
Confronting America's Social Problems

University of California, Berkeley

School of Social Welfare

Instructor: Josué Meléndez Rodríguez, MA, MSW



Class Location & Time:



Office Location & Hours:



Course Description and Objectives

Social Welfare 20 is designed to guide students through an introductory examination of the American approach to social problems, with a focus on social and economic justice issues affecting at-risk populations. Problems such as poverty, inequality, racism, and sexism will be explored from a multitude of perspectives through in-class presentations from the instructor and students, as well as community members; video and other presentations may also be used. Additionally, students will select one social problem to explore more thoroughly through individualized study. While this course focuses on the U.S., international perspectives are encouraged to facilitate a comparative learning experience that accounts for the realities of a global society.

By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to:

- Explain the concepts of privilege and oppression, and provide two examples of how these may manifest in a diverse society.
- Identify and describe three social problems affecting at-risk populations in the U.S., and describe two distinct perspectives on each of those three problems.
- Identify and describe one additional social problem affecting an at-risk population in the U.S., and briefly chronicle the history of, describe two distinct perspectives on, and provide an opinion about that one problem.
- Describe two ways in which an undergraduate student can affect positive social change in a manner that aligns with social work values and ethics.

Required Reading

Primary

Bonds, E. (2015). *Social problems: A human rights perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Secondary (select one)*

Berg, B. J. (2009). *Sexism in America: Alive, well, and running our future*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2013). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Shipler, D. (2015). *Rights at risk: The limits of liberty in modern America*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Signorile, M. (2015). *It's not over: Getting beyond tolerance, defeating homophobia, and winning true equality*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

*Students may choose a different book, but must request instructor approval by May 28 and subsequently receive that approval.

Additional (to be assigned)

Other readings (as well as listening and viewing exercises) may be assigned throughout the course. These may include journal and newspaper articles, as well as audio and video clips.

Student and Instructor Responsibilities

Time Commitment: Through reading, writing, presentation preparation, and in-class participation, students are expected to dedicate an average of 15 hours per week to this course. Meanwhile, engaging in the same activities, as well as grading, the instructor is expected to dedicate an average of 20 hours per week to this course. These are the standard amounts of time assigned to a two-credit course in a six-week session. The design of this course accounts for this expectation.

Assignments and Grading: In order to receive a passing grade, students must complete all work. The instructor will provide a rubric at least one week prior to an assignment due date (2 weeks for final assignment). The instructor will fairly grade and return work with constructive comments in a timely fashion, typically within one week. Students will be graded based on the following:

- Attendance and Participation (36 points)
 - Students are required to attend and meaningfully participate in all classes. This means arriving on time, staying to the end of class, and only being away during breaks. This also means preparing for class (e.g., doing the readings and reflections), and engaging in lectures, discussions and other activities.
 - There are 12 class meetings. Students can earn 3 points per meeting: 1 for being physically present, 1 for actively listening to lectures and other presentations, and 1 for actively participating in discussions and other activities.
 - Because of the condensed summer schedule and dialogic nature of this course, absences are strongly discouraged and can severely impact the final grade. More than one absence may result in a failing final grade. Even though it is impossible to truly make up an absence, one substantive written assignment that will account for $\frac{1}{3}$ of the attendance points will be required for any missed class.
 - The instructor will manage class meetings, facilitating presentations and discussions. Students will share in this responsibility; they will also facilitate presentations and discussions, and are ultimately responsible for their own engagement.
- Readings and Reflections (14 points)
 - Students will read from the primary text as outlined in the calendar below, and write a one paragraph (i.e. five to seven well-structured sentences) response to a question about each of the seven chapters. The instructor will identify the question at least one week in advance, and the writing will be due at the beginning of class. These reflections are worth up to 2 points each. Reflections turned in late count for only $\frac{1}{2}$ their regular points.

- Students will select additional readings as outlined: one book from the list above to be read throughout the semester; at least two journal articles used for the first in-class presentation; and at least three journal articles used for the final essay. The instructor will provide guidance throughout this selection process.
- As noted, additional reading, listening, and viewing exercises may be assigned throughout the course.
- Two Presentations (25 points)
 - 16 points: The first presentation, which should be approximately ten minutes, will be about one of the social problems discussed in the primary text. For this presentation, students will use a minimum of two journal articles, which they are responsible for finding themselves, in addition to the primary text as references. Students may elect to do this as a group presentation. If this is done, the time allotment and number of required references will be increased accordingly. These presentations will take place during weeks two to four.
 - 9 points: The second presentation, which should be no more than five minutes, will be about the student's final essay. For this presentation, students will discuss the outline of their final project and get feedback from the class. These presentations will take place during week five.
 - Students who do not facilitate these presentations will have to submit detailed slides with extensive writing or voice-over worth a maximum of $\frac{1}{3}$ of the presentation points, and may receive a failing final grade.
 - The instructor will provide clear guidelines for the presentations at least one week in advance and will be available to students for individual guidance as needed.
- Final Project (25 points)
 - A three-page APA-style (double-spaced; one-inch margins; 12-point, Times New Roman font; etc.) essay is due on the final day of class (July 2). This essay will make use of the primary and secondary texts, as well as a minimum of three journal articles. This will focus on the social problem addressed by the secondary text, providing a brief history of, presenting at least two distinct perspectives on, and providing the student's own informed opinion about that problem. While the instructor may agree or disagree with the student's opinion, there is no "correct" opinion. Students must engage the class material and present a thoughtful and well-written essay. The political, religious, or other subjective leanings of the argument will not impact grading.
 - In lieu of an essay, students may create a slide presentation with either detailed writing or voice-over that is comparable in depth to the essay. If students choose this option, they must inform the instructor no later than June 23.
 - Final projects turned in late will be deducted two points per day, with a maximum allowance of three days late.
 - The instructor will provide clear guidelines for this project at least two weeks in advance and will be available to students for individual guidance as needed.

