COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the modern world social problems have become more complex, challenging, and far-reaching than in the past. Ours is a time of uneasiness as we face such vexing crises as climate change, political and cultural polarization, health-related pandemics, as well as growing inequality – both at the national and international level. These issues necessitate that we adopt a global approach to the origins and implications of social problems for societies, communities and everyday life.

This course will draw from a variety of sociological perspectives to analyze both the objective conditions of social problems, and – through personal narratives – how we experience these problems. We will use our Semester at Sea journey to investigate the many ways social problems manifest in local contexts and how we, as a human community, collectively struggle to find solutions. Social problems do not simply arise from some mystical state-of-nature, rather they are socially constructed products of human activity. Consequently, the recognition and desire to seek solutions is highly contested, with the debate over social problems interwoven into the very fabric of modern life. The hope of this course is that we embrace our responsibility as world citizens by taking-on the challenges of today’s social problems as our life’s work.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify and define what social problems are and the ways sociology approaches and addresses these problems
2. Become aware of the global complexities associated with today’s social problems
3. Recognize the key historical process and contemporary social institutions that contribute to social problems
4. Evaluate the consequences of social problems by assessing who are the winners and losers
5. Be willing to participate in the challenge of confronting the critical social problems we face today and in the future
REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND SUPPLIES

AUTHOR: Richard H. Robbins & Rachel Dowty Beech
TITLE: Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism
PUBLISHER: Pearson
ISBN: 9780134732794
Available as an ebook
DATE/EDITION: 2018/7th edition (a la cart edition)

AUTHOR: Mary Robinson
TITLE: Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future
PUBLISHER: Bloomsbury Publishing
ISBN: 9781408888438
Available as an ebook
DATE/EDITION: 2018/Paperback

Students are required to purchase a Field Notebook for the course.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Hamburg, Germany – September 9

A1—September 11: Course Introduction
Welcome to Social Problems: Course, Field Class Overview, and expectations
Critical Questions:
1. How does your social and historical location inform what is perceived as a social problem?
Assignments: What is a Social Problem?

A2—September 13: Situating Social Problems
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 1: Constructing the Consumer
Critical Questions:
1. What is important about becoming a consumer to the understanding of social problem?
2. How does media frame the way we see social problems – can media illuminate problems?

Casablanca, Morocco – September 15-19
A3—September 20: Class and Violence
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 2: The Laborer in the Culture of Capitalism
Critical Questions:
   1. How is the struggle against violence connected with the culture of capitalism and what is unique about this relationship in the Arab context?
   2. What does comparative data contribute to how we see social problems?

A4—September 22: Historical Backdrop to Today’s Problems
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 3: The Rise and Fall of the Merchant, Industrialist, and Financier
Critical Questions:
   1. How do we place social problems in historical context?
   2. What role has Africa played in global social problems?
Assignments: Why are indigenous and marginalized peoples so vulnerable to the impacts of social problems?

A5—September 24: Nations, Problems and Africa
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 4: The Nation-State in the Culture of Capitalism
Critical Questions:
   1. What role have nations played in perpetuating and overcoming social problems?
   2. What is the link between conflict and climate change?
Assignments: Can war solve social problems?

A6—September 26: Climate Change as a Wicked Problem
Readings: Robinson, Prologue: Marrakech & Chapter 1: Understanding Climate Justice and Chapter 2: Learning from Lived Experience
Critical Questions:
   1. Who is the recipient of climate justice?
2. How can the approach to water vulnerability in Ghana be assessed?

Takoradi, Ghana — September 27-28
Tema, Ghana — September 29-October 1

A7—October 3: First Course Exam
Assignments: In Class Exam – ALL

Community Programming — October 4 (No Class)

A8—October 6: Population & Migration - the Problem of Who, Where & How Many
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 5: Population Growth, Migration, and Urbanization
Robinson, Chapter 7: Migrating with Dignity

Critical Questions:
1. Are there too many of us on the planet?
2. How does migration and lack of mobility contribute to social problems?
Assignments: Film: GMO OMG (Watch in class)

A9—October 8: Disease and the Social Environment
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 8: Health and Disease

Critical Questions:
1. How can health and wellness be an indicator for social problems
2. What have been responses to the growth in global health-related issues?

