

**Sociology 1306  
(Spring 2013)**

**Contemporary Social Problems (Core Curriculum)**  
**Section: 201**  
**2:30-3:20 MWF**  
**BH 210**

**Instructor: Marcus Antonius Ynalvez**  
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**Consultation Hours: Th 2-5 & F 3:30-6:30**  
**or by appointment**

**Required Materials**

1. Required Textbook: Anna Leon-Guerrero (2011). *Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed)* Sage-Pine Forge, CA (ISBN 978-1-4129-9041-7)
2. A notebook to take notes during discussions, interaction, and lectures.

**Course Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce and socialize students to the systematic study and understanding of contemporary social issues and problems. We will start the course by linking personal experiences and troubles to the larger public issues and global problems through a reflexive process which C. Wright-Mills referred to as the *sociological imagination*.

We will then formally define what we mean by social issues and problems, discuss various theoretical perspectives -- *structural functionalist, Marxian-inspired conflict, feminist, and symbolic interactionist* -- that attempt to elucidate and explain the nature, origins, dynamics, and impacts of these phenomena on both *the individual* and *the body social*. We will go on to discuss the bases of social inequality, the various social institutions, and the other aspects of our physical and social world that are integral to the study of contemporary social issues and social problems.

Toward the end, we will learn how to 'convert' our academic and theoretical understanding of social issues and problems into social action. This will help us recognize actual challenges, dilemmas, issues, and problems in our own community (i.e., Laredo and the greater South Texas region), and inspire us to become proactive agents in coming-up with solutions to these issues and problems (Leon-Guerrero 2011).

Because cultures, meanings, practices, technologies, values, ways of life -- and most everything -- change and evolve, there will always be new issues and problems to contend with. As Robert Merton argued, every cultural, economic, political, social, and technological item will have a set of manifest functions, of latent functions, of non-functions, and of dysfunctions. Meaning, the items that we construe as solutions can also generate problems. Hence, a systematic understanding of the nature, origins, and dynamics of social issues and social problems is imperative.

### **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

Upon successful completion of this course students will:

1. Analyze and evaluate sociological concepts and principles.
2. Articulate sociological thinking in their understanding of the objective and subjective realities of social issues and social problems in their community.
3. Identify the different bases of social inequality that link to social issues and social problems in their community.
4. Link numerical indicators of social problems across different social categories.
5. Analyze, deconstruct, and explain social issues and social problems in their community from a *structural functionalist, conflict, feminist, and symbolic interactionist* point of view.
6. Generate a well-written sociological analysis of a particular social issue or social problem in their community.
7. Produce a set of policy recommendations that will lead to the resolution of that particular social issue or social problem.

**Core-curriculum Learning Outcomes (CCLOs).** Upon successful completion of this course students will achieve the following learning outcomes:

**Critical Thinking:** includes creating thinking, innovation, inquiry and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information (SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7).

Students will use critical thinking skills to apply sociological concepts, principles, and perspectives in describing, analyzing, and explaining the objective and the subjective realities of contemporary social problems through a final term paper. The assignment selected will be assessed using the University rubric on critical thinking.

**Communication Skills:** include effective written, oral, and visual communication. (SLOs: 2, 6 & 7)

Students will write a research paper that will assess all four competencies (Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, and Social Responsibility). Students will identify, describe, and analyze a social problem in their community and devise ways to research and recommend possible solutions to that social problem. Students are further expected to use tables, graphs, and charts to analyze and formulate conclusions about the social problem they choose to investigate in their community. The paper should contain 2,500-3,000 words and the following format: *Margins 1"x1"x1"x1"; Font = Arial; Font size = 10/11.* Projects will be scored using a written communications rubric which includes the domains covering grammar, organization, and clarity.

**Empirical and Quantitative Skills:** includes the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions (SLO: 4)

Students will be required to interpret and analyze a variety of numerical indicators that address a wide variety of social problems across social categories such as age, gender, social class, religion, race and ethnicity. Tables, graphs, and charts that include this type of information will be required in the final term paper. The University rubric on Empirical and Quantitative Skills will be used to assess this objective.

**Social Responsibility:** includes intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities (SLOs: 2, 3, 6, & 7).

In the final term paper, students must identify, describe, and analyze a social problem in their community, examine the cross-cultural impact of the problem on the community, and propose a solution that includes a description of the civic responsibility of students as members of their communities. The University rubric on social responsibility will be used to assess this core curriculum objective.

**Grading and Course Requirements**

Mid-term and final exam: 55%

Quizzes and assignments: 15%

Term paper: 30%