SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines critical American social problems that threaten the very fabric of our collective life as a nation. These include problems of the economy and political system, social class and income inequality, racial/ethnic inequality, gender inequality and heterosexism, problems in education, and problems of illness and health care. The course has three main objectives. One involves providing students with the theoretical and methodological tools needed to critically analyze these problems from a sociological perspective. A second involves providing students with current data and other information documenting the seriousness of these problems. The final objective focuses on evaluating social policies addressing these problems (e.g., affirmative action, welfare-to-work programs, pay equity legislation), with special reference to questions of social justice, the common good, as well as public and individual responsibility. Class format will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, with a very strong emphasis on the latter. American Dilemmas carries writing, ethics and leadership, and cultural diversity “flags.”

This course may be used to fulfill three hours of the communication component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and personal responsibility.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Attendance: Regular attendance and punctuality are expected. You’re allowed three non-penalized absences during the semester, excluding our introductory class meeting on August 30th. Students who miss more than three classes, regardless of the reason for the absences, will have their semester grades reduced by two full percentage points for each absence beyond the three allowed. In accordance with University policy, the one exception to my attendance policy concerns absences for religious reasons, assuming that advance, written notification is given.

Role will be taken regularly, typically daily. If you’re late, it’s your responsibility to touch base with me after that class to make sure you’re counted as present. It’s also your responsibility to keep track of your absences. You can leave class if I’m not there by 9:15, unless other arrangements are announced prior to that time.

GRADING:

a) Class Participation: You’re expected to come to class prepared to answer questions about and discuss the assigned readings. You’re encouraged to share with the class newspaper clippings or other materials that are relevant to what we’re reading and talking about. Class participation will count for 20% of your semester grade.
b) **Papers**: You’ll write papers on **four** of the seven substantive topics covered in the course. Papers will run 3 ½-4 double-spaced pages. They must be typed or computer generated, with one inch margins all around. **Papers are expected to be well-written and well-proofed.** If you are unsure about your writing please touch base with the folks at the University Writing Center in PCL. Papers will be evaluated in terms of quality of research, depth of thought, strength of argument, and clarity of expression (i.e., writing style). With one exception, you’ll select the substantive areas that you want to write about. Everyone will write a paper on some aspect of the economy, which is the first substantive topic we’ll cover. You’ll revise these “economic” papers in line with my comments and resubmit them to me. The average of the first and second economic paper grades will constitute the final grade for your economic paper. If you get a 95 or higher on your initial submission, you don’t have to revise and resubmit your paper, though you can if you want to. **In all cases, late papers are penalized at a rate of one point per day, regardless of why they’re late.** If you leave a late paper in my mailbox, make sure the date is stamped on it and initialed by a representative from the Sociology Department. I cap late points at 20. **The average of your four paper grades will count for 60% of your semester grade.**

b) **Written Critique of Student Paper**: You’ll also submit a copy of your initial economic paper for peer critique. In other words, everyone will critique another student’s first economic paper. **Peer critiques will run between 1 1/2-2 double spaced pages and will address the paper’s conformity to instructions given on prompt, quality of research, depth of thought, strength of argument, and clarity of expression (i.e., writing style).** Late critiques are penalized at the rate of one point per day, regardless of why they’re late. **Your written peer critique will count for 5% of your semester grade.**

d) **Pop Quizzes**: There will be an unspecified number of pop quizzes given during the semester. They will cover the previous day's discussion and/or the current reading assignment, typically both. **Makeups will not be given for missed quizzes, regardless of why they were missed, but your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.** There is one exception to this policy. In accordance with university regulations, anyone who misses a quiz for religious reasons will be allowed to makeup the quiz, assuming advance, written notification was given. **The average of your pop quizzes will count for 15% of your final grade.**

e) **Grading Scale**:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>72.5-76.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5-92.4</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>69.5-72.4</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>86.5-89.4</td>
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<td>66.5-69.4</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>82.5-86.4</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>79.5-82.4</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>76.5-79.4</td>
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**DEADLINES:**

Friday, September 15th is the last day to drop a course for a possible refund. Tuesday, November 7th is the last day to change registration in a course to or from the pass/fail basis. It is also the last day that a student can, with the Dean’s approval, drop a course or withdraw from the university, except for urgent, substantiated, non-academic reasons.

