



TRUE BLUE CORE

SOC 2010 Social Problems

3 CREDIT HOURS

Instructor Information

Instructor:

Office Location:

Office Phone:

Email Address:

Office Hours:

True Blue Core Category and Student Learning Outcomes

True Blue Core Knowledge Domain: Human Society & Social Relationships (HSSR)

- For all catalogs 2024-2025 and beyond, this course can be used to satisfy 3 hours of the True Blue Core curriculum requirement for Discovery in Social and Behavioral Sciences in HSSR. If you have already fulfilled the Discovery requirement for HSSR, this course can be used in the Explorations in HSSR category. To learn more about TBC requirements: <https://w1.mtsu.edu/truebluecore/core.php>.
- For all catalogs prior to 2024-2025, this course may be used to satisfy 3 hours of the general education curriculum requirement for Social/Behavioral Sciences. To learn more about general education requirements for catalogs prior to 2024-2025: https://w1.mtsu.edu/gen_ed/requirements.php

The True Blue Core Outcome for Discovery in Social and Behavioral Sciences (HSSR):

- Students will think critically by explaining issues/problems, selecting and using evidence, considering context and assumptions, and representing their position and conclusions logically and effectively.

Course Description

In this course we will examine a variety of social issues ranging from problems of the environment to poverty, racial inequality, drugs and crime. Using a sociological imagination, our initial endeavor will be to develop a base understanding of what social problems are, why certain issues are seen as social problems, and the implications of this social construction. Building on this, we will examine a variety of social issues and the effects of these social issues on individual's lives. Further, we'll discuss and examine the media's role in shaping, reflecting, and perpetuating these social problems. Students will leave the course with a comprehensive understanding of the sociological perspective on social problems with an eye towards solutions.

You will evaluate issues and problems from an objective, empirical, and scientific perspective. Specifically, through online readings, discussions, debates, and assignments, you will learn to think sociologically and apply sociological methods to the analysis of social problems, providing you with a better understanding of the major social issues we face in the 21st Century and enabling you to take informed positions on these issues.

You will be encouraged to express your own ideas and opinions about the issues addressed as long as your arguments are presented rationally, logically and respectfully. You also will be exposed to alternative views and positions held by others and, while you are not required to agree with these views, you are expected to thoughtfully and respectfully consider them.

True Blue Outcome: Students will think critically by explaining issues/problems, selecting and using evidence, considering context and assumptions, and representing their position and conclusions logically and effectively.

Explanation of Issues/problems

Students will learn about a variety of issues from both an social constructionist perspective (what problems are constructed as "problems" and the more standard issues that many would agree are problems. The focus is the United States, however, they will learn problems related to age, race, gender, sexuality, occupation, education, the environment, families, crime and criminal justice, and income. Students will also have develop a literacy for evaluating media and understanding the media's role in how social problems get defined or don't.

Selecting and using evidence

Students will learn sociological methods used to gather, analyze, and discuss empirical research findings. Various assignments highlight the importance of media literacy as well as understanding how social scientific methods, data, and evidence are likewise gathered, analyzed, and discussed. Students will read peer reviewed journal articles and are expected to know how to gather information from a peer reviewed article.

Student's Position, context, and assumptions

One of the features of SOC 2010 is to develop students' understanding of global connections. SOC 2010 highlights interconnectedness and aims to achieve the goal of fostering empathy for others' social problems. Empathy is a part of the sociological imagination and is an excellent tool for examining assumptions related to social problems. This is not possible without first learning to see themselves as a product of society, their environment, friends, family, etc. To be able to effectively meet the objectives of this course, students will learn about how the problems they have faced in their life are related (or not) to the social problems we discuss.

