

Sociology 20, sec. 51Z CRN 13502
SOCIAL PROBLEMS
De Anza College Summer, 2023

Instructor: Kamau Birago, Ph.D.
E-mail: biragokamau@fhda.edu

Classroom: Online
Classes: Asynchronous via Canvas

Canvas Office Hours: Fri 10:00-Noon

Text: **Best, Joel** *Social Problems* 4th ed. (Paperback – yes, the edition matters)
(Kindle option available)
978-0393533040

Please read this syllabus thoroughly and carefully at the beginning of the course and consult it throughout the summer.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (Required by Division)

Student Learning Outcome: The student will develop a sociological imagination, which is the ability to evaluate the effects of cultural, structural, historical, geographical, institutional and stratification processes on groups and individuals, including one's own experiences.

Student Learning Outcome: The student will distinguish the sociological perspective from other sciences, including its methods, theories and empathetic standpoint.

MORE COURSE OBJECTIVES

This is a course designed to give the student who takes it the ability to:

- (A) Appreciate the difficulty in establishing the meaning of a “social problem”;
- (B) Understand and clearly communicate to others the distinctiveness of a *sociological* approach to social problems;
- (C) Understand and clearly communicate to others the social processes through which conditions come to be regarded as social problems;
- (D) Apply sociological analyses to communicate how social problems differentially impact inter- and intra-national collectives;
- (E) Understand the intended and unintended social, economic and political consequences of attempts by various social entities to articulate, respond to, and/or solve social problems;
- (F) Use sociological analysis to think critically about some of the domestic and global social problems we are currently facing (or not facing) and how one might go about effecting social change.

Sociology Department Statement on Feedback: The Sociology Department understands that students can interpret the feedback they get from teachers in a lot of different ways and that sometimes it can be difficult to receive critical feedback. We have high expectations for the quality of your work in our classes. We want you to know that when we give feedback, it is because we believe in your ability to reach those expectations. We believe in your intellectual abilities and in your desire to grow as a student. The goal of our feedback is to help you develop your skills.

Organization of Classes: In a fully asynchronous course, there are no scheduled face-to-face meetings between students and instructor nor among students. In essence, such a course is self-

teaching with guidance/assistance by an instructor. The student's motivation is the key to her/his success in such a course.

This online class will be taught using the Canvas course management system. If you have never taken an online course, and/or if you have never taken a course in Canvas, you will need to, as soon as possible, familiarize yourself with doing so. Information about Canvas and Online Education Orientation can be found in Canvas on the Student Resources page: <https://deanza.instructure.com/courses/3382>. The Student Online Resources hub with extensive information and tips can be found at deanza.edu/online-ed/students/remotelearning. I have also included these and other introductory possibilities in the Pre-Class Module.

You access Canvas courses by clicking on Canvas on the De Anza College Home Page (www.deanza.edu) or through your Portal. When you do so you'll see your Dashboard, a list of De Anza College Canvas courses that you have been enrolled in. (You may not be able to see our course until Monday, July 3.) You will then be able to click on our course, after which you will be taken to the course homepage. To the left of the text of the homepage will be two lists. The list closest to the text is Course Navigation (which includes Home, Syllabus, Modules, etc.). The list to the left of Course Navigation is Global Navigation (which includes Dashboard, Courses, Calendar, etc.).

The six weeks of the course are organized into the six Modules organized in our Canvas course. My expectation is that students will complete 1 Module per week. Students are to work in order through successive Modules to complete the course. Each Module (except for Modules 3 and 6, which are Exam weeks) will consist of two assigned readings, two lectures to be viewed for that Module, and two R/Rs (see below) to be submitted when the student has completed the readings and viewed the lectures. The assigned readings may be from the textbook and/or from non-text sources. Non-text readings are listed as Pages within the Modules. It is expected that the student will first do the reading, then watch the lecture, and finally write and submit the R/R, in that order (e.g., do Reading 1.1, view Lecture 1.1, Submit R/R 1.1, then do Reading 1.2,...). An R/R Schedule is accessible in the Pre-Class Module.