Cape Town, South Africa — October 9-14

A10—October 16: The Nexus of Environment & Consumption
Readings: Robbins & Beech: Chapter 7: Environment and Consumption

Critical Questions:
1. Is the environment and consumption one of the great dilemmas today?
2. How do we address the rise of a capitalist system that promotes global consumption?
3. Who wins and losses in the consumption game?
Assignments: Film: This Changes Everything (Watch in class)

A11—October 18: Grappling with Declining Biodiversity

Critical Questions:
1. Can the planet sustain us?

Assignments: Measuring your ecological footprint

A12—October 20: We’re Losing Cultural Knowledge
Readings: Robinson, Chapter 4: Vanishing Language, Vanishing Lands

Critical Questions:
1. Is the global tourist industry sustainable?
2. Should Antarctica be opened for tourism?

Port Louis, Mauritius — October 22-24

A13—October 25:
Readings: Robinson, Chapter 3: The Accidental Activist and Chapter 5: A Seat at the Table

Critical Questions:
1. Who are the climate heroes (or heroines) today?

Assignments: Film: Climate Refugees (Watch Prior to class)

A14—October 27: The Faces at the Bottom of the Global Well
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 6: Hunger, Poverty, and Economic Development

Critical Questions:
1. What is precarity in social problems?
2. Are all solutions to alleviating poverty laudable – how do we decide?

Assignments: Sex-Work – Take a Position.

Community Programming — October 28 (No Class)

A15—October 30: Who’s Going to Step-Up?
Readings: Robinson, Chapter 6: Small Steps Towards Equality

Critical Questions:
1. Can we make climate change a small problem?
2. Who is the most climate vulnerable?
3. What happens when the planet is ‘feed-up’?
Mumbai, India — November 1-6

A16—November 7: Struggling to Solve social Problems
Critical Questions:
1. How and where does resistance to social problems come from?
2. What role do social movements play in social problems?

A17—November 9: China as a Global Actor
Critical Questions:
1. Climate Science: Is it effective in combating social problems?
2. Where does China fit in to our contemporary understanding of social problems?

Reflection & Study Day — November 11 (No Class)

A18—November 12: Course Presentations and Exam Two (for some)
Assignments: Group Presentation #1; Other Half of Class Take-Home Exam

A19—November 14: Race, Ethnicity and Social Problems
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 9: Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Conflict
Critical Questions:
1. Why does race remain a persistent terrain for social problems?
Assignments: Pluralistic or ethnonational society – A Debate

Port Klang/Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia — November 15-19

A20—November 21: Resistance Isn’t Futile
Readings: Robbins & Beech, Chapter 10: Peasant Adaptation and Resistance in the Face of Uncertainty
Critical Questions:
1. Power-plays and resistance, why is water so important?

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam — November 22-27
A21—November 29: Climate Change... Again!
Critical Questions:
1. Can peasants be the global revolutionary vanguard?

A22—December 1: Lifting All Boats – Can We?
Readings: Robinson, Chapter 8: Taking Responsibility and Chapter 9: Leaving No One Behind
Critical Questions:
1. How do we become one another’s stewards?
2. Where and how do we organize to confront social problems?
Assignments: Film: It’s a Girl (Watch in Class)

Xiamen, China — December 3-8

A23—December 9: Solutions Both Current and Future
Critical Questions:
1. How do we assess possible solutions to social problems?
2. Who is accountable?

A24—December 11: States Are Less Helpful Then Before
Critical Questions:
1. Right-wing populism is not just a U.S. phenomenon
Assignments: Film Review Due.

Busan, South Korea — December 12-15

Study Day — December 17 (No Class)

A25—December 18: Final Exam (Need I Say More!)
Assignments: Group Presentation #2; Other Half of Class Take-Home Exam

Arrive Shanghai, China — December 22

FIELD WORK
Semester at Sea® field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of
the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Proposed Field Class Description (for two ports)

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class. Failure to attend the field class will result in the loss of 20% of your total course grade.

