

SOC 152 – Social Problems in the Community

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Course Description

This course is about learning to critically think about society and various problems in society. This course will examine several contemporary social issues as we wrestle with how we can decide if an issue is a social problem, decide which social problems might be more significant than others, and evaluate potential solutions for social problems. We are going to investigate these challenging questions with the goal of helping us to think deeply about how we might seek justice on an individual level and within society.

Problem-based Learning Project

Students will be placed into small groups and assigned a Problem-based Learning (PBL) case. Students will explore the dimensions of the problem, analysis of the problem, and propose policies for addressing the problem. While a portion of the PBL is a group effort, each student will be responsible for his or her own essay. Separate essays permit you to demonstrate what you have learned and to draw your own conclusions from the evidence. The three cases are presented below, along with guidelines for the problem-based learning essay.

Case I: “The Hunger Paradox”: Obesity and Poverty in Springfield, MO

Key Question: What is the sociological relationship between obesity and poverty?

“The hunger paradox,” a term coined by the New York Times, is used to highlight the fact that there is a strong positive correlation between obesity and poverty in the U.S. According to the New York Times, “a recent survey found that the most severe hunger-related problems in the nation are in the South Bronx, long one the country’s capitals of obesity. Experts say these are not parallel problems persisting in side-by-side neighborhoods, but plagues often seen in the same households, even the same person: the hungriest people in America today, statistically speaking, may well not be sickly skinny, but excessively fat.¹” Missouri’s adult obesity rate has been increasing since 2014 and is currently 32.4 percent.²

Your task is (1) to carefully describe the dimensions of this social problem, with a focus on the U.S. and Springfield, MO; (2) to identify specific sociological roots of this problem using scholarly and other credible sources; and (3) to discuss the consequences of the problem and articulate one micro- and one macro-level policy to address it.

¹ Dolnick, S. 2010. “The Obesity-Hunger Paradox.” The New York Times, March 12.

² *The State of Obesity*. 2017. Trust for America’s Health. Retrieved on 8/20/17 (<http://healthyamericans.org/reports/stateofobesity2016/>)

Case II: Gentrification in Springfield, MO

Key Question: Is gentrification good for the urban poor?

Gentrification has been a controversial process, particularly in terms of its effects on low-income populations who live in gentrifying neighborhoods. One example from the Springfield area that triggered community tension is the former Calvary Temple church that was torn down in 2015 to make space for a Walmart Neighborhood Market. A key question has been who benefits from gentrification—and who, if anyone, loses.

Your task is to (1) define the phenomenon of gentrification, to identify key actors in the gentrification process, and to describe ways in which a gentrified neighborhood changes; (2) describe the process of gentrification in a particular neighborhood in Springfield, MO; (3) study and describe the debate over gentrification; (4) make a micro- and macro-level recommendation for making benefits more equitable for old and new residents.

Case III: Free Speech versus Protection of Students from Verbal or Cyberbullying

Key Question: How do middle and high schools write rules to protect students from verbal or cyberbullying without violating free speech rights of students?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, bullying can affect students' social and emotional well-being, their academic performance, and even result in physical injuries.³ The national conversation on bullying has gained attention with recent cases of gay teens who have committed suicide. This year's review of Springfield, MO public schools' annual safety reports shows there were 158 assaults involving students assaulting other students during the 2015-2016 year, the highest number recorded over the last five years, with bullying cited as one contributing factor.⁴ Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, and widely recognized as a significant pillar of our democracy, but how do we distinguish between free speech and bullying?

Your task is (1) to carefully describe the dimensions of this social problem, with a focus on the U.S. and Springfield, MO; (2) to identify specific sociological roots of this problem using scholarly and other credible sources; and (3) to discuss the consequences of the problem and articulate one micro- and one macro-level policy to address it.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2017. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention. CDC.

⁴ Riley, Claudette. 2017. "Spike in Assaults, Especially in Middle Schools, Dominates SPS Crime Report." *Springfield News Leader*. Published January 7, 2017. Retrieved on August 20, 2017 (<http://www.news-leader.com/story/news/education/2017/01/08/spike-assaults-especially-middle-schools-dominates-sps-crime-report/93801120/>)

ASSIGNMENT: Annotated Bibliography

The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to prepare a literature review on your topic. Your annotated bibliography requires a minimum of **five** scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles. References from community or government reports, as well as law journals, may be used in your individual papers and are encouraged, but will not be counted towards the five peer-reviewed article minimum requirement. You are only required to submit annotations for five of your sources. References should be recent (from the last seven years).

What is an annotation?

An annotation indicates the usefulness of a particular source and provides a record of your research. This assignment will help you prepare to write a research paper on your chosen topic.

Example of an annotation:

Kaiser, M. L. (2011). "Food Security: An Ecological-Social Analysis to Promote Social Development." *Journal of Community Practice*, 19(1), 62-79.

Kaiser (2011) provides background information about food insecurity before outlining the problems associated with it. This article touches on what it means to be food insecure, how many families are food insecure, and why so many Americans face food insecurity even though there is a surplus of commodities that are being produced. The main point is that addressing the multi-faceted issue of food insecurity will require collaborative efforts between sociologists, agriculturalists, biologists and politicians. The author also stresses that food insecurity is not only caused by a lack of available food, but by a lack of a reliable means to access available food. Compared to other sources, this source provides information about what kinds of programs need to be put in place to combat food insecurity. This source contributes to the topic because one aspect of food insecurity is the lack of access to safe and healthy food, which could contribute to obesity. Poverty often leads to a lack of transportation, which limits the types of food people are able to obtain. People living in poverty are often limited to corner markets, fast food restaurants, and convenience stores, none of which have food options that are both affordable and healthy.

Rubric:

Criteria	Possible Points
1. Citations in APA style or MLA style	2
2. Identifies the intended audience	2
3. Clearly states the main point and/or purpose of the source	2
4. Compares the source with the other works cited	2
5. Explains how this source contributes to the topic	2
Total	10

ASSIGNMENT: Problem-based Learning Essay

Objective: The problem-based learning (PBL) essay is intended to develop your ability to define, analyze, and address a social problem and to communicate your findings effectively in written form. The paper must be 4-6 pages and include a minimum of 5 peer-reviewed references. Formatting should be double-spaced, 1" margins, 12pt. Times New Roman, not including the references page.

- **20 pts.:** Introduce your reader to your case in an engaging way. Clearly define and describe the dimensions of your social problem or issue in a well-developed introduction. Show your reader what the problem is and why it's interesting and socially significant.
- **40 pts.:** Analyze the social roots of the problem, identifying at least three specific sociological aspects (cultural, economic, educational, political, etc.) of the problem. Each aspect should be discussed in detail and linked clearly and explicitly to the problem at hand. All evidence must be carefully cited.
- **20 pts.:** Elaborate one micro-level (individual, small group, or community-level) and one macro-level (state or national-level) policy or practice that could be implemented to address the problem. Be sure your policies are linked to the problem's roots.
- **5 pts.:** Discuss briefly potential strengths and weaknesses of your proposed policies. Consider obstacles to implementation and opportunities for implementation.
- **5 pts.:** Prepare a clear conclusion that offers a general review of the problem and briefly proposes avenues of future research and policy intervention.
- **10 pts.:** Overall quality of your paper. This includes both the depth of your analysis and the quality of your writing.