



**DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND EDUCATION**

**COURSE OUTLINE – FALL 2015**

**SO1020 (A2) SOCIAL PROBLEMS – 3 (3-0-0) 45 HOURS**

**INSTRUCTOR:** Alan Segal **PHONE:** 780-539-2011  
**OFFICE:** C410 **E-MAIL:** asegal@gprc.ab.ca  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Wednesdays: 14:45 – 15.30 or by Appointment

**PREREQUISITE(S)/CO-REQUISITE:** None

**REQUIRED TEXT/RESOURCE MATERIALS:**

*Social Problems, Second Edition* - Joel Best

**CALENDAR DESCRIPTION:** Analysis of the social construction of social problems, focusing on selected structural and behavioural problems such as inequality, substance abuse, family violence, pornography, mental and physical handicaps. Personal and societal responses and intervention attempts will be explored.

**CREDIT/CONTACT HOURS:** 3 Credits / 3 hours per week

**DELIVERY MODE(S):** Class and Group Discussion, Lectures, Film Analyses

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Acquire a critical sociological understanding of how social problems become perceived as such, or how they cease to be understood as problematic.
2. Become familiar with social practices important to inducing support or non-support in society.
3. Become familiar with sociological theories that explain the construction of reality.

- Learn the meanings of ideology, social cohesion, conflict, discourse, social stratification, hegemony, and other concepts that help us to analyze, sociologically, social problems.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- Utilize different sociological interpretations of a wide range of social experience, as introduced and discussed in class.
- Develop critical talking points on particular theories used by sociologists to explain the emergence and disappearance of social problems.

**TRANSFERABILITY:** UA, UC, UL, AU, & KUC

**Grades of 'D' or 'D+' may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students must be aware it is their responsibility to contact receiving institutions to ensure transferability.**

**GRADING CRITERIA:**

| <b>GRADING CONVERSION CHART</b> |                           |                              |                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Alpha Grade</b>              | <b>4-point Equivalent</b> | <b>Percentage Guidelines</b> | <b>Designation</b>          |
| <b>A+</b>                       | <b>4.0</b>                | <b>95 – 100</b>              | <b>EXCELLENT</b>            |
| <b>A</b>                        | <b>4.0</b>                | <b>90 – 94</b>               |                             |
| <b>A-</b>                       | <b>3.7</b>                | <b>87 – 89</b>               | <b>FIRST CLASS STANDING</b> |
| <b>B+</b>                       | <b>3.3</b>                | <b>83 – 86</b>               |                             |
| <b>B</b>                        | <b>3.0</b>                | <b>80 – 82</b>               | <b>GOOD</b>                 |
| <b>B-</b>                       | <b>2.7</b>                | <b>77 – 79</b>               |                             |
| <b>C+</b>                       | <b>2.3</b>                | <b>73 – 76</b>               | <b>SATISFACTORY</b>         |
| <b>C</b>                        | <b>2.0</b>                | <b>65 – 72</b>               |                             |
| <b>C-</b>                       | <b>1.7</b>                | <b>60 – 64</b>               |                             |
| <b>D+</b>                       | <b>1.3</b>                | <b>55 – 59</b>               | <b>MINIMAL PASS</b>         |
| <b>D</b>                        | <b>1.0</b>                | <b>50 – 54</b>               |                             |
| <b>F</b>                        | <b>0.0</b>                | <b>0 – 49</b>                | <b>FAIL</b>                 |

|           |            |          |  |
|-----------|------------|----------|--|
| <b>WF</b> | <b>0.0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>FAIL, withdrawal after the deadline</b> |
|-----------|------------|----------|--|

**NOTE:** On the College’s marking grid there is no D-. Therefore no such final mark will be recorded. However, for the course assignments, I will use D- as an additional non-failing mark.

**EVALUATIONS:**

Academic assignments for this course emphasize synthesis of ideas from a sociological standpoint, and the best questions you can think of to advance that synthesis. Analysis does not mean just reporting what others have said on a topic. Important as this is, other authors` ideas or conclusions are valuable because they add insight or specific details that help you to ask questions about the topic you have selected. My assignments are a philosophical inquiry that is advanced through your and others` investigations. Deciding what questions are worth raising is an important part of analysis. Conclusions can be valuable but aren’t obligatory for any of my assignments.

