

Sociology 302: Contemporary Social Problems
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Fall 2011

Professor Kelsy Kretschmer

Office: Faner 3423

Class Schedule: MWF 12:00 – 12:50pm

Email: kkretsch@siu.edu

Location: Parkinson 108

Office Hours: Monday 4-5pm, Tuesday 9am-noon, Wednesday 4-5pm, Friday 4-5pm

Course Description

We often feel surrounded by problems, and for evidence, we need only open a newspaper or turn on the news. While all of the talk about social problems seems overwhelming, it is also true that only some problems get any attention at all. This class, through the “constructionist” lens, is designed to help students understand why some conditions and issues get defined as problems and others remain largely ignored. Students will be asked to think through key questions regarding the creation, management, and solutions of social problems. How do problems get defined? How can the same conditions, defined as a problem, be considered differently? How does social location affect the solutions people come up with for social problems?

In this course, we will focus on the specifics of a few social problems, and on the process by which social conditions get defined as social problems. We will focus on the construction of social problems in the United States, but will include comparisons to other nations to understand the ways other societies are approaching the same problems (population growth and decline, poverty, inequality, etc.). We will also pay attention to the ways that social problems and their solutions change over time.

Course Requirements

- Examinations: Students will take a mid-term and final examination, as scheduled below. I will provide additional information on these exams as they get closer. **Exams must be completed on the scheduled days; no make-up tests will be given. If you can't attend the scheduled examinations, it will be very difficult to pass the course.**

- Short papers: Students will submit two short papers (2 to 4 pages, typed double-spaced, 1 inch margins) using the course materials and theoretical issues discussed in class to

examine a contemporary social problem. I will provide a hand out with additional guidelines. In order to familiarize yourself with current events, it's a good idea to browse a good daily newspaper. **Papers will lose a letter grade for each day they are late after the due date.**

- Discussion questions: Twice during the semester students will be scheduled to create discussion questions for their small group and also lead the discussion of that group. Please see the last page of this syllabus for the schedule sign-up sheet and further directions. Students will also turn in their discussion questions to me on the day of the discussion. **If you are absent on the day you are scheduled for leading discussion, you will forfeit all points. You may not turn the questions in to me unless present on your scheduled day.**

Final grades will be based on the percentages listed below. There is no extra credit offered in this course.

Short paper #1 (Friday, September 16):	10%
Short paper #2 (Friday, November 18):	10%
Discussion Questions (as scheduled):	10%
Discussion Questions (as scheduled):	10%
Midterm (Friday, October 14):	20%
<u>Final (Monday December 12, 12:50pm - 2:50pm):</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total:	100%

Emergency Procedures:

Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on

posters in buildings on campus and is available on the BERT website at <http://www.bert.siu.edu/>, Department of Public Safety's website www.dps.siu.edu/ (disaster drop down) and in the Emergency Response Guidelines pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

Required Reading

Critser, Greg. 2003. *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World*.
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Draut, Tamara. 2007. *Strapped: Why America's 20- and 30-somethings Can't Get Ahead*. Anchor books.

Glassner, Barry. 2010. *Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. Basic Books

Course Schedule:

Week 1. Aug 22, 24, 26

Readings: Glassner Ch 1

Week 2. Aug 29, 31, Sep 2

Readings: Glassner Ch 2

Week 3. Sept 7, 9

Readings: Glassner Ch 3

Week 4. Sept 13, 14, 16 ***Paper #1 due on Friday, Sep 16***

Readings: Glassner ch 4

Week 5. Sept 19, 21, 23

Readings: Glassner Ch 6

Week 6. Sep 26, 28, 30

Readings: Glassner Ch 7

Week 7. Oct 3,5,7

Readings: Glassner Ch 8

Week 8. Oct 12, 14 *** **Midterm on Friday*****

Readings: Glassner Ch 9

Week 9. Oct 17, 19, 21

Readings: Glassner Ch 10; Critser Introduction

Week 10. Oct 24, 26, 28

Readings: Critser Ch 1 & 2

Week 11. Oct 31, Nov 2, 4

Readings: Critser Ch 3

Week 12. Nov 7, 9

Readings: Critser Ch 4

Week 13. Nov 14, 16, 18 *** **Paper #2 due on Friday, Nov 18th*****

Readings: Critser Ch 5 & 6

Week 14. Nov 21

Readings: Critser Ch 7

Draut Ch 1&2

Week 15. Nov 28, 30, Dec 2

Readings: Draut Ch 3 & 4

Week 16. Dec 5, 7, 9

Readings: Draut Ch 5, 6 & 7

Final Examination: Monday December 12, 12:50pm - 2:50pm

Contemporary Social Problems Discussion Group Schedule

Most Fridays will be devoted to small group discussion. We will divide our class into groups of five, and for each of the dates listed below, one member of each group will be responsible for creating three to five questions based on the course reading to bring in for discussion. The person who writes the questions will also be responsible for leading the discussion and (sometimes) reporting back to the larger class on the group discussion. Make sure to craft questions that can inspire significant discussion; questions that inspire a lot of conversation or controversy will make your job as discussion leader easier. **You will also turn in a copy of these questions to me; the quality of your questions will be considered as a part of your overall grade. If you are absent on your scheduled day, you will forfeit all of the points for this assignment.** In order to give you examples of the kind of questions I am looking for, I will create the questions for our first week (August 2).

In the following table, decide who in your group will be responsible for which days. You should each be scheduled for 2 days. Because we have eleven days to cover, your group will need to pick one day in which you each contribute a question for the discussion. Each of you should fill out the entire schedule for yourselves, and your group needs to make an additional copy of the group schedule for me.

Date	Name
September 2	
September 9	
September 16	
September 23	
September 30	
October 7	
October 21	
October 28	
November 4	
November 18	
Dec 2	