Conclusions and related outcomes

By learning about, evaluating, analyzing, and discussing the sociological study of social problems, how the media plays a role in what we know and don't know about social problems, students will be expected to demonstrate their mastery of a particular social problem(s) with a course project. One of the main outcomes of SOC 2010 is that students will both understand what might be called objective social problems and also how social problems are socially constructed. That is, we may think that violent crime is the biggest issue we face, however, crime rates have been on the general decline since the 1980s. So why does the media focus on crime so often? Students will demonstrate a preliminary understanding of social structure, social institutions that make up social structure and agency. They will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge of how social institutions both create and perpetuate social problems (and solve them!)

Course Overview

What are social problems? What are some of the most pressing social problems in our society? How are people affected by these problems? What is the media's role in shaping, reflecting, and perpetuating social problems? Are there any solutions? Why do we even care? In this course, we will use social theory and our sociological imaginations to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate contemporary social problems, how they relate to our everyday lives, and how they are presented in the media.

Course Objectives:

1. A very important goal in this course is to work towards developing and utilizing our sociological imaginations, the ability to see the relationship between our own individual experiences and society at large. The sociological imagination will allow us to understand how "personal troubles" can be related to and embedded within a larger social context of public issues that include political and structural implications. In this way, we will be deeply examining how the social construction of contemporary social problems impacts our lives and the lives of others.
2. To invoke scientific inquiry, specifically sociological theory and method, to analyze and evaluate contemporary social problems. Another very important underlying goal here is to develop an understanding of social problems that goes well beyond "common sense."
3. To employ our sociological imaginations and scientific inquiry to critically think about how social problems are defined, and how these definitions vary greatly across time and space. This will lead us to explore in depth the implications of culture, and how it shapes and reflects our understanding of social problems.
4. To apply all of these goals above to public discussions about social problems, such as in the media for example, and actively use what we've learned to connect our study of social problems to our everyday life (i.e., how social problems affect us, how they affect other people, and how they are reflected and perpetuated within the media.)

5. To engage in deep, critical, analytical discussion about the topics we cover every week. An important objective of this course is that we work together to create an environment that supports this kind of conversation. In so doing, my hopes are that we are able to take what we've learned in class, through discussion, and apply it to settings that extend far beyond the classroom.

Expectations, and Requirements

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Understand and recognize basic sociological understandings of social problems.
2. Develop and practice methods of research, critical thinking, data analysis, and problem solving used by social scientists through writing and class discussions.
3. Write a research paper.

Students will be expected to attend lectures, keep up with the readings, and do the required work. Lectures will only play a part of the class meetings, with discussion and in-class activities also playing a role. Small group activities will also be utilized and films will play a role in the course. Please ask a fellow classmate for any notes you might have missed. Class lecture *complements* class readings. Therefore, I expect full preparation (reading material before class) and participation.

Course Requirements

Attendance: Your attendance is vital to this class, both for your own learning and for our growth as a community of scholars. Attending class will help you with your assignments and contribute to your understanding of the material. I will pass around a sign-up sheet each day in class. In order to receive credit for the day, you must arrive on time and attend the entire class session. You are responsible for the material presented during class whether or not you attend. Please arrange with another student to get missed notes and announcements. This will be a discussion-based class. You will receive a full participation score if you are an active discussant **and** you do not miss more than one class.

In addition, the following incentive scale will be used

0-1 missed class	+ 2 added to final grade
2 missed classes	nothing added or subtracted
More than two missed classes	-1 for each class missed

1. Quizzes and Participation: 20%

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and complete all reading assignments on time. I will do pop quizzes or classroom activities approximately 15 occasions over the course of the semester. I will do so by asking you to write a discussion question on the assigned readings, complete a group activity, take a short pop quiz on the readings, or complete another task. In other words, the manner in which I take attendance is also designed as a check on your reading. Each activity is worth 1 point of your overall grade (1 x 15 = 15). **Since these activities are measures of attendance, you cannot make them up. Absolutely no exceptions.**

Overall Participation is 5% of your grade.

Active and informed participation is expected of all students. You must be present in class in order to participate; excessive absences will result in a lower participation grade. Because not all students are comfortable speaking up in class, however, it is accepted that participation can be verbal or non-verbal. Other acceptable forms of participation include: suggesting outside readings, recommending related films or television programs, and attending and reporting on related campus activities.

