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

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OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 1:00 to 2:00 PM (or by appointment)
CLASS: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10:30 to 11:45 AM
ROOM: WEB 103

COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this course, we will 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, often in organized groups, struggle - or join forces - in attempts to criminalize or de-criminalize, regulate or de-regulate, and control opinions and behaviors on issues like abortion, prostitution, 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 labeling them as social problems. Questions we will explore include: Who defines what a social problem is? Why is that phenomenon - and not others - labeled as problematic? And what kinds of solutions - often at the exclusion of others - are implemented to deal with such condition? 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 “problems” while some do not. For sociologists, exploring the answers to these questions is just as important as the study of the 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 that need to be recognized and addressed. Therefore, we will also pay close attention to fundamental phenomena such as the distribution of wealth (e.g. poverty and inequality), the state of 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) and this 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 re-think many taken-for-granted forms of knowledge, you should have a better understanding of the different kinds of issues in which sociologists are interested by the end of the semester. As a result, you will develop a clearer and more sophisticated way of viewing these issues, and, in the process, learn to enjoy taking a sociological perspective.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**


**CLASS EVALUATION**

- Participation: 10%
- Quizzes on Course Readings (6): 30%
- Critical Book Review Essay (6-8 pages): 25%
- Final Exam: 35%