**SUGGESTIONS AND MATTERS OF POLICY:**

a) If you run across a word you don't know, look it up. I strongly encourage using dictionaries.

b) You need to take good notes. These will help you when writing your papers.

c) There's no such thing as a stupid or inappropriate question. We’ll be discussing multiple, controversial issues. During these discussions, we will show respect for one another and for our opinions, even if we disagree
with those opinions.

d) If you miss class, make arrangements to copy another student's notes. I'll be happy to go over them with you and answer any questions you may have.

e) You're responsible for any material covered, as well as any assignments or announcements made during your absences.

f) Only one person talks at a time. Whoever "has the floor" deserves the attention of the entire class.

g) Cheating is considered a very serious matter and will be dealt with accordingly. You can view the UT Honor Code at http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html.

h) If you currently have disability accommodations, please let me know not later than Wednesday, September 6th. Please be prepared at that time, or shortly thereafter, to provide appropriate documentation. I can provide accommodations only if you give me a letter from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). You may request accommodations from SSD at 471-6259 or http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/.

i) If class is canceled unexpectedly, the scheduled activity (i.e., reading assignment) will automatically carry over to the next day of class, unless I inform you otherwise via email.

j) Make backup copies of any work done on the computer.

k) Please turn your phone off during class, unless you have a compelling reason to keep it on.

l) If you tell me that you're going to be absent on a particular date, I'll acknowledge what you tell me. Please understand, however, that this acknowledgement does not excuse the absence. It will count, assuming that it is not for religious reasons.

m) Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

n) Please familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency

o) In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

p) If you require assistance during an evacuation, please inform me of this in writing not later than Wednesday, September 6th.

q) If you observe unusual and/or problematic behavior in another student or if you are experiencing a personal problem, you may contact the Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL) at 512-232-5050.

r) If you have a license to carry a hand gun, you have a legal right to bring your concealed weapon to class. However, I would appreciate it very much if you leave your gun outside the classroom, preferably at home.
REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:

**Required:** A small packet of prepared readings purchased from Paradigm Books located in Melissa’s Boutique at 2401A Rio Grande (the corner of Rio Grande and 24th Street)

Most of your required readings will be on Canvas (C).

To maintain a focus on current issues, additional and/or alternate readings may be assigned.

**Note:** Class discussions will focus on the assigned readings for the day. The specific topics covered in the discussions will be guided by student interest.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

August 30

I. Course Introduction

II. Studying Social Problems

September 1

(no assigned reading) (lecture/discussion: What is a social problem?)

III. The Economy

6 (no assigned reading) (lecture: shift from a manufacturing to a service based economy)
8 #1
11 #2-5
13 #6-8
15 pp. 53-71 of #9

IV. Inequality, Social Class, and Poverty

18 pp. 71-106 of #9 (economic papers due)
20 PP. 106-127 of #9
22 #10-14
25 #15-17 (peer critiques due)
27 #18-19
29 #20-24

October 2 #25-28 (revised economic papers due)
4 Pp. 417-447 of #29 and #30 and 31
6 #32-33
9 Pp. 447-454 of #29 and #34

V. Politics

11 #35-38 (inequality papers due)
13 #39-41
16 #42
18 #43

VI. Race and Ethnicity

20 #44-45 (politics papers due)
23 #46-48
VII. Gender and Sexuality

November
1 #59-60 (race/ethnicity papers due)
3 #61-65
6 #66-69
8 #70-74

VIII. Problems in Education

10 #75
13 #76-78 (gender/sexuality papers due)
15 #79-81
17 #82
20 #83-85

IX. Problems of Illness and Health Care

27 #86-87
29 #88-91 (education papers due)

December
1 #92-94
4 #95-97
6 #98
8 #99
11 #100

14 (health care papers due in my mailbox in the Sociology Department (CLA 3.306) by 4:00 PM) Late papers MUST be emailed to me as an attachment in Microsoft Word or PDF format.