Proposal Title #1: Confronting the Challenge of Climate-Driven Sea-level Rise
Country: China (Xiamen)
Idea: Across the globe, climate change is one of the most pressing social problems facing societies. Specifically, sea-level rise and extreme water events such as storm surges are major hazards for low-lying coastal regions and cities. Worldwide, people are on the move as a result of these environmental disruptions. The United Nations estimates overall migration today to be at one billion people, while the World Bank predicts that by 2050 there could approach 200 million “climate refugees” annually (World Bank 2018). With sea-levels rising at faster than predicted rates, one such “hotspot” for climate refugees is South Asia. China’s vulnerability to sea-level rise is especially acute given that more than 550 million people live in China’s coastal provinces – one of the world’s most densely populated regions (China’s Third National Assessment Report on Climate Change 2015). Today, more than 145 million residents are directly at risk from rising sea-levels, especially in the major low-lying cities of Shanghai, Qingdao and Xiamen. An extreme sea-level rise of about four meters could impact up to 800,000 residents of Xiamen alone, with devastating consequences for the ecological, social and economic life of the city (Lilai et.al. 2016).

This field class involves a visit to the Xiamen Meteorological Bureau Dormitory to speak with climatologists, city planners, and government officials about the strategic decisions being taken in the face of climate-driven sea-level rise. Specifically, we will focus on the recently implemented People-Oriented Emergency Response Mechanism (POERM), which was designed by the Chinese government in 2006, and implemented in Xiamen beginning in 2016. POERM was used effectively to save lives and reduce losses when super typhoon Meranti, the strongest storm in 21 years, hit Xiamen in September 2016.

Objectives:
1. Apply a sociological understanding to the study of social problems by considering the issue of rising sea-levels facing Xiamen, China.
2. Become aware of how interconnected we are when considering such complex global problems like climate change.
3. Recognize the context within which social problems emerge, and the contemporary actors and institutions that attempt to address these problems.
4. Evaluate who the winners and losers are when we attempt to “solve” social problems?
5. Acknowledge our personal and collective responsibility for problems like climate change, and the need to actively confront this challenge.

Proposal Title #2: Confronting the Challenge of Climate-Driven Sea-level Rise
Country: Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City)
Idea: Across the globe, climate change is one of the most pressing social problems facing societies. Specifically, sea-level rise and extreme water events such as storm surges are major hazards for low-lying coastal regions and cities. Worldwide, people are on the move as a result of these environmental disruptions. The United Nations estimates overall migration today to be at one billion people, while the World Bank predicts that by 2050 there could approach 200 million “climate refugees” annually (World Bank 2018). With sea-levels rising at faster than predicted rates, one such “hotspot” for climate refugees is South Asia. With over 2,000 miles of coastline, Vietnam is considered one of the top 10 countries most at risk, from extreme weather events and rising sea-levels, related to climate change. This dubious global ranking is further compounding by the fact that Vietnam ranks fifth in terms of the proportion of the population living in low-elevation coastal zones. Most severe amongst these regions is the Mekong and Red River deltas. Recently, the Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) noted that a one meter rise in sea-level would flood approximately 39% of the Mekong River Delta region (MONRE 2016).

This field class involves a visit to the Center of Water Management and Climate Change (WACC) in Ho Chi Minh City (http://wacc.edu.vn/). WACC was founded in 2011 under a bilateral agreement between Vietnam National University (Ho Chi Minh City) and the Netherlands. WACC’s activities include research, training and consultancy regarding water and climate change in Southeast Vietnam. Specifically, WACC’s “Dynamic Research for Sustainable Life” is a vision for strengthening the adaptability of the poor in communities facing water-related crisis from climate change in the Mekong Delta. Their objective is to enhance the collaboration of governmental groups, NGO, and commercial businesses to find sustainable solutions to the climate-challenges that the Mekong Delta is facing.

Objectives:
1. Apply a sociological understanding to the study of social problems by considering the issue of rising sea-levels facing Vietnam and the Mekong Delta.
2. Recognize the importance of collaborative efforts between critical actors (such as community members, universities, NGOs, and businesses) that are necessary to address the complexities of modern social problems.
3. Become aware of how interconnected we are when considering such global problems like climate change.
4. Evaluate who the winners and losers are when we attempt to “solve” social problems?
5. Acknowledge our personal and collective responsibility for problems like climate change, and the need to actively confront this challenge.