Some readings, lectures, and class discussions may challenge how you think about the world. Part of your task as students is working hard to build a deep understanding of course materials. This is an integral part of developing an informed and analytical perspective. When based on a serious effort to understand course materials, critique and dissent can help us as a collective to expand our views and analyses. However, in order to maintain a productive classroom environment for all, it is essential to listen carefully to others and to voice dissent in a respectful manner.

Tardiness, packing up early, sleeping in class, using electronic devices without my permission, and other disruptive behavior will result in a lower participation grade. Failure to bring books or printed copies of readings to class on the relevant days will also result in a lower participation grade.

2. Mid-Term Examination: 1 at 10%

A midterm consisting of short and long-answer questions. This is take-home. You will have a week to complete it. **DUE October 9th**

3. Term Paper: 1 @ 20 %

You will turn in a final the day we return from Thanksgiving Break.

- Pick a social problem about which you wish to write. Topics must be approved by me on the 6th week of class (October the 2nd). On this day, you are to bring a one paragraph statement of the social problem that you wish to write about in your term paper.
- Several times throughout the semester, I will reserve time in class for us to discuss your topics and how you are going to approach the term paper.
- In the term paper, you must explain why your topic is a social problem, why sociologists would care about the social problem, and what solutions might alleviate or help to solve the social problem. You will need to bring in at least **three** outside sources to write your paper. These can be scholarly sources or reputable news media sources. You are required to have a works cited page.

- I want you to have fun with this paper and to be creative. I am looking for evidence that you are learning the material and thinking critically about how to solve problems in our society.
- The paper should be about 5-7 pages and should include an introduction, conclusion, and thesis statement.
- You will turn in a hard copy after you return from Thanksgiving Break.

The following rubric will be used:

Grammar/Spelling	4 points
Introduction/Conclusion	4 points
Thesis/topic paragraph	4 points
Evidence you are reading class material	4 points
Organization/outside sources	4 points

4. Final Exam: 1 at 10%

Same format as midterm. You will turn this in the last day of class.

5. Media Representation of Social Problem 10% of your grade

In this assignment, you will find examples of how the media represents a social problem of your choosing. Be sure that you are specific with the social problem that you choose because it's much easier to research infant mortality and racism than general racism. You are expected to demonstrate your answer to the following general questions: how does the media represent the social problem I chose? What do they focus upon? What do they not focus upon? How does their focus shape what parts of the social problem get highlighted for the public? You are also to find another source of information that is related to your topic, but that highlights nearly opposite elements. For instance, if you chose the burning of fossil fuels as your social problem, you need to also find people who are arguing that we should be able to burn fossil fuels. You will write about who is making what claims and how effective they are.

1. Choose Topic

Feel free to start with the topics that we cover in class, but again, I want you to be more specific than the topics that we cover, if applicable.

2. Find two sources for both sides. These must be reputable online newspaper sources. You may be asking yourself: What is reputable? What is fake news? How do I know what to believe? I will address these questions and more in the coming weeks.

3. In 2-3 pages, you will provide an overview of your social problem and the flip side of that social problem, you will summarize what you learned in the articles, you will discuss the scientific study of social problems and the social construction of social problems using at least one of our introductory readings to, and you will provide a conclusion and bibliography. See “standard essay format expectations” under D2L content.

Help on evaluating online news sources:

1. <https://library.mtsu.edu/tutorials/evaluatingresources> (Evaluating Sources)
2. https://libapps.s3.amazonaws.com/accounts/58836/images/Ad_Fontes_Media_Bias_Chart_2022.jpg (Media Bias Chart)
3. https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=35518946 (CRAAP Test)
4. https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=35518946 (identifying “fake” news)
 - a. Fact Checking 101 <https://www.poynter.org/mediawise/is-this-legit-digital-media-literacy-101/fact-checking-101/>
 - b. Politifact: <https://www.politifact.com/>
 - c. Fact Check.org <https://www.factcheck.org/>
 - d. Flack Check: <https://www.factcheck.org/>
 - e. Sci Check: <https://www.factcheck.org/scicheck/>
 - f. Check your fact: <https://checkyourfact.com/>

***There are about five more links on the link in item number 4.

6. Social Problems and Popular Culture 10%

In this assignment, you are going to engage how other forms of media represents social problems. This should help to foster an awareness that all sorts of art forms discuss social problems, how to fix them, etc. (and not just sociology!)

