



This course is part of GVSU's General Education Program.

The goal of the program is to prepare you for intelligent participation in public dialogues that consider the issues of humane living and responsible action in local, national, and global communities.

The program is designed to increase your knowledge and skills in the following areas:

Knowledge Goals

1. The major areas of human investigation and accomplishment - the arts, the humanities, the mathematical sciences, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.
2. An understanding of one's own culture and the cultures of others.
3. The tradition of humane inquiry that informs moral and ethical choices.

Skills goals

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective writing
2. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking.
3. To think critically and creatively.
4. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.
5. To integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives.

Ensuring that undergraduate students receive a broad general education has been a primary goal of colleges and universities since their inception. In this era of increasing specialization and growing demand for professional expertise, it is vital that we continue to emphasize the value of general learning.

GVSU maintains that a complete education involves more than preparation for a particular career. A career occurs in the context of a life, and a sound general education helps one "make a life" as well as "make a living." The university is committed to assuring that all undergraduate students, regardless of academic major, receive a broad education rooted in the arts and sciences.

Teaching in the liberal tradition is at the heart of Grand Valley's identity, and this focus is critical in our General Education Program. Liberal education transcends the acquisition of information; it goes beyond the factual to ask important evaluative and philosophical questions. Liberal learning holds the fundamental principles and suppositions of a body of knowledge up to inquiry, question, and discussion. It helps a person recognize the assumptions under which he or she operates and encourages the examination and questioning of those assumptions. Liberal learning begins in the General Education Program and continues through the more specialized studies comprising each student's major and minor areas of study.

Grand Valley State University educates students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies.

Sociology 280 – Social Problems
Section 1

Instructor: Jeffrey Rothstein
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(or by appointment – just ask!)

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Course Overview

Sociology provides perspectives recognizing and emphasizing that social problems stem from sources within and beyond the individual. The goal of this class is to provide some basic tools for examining problematic behaviors through sociological lenses. Consequently, difficult questions that challenge many commonly held beliefs, as well as the existing structure of society, will be raised.

Class discussion can breathe life into a course. However, frank discussions about social problems often involve subjects we avoid in daily life. Therefore, this class not only provides an overview of a number of important issues in our society, but serves as an opportunity to share opinions, analyze arguments of a sensitive nature, and perhaps challenge our own long-held assumptions about the society in which we live.

Course Structure

Social problems are innumerable. Therefore, we will not cover all of them. Instead, we will look briefly at an array of prevalent social problems. In general, the course is designed to expand from the micro to the macro. We will first address problems of, and between, individuals, then segue to those of institutions and society more broadly, and ultimately cover topics associated with globalization.

Most of the reading for this course is from the required text:

Understanding Social Problems (Seventh Edition) by Linda Mooney, David Knox, and Caroline Schacht.

Course Goals, Expectations and Grading

The fundamental goal of this course is to familiarize students with a range of social problems and the ways that sociologists approach view them. This will help students develop their capacity to analyze social phenomena more broadly and formulate their own opinions regarding important social problems.

In accordance with General Education content goals, this course is designed to help students:

1. gain understanding of how knowledge in the social sciences is created and applied.
2. learn some of the major approaches, methods, theories, and substantive findings of sociology.
3. take an informed critical stance that will allow them to weigh and apply ideas and claims from the social and behavioral sciences outside the classroom.

In accordance with General Education skill goals, this course is designed to teach student to:

1. engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing.
2. think critically and creatively.
3. locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Therefore, quizzes will focus on key concepts and terminology while exams and essays are designed to encourage students to research, analyze, and articulate cohesive arguments around particular social problems.

Weekly Blackboard online quizzes

Students will take two weekly online quizzes based on the textbook assignments for that week. Each quiz will be worth 10 points, and the best 10 grades will contribute toward the final course grade. Each student's two worst grades will be discarded.

Quizzes are only available on the week they are assigned, beginning at 12:01 am on Monday and ending at 11:59 pm on Sunday.

For full details on how and when to take the quizzes, carefully read the *Guide to Online Quizzes* in the "Assignments" folder of Blackboard.

Note: Failure to take any quiz will result in a grade of '0'. No makeup quizzes will be allowed.

Exams:

Students will take two written exams based on material covered in class. The first will be on Tuesday, May 31, during the second half of class (1:30-3:20). The second will be on Tuesday, June 21. Each will be an essay exam, will cover roughly one-half of the course, and will be worth fifty points, or one-sixth of the overall course grade.