Field Class Evaluation

Your Field Class grade will be determined in two ways. First, your attentiveness and active engagement while in the field. Here demeanor, participation, and integration of course material will be held in high regard. More substantially, the second determination will be based on producing a five-page paper. As true with all the course papers, this paper should meet the formatting specifications for course (to be discussed in class). The paper will have three aspects to it. First, once you leave the field write a three page reflection on what you learned based on your observations and engaging questions. Second, from this reflection generate 2 open-ended questions to be used to interview someone else from the class.
These questions should be derived from your reflective conclusions, such as: Given the complexity of social problems, how do people become aware of them? Don’t forget to include your original questions in the final paper. Using these questions, seek-out a classmate and interview them (I will also make in-class time for interviews to take place). Based on the data gathered, the final part of your paper should be a two-page summary of the similarities and differences between your original reflection and what your interviewee said – what’s interesting here? The Field Class paper is due within 48 hours of departure from the Field Class port country. Your Field Class participation and Paper together are worth 20% of your overall course grade.

Independent Field Assignments

Along with our focused Field Class discussed above, you will also be visiting nine other global locations. While you are expected to be engaged with the learning process in all your stops, observing and documenting your experiences in a Field Notebook; for the “Independent Field Assignment” portion of this course, you are asked to pick two additional (that is, Non-Field Class) port stops for special scholarly attention. [PLEASE NOTE: Due to its proximity to Semester at Sea’s Final Exam day Busan, Korea is not a port-stop available for this assignment.]. The Independent Field Assignment entails a concentrated and concerted effort to capture what you consider to be one central social problem in each location. Given that social problems are not always evident, your assessment should be derived based on the overall time you spend off-ship in the region/country.

This evaluation should involve not only careful observation and detailed entries in your Field Notebook, but – where appropriate and safe – engaging with the people you meet in these port-stops (this ought to be true for all our Semester at Sea encounters!). PLEASE NOTE: As you know by now, social problems are inherently contentious, do not put yourself or those you talk with at risk by bringing-up sensitive or overly controversial issues/topics. That said, however, ask a lot of questions. Being inquisitive, curious and interested in the lives of others is a sign of respect and critical to learning. To assist with directing your investigation in the two selected ports, address the following questions in your final write-up, keeping in mind that those you encounter can also assist – where appropriate – in answering these questions.

1) What social problem have you identified and why do you consider it a problem?
2) What is the broader social context within which this social problem developed?
3) In your observations of the physical and social setting, discuss how the social problem becomes evident to you (that is, what do you see people doing and the environment they are living in that illustrates the social problem). Be detailed and creative in your assessment here.
4) Finally, what sociological approach to the study of social problems best explains this problem, and what solution does this approach offer?

Your Independent Field Assignment paper should be four pages in length and informed by your diligent notes taken in the field. In addition to answering these five questions for each site, please provide as an “appendix” a two-page sampling from your Field Notebook observations. The appendix is not included in the paper’s page-length. Your Independent Field Assignment paper is worth 15% of your overall course grade and is due within two
class meetings of exiting your final field site (that is, within 48 hours after exiting your second chosen port stop).

**Group Photo Presentation Project**

In addition to exams, there will be a group-based photo project and presentation. This is a project draws on collaborative teamwork to produce a sociologically-informed photo documentary of social problems in the field. Groups of 3-4 will be formed in day one or two of the course and will decide on your problem-of-choice (with approval). Possible topics include social inequality, environmental degradation, violence & war, migration & population, struggles against social problems, discrimination and prejudice against marginalized populations, attempts at finding social problem solutions, and many others. PLEASE NOTE: You can modify your topic as we move through our port stops, just let me know of the group change. Using a digital camera or phone, you will be asked to gather visual evidence indicating your particular social problem across three of the ports visited depending on whether you present on the 18th class-day or the 25th. Those presenting on the 18th day will choose three ports from: Casablanca; Ghana; Cape Town, & Mauritius; while those presenting on the 25th day will select from: Mumbai, Kuala Lumpur; Ho Chi Minh City; and Xiamen. [PLEASE NOTE: Due to its proximity to Semester at Sea’s Final Exam day Busan, Korea is not a port-stop available for this assignment.]