For a course in the area of Social Problems, ability to stand back from material is as important as being passionate about problems that already exist.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

|                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Assignment 1: Midterm Essay   | Weight: 33.3% |
| Assignment 2: Film analysis I | Weight: 33.3% |
| Take home final exam          | Weight: 33.4% |

How your grade is calculated?

The two assignments and the take home final exam are equally weighted. Each assignment and the final take home exam will be given a letter grade (A to F) corresponding to a numerical score value (4 to 0) as per the grading criteria table shown above. The final grade for the course will be determined by the average of the scores on the two assignments and the final take home exam. The following example illustrates the determination of how the grade is calculated:

| Task         | Grade | Score | Final score & Grade        |  |
|--------------|-------|-------|----------------------------|--|
| Assignment 1 | B     | 3.0   | 3.0                        |  |
| Assignment 2 | A-    | 3.7   | 3.7                        |  |
| Final Exam   | B+    | 3.3   | 3.3                        |  |
|              |       |       | $(3.0+3.7+3.3)/3=3.33=B+*$ |  |

**\*Please note that your final grade will be based on the two assignments and the take home final exam. However, your grade may go up by at least one letter grade beyond the average of these three assignments as a result of participation as outlined later in this document.**

Assignment 1 - Essay:

Due the Last Class of October

Minimum length for this assignment is 1000 words.

Select an aspect of social experience. For this assignment you will write on something not generally responded to as a social problem. The basis for this selection is open:

1. a report of some kind
2. any expression in some kind of social media platform
3. a statement by one or more individuals
4. something you have read
5. an experience you have undergone or observed
6. an occurrence in your community (as in physical, cultural, social, economic, recreational, etc.)
7. some video/film footage you have seen

Use ideas communicated in Joel Best's book, to discuss to why your choice is not be seen as a social problem. This assignment is **NOT** an opinion piece. Your effort must employ the ideas and logic of Joel Best's approach to understanding what are or are not, or may become, social problems. This analysis does not allow you to be an advocate. This you can be in the second assignment for the course. Therefore, don't let your opinions overwhelm your investigation analysis. A viewpoint based on analysis is not the same as an opinion. Both a viewpoint and analysis are possible, but not if you overlook either in favour of the other.

Assignment 2 - Essay:

Due the Last Class of November

Minimum Length 1000 Words

**As this is a Sociology course, at least one sociological concept must be incorporated into the discussion/analysis. You must find this from this course or any other Sociology course you may have taken.**

Selecting on the same basis as you used for the first assignment, this will be an advocacy paper. Choose a topic you believe should be seen as a problem, or not. But in either case it has to be something society at large, in your assessment, does not now recognize as problematic, or not. However, this can't be just a rant. Assess the topic, tell me your criteria for adopting or dismissing it as a social problem. Integrate the required concept(s) into your assessment.

Take-Home Exam – Assignment 3: Film Analysis:

Due Dates: TBA

Minimum length is 1000 words

Throughout the semester I will show you some films in class. For this essay you will choose one of the films and discuss it using ideas from the course on social problems. Don't give me a cinematic analysis, though. If the cinematography was rather poor in your view, this may not be relevant to the assignment. What do the makers of the movie want us to think after viewing it? How do they build their case? Is the film persuasive or not, and what makes it so?

This will be a take-home essay question that you will submit on the scheduled exam date.

**\*Grammar is important to communicating precise meaning. Therefore, while it will not be valued as highly as content, it will be evaluated and therefore can affect your mark.**

**\*\*\*ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SENT BY EMAIL, TO MY COLLEGE ACCOUNT:  
[asegal@gprc.ab.ca](mailto:asegal@gprc.ab.ca) ALSO, YOU MUST INCLUDE THE WORD 'ASSIGNMENT' IN THE SUBJECT LINE,  
AND INDICATE ON THE SAME LINE, WHICH ASSIGNMENT IS BEING SENT.**

*Discussion Bonus: (A, B, C, D)*

Every person in the course may (but not necessarily will), receive a bonus mark based on a combination of the frequency and quality of the participation. Discussion postings to a Moodle discussion forum also will be considered class participation. You will be eligible for a bonus mark only if you display commitment to the course by reading the books and completing all written assignments. Although attendance is not relevant to the regular assignments for the course, it is important to your eligibility for a bonus mark. The bonus mark offers an A, B, C, or D. No plus or minus signs will be used. If you receive a bonus mark, it will be added to your overall grade total prior to working out a final mark.

