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Office hours: by appointment
Email: kt.macdonald@ualberta.ca

Policy about course outlines can be found in §23.4(2) of the University Calendar.

Course Description: In this course we will think about social problems sociologically – how do people convince others that something is a social problem? What does it mean to call something like poverty, homophobia or climate change a social problem? What do we learn about others, the world, and ourselves when we use sociological tools to examine them? In learning about Social Problems we will not only think about the problems that society currently is facing, but also how social problems are recognized that way, and how they are created in the social world.

Class Set Up: Since we are a Spring class, the course will move quickly. We will meet twice a week for three hours each time. Class will be divided between lecture, discussion, in class activities and some guest speakers. In the class we will work to learn with and from one another. Our class will require an environment of trust and mutual respect. By coming to class and participating actively both out loud and sometimes through writing you can expect to further your learning. Students are expected to arrive to class having read the assigned readings for that day and prepared to discuss.

Learning Objectives:
1. To learn about social problems – what are they and how do we recognize them?
2. To be able to apply sociology to examine social problems.
3. To be able to apply what we learn to examine everyday experiences in your own life.

Required Texts:
Ehrenreich, B. 2001. Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America. New York: Metropolitan Books. Both readings are available through the University Bookstore. Other supplementary readings may be assigned and will be available electronically or through eClass.

Assessment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 1 (news examination)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>
Assignment 2 (social problem analysis) 30%
Including presentation
Final Exam 30%

Participation (10%): Your participation in this course will be graded based on your being present to conversations and activities in class. This will include group activities, reflections and class discussions.

Assignment One (10%): For this assignment, you will choose a social problem that is debated in the public media. On a print copy of the news story you will be asked to identify where and how in the news article the social problem is being constructed. Further details and a rubric will be distributed in class. This assignment is due May 18th 2016 in class.

Mid-term exam (20%): Your midterm exam will be 30 multiple-choice questions as well as short answer and essay questions and will be held on May 30th 2016 in the first half of class. You will be responsible for readings, in class discussions, lectures and other content. These questions will not just test your memory of the course content, but also your ability to think with the ideas in class.

Assignment Two (30%): This assignment will build off of assignment one. Choosing a second news article from a different source that describes the social problem differently, you will analyze from a sociological perspective how the social problem is differently being constructed. On the last day of class each student will be asked to give a brief presentation about their social problem and assignment.

Final exam (30%): Your final exam is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, June 16th at 11:30AM. It will consist of 50 multiple choice questions as well as a short answer and an essay section covering material from the whole course. Again, these questions will be about the material, but also asking you to think sociologically.

Late Assignment Policy: Late assignments will receive a penalty of 5% per day (unless the student has made other arrangements with the instructor).

Missed Exams: Neither absence from class nor travel plans will be accepted as legitimate reasons for failure to attend an exam. An unexcused absence will result in a grade of zero for that exam. Should you miss a mid-term, you must contact the Instructor via e-mail within two working days of the originally scheduled exam, or as soon as you are able, in regards to the circumstance underlying the absence. Please note that depending upon the circumstances, appropriate documentation may be required. Students with an excused absence can either write the missed mid-term exam or shift the weight of that exam to other course requirements. This will be decided in conversation with the instructor. If you fail to write the final exam you must formally apply to your Faculty within two working days following the missed exam in order to be considered for a deferral. The decision to grant a deferred final exam is not the Instructor’s. Deferred examinations are intended to accommodate students who have experienced an incapacitating illness or severe domestic affliction; applications based on minor or
inconsequential ailments will not be approved. Please also note that as stated in § 23.3(2)c of the Calendar, “a deferred examination will not be approved if a student (a) has not been in regular attendance where attendance and/or participation are required, and/or, (b) excluding the final exam, has completed less than half of the assigned work.”

Grading:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>95 – 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>88 – 94</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>82 – 87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>78 – 81</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>74 – 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70 – 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>66 – 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>62 – 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>58 – 61</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>54 – 57</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>50 – 53</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>49 and below</td>
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*A range* demonstrates a good grasp of the course work, and adds perspective to what has been learned through independent thinking. This engagement is meaningful, engaged and thought provoking. A’s also demonstrate the student’s ability to communicate her ideas.

*B range* demonstrates a good grasp of course material and a grasp of the course work with fluidity and connections between concepts, ideas and various readings. The B range also demonstrates the student’s ability to communicate clearly her ideas, thoughts and concepts.

*C range* demonstrates a submission of work that grasps course material but without pushing past the ways it is delivered in class; a lack of connections made independently in submitted work.

*D range* demonstrates a submission of work that loosely grasps the course material, with little connections between ideas, concepts or thoughts.

**Schedule of Readings:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 9th</td>
<td>Syllabus (eclass)</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 11th</td>
<td>Chapters 1 and 2 in <em>Social Problems</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 16th</td>
<td>Chapters 3 and 4 in <em>Social Problems</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18th</td>
<td>Chapters 5 and 6 in <em>Social Problems</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment one due</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 25th</td>
<td><em>Nickel and Dimed</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 30th</td>
<td><strong>Midterm exam</strong> in class (1st half)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two Readings posted on eClass</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
June 1st | Chapters 7 and 8 in *Social Problems*
June 6th | Readings posted on eClass
June 8th | Chapters 9 and 10 in *Social Problems*  
Assignment Two due
June 13th | Chapter 11 in Social Problems
June 15th | Exam review  
Presentations

**Academic Integrity:** The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence.

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

**Resources:** Students who require accommodation in this course due to a disability are advised to discuss their needs with Student Accessibility Services (1-80 Students’ Union Building see http://www.ssds.ualberta.ca for more information)

For assistance with writing, some resources are the Centre for Writers (1-42 and 1-23 Assiniboia Hall see http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/) and Writing Resources (2-300 SUB see http://www.studentsuccess.ualberta.ca/WritingResources.aspx)

For more information about academic integrity consult the Student Conduct and Accountability website where you can download a handbook on academic offences.  

**Examples of Exam Questions:**

*Multiple Choice*

1. A subjectivist might suggest that heightism is not a social problem in the United States because
   a. there is no research to indicate that people are discriminated against on the basis of their height.
   b. Americans do not think of discrimination based on height as a problem.
c. heightism is not illegal in the United States.
d. discrimination based on height does not hurt enough people to cause serious harm to society.

2. The term social constructionism refers to the way people
   a. create fresh understandings of the world around them.
   b. learn language from their parents.
   c. use language to define their place in society.
   d. learn to differentiate social conditions from social problems.
   e. all of the above
   f. b and c only

3. Saying that something is socially constructed means that it is
   a. not real.
   b. only real because a group of people created it.
   c. real only to those who have had experience with it.
   d. shaped by people’s definitions and understandings of it.

Short Answer:

1. Who are claimsmakers?

2. It is suggested in your text that there are certain moments when it might be logical for a particular movement to go into a period of abeyance. How might a movement determine when to enter such a period and when to exit it?

Essay Question:

1. Describe a social problem that is important to you – how would you convince someone that it is a social problem? What strategies would you use?

2. How does Barbara Ehrenreich construct low wages as a social problem in her book *Nickel and Dimed*?

3. Explain how interests and ideologies influence certain segments of the population in their response to particular claims. How might claimsmakers use this knowledge to get the largest possible reaction to their claims?