

**SOC 218 – INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS (3)
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MANOA**

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Nandita Sharma

E-MAIL: nsharma@hawaii.edu

OFFICE: Rm. 205 Saunders Hall

OFFICE TEL.: 956-8438

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 11:00 to 12:00 PM (or by appointment)

CLASS: Mondays and Wednesdays: 12:00PM to 1:15PM

ROOM: BUSAD D105

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we examine the social construction and organization of social problems. Broadly speaking, the term “social problems” is used to describe a wide variety of phenomena (issues, situations, behaviors and ideas) that are widely perceived and labeled as problematic, and for which a solution is seen as possible and necessary. However, definitions - and perceptions - of social problems are neither uncomplicated nor unchallenged. People, as individuals and in organized groups, struggle to either criminalize or de-criminalize, regulate or de-regulate, and control opinions and behaviors on issues like abortion, prostitution, physical and mental health, homosexuality, alcohol and drug use, gambling, etc.

With this in mind, we will devote a significant part of this course to looking at some of these topics, and to the struggles that have led to them being labeled “social problems.” Questions we will explore include: Who defines what a social problem is? Why are some phenomena - and not others - labeled as problematic? And what kinds of solutions - often at the exclusion of others - are implemented to deal with them? We will also examine how ideas of “difference” and social practices of difference-making (e.g. gender, “race,” “nation,” and class) shape the process by which certain people and phenomenon come to be seen as “normal” while others are seen to be “problems.”

For sociologists, exploring the answers to these questions is just as important as the study of “social problems” themselves. Such an examination will be done within the context of the existence of fundamental issues of inequality and discrimination within the United States and around the world. Therefore, we will also pay close attention to fundamental issues such as the uneven distribution of wealth (e.g. poverty and inequality), the work done by key social institutions (e.g. definitions of family; the educational system), and to global conditions (e.g. the environment, militarism, and corporate power).

CLASS FORMAT

The course consists of lectures, small group discussions, videos/films and individual assignments. Students will have the opportunity to practice the techniques of critical reading and thinking, of expository writing, of oral expression and of working with others.

CLASS ATTENDANCE:

Your attendance is expected. You are responsible for everything that is covered during class time. Moreover, attendance is usually a good indicator of your participation in this course (i.e. interest, commitment and enthusiasm), which accounts for 10% of your grade. Just as importantly, you are expected to come *fully prepared* for each class by having completed your assigned readings and

having developed questions and comments that will allow you to be an *active* participant in class discussions.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

If you pay careful attention during class, do all of your readings, and are prepared to discuss the research presented in them, you will: have an understanding of the different ways that “social problems” have been discussed and studied; a working knowledge of the key theories explaining the emergence of “social problems”; and be able to evaluate, compare, and contrast these key theories.

REQUIRED READINGS: TBA

CLASS EVALUATION

Participation	10%
1st In-class Exam	30%
2nd In-Class Exam	30%
Critical Book Review Essay (8-10 pages)	30%