

**DAEMEN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK & SOCIOLOGY**

**SOC 209: SOCIAL PROBLEMS (SPRING 2023)  
NIAGARA FALLS HIGH SCHOOL**

Instructor	Diane R. Bessel, PhD, LMSW, CNM	Office Location	Curtis Hall – West Wing
Office Phone	716-566-7876	Zoom Meeting Room	<a href="https://daemen.zoom.us/j/8594189381">https://daemen.zoom.us/j/8594189381</a>
Email	dbessel@daemen.edu	Office Hours	By Appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In our daily lives, we are confronted with conditions, perspectives, and behaviors which undermine the well-being of members of our society. Some of these are considered sufficiently negative that they secure the attention of private citizens, policymakers, or other stakeholders who seek to develop wide-ranging solutions to address them. They are known as social problems.

Recently, we have been living through a global health pandemic that is exacerbating and laying bare many of the most pressing social problems of our time. Some are deep-seated and well-known (i.e., poverty, racism, disparities in health care) while others are only beginning to receive greater attention from the broader society (i.e., political division, lack of national unity, media/disinformation). Most problems are rooted within some combination of five (5) societal mechanisms including extensive social stratification; the exercise of power, privilege, and authority; political, technological, and economic imperatives; the declining effectiveness of institutions; and deviation from expected values and norms.

This course introduces the study of social problems. Using a sociological lens, students will learn what constitutes a social problem and answer important questions about them. What is the social problem? How is it defined and by whom? What are some of the causes of the social problem? What groups are most affected by the social problem? What are the consequences of the social problem? What can, or should, be done to resolve the social problem? Drawing on various case studies, students will gain a greater understanding of contemporary social problems and how deeply interconnected and systemic they are.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the completion of this course, students are expected to be able to:

1. Identify contemporary social problems and offer a basic analysis of them;
2. Consider how social problems and their processes interact with and/or maintain social inequalities;
3. Demonstrate an awareness of the complexities of social problems and the difficulties in resolving them;
4. Apply sociological analysis to consider possible solutions to social problems.

### **REQUIRED TEXT**

*Social Problems: Continuity and Change* (2016). Available at: [https://saylordotorg.github.io/text\\_social-problems-continuity-and-change/](https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_social-problems-continuity-and-change/)

This text was adapted by The Saylor Foundation under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial ShareAlike 3.0 License without attribution as requested by the work's original creator or licensee.

Students are **strongly encouraged** to visit the Microsoft Team Site developed for the course. The site will include supplemental materials and links to documentary films and/or short video clips from various news outlets required for the course. Please be aware that these films and video clips may tackle subjects that are controversial and/or upsetting to some and may include the use of profanity and illicit or illegal activities.

## COURSE FORMAT

This is a seated course with course content delivered through weekly in-class lectures. Readings, lecture content, video links, assignments, and/or other materials will be made available on the course's Microsoft Teams page. Updated content will typically be posted no later than 9am on Mondays and will include specific learning objectives.

Students are encouraged to log into the Microsoft Teams course site at least once a week, if not more frequently, to secure materials.

## TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Students will need access to a computer with the following to access in Daemen University course content:

- A processor of 2.4GHz or faster
- 4 GB of RAM
- A high-speed Internet connection (1.5 Mbps upload and download required; 4 Mbps or better preferred)
  - *Caution: The use of public access computers (for example, at restaurants) or employer-provided computers may result in slowness or errors (timeouts or access problems) when accessing course materials. Public access computers may restrict access to certain course materials or systems due to security limitations.*
- Monitor and video card with 1024 x 768 or greater resolution
- Keyboard and mouse (or equivalent i/o device)
- Speakers/Headphones and a Microphone
  - Noise-canceling headphones typically preferred
- A web camera capable of video web conferencing

### Operating System

- Microsoft Window 10 or newer
- Apple macOS 10.12 or newer

### Web Browser

- [Google Chrome](#), the latest version, is recommended.
- [Browser check](#) provided by Daemen's Learning Management System, Blackboard.