- Late Assignments and Incompletes
 - Late assignments, which are strongly discouraged, need to be discussed with the instructor as early as possible. If this is not done, they may be given zero points.
 - If the student requires an accommodation as noted below and the late assignment is related to that accommodation, the penalties outlined above may not apply.
 - As dictated by university policy, a grade of Incomplete can only be given in rare extreme situations. If a student may need a grade of Incomplete, they should discuss this with the instructor as early as possible.
- Grading Scale

A+	97 or more points
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 or fewer points

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated. Zero points will be earned for any work that was completed by engaging in academic dishonesty. Students cannot purchase information or written text on the Internet, use someone else's ideas or words as their own without proper acknowledgement, submit written text that another person wrote or that the student wrote for another purpose for which they have already received credit, or place their name on a group project for which they did not substantively contribute. All suspicious activities will be reported to the School of Social Welfare and Center for Student Conduct. To avoid the negative consequences that can result from engagement in academic dishonesty, it is strongly advised that students speak with the instructor about any related difficulties rather than compromise their integrity. For more information on Berkeley's policies about academic integrity, visit <http://studentconduct.berkeley.edu>.

Technology: Technology is allowed in class only to the extent that it supports the learning experience. Computers may be used for note-taking and fact-checking, for example, but not for Facebooking or Instagramming. Phones cannot be used during class, except with direct permission from the instructor. This policy is strictly enforced. The instructor reserves the right to give zero points for attendance and participation to students who violate this policy and/or to require those students to leave the class.

Accommodations

To request accommodations due to a disability, the student should contact the Disabled Students Program via phone (510-642-0518 [voice] or 510-642-6376 [TTY]) or by visiting their office (260 César E. Chávez Student Center, #4250). If the student has an accommodation letter from this

office, it should be provided to the instructor automatically. However, students are encouraged to also meet with the instructor to discuss accommodations in order to better ensure their needs are adequately met.

If the student must miss class or requires other accommodations due to religious observances and/or cultural traditions and customs, please meet with the instructor in a timely fashion to discuss these accommodations.

Calendar

Additional details about student presentations and other in-class activities will be provided at a later date. All class meetings will require a significant amount of dialogue, so students should come prepared to engage in thought-provoking discussions about each meeting's topic. Please note that the chapters indicated for some class meetings [e.g., "(Ch. 1)"] refer to the chapters of the primary text that should be read prior to that meeting, with a reflection due at the beginning of that meeting.

Week 1

May 26 Welcome; Introductions; Syllabus Review; Critical Pedagogy Presentation
May 28 Presentations about Privilege and Oppression, and Social Work Values and Ethics

Week 2

June 2 Community Presentation; Human Rights Presentation (Ch. 1)
June 4 Community Presentation; Lecture and Student Presentations about Wellbeing (Ch. 2)

Week 3

June 9 Community Presentation; Lecture and Student Presentations about Inequality (Ch. 3)
June 11 Community Presentation; Lecture and Student Presentations about Racism (Ch. 4)

Week 4

June 16 Community Presentation; Lecture and Student Presentations about Sexism (Ch. 5)
June 18 Community Presentation; Lecture and Student Presentations about Globalization (Ch. 6)

Week 5

June 23 Student Presentations about Final Projects
June 25 Student Presentations about Final Projects

Week 6

June 30 Social Action Presentation (Ch. 7)
July 2 Review and Wrap-Up; Final Projects Due

Notes on Course Design

It's important to remember that this is both the instructor's and students' course: the instructor serves as a guide, and students manage their own learning. Keeping this in mind, the instructor and students will work together to develop a constructive experience, giving consideration to each student's interests and learning styles. The exact content of reflections, presentations, final projects, and other class components may change or evolve as the instructor engages with students. This will be done to ensure that everyone both develops a general understanding of social problems in the U.S. through a shared learning experience and is able to explore more deeply a problem of interest through individualized study. This approach to the teaching and learning experience will be discussed in more detail during the first class meeting.