Midterm and Final Exam: You will take the Midterm and the Final Exam within Canvas. Both are *requirements* for passing the course. You can access them, after I have opened them up for you to access, by clicking Quizzes in the Course Navigation menu. In addition, instructions for taking these exams will be provided in the Modules. Both the Midterm and the Final Exam will have time limitations (which you will find in their respective instructions pages). Exams are to be taken **at a single setting** – once you begin you must continue until you are finished or until the time limit for the exam runs out. **The dates for the Midterm and the Final Exam are set – you must take them on those dates whether you have completed your preparation or not.**

Course Requirements and Grading:

- I. Discussion Participation- 25%
- II. Reading & R/R's- 25%
- III. Midterm Exam- 25% (administered Fri 7/21)
- IV. Final Exam- 25% (administered Fri 8/11)

For your course grade, I follow conventional grade point procedures: A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, and so on. So, for example, if you receive the highest possible grade for your Discussion Participation, you would get a 4.0 for that course requirement. Secondly, I multiply your grade point for each requirement by its percentage of the course grade (i.e., by .25). Thus, to continue the example, your Discussion Participation 4.0 will be multiplied by .25, giving you a 1.0 for your final Discussion Participation score. Notice that if you received a 4.0 for each of the four requirements, you'd earn a 1.0 for each, and $1.0 \times 4 = 4.0$, or an A. This math establishes your base grade which will be the minimum grade you will receive, but if I observe that your growth over the course merits it, I reserve the right to adjust your final grade upward. Final grades are on the conventional scale wherein in A = 3.85+, an A- = 3.5 to 3.849, a B+ = 3.15 to 3.49, a B = 2.85 to 3.149, etc. **Notice that a student who excels in three of the four course requirements but scores a zero on the fourth can achieve a maximum course grade of 3.0.**

Instructor Expectations: There are several expectations I have for students in this course, as follows:

i) *courtesy.* It is expected that all students will be respectful toward one another and the professor (and vice versa). In an asynchronous online class, this means in what we write.

ii) *special needs.* If you have any physical, mental, or other disability, either hidden or visible, which may require classroom, test-taking, or other reasonable modifications, please email me as soon as possible. You must also be in contact with Disability Support Services. Please refer to the Canvas Page: Student Support and Disability Services in the Pre-Class Module.

iii) *participation.* In a fully asynchronous course such as ours, a significant percentage of the Participation grade will be based on the quantity and quality of your participation in our class discussion, which is accessed by clicking on Discussions in the Course Navigation menu, and then clicking on Discussion. The discussion is to be limited to the sociology you are learning about. If you wish to interact with your classmates about non-sociological matters, (such as exchanging information about each other or interests with each other) please use Chat rather than Discussions.

iv) *communication.* Feel free to initiate communication with me at any time throughout the course. One-on-one “online face-to-face meetings” can be arranged during my office hours (see the entry in the Pre-Class Module) and you can always contact me via email concerning your ongoing experiences in the course. This includes any problems you’re having with Canvas, with the readings, any issues you’re having with me, or anything else. Instructors tend to look favorably upon demonstrations of student commitment to *learning*, beyond the utilitarian objective of getting good grades.

v) *independent individual work.* R/Rs and exams must be free from plagiarism, joint composition from classmates or others, and any other form of cheating. Violation will result in a zero for that assignment, and the student will be referred to Dr. Elvin T. Ramos, the Social Sciences/Humanities Dean, for disciplinary action.

vi) make up/revision/extra credit policy. I do not accept make up work, revisions, or allow make up exams. I also do not accept extra credit work.

vii) being informed. As a college student, and especially one taking a sociology course, I expect you to be aware of what's going on in the world. Please watch the world/national news daily (or obtain comparable awareness by another means). Try to make connections between current events and what you are learning in class.

viii) R/Rs. R/Rs are the main means you have of demonstrating that you are **thinking about and learning** the sociology of social problems that you are being introduced to. In a fully asynchronous course such as ours, R/Rs refer to your reflections on both the Module Lectures and the Module Readings. Each Module has its R/R assignment and deadlines listed in the Module entry. In my experience, there is a positive correlation between writing good R/Rs and performing well on exams. (An example of a good R/R is provided in the Pre-Class Module.)

