reading assigned.

**Week 1: Thurs, 1/22/2014**
Course Introduction & Syllabus
Sociological Snippets at [www.angelfire.com/or/sociologyshop/socsnip.html](http://www.angelfire.com/or/sociologyshop/socsnip.html) or Social Truths at [www.smashwords.com/books/view/242645](http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/242645)

Earl Babbie, “How to Avoid Plagiarism” [www.csuc.edu/ssricrem/Howto/plagiarism.htm](http://www.csuc.edu/ssricrem/Howto/plagiarism.htm)

**Week 2: T/Th, Jan 27-29**
ch. 1: Sociological Approach; [www.lclark.edu/~goldman/socimagination.html](http://www.lclark.edu/~goldman/socimagination.html)
ch. 2: Wealth & Power; [www.michaelparenti.org](http://www.michaelparenti.org)
Plagiarism Reflection Paper due either day this week (minimum 350 words with word count)

**Week 3: T/Th, Feb. 3-5**
ch. 4: Environment Threats; [www.seac.org](http://www.seac.org)

**Week 4: T/Th, Feb. 10-12**
ch. 3: Population & Inequality; [inequality.org](http://inequality.org)
ch. 5: Demographic Changes; [www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty.htm](http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty.htm)

**Week 5: T/Th, Feb. 17-19**
ch. 6: Urban Problems; [mirror.undp.org/magnet/icg97/SURVEY.HTM](http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/icg97/SURVEY.HTM)
Project Proposals due Week 5 or earlier

**Week 6: T/Th, Feb. 24-26**
Homelessness: [www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts.html) (read at least three fact sheets from this web site)
Film: Streets of Paradise

**Week 7: T/Th, March 3-5**
Poverty (continued): [www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Poverty.asp](http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Poverty.asp)
Film Reflection Due either day this week (minimum 350 words with word count)
Week 8: T/Th, March 10-12
*** In-Class Midterm Essay Exam on both Tuesday (Part 1) and Thursday (Part 2) ***

Week 9: T/Th, March 17-19
ch. 8: Racism; www.dickshovel.com/priv.html

Spring Break & Cesar Chavez Day

Week 10: Th, April 2
ch. 9: Sexism; www.womensenews.org
ch. 10: Homophobia; www.qrd.org

Week 11: T/Th, April 7-9
ch. 14: Work; usas.org

Film: Honey, We Bought the Company and/or Democracy in the Workplace

Week 12: T/Th, April 14-16
ch. 16: Education; www.publiceducation.org
Film Reflection due either day this week (minimum 350 words with word count)

Week 13: T/Th, April 21-23
ch. 17: Health/Disease/Healthcare; www.calnurses.org; www.healthcentral.com;
www.brook.com/smoke; www.brook.com/veg
Film: Forks Over Knives
Option 2 Projects (Research Papers) due this week

Week 14: T/Th, April 28-30
ch. 18: National Security; www.chomsky.info/books/hegemony03.htm
Option 3 (Alternatives) Projects due this week

Film Reflection due either day this week (minimum 350 words with word count)

Week 15: T/Th, May 5-7
Course Conclusion & Social Solutions
ch. 19: Solutions;
Option 1 (Experiential Learning Journals) due this week
Week 16: T, May 12
Course Conclusion Continued, More Social Solutions, and Final Exam Review

globalideasbank.org

Final Essay Exam:
Sec. 02 (22365): Thursday, May 21 at 7:15 AM in DMH 227
Sec. 03 (22366): Monday, May 18 at 2:45 in DMH 227

http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/final-exam-schedule-spring.html

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