Required Readings

1. “Working Principles” by Robert Reich. The American Prospect Online (C)


3. “The Great Decoupling of Corporate Profits From Jobs” Blog post by Robert Reich (C)

4. “Profits, but no Jobs” The Economist (C)

5. “Report: American Workers are More Productive Than Ever, But for Less Pay” Mint Press (C)

6. “Forced to Work Off the Clock, Some Fight Back” New York Times (NYT) (C)

7. “Worked Over and Over Worked” by Steven Greenhouse (from The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the
8. “Ethan: A Product of the Service Industry” by Katherine Sobering (from Invisible in Austin, University of Texas Press) (C)


10. “Inequality: Fact Sheet” SWA (EPI) (C)

11. “CEO Pay Remains High…” (EPI) (C)

12. “CEOs Make 276 Times More Than Typical Workers” (EPI) (C)

13. “These Hedge Fund Managers Made 4.7 Million Per Day Last Year” The Washington Post (C)

14. “Where the 1% Fit in the Hierarchy of Income” (Bloomberg) (C)

15. “Rich Benefit Most From Tax Cuts” (NYT) (C)

16. “The Skewed Benefits of the Tax Cuts” (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities) (C)

17. “An Economic Analysis of Top Tax Rates Since 1945” (Congressional Research Service) (C)

18. “Wealth: Fact Sheet” SWA (EPI) (C)


20. Mobility: Fact Sheet (EPI) (C)

21. “Middle Class Shrinks Further as More Fall Out Instead of Climbing Up” (NYT) (C)

22. “America’s Shrinking Middle Class: A Close Look at Changes Within Metropolitan Areas” (Pew Research Center) (C)

23. “The Class of 2017” (EPI) (C)

24. “American Dream Fades for Generation Y Professionals” (Bloomberg) (C)

25. “Given a Shovel, Americans Dig Deeper Into Debt” (NYT) (C)

26. “Seductively Easy, Payday Loans Often Snowball” (NYT) (C)

27. “Major Banks Aid in Pay Day Loans Banned by States” (NYT) (C)

28. “Bank Fees are a Hidden Cost of Payday Loans” (NYT) (C)

29. “Chapter 7-Poverty” pp. 419-460 in SWA (EPI) (C)

30. “Poor People Don’t Plan Long Term; We’ll Only Get Our Hearts Broken” (The Guardian) (C)

32. “Selling in Minnesota” by Barbara Ehrenreich (from Nickel and Dimed, Metropolitan Books)

33. “Out of Reach 2015” (National Low Income Housing Coalition) (C)


35. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” by Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. in (Perspectives on Politics) (C)

36. “Vague Law and Hard Lobbying Add Up to Billions for Big Oil” (NYT) (C)

37. “Big Financiers Start Lobbying for Wider Aid” (NYT) (C)


39. “How Falling Behind the Jones Fueled the Rise of Trump” (NYT) (C)

40. “The Decline of Unions and the Rise of Trump” (NYT) (C)

41. “Explaining Nationalistic Political Views: the Case of Donald Trump” by Jonathan Rothwell (Gallup)

42. “When Islamaphobia Turns Violent: the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election” by Engy Abdelkander. The Bridge Initiative: A Georgetown University Research Project (C)

43. “The Age of Political Segregation” and “The Politics of Migration” by Bill Bishop (from The Big Sort, Houghton Mifflin) (P)

44. “Defining Racism: Can We Talk?” by Beverley Daniels Tatum (from Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, Worth Publishers) (P)

45. “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (from Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, Worth Publishers) (P)

46. “Does Race Matter in Neighborhood Preferences?” Results From a Video Experiment” by Marie Krysan, Mick P. Couper, Reynolds Farley, and Tyrone Forman (National Institutes of Health Public Access Author Manuscripts) (C)

47. “Affluent and Black: Still Trapped by Segregation” (NYT) (C)

48. “Critics See Efforts to Purge Minority Voters From Roles” (NYT) (C)

49. “African Americans: Fact Sheet” (SWA) (EPI) (C)

50. “Worsening Wealth Inequality by Race” (CNN Money) (C)

