Sociology 115: Social Problems

Spring 2025, Professor April Sutton

Friday: 5-7:50pm

Office hours: After class and by appointment

asutton@ucsd.edu

**Course Description**

In this course, we will discuss some of the most pressing social problems facing the United States today. Throughout the course, we will learn how to apply sociological research methods, concepts, and perspectives to these social problems, and we will brainstorm about possible solutions. We will primarily focus on education, work, and health inequalities by racial/ethnic, gender, class, immigrant status, sexual orientation, and geography.

The discipline of sociology, when approached with a healthy understanding of its limitations, provides some of the best tools available for making sense of our social world. In addition to developing a strong grasp of important trends and issues in the U.S., students will leave this semester with a “sociological lens” or “sociological toolkit” that can be applied to critically examine issues and experiences outside the scope of the course. Once you develop this lens, it will last you a lifetime.

**Course Communication**

My job is to provide you with opportunities to succeed in this course. It is your prerogative to

take advantage of those opportunities. Please do not hesitate to email us or to visit me during

office hours. If you are not able to meet with me during office hours I are happy to meet with

you at another mutually convenient time.

Please check your email regularly for updates on class-related logistics.

Classes will be incorporate discussion and group work. There is a lot of evidence that students learn more effectively when they are actively engaged, so please come to each to ready to contribute your thoughts on the readings, listen carefully to others, respond to questions, and raise meaningful questions. If you don’t understand something, speak up—chances are that I haven't made myself clear and that others are also puzzled. I am also available to review or clarify class material outside of class, so feel free to come by during office hours.

**Grade components**

The requirements for the course and their approximate weights are:

Summaries of articles (using template): 30%

In-Class Assignment on readings: 20% (drop lowest 3)

Group presentation: 25%

Policy Brief: 25%

\***A note on participation**: If you struggle with verbal classroom participation for any reason, please contact me and we can arrange supplemental written assignments in lieu of some portion of your verbal participation grade. I will otherwise assume that every student should be actively participating in discussion.

**Summaries:** You will submit summaries of each reading assigned before each class, using a detailed template on Canvas. 10 points will be deducted each day your summaries are late.

**One-time opportunity for extra credit** (5 extra points on policy brief): Pick a song or news article to analyze and give a 5-minute presentation to class (excluding the time it takes for the class to listen to the song). Directly link the song or news article to at least 2 concepts or assigned materials from class. Submit a brief description of how the how the song or new articles you have chosen is relevant to at least 2 concepts or 2 assigned materials. Please sign-up by emailing your topic and date you wish to present.

**Group Presentation and Policy Brief guidelines/rubric are under “Files” on Canvas.**

**Excuses Policy- Centered on Your Time and Wellbeing**

College is demanding, and so is life outside of it. Things may come up — illness, stress, family emergencies, burnout — and when they do, I don’t want you to feel pressure to write a detailed excuse email if something goes wrong.

Instead, to keep your focus on recovery and regrouping (not crafting the perfect apology), you’ll submit a short reflection at the end of the quarter listing any missed classes or late assignments. Please list only high-level information (not details) — just dates and a short note.

This policy is designed to respect your time, your privacy, and your ability to manage your own responsibilities without the extra stress of emailing me during a challenging time.

Let’s focus on the learning and your overall well-being — not the paperwork.

**Course rules**

• This course is reading-intensive. It is in your best interest to keep up with readings; catching up is far more difficult and time-consuming than keeping up. Please read all the assigned materials for the day before coming to class.

• If you miss class and are interested in recovering material from that day, it is your responsibility to find a classmate that is willing to share notes with you. I will not respond to requests such as “Professor Sutton: Did I miss anything important today?” or “Professor Sutton: Will anything that you went over today be on our exam?”

**Academic Integrity and Campus Resources**

*Academic Integrity:* UCSD’s policy on academic integrity will be in effect throughout this course for all assignments.As an academic community, none of us can afford to tolerate academic dishonesty of any sort,including plagiarism, falsifying data, or otherwise cheating. I take academic integrity veryseriously. Please talk to me or visit the following UCSD website if you have any questions aboutwhat constitutes academic integrity: http://www.ucsd.edu/currentstudents/

academics/academic-integrity/index.html.

*Accommodations:* UCSD is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs, and I support and adhere to the UCSD accommodation policies on all assignments, exams, and other classroom activities. If you have a documented disability (or think you might have one) and as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class or complete course requirements, **let me know as soon as possible.**

Students who need special accommodation or services should contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), University Center 202, email osd@ucsd.edu, tel 858.534.4382. You must register and request that the OSD send me official notification of your accommodation needs as soon as possible.

*Counseling services and test anxiety*: Free and low-cost counseling and mental health services are available on campus. Please take advantage of services if needed. Information is available at https://caps.ucsd.edu/. Additionally, it is important for you to remember that you are more than your grades. This doesn’t mean you should not try to do well, but sometimes “bad” grades happen. I do not judge you as a person or look down on you if you do badly on an exam – it happens to all of us sometimes. Don’t let a suboptimal grade—whatever that means to you— keep you from coming to talk to me if you are serious and willing to put in the time to improve.

**A note on syllabus revisions:**

No matter how carefully I plan, I may need to make syllabus revisions during the quarter. I will email the class if I adjust the syllabus and will post any revisions on Canvas. It is your responsibility to keep up with due dates, syllabus revisions, etc.

