Course Description:

This seminar will explore issues in social constructionist social problems theory. Rather than focusing on the conditions we ordinarily think of as social problems, we will examine how various actors come to define conditions as problematic, the claims-making and other strategies that take place in these definitional processes, and some outcomes of these processes for specific cases. How is it that a social phenomenon comes to be seen as a social issue? How do people decide what is or is not a social problem, and how do they organize to get others to agree? What is at stake in these processes? We will begin with an introduction to constructionist theory and some debates regarding its utility. We will then examine stages and components of social problems construction. The goals of this course are to enable students to critically assess relevant theory, methods, and analyses in general terms, evaluate how well empirical exemplars make use of the approach, and draw upon it for their own research agendas.

Texts:


• Readings available through JSTOR and other full-text sources and on ER (electronic course reserve) in Morris Library. If not otherwise noted, look in JSTOR.

Seminar Requirements And Grading For Sociology 550

1. Regular attendance and active participation in discussion.
2. Completion of all readings on schedule.
3. Serving as discussion leader(s) as assigned. NOTE: students will turn in a brief précis (1-2 paragraphs MAXIMUM) for each of the readings or book chapters they will be presenting (and should prepare enough copies for everyone. I will provide guidelines).
4. Oral presentation of seminar paper. These will be organized as sessions, exactly like those one finds at our annual professional meetings (each presenter will have 15-20 minutes; I will provide guidelines).
5. Seminar paper (due by 3:00 April 29. I will provide guidelines).
SEMINAR PAPER

The paper (of potential journal quality and length--25-30 pages) may be one of two types: {1} an analysis of empirical material (if you are currently engaged in research which is yielding data suitable for constructionist analysis (in this case, claims about a social problem) or {2} an historical analysis of the emergence of a social problem, based on a literature review BEYOND what we read in the seminar.

NOTE: you must meet with me prior to the third class meeting (January 28) to discuss your proposed topic. At this time, you will be required to provide me with a one-page (maximum) prospectus outlining your topic.

Grading will be based on presenting, leading, and contribution to discussion (20%), presentation of the seminar paper (5%) and the papers (75%). There will be no incompletes except for extraordinary reasons.

Week 1 (January 14): INTRODUCTION AND TECHNICAL MATTERS

Week 2 (January 21): THE CONSTRUCTIONIST STANCE


Recommended:
Best, J. 1989, 1995. Images of Issues, 1st and 2nd editions. (see below)

Week 3 (January 28): CONSTRUCTIONISM'S CRITICS AND CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Week 3 (January 28): CONSTRUCTIONISM’S CRITICS AND CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIONISM (CONT.)


Recommended:
Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems (see above).
Constructionist Controversies: Issues in Social Problems Theory (see above).

Week 4 (February 4): CLAIMS AS RHETORIC


Week 5: (February 11): MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RHETORIC


Week 6: (February 18): EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS CONSTRUCTION

Week 7: (February 25): CLAIMSMAKER/CLAIMS AND MASS MEDIA I

Week 8: (March 4): CLAIMS AND MASS MEDIA II

Week 9: (March 18): CLAIMS IN THE PUBLIC POLICY ARENA

Week 10: (March 25): SOCIAL PROBLEMS WORK

Week 11: (April 1): SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT I
Week 11:  (April 1): SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT I (CONT.)

Week 12:  (April 8): SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT II

Week 13:  (April 15) SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Week 14:  (April 22)  ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Week 15:  (April 29)  ORAL PRESENTATIONS and DUE DATE for SEMINAR PAPER

Emergency Procedures. Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and health 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, available on BERT’s website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Safety’s website www.dps.siu.edu (disaster drop down), and in Emergency Response Guideline 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.