51. “Even After Decades of Affirmative Action…” (NYT) (C)
52. “Latinos: Fact Sheet” (SWA) (EPI) (C)
53. “Border Crossings” (IPS) (C)
54. “Xiomara: Working Toward Home” by Jennifer Scott (from Invisible in Austin, University of Texas Press) (P)
55. “Getting Immigration Reform Right” by Ray Marshall, EPI (C)
56. “For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance” (NYT) (C)
57. “The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation’s Schools” (Southern Poverty Law Center) (C)
58. “A Different Mirror” by Ronald T. Takaki (from Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology, Wadsworth)
59. “Women: Fact Sheet” (SWA) (EPI) (C)
60. “Women’s Work and the Gender Pay Gap” (EPI) (C)
61. “Maternity Leave Among OECD Countries” (EPI) (C)
62. “Shaping the Brains of Tomorrow” by Ross A. Thompson. (The American Prospect Online) (P)
63. “Starting Right” by Joan Lombardi. (The American Prospect Online) (P)
64. “The European Model” by Marcia K. Meyers and Janet C. Gornick. (The American Prospect Online) (P)
65. “Paid Leave is Good for Business” U.S. Department of Labor Blog (C)
66. “Suicides Put Light on Pressures of Gay Teenagers” (NYT) (C)
67. In Suburb, Battle Goes Public on Bullying of Gay Students (NYT) (C)
68. “High Risks Among Sexual Minority Youth” (Centers for Disease Control) (C)
69. “Gay and Lesbian High School Students Report ‘Heartbreaking’ Levels of Violence” (NYT) (C)
70. “President Calls for Constitutional Amendment Protecting Marriage” by George W. Bush (The White House) (P)
71. “The High Price of Being a Gay Couple” (NYT) (C)
72. “Judge Topples U.S. Rejection of Gay Unions” (NYT) (C)
73. “Court Rejects Same-Sex Marriage Ban in California” (NYT) (C)
74. “Supreme Court Ruling Makes Same-Sex Marriage a Right Nationwide” (NYT) (C)
75. “Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1%...” (NYT) (C)
76. “How Selective Colleges Heighten Inequality” by Robert B. Reich. (The American Prospect Online)
77. “And the Rich Get Smarter” (NYT) (C)
78. “The Cost of a College Degree Has Increased 1,120 Percent” (Huffington Post)
79. “The Great Stagnation of American Education” (NYT) (C)
80. “Colleges are Failing in Graduation Rates” (NYT) (C)
81. “Who Gets to Graduate?” (NYT Magazine) (C)
82. “America in the Global Economy” (National Center on Education and the Economy) (C)
83. “Tough Choices or Tough Times” by Marc Tucker. (National Center on Education and the Economy) (C)
84. “The Teacher Pay Gap is Wider Than Ever” (EPI) (C)
85. “Response to Marc Tucker” (EPI) (C)
86. “The Bitter Pill” (Time Magazine) (C)
87. “The EpiPen, a Case Study in Health Care System Dysfunction” (NYT) (C)
88. “The Relationship of Health Insurance and Mortality” by Steffie Woolhandler and David U. Himmelstein, (Annals of Internal Medicine) (C)
89. “Health Insurance Deductibles Outpacing Wage Increases, Study Finds” (NYT) (C)
90. “Even the Insured Can Face Crushing Medical Debt” (NYT) (C)
91. “The Erosion of Employment Based Insurance” (EPI) (C)
92. “Is the Affordable Care Act Working?” (NYT) (C)
93. “Obamacare Appears to be Making People Healthier” (NYT) (C)
94. “Obamacare Seems to be Reducing People’s Medical Debt” (NYT) (C)
95. “Six Years Into the Obama Health Care Law, Who are the Uninsured?” (NYT) (C)
96. “Who Would Have Health Insurance if Medicaid Expansion Weren’t Optional” (NYT) (C)
97. “Obamacare Options: In Many Parts of the Country, Only One Insurer Will Remain” (NYT) (C)
99. “Toward Higher Performance Health Systems: Adults Health Care Experiences in Seven Countries, 2007” by Cathy Schoen, Robin Osborn, Michelle M. Doty, Meghan Bishop, Jordon Peugh, and Nandita Murukutla. (Health Affairs) (C)
100. “National Health Insurance: Could it Work in the U.S.?” by James E. Dalen and Joseph Alpert. (The