Eligibility for the bonus is nullified if you are absent for more than 3 classes.

#### **STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:**

University courses provide the best intellectual and perhaps social experience, when students arrive prepared for the day's work. My classes are heavily discussion -oriented and therefore require commitment from students.

1. Read assignments.
2. Participate in class conversation about the material.
3. Complete all written work.
4. Indicate on submitted material your name; section and course number; and which assignment is being sent to me.
5. *All written work must be sent via email to [asegal@gprc.ab.ca](mailto:asegal@gprc.ab.ca) You MUST use the word 'assignment' in the subject line.*
6. *Electronic Devices: People who must have contact with others during class time may leave their cell phones on 'vibrate', and leave the room if a response is required. Otherwise,*

*texting or use of phones will result in you having to miss that particular class. Please do not put me in a position of having to do this.*

### **STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING:**

In an academic setting, presenting others' work as your own is a serious violation. However, referencing articles and books and online academic products do not prevent you from building on their ideas and speculations. For a more precise definition of plagiarism and its consequences, refer to the Student Conduct section of the College Admission Guide at <http://www.gprc.ab.ca/programs/calendar/> or the College Policy on Student Misconduct: Plagiarism and Cheating at [www.gprc.ab.ca/about/administration/policies/\\*\\*](http://www.gprc.ab.ca/about/administration/policies/**)

\*\*Note: all Academic and Administrative policies are available on the same page.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:**

#### **DISCUSSION SEQUENCE:**

1. Introduction to SO1020
2. SP: A Note to the Reader; Chapter 1 - The Social Problems Process

Class Discussion:

What criteria for determining a social problem, does Best present?

Prepare to explain his understanding social problems process. Identify the elements of this process. Are social problems determined or defined? Does it matter?

3. SP: Chapter 2 - Claims

Class Discussion:

Frequently in daily conversation we allege claims of all kinds. Are these assertions different qualitatively from the claims Best refers to? Are all claims similar to each other?

How would you outline the logic of one of the claims that Best develops in the chapter?

Has he persuaded you that the power of a claim has merit only if it possesses the structure he recommends?

4. SP: Chapters 3 & 4 - Activists as Claimsmakers; Experts as Claimsmakers

Class Discussion:

Can anybody be a claimsmaker?

Is any statement asserting truth or accuracy a type of claim, and therefore the person expressing the assertion also a claimmaker?

Political Science and Sociology come together when referring to the *polity*. What is the polity, and why does Best link it to establishing claims?

Chapter 3 indicates not all claimmakers are equal. In what various ways are claims, and their advocates, assessed? By who?

Prepare to discuss the full purpose and logic of both chapters, and whether it matters if one is an 'expert' or not.

5. SP: Chapter 5 - Media and Claims

Class Discussion:

When making a claim persuasive, is media actually valuable?

Are certain aspects of the media more significant than others--according to Best--in giving claims some momentum?

What characteristics of a consuming audience render some types of media more effective than others?

Does it really matter if an event becomes news?

What is the relationship between issue ownership and dominant narratives, and media activation or activism toward particular goals?

6. SP: Chapters 6 & 7 – Public Reaction; Policymaking

Class Discussion:

What is the/a public? Can a society have more than one at a time? Who or what comprise a public? How do claimmakers and policymakers assess the importance of a public?

Can a movement be successful without securing changes in policy or law?

7. SP: Chapters 8 & 9 - Social Problems Work; Policy Outcomes

Class Discussion:

How does Best evaluate policy outcomes?

When might he, or we, consider social problems work to have been a failure, or a success?

8. SP: Chapters 10 & 11 - Claims Across...; Uses of...

Class Discussion:

Case Study approach can be revealing, according to Best. Why? What does the approach indicate to people wanting to comprehend the solidification of a social problem interpretation? What are the components of Space-and-Time claims?

In what sense is progress a problem?