

Sociology 538
Seminar in Crime and Deviance (3 credits)
Fall 2009
Tu Th 12:40-2:00
Dan Doyle

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Seminar on Social Problems

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this seminar is to critically examine the constructionist approach to social problems and to use that approach to analyze a number of recognized and nascent social problems. The constructionist approach focuses attention on how it is that certain social conditions come to be defined as social problems.

Specific objectives:

1. Students will develop a thorough understanding of the construction of social problems by reading the text and associated articles, and participating in class discussions.
2. Students will enhance their oral communication skills by active engagement in class discussions.
3. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the construction of social problems by engaging in a claimsmaking effort.

READINGS

The required readings for this class are found in two books:

Loseke, Donileen R. 2003. *Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine de Gruyter.

Loseke, Donileen R. and Joel Best. 2003. *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine de Gruyter.

In order to fully participate in class discussions, students are required to read the assigned chapter(s) **prior** to the class during which that particular material will be discussed.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Since much of the learning in this course will take place through guided class discussion, active and informed participation in such discussions is required. I will score each student's level of participation for each day of the class. A student not present will receive 0 points for that day. Those present who participate in a minimal fashion will earn 1 point. Those with average participation will earn 2 points. Those with above average participation will earn 3 points. Those with excellent participation will earn 4 points. I will drop the lowest three participation scores. The maximum number of participation points available is 100.

CLAIMS-MAKING EXERCISE

Graduate students are required to plan and implement a claims-making effort designed to construct or further the construction of some actual social problem. Students will be required to write a report and compile a portfolio describing their activities and give a short presentation to the class.

EXAMS

There will also be a midterm and a final exam, both of which will be in-class essay exams. These exams require students to apply knowledge gained in class to real-world situations. Each exam is worth up to 75 points. Exams will be graded on both content and writing.

QUIZZES

To encourage students to come to class well prepared, ten quizzes will be administered without warning throughout the semester. Quizzes are worth 5 points each and will cover the current reading assignment.

GRADING

There are a total of 450 points available:

	Possible points
Participation in class discussions	100
Claims-making exercise	150
Exam #1	75
Exam #2	75
Quizzes	50

A student's grade will be based on the total number of points achieved. Plus/minus grading will not be used in this class. Final grades will be assigned as follows:

405 points or above	A	270 to 314.5 points	D
360 to 404.5 points	B	265.5 points or below	F
315 to 359.5 points	C		

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

All students must be aware of and carefully adhere to the provisions defining and prohibiting academic misconduct in the UM Student Conduct Code. To download the code go to:

<http://life.umt.edu/SA/documents/fromWeb/StudentConductCode1.pdf>

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Teaching and learning are most likely to take place where the classroom environment is one characterized by mutual respect and freedom from unnecessary distractions. Below are some comments regarding the responsibilities of instructors and students in maintaining a good classroom environment. I will adhere to these guidelines to the best of my ability and I expect you to do likewise.

Vital to the whole notion of a university is the free exchange of ideas. Such an exchange is more likely in an atmosphere free from ridicule, insults, or personal attacks.

Late arrivals and early departures decrease the learning time available, interrupt the flow of class, and are distracting to all. The instructor should be careful to avoid keeping the students in class past the scheduled ending time. In turn, students should refrain from packing up their belongings and/or leaving prior to being dismissed by the instructor.

It is also distracting when students engage in private conversations, talk or text on a cell phone, use handheld computing or communication devices, listen to headphones, or read the non-class materials during class. Cell phones, pagers, and similar devices must be adjusted so that they do not ring, beep, or buzz audibly during class.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

September 1	Introduction
September 3	Examining Social Problems Reading: Loseke, Ch. 1
September 8	Examining Social Problems (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Introduction & Ch. 1 & 2
September 10	Examining Social Problems (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 3 & 4
September 15	Claims-Makers and Audiences Reading: Loseke, Ch. 2
September 17	Claims-Makers and Audiences (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 5 & 6
September 22	Claims-Makers and Audiences (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 7 & 8
September 24	Constructing Conditions Reading: Loseke, Ch. 3
September 29	Constructing Conditions (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 9 & 10
October 1	Constructing Conditions (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 11 & 12
October 6	Constructing People Reading: Loseke, Ch. 4
October 8	Constructing People (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 13 & 14
October 13	Constructing People (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 15 & 16
October 15	Constructing Solutions Reading: Loseke, Ch. 5
October 20	Summary and review for the midterm
October 22	Midterm exam (in-class essay) Covers: Loseke Ch.1-4 and Loseke & Best, Ch. 1-16

October 27	Constructing Solutions (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 17 & 18
October 29	Constructing Solutions (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 19 & 20
November 3	Social Problems and Everyday Life Reading: Loseke, Ch 6
November 5	Social Problems and Everyday Life (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 21 & 22
November 10	Social Problems and Everyday Life (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 23 & 24
November 12	Social Problems and Troubled People Reading: Loseke, Ch 7
November 17	Social Problems and Troubled People (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 25 & 26
November 19	Social Problems and Troubled People (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 27 & 28
November 24	Evaluating Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems Reading: Loseke, Ch 8
November 26	Thanksgiving Day Holiday
December 1	Evaluating Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 29 & 30
December 3	Evaluating Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems (continued) Reading: Loseke & Best, Ch. 31 & 32
December 8	Social Construction Theory and Issues Reading: Loseke, Appendix (pp. 183-202)
December 10	Grad student presentations, summary, and review
December 15	Final Exam at 3:20 P.M. (In-class essay) Covers: Loseke Ch.5-8 & Appendix and Loseke & Best, Ch. 17-32