On the Thursday preceding each exam, students will be given, and we will review, 3-5 essay questions that draw on class materials (readings, lectures, films, discussions, etc.). On the day of the exam, we will randomly select the exam question from among that list. Therefore, students should be prepared to answer all of the questions, and not attempt to guess which might be the actual exam question.

Because analysis is more important than memorization, students are free to bring whatever notes or other printed material they wish to the exam. Students may prepare complete answers to the questions ahead of time, bring them to the exam, and submit the appropriate one after the exam question is selected. However, typed answers may not exceed two sides of a page, double spaced, with one-inch margins all around.

A word to the wise: Since students have the questions ahead of time, expectations are high. Students who take time to formulate and outline an answer to each question during the week they have to study usually perform far better than those who attempt to "wing it" the day of the exam.

Position Paper:

Discussions of social problems often include debates over public policies designed to rectify or deal with them. Accompanying each social problem covered in the course, the syllabus offers a

commonly debated public policy. Each student will select a public policy from the syllabus and write a 3-4 page essay arguing a position related to that policy. Details of the assignment can be found in the Assignments folder of Blackboard.

Class Participation, Attendance & Extra Credit:

Students are expected to attend and give their full attention to class. As incentive, students with perfect attendance will be awarded 10 extra credit points. Likewise, students are encouraged to participate in class discussions, and students may improve their final grade by up to ten points by regularly and constructively contributing to class discussions.

On the other hand, distracting behavior in class will result in the loss of credit. Students are expected to give their full attention to class, and will lose 5 points if they do any of the following in class: *sleep; take out a cell phone for any reason; study for other classes; use a computer for non-class related activities (email; facebook; etc.); participate in any other non-class related activities during class.*

Final Grade Calculation:

Final grades will be based on the 300 points outlined above, as follows:

≥276	A
≥270 & <276	A-
≥264 & <270	B+
≥246 & <264	B
≥240 & <246	B-
≥234 & <240	C+
≥216 & <234	C
≥210 & <216	C-
≥195 & <210	D
<195	F

Other Issues

Students should feel free to contact me in person, by phone, or by email. Please do not wait to tell me you are having problems with assignments, readings, class materials, or any other aspect of the course. It is easiest to find solutions to problems if we address them earlier rather than later in the semester.

Students with disabilities.

If you have a disability that will require special accommodation(s) in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services. If you have already done so, you should have a letter that describes your specific needs and the necessary accommodations. Please bring that letter to my attention as soon as possible.

Course Outline, Readings & Public Policy Issues

**Note that reading assignments do not follow the order of the textbook.*

- May 10 Introductions, Overview of Syllabus & Goals of the Course
Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems
Reading: Chapter 1
- May 12 Alcohol & Drugs
Reading: Chapter 3
- Public Policy Issue: the “war on drugs”
(PAPERS ON THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT MARIJUANA
SHOULD BE LEGALIZED ARE FORBIDDEN)
- May 17 *Library Research Orientation (12-1:30) – meet in library*
Crime & Social Control
Reading: Chapter 4
- Public Policy Issue: mandatory minimum sentencing
- May 19 Class, Poverty & Inequality
Reading: Chapter 6
- Public Policy Issue: the minimum wage
- May 24 Racism, Prejudice, and Discrimination
Reading: Chapter 9
- Public Policy Issue: affirmative action
- May 26 Problems of Education
Reading: Chapter 8
- Public Policy Issue: school vouchers
- 1:45-3:20 Exam Review
- May 31 Problems Associated with the Family
Reading: Chapter 5
- Public Policy Issue: “Fixing” Social Security
*Exam 1 1:30-3:20 (questions to be made available on May 26)
- June 2 Sexism
Reading: Chapter 10

	Public Policy Issue: pay equity
June 2*	Position Paper Thesis & Annotated Bibliography Due
June 7	Problems of Work in a Global Economy (focus on U.S.) Reading: Chapter 7
	Public Policy Issue: The Employee Free Choice Act
June 9	Problems of Work in a Global Economy (focus on “Developing” countries) Reading: Chapter 12
	Public Policy Issue: international labor standards
June 14	Problems of International Health Reading: Chapter 2
	Public Policy Issue: malnutrition
June 14*	Position Paper Due in class and to Turnitin
June 16	Environmental Problems Reading: Chapter 13
	Public Policy Issue: “Cap & Trade” of carbon emissions
	1:45-3:20 Exam Review
June 21*	Exam #2 (questions to be made available on June 16)