R/R's are not summaries, nor are they opinions (e.g., "I like...", "I agree with...", etc.) nor are they reports (e.g., "I learned about this, I learned about that...", etc.). They are exercises in **critical thinking** (see, Page: Critical Thinking in the Pre-Class Module). They may be critiques, questions about, or attempted applications of what you've read – as a whole, the single thing you found most compelling, or anything between these. They may also ask about something that you're not sure you understood, but you must include what your understanding *is*. Your R/Rs should be long enough for me to assess how your brain is processing the new sociology that you are being introduced to (between a paragraph and a page in length).

You may write about one interesting thing that stood out for you in the reading. On the other hand, you may write about the entire reading taken as a whole. Remember to **communicate, don't regurgitate**. Before you write, answer the following questions for yourself: What did I learn about *sociology of social problems* in this reading? What did I learn about the associated *theme* from the readings? What did I find confusing or questionable from the readings, and how can I *demonstrate* this to Professor B. beyond just stating it? What did I learn that was interesting, surprising, eye-opening, etc. from this reading? **Do not worry about being "right" or "wrong"**: That is not the point of the R/R. [Do not base what you write on the *examples* the textbook uses to illustrate a particular concept (these are any parts of a page that is not in the main text)].

R/R's will not receive grades. I will read and evaluate them, then assign to them one of the following designations: $\sqrt{+}$ means you've posed an interesting and provocative R/R, $\sqrt{}$ means you've posed an adequate one, $\sqrt{-}$ means your R/R was inadequate. (The ability to express your thinking through written communication is necessary: If this is something that is difficult for you, you should take steps to improve your writing skills, including but not limited to the writing resources available to you at De Anza.) You may or may not receive a comment about your R/R, but a comment is in no way related to the evaluation of its quality. I expect that your R/Rs will improve over the course as you get accustomed to writing them. **I would prefer that one R/R is submitted within a single email message, rather than multiples of them submitted in a single message.**

If you are caught violating any of the course policies once, I will report your violation to Dean

Ramos for possible disciplinary action. A **second violation** will result in **(1)** a second notification to Dean Ramos; **(2)** you will be prohibited from participating in class for two classes after the violation (adding two unexcused absences to your course record); **(3)** I will file an Advocate report with the Dean of Student Development, Michelle LeBleu Burns; and **(4)** you will be required to meet with Dean LeBleu Burns, who will put a letter in your file and make a determination about your continuing in the class. I don't know how I can make it any clearer about how seriously I take these expectations. Yet, there are often some students who just don't seem to get it. Please don't be one of them this summer.

Exceptions to Instructor Expectations: If you have a legitimate and unavoidable reason for not being able to comply with *any* of the above expectations, then (1) we should discuss it, via email, as soon as possible, and (2) do not sign and turn in your Syllabus Acknowledgment until after we have discussed it.

If You Need Help: The Student Success Center offers individual and group tutoring, as well as several types of workshops. Students who use its services succeed at much higher rates than those who do not. As you may know, De Anza now also offers free online tutoring with Smarthinking, available to all students via MyPortal. For more information, go to www.deanza.edu/studentsuccess.

Your Instructor: Kamau Birago, Ph.D. You may call me Professor Birago (pronounced bĭ-RAH-gō) or Professor B. I'm aware that some students in past courses have concluded that I am "intimidating" after reading my syllabus, but these students have made an incorrect inference. The correct inference is, simply, "Professor B. is trying to provide me with all of the information I need in order to be successful in his class this summer." The most efficient means of communication with me outside of office hours is via email. More about me is to be found in our Homepage in Canvas, and if that isn't enough, just ask!

COURSE SCHEDULE

As mentioned, you proceed week-by-week through the Modules. Again, **please depend only on the Modules, not the Calendar nor the To Do list, to guide you.**

Final Exam: Friday August 11 via Canvas
Don't forget to submit the Required Post-Exam Statement via Email

After completely reading this syllabus and when Canvas opens up, you must copy, fill out and submit via email the Syllabus Acknowledgment, located in the Pre-Class.