1. Pick your topic.
2. Find two art forms that focus upon the social problem that you choose. For instance, say your topic is the social problem of mass incarceration. You could you literally one of thousands of songs. For an example of the second media form, check out the following link about contemporary painters/performers and their representations of mass incarceration.

3. **Analyze the examples using your sociological imagination. You should aim to answer questions like: what problem is being represented? Is there a call to action? Why or why? How is this sociologically meaningful? (Hint: focus on the institutions that perpetuate the social problem, the context that allowed the art form to be created, and how the art form has been received, for example(s).)**
4. **The week after spring break, you will give a three minute presentation on what chose, why you chose that topic, and what you learned.**

7. Social Problems and Global Comparisons, 10%

1. You pick a social problem and get facts about that social problem here in the U.S. (you can also focus on one state). Please utilize a reputable news source to get your statistics.
2. Then pick another country to compare the U.S. (or a state). What is similar? What is different? Why could national context make an impact? How does sociology help us make sense of the similarities and differences?

Then you will turn in this report which should be about one page. Based on your submissions, I will either categorize your papers topically or by region.

3. You will meet with your group to discuss turning in a group report that expounds on the theme I identified, and also you are to come up with two additional themes.
4. You will explain what these two additional themes are in a class presentation the last week of class.
5. Each of you will write separate reflection papers that detail what you learned, if you liked it, and how it connects to class.

8. Controlling Images, 10%

The objective of this assignment is to further provide you with critical thinking skills in regard to the media. We are learning about controlling images and racism and your assignment is to find a controlling image a racial group.

1. Decide which controlling image you want to focus upon
2. Decide what image you will use:

3. Tie this to the social problem of racism in a 3-4 page paper that will address the following:
 - a. Why is this a social problem?
 - b. brief description of the image,
 - c. the controlling image(s) most closely assigned to the image,
 - d. a brief history of how the controlling image originated,
 - e. what assumptions it upholds concerning the racial group,
 - f. and how it has been used to justify oppressive actions toward a group.

*As always, include a thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion.

- Topic 1: Scientific Study of Social Problems and Social Constructionism
 - Media Coverage of Social Problems
 - Claimsmakers
 - Politics and Power
- Topic 2: Problems Related to Economic Inequality
- Topic 3: Racial and Ethnic Inequality Problems
- Topic 4: Gender Inequality Problems
- Topic 5: Sex and Sexuality Problems
- Topic 6: Age and Age Inequality Problems
- Topic 7: Crime and Criminal Justice Problems
 - Problems Related to Drugs and Alcohol
- Topic 8: Physical and Mental Health Problems
- Topic 9: Occupation Problems
- Topic 10: Family Problems
- Topic 11: School Problems
- Topic 12: Environmental Problems
- Topic 13: The Remedy?

Grading:

94-100 = A

90-93 = A-

87-89 = B+

84-86 = B

80 – 83 = B-

77-79 = C+

74-76 = C

70-73 = C-

60 -69 = D

60 and Below = F

Classroom Participation

This class will be a discussion-based class. Occasionally, I will lecture and then open up topics for discussion. Participating in class is part of your grade. It my belief that you will learn more if we focus on the process of learning, as opposed to rote memorization. I will come to class each day with discussion questions, and we will talk about the readings. If you are shy or do not feel comfortable talking in class, I encourage you to craft a question or clarification that you would like to discuss with the class before the class session. I personally have a difficult time in discussion-based classes as well. My solution through the years is to mark questions, confusions, or insights while reading. This process might help you if you are shy or do not like to talk openly in class. If this still makes you uncomfortable, please feel free to talk to me and we can figure out another way for you to fulfill your participation grade. During discussion, I might also call on students. If this makes you uncomfortable, please let me know.