### Software/Applications

- [Microsoft Office](#) is available for all Daemen students via Office365.
- [Adobe Reader](#), the latest version, is recommended.
- [Antivirus software](#), updated regularly, is strongly recommended.
- [Zoom](#) will be used for any synchronous meetings and is available via phone, tablet, or computer.

### Content Filters

- Content filters may need to be disabled in order to view certain types of academic-related content.

## COMPUTER LITERACY REQUIREMENTS

At a minimum, students should have the basic computer literacy skills found in [Daemen University's Basic Computer Requirements Policy](#). These include, but are not limited to: using a keyboard and mouse; selecting, copying, and pasting text; sending and receiving email; saving and retrieving files in different formats (.docx, .pdf, .pptx., etc.); using a text editor (changing fonts, inserting links, using spell check, etc.); attaching and upload files; accessing the Internet using a web browser; and resetting basic web browser settings (clearing cache/history, cookies, etc.).

## **COURSE MEETINGS**

Class meetings will include lectures, reflecting critical content or topics of discussion, as well as interactive activities. Students will also be able to ask questions related to lectures and/or assignments via email or through the Microsoft Teams course site. Students should anticipate participating in various learning activities to assess their knowledge of content and aid in the development of critical thinking skills.

## **FACULTY COMMUNICATION**

Students with questions about course content and/or assignments are asked to contact their instructor via email for best response. Please allow the instructor up to 24 hours to respond. It is not necessary to send repeated messages to the instructor during that time. If the instructor is out of office or is otherwise delayed in responding to emails, students will receive a message indicating when they can expect to hear from the instructor.

Faculty members who are sick or otherwise unable to hold a class meeting are required to provide notice to students with as much advanced notice as soon as possible. Notice of class cancellations will be communicated via email and through the Microsoft Teams course page.

## **ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION**

Students are expected to contribute to the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning by actively and respectfully engaging with all required course content.

Students anticipating prolonged disengagement from class (three or more days) due to extended illness, injury, relocation, loss, or academic discipline, must inform their instructor with as much advanced notice as possible. The instructor will determine if an exception to class attendance and participation requirements can be made on a case-by-case basis. If deemed possible and appropriate, the instructor will discuss options for completion of assignments and/or activities. Students are responsible for any content covered during their disengagement and should arrange with their classmates or instructor to secure any notes or supporting materials.

Students who do not provide adequate notice of prolonged disengagement from the course are subject to deductions in their participation grade at the discretion of the instructor.

## **WORKLOAD**

This 3-credit course requires approximately 8-10 hours of student engagement each week for approximately 15 weeks. Due to the nature of course content, these hours may be exceeded in a given week. Student work may include but is not limited to completion of required reading, viewing, and/or audio content, participation in discussions or other interactive activities, written assignments, and online or library research.

## **INSTRUCTION METHODS**

The course will utilize a variety of teaching techniques including lectures and interactive activities. Documentary films, special readings, guest speakers, field trips, and/or supplemental materials may be selected for inclusion of specific content relative to identified topics and to foster integration.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Over the course of the semester, students will have the opportunity to explore up to ten (10) social problems identified by the class. These may include but are not limited to poverty, hunger and homelessness, racism and racial/ethnic inequality, gender-based violence, human trafficking, family disruption, interpersonal or domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, aging and ageism, disparities in healthcare, mental health/suicide, addiction, educational inequities, school shootings, gun control, crime/violence, police brutality, domestic terrorism, immigration, political divide/lack of national unity, elections/election reform, the media/disinformation, threats to democracy, natural disasters, and climate change/environment.

Students will be assessed related to each of the following:

- ✓ **Class Participation:** As this is a university-level course, students are expected to come to class prepared and to engage in meaningful and respectful discussions on the social problems being examined. Class participation will be evaluated using a rubric that measures attendance, preparation, engagement, listening skills, and behavior and will account for ten (10) points or 10% of the final course grade.
- ✓ **Discussing Social Problems Response Papers:** Weekly throughout the semester, students will have an opportunity to respond to questions posed by their instructor on the social problem being discussed. Through these response papers, students will have an opportunity to reflect on and critically engage course content, organize their thoughts, and share their perspectives in a productive manner. Students must complete a total of six (6) response papers throughout the course – if students submit more than the required number, only the six (6) highest scoring responses will be included their grade. Each response is worth up to ten (10) points for a total of 60% of the final course grade.
- ✓ **Social Problem Exploration Presentation:** Students will choose a social problem *not covered in the course* and engage in a review of scholarly resources to complete a sociological analysis on it. Students will then craft a brief presentation (10-15 minute) on their identified social problem to be shared with the class. The presentation must address each of the questions below:
  - ✓ What is the social problem? How is it defined and by whom?
  - ✓ How large is the problem? What populations/communities are directly/indirectly affected by it?
  - ✓ What are some of the causes of the social problem?
  - ✓ What are the consequences of the social problem?
  - ✓ What can, or should, be done to resolve the social problem?

Social problem exploration presentations will be worth up to thirty (30) points or 30% of the final course grade. They will be shared during the last weeks of class.

## **SUBMISSION OF WORK**

Assignments will be submitted in class on specified due dates.

If you are unable to submit your work on time due to class absence, illness, family concerns, or other emergencies, please contact the instructor to discuss the possibility of an extension with as much advanced notice as possible. The instructor will determine if an extension can be provided on a case by case basis. If deemed possible and appropriate, the instructor will discuss options for completion of assignments and/or activities.

Any assignment submitted after the deadline, without prior permission from the instructor, will be considered late at a penalty of 5% per day.

## **GRADING POLICY**

Grades are determined based on criteria articulated in the assignment description and/or rubric. This standard applies to all students in the class. While students are encouraged to ask questions about assignments, faculty are unable to review draft assignments prior to grading.

There are no individual extra credit options available for this course. Individual extra credit is discouraged because participating students are graded on different criteria, which is unfair.

There are no exceptions to the rules stated above. Students facing life issues that may hinder their performance in the course are strongly encouraged to contact their instructor as soon as possible to discuss the situation. Please do not wait until after the crisis is over or until the end of semester as instructors are typically more limited in their ability to assist students at that time.

## GRADING BREAKDOWN

Class Participation	10%	Total Points:	_____
Social Problem Response Papers	60%	Total Points:	_____
Response Paper #1		Points Earned:	_____
Response Paper #2		Points Earned:	_____
Response Paper #3		Points Earned:	_____
Response Paper #4		Points Earned:	_____
Response Paper #5		Points Earned:	_____
Response Paper #6		Points Earned:	_____
Social Problem Exploration Presentation	30%	Total Points:	_____
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total Points Earned:</b>	_____

## GRADING STANDARDS

93-100 = A	83-86 = B	73-76 = C	62 or below = F
90-92 = A-	80-82 = B-	70-72 = C-	
87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	63-69 = D	

## ACCESS TO GRADES

Instructors will strive to grade assignments within three (3) days of their submission. If this is not possible, the instructor will inform students about any delays via email and/or Microsoft Teams announcement.

Students can expect to see direct feedback from their instructor on any given assignment within two days of grade posting. This may include feedback provided via the Microsoft teams site, physical or electronic/scanned copies of assignments with instructor comments, and/or recorded (video/audio) feedback.

## GRADE APPEALS POLICY

Students who feel that they have been graded unfairly may appeal their grade to the instructor in writing (email will suffice) within two weeks of grade posting. Verbal grade appeals will not be considered. By providing a written appeal, students have the opportunity to present their case for a better grade fully, clearly, and concisely, and the instructor has the ability to reflect on their arguments.

In their appeal, students should state the specific reasons why they feel they deserve a higher score on the assignment based on the written instructions and material submitted. Instructors are unlikely to respond to arguments about the amount of time spent preparing materials or other life commitments. Instead, please identify how the assignment meets course requirements.

## OTHER GRADING POLICY

Students are responsible (financially and otherwise) for any courses included on their academic schedule. Students should pay careful attention to Daemen University or Niagara Falls High School Add/Drop and Withdrawal dates. These dates are typically communicated to students via university-wide emails.

An unauthorized withdrawal (UW) is given at mid-term to students who have not officially withdrawn from the class but are not attending.

There will be no incomplete grades given for this course.