Prior to taking photos, please review and make yourself familiar with the “Ethical Photography” section of the Semester at Sea Voyager’s Handbook. Your group will compile approximately 15-20 photos for your presentation, the format & presentation length will be determined in class. The presentation should employ a comparative approach that thematically pulls together your group’s understanding of the human costs of social problems, an understanding informed by the course material. While constrained by time, the presentation should be energetic and creative. Have fun while teaching the rest of us what you have learned about social problems. As part of your grade a collectively produced three page group paper should be turned in at the time you present, which – in written fashion – summarizes your conclusions. Additionally, each group member will evaluate the contribution of others, to ensure a shared and equitable distribution of labor. The Group Photo Project is worth 20% of your overall course grade.

**NON-FIELD BASED COURSE WORK**

**Course Exams**

Each student will take a total of two exams. The first exam will be administered to everyone in-class on the 7th class meeting. It will consist of short answer essays, terminology and definition matching, and multiple-choice questions. The second exam will consist of a five-page take-home essay exam. When your second exam is due will be determined by when your Group Photo Project presentation takes place (see above). For instance, those presenting their photos during the 18th class-meeting will turn-in a take home essay exam on the 25th day of the class (SaS Final Exam Day), while those presenting their photo project on the Final Exam Day will turn-in a take home essay exam on the 18th day of the course. In
short, on the 18th and 25th class meetings, half of the class will either be presenting their Group Photo Project or handing in an essay exam. The take-home essay exams will be designed to allow you to synthesize and display your understanding of the course material by integrating into your essay your experiences while in port. Collectively, both exams are worth 30% of your overall course grade.

**Collaborative Learning Exercises**

Throughout the semester there will be a series of short in-class collaborative exercise designed to apply course material and stimulate discussion. In addition, these exercises will assess whether the material for that day has been read, along with giving credit for course attendance. Collectively, these collaborative exercises are worth 10% of your overall course grade.

**Film Review**

There will be a total of four films shown over the semester. You are asked to **pick one** film and review it. Your review should discuss three points: 1) how the film fit into the course material; 2) what important ideas were illuminated or enhanced by/in the film and; 3) whether you considered the film relevant and helpful to your understanding of social problems. Your film review should not exceed two pages in length, is due the class period before our final meeting (but may be submitted anytime upon completion) and is worth 5% of your overall course grade.

**METHODS OF EVALUATION**

Field Class = 20% [Please Note: Failure to attend the Field Class will result in the loss of 20% of your course grade.]
Independent Field Assignment = 15%
Group Photo Presentation Project = 20%
Exam One = 15%
Exam Two = 15%
Collaborative Learning Exercises (in class) = 10%
Film Review = 5%

**GRADING SCALE**

The following Grading Scale is utilized for student evaluation. Pass/Fail is not an option for Semester at Sea® coursework. Note that C-, D+ and D- grades are also not assigned on Semester at Sea® in accordance with the grading system at Colorado State University (the SAS partner institution).

Pluses and minuses are awarded as follows on a 100% scale:

| Excellent | Good | Satisfactory/Poor | Failing |
ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea® classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor’s supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea® provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A letter from students’ home institutions verifying the accommodations received on their home campuses (dated within the last three years) is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage. More details can be found within the Course Registration Packet, as posted to the Courses and Field Classes page no later than one month prior to registration.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one’s own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea® courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: “I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment.”

RESERVE BOOKS FOR THE LIBRARY
None

FILMS

TITLE OF FILM: GMO OMG
DISTRIBUTOR: MPI Home Videos/2014

TITLE OF FILM: This Changes Everything
DISTRIBUTOR: The Message Productions/2015

TITLE OF FILM: Climate Refugees
DISTRIBUTOR: Video Project/2010

TITLE OF FILM: It’s A Girl
DISTRIBUTOR: Shadow Line Films/2014

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

None

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

None