Classroom Behavior:

- I want our class to be a place where we can safely engage topics without fear of discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, sexuality, or disability. I encourage you to respect your classmates' opinions on matters even if they differ from your own. If you all respect each other, we can discuss opposing viewpoints in a constructive way. However, I reserve the right to intervene if I feel that you are being derogatory to one of your colleagues.
- Don't use your cellphone to browse Facebook or engage in other behavior that might be distracting to your classmates. You have 23 other hours in the day to keep up with social media.
- You need to remember to turn the ringer off on your cell phone.
- Many of the issues discussed in this class are sensitive subjects. We will all respect one another's viewpoints. We will also respect everyone's right to ask questions. I do ask that you think through your thought or question before you say it out loud to assess whether you think it will be outright offensive to anyone. I also will not tolerate personal or group-based attacks. Keep in mind that there will be questions I do not know the answers to. However, I will do my best to get answers for us when possible.
- When in class I expect that students will have their cell phones turned off and put away.

- I do not permit the recording (video and audio) of my lectures or discussions. The presence of a recording device may cause some students to be apprehensive about participating in discussion.
- Please arrive to class on time and prepared to be a full participant. If you are going to be more than 5 minutes late, please let me know prior to that class period.
- You should stay in class until it is over unless you have made prior arrangements with me.
- You should have the readings completed before coming to class.
- Reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, text messaging or whatever else, are unsuitable activities during class time. If you would prefer to do something else during class, you may choose not to attend.

Structure of Class

We will begin class by clarifying issues, discussing questions and reviewing material from the previous class. I will attempt to also make linkages and connections to previously covered class material. Thus, it is a good practice to think about these connections while you are reading. We will first engage different theoretical lenses so you can use these to think about social problems and solutions. I will lecture from power-points and open up the lecture for discussion along the way. When class is coming to an end, I will try to reserve the last five or ten minutes to give you a cursory introduction to class material for the next session and some things to think about while reading. This should also give you another opportunity to ask questions or clarify anything that you are confused about.

Other Information

Assignments:

Are due in class unless otherwise noted. I will use D2L to post announcements, readings, and other relevant information.

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Middle Tennessee State University is committed to campus access in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Any student interested in reasonable accommodations can consult the Disability & Access Center (DAC) website and/or contact the DAC for assistance at 615-898-2783 or dacemail@mtsu.edu.

Academic Misconduct and Scholastic Dishonesty:

Academic misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated and is subject to university policies and repercussions. Academic Misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or facilitating any such act. For purposes of this course, the following definitions apply:

- Plagiarism. The adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images, or works of another person as one's own without proper acknowledgment.

- Cheating. Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours.
- Fabrication. Unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
- Facilitation. Helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic misconduct.

Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship:

Do you have a lottery scholarship? To retain the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship eligibility, you must earn a cumulative TELS GPA of 2.75 after 24 and 48 attempted hours and a cumulative TELS GPA of 3.0 thereafter. A grade of C, D, F, FA, or I in this class may negatively impact TELS eligibility. If you drop this class, withdraw, or if you stop attending this class you may lose eligibility for your lottery scholarship, and you will not be able to regain eligibility at a later time. For additional Lottery rules, please refer to your Lottery Statement of Understanding form (<http://www.mtsu.edu/financial-aid/forms/LOTFEV.pdf>) or contact your MT One Stop Enrollment Coordinator (<http://www.mtsu.edu/one-stop/counselor.php>).

Statement about Syllabus: The course syllabus is a *general plan* for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Email: I will make every attempt to respond to emails within 24 hours.

Make-up Exams: Only in the direst of circumstances will I allow make up exams.

LECTURE SCHEDULE, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

SP = Best Book R: Silver Book

***Schedule will be here

***Bibliography