## **SYLLABUS CHANGES**

The policies and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be communicated via Microsoft Teams course site posting and email.

## **BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS**

Daemen University expects its students to obey all applicable federal, state, and local laws; to behave in moral, ethical, civil, and courteous ways; and to observe the specific policies, procedures, regulations, rules, and standards that are promulgated by the university for conducting its own affairs.

Daemen University reserves the right to dismiss or request the withdrawal of any student whose academic standing, conduct, or manner renders his/her continued attendance undesirable. Similarly, unprofessional and/or disruptive behavior during instruction is not permissible and may, at the instructor's discretion, result in the student being asked to leave a class meeting.

Students are expected to know what conduct is permitted or prohibited by reading the [Student Handbook](#), the University Catalog, [Student Code of Conduct](#), [Residence Hall Contract](#), and all other University policies pertaining to students behavior. See the [Daemen University Student Handbook](#) for a list of the basic rules governing a person's behavior on campus and in their courses including non-discrimination. Violation(s) of these rules, or other conduct which reflects unfavorably on the student or the University, may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS**

Students are expected to demonstrate professionalism in their interactions with one another and with their faculty while in the classroom. This includes, but is not limited to, engaging in appropriate behavior, values identification, and ethical decision-making; communicating in written or verbal form in a scholarly manner; and remembering to keep confidential all issues of a personal nature discussed in class.

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY**

Daemen University Social Work & Sociology's goal is to help each student engage in self-reflection and assessment and to develop their critical thinking skills, creativity, and confidence through the exploration of course content. To ensure all participants have a chance to excel, faculty will promote the development of a learning community which seeks to preserve the freedom of thought and expression of all its members. A culture of civility and mutual respect that honors the rights, safety, dignity, and worth of every individual is essential to preserve such freedom.

Daemen Social Work & Sociology affirms respect for the rights and well-being of all members by:

- rejecting bigotry, discrimination, violence, or intimidation of any kind;
- maintaining a practice of personal and professional integrity and expecting it from others; and
- promoting the diversity of opinions, ideas, and backgrounds that is the lifeblood of the academic experience.

Daemen Social Work & Sociology students must also commit to creating a learning context in which understanding and respect for diversity and difference is practiced including:

- Being open to the views of people different from themselves by recognizing that each and every voice is important and brings with it a wealth of experiences, values, and beliefs;
- Honoring the uniqueness of classmates and appreciating opportunities to learn from each other; and
- Respecting opinions of others and refraining from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind.

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

Students are encouraged to participate in scheduled appointments with their instructor should they experience difficulty with course content, materials, or assignments.

In addition, the Daemen University Student Success Center is a collaborative of offices on campus that offer a wide range of assistance including academic advisement, career services, leadership development, and academic coaching to help students improve their overall performance. Assistance related to improved study skills, writing skills, note taking, and time management is available through The Learning Center. These services are available free to all Daemen University students by calling 716-839-8228.

Reference librarians are also available to assist students with research and use of APA formatting. Students can schedule appointments with reference librarians using this link: [Librarian Research Assistance](#).

### **POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY**

From [Daemen University's Student Handbook Section Seven: Academic Policies](#)

Academic dishonesty, of which, cheating and plagiarism are the most common examples, is a serious violation of the principles of higher education. Daemen University takes the position that academic honesty is to be upheld with the highest degree of integrity. The University has a responsibility to support individual thought and the generation of new ideas. This cannot be done when violations of academic honesty go unchallenged.

Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to:

- use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations;
- dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; or
- the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the University faculty or staff.

Examples of plagiarism includes, but are not limited to:

- the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement;
- the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling or distributing of term papers or other academic materials; or
- submitting previously or simultaneously submitted work - in whole or in substantial part - from another course for academic credit in a second course, without prior and expressed consent of the instructor.

In an instance where there has been a violation of the principles of academic honesty, the instructor may choose to follow one or more possible alternatives including but not limited to: (1) automatic failure of the work; (2) automatic failure of the entire course; (3) recommending expulsion from the degree program; or (4) recommending expulsion from the University. The student may appeal the instructor's determination in accordance with the Grade Appeal Procedure.