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HTS 2016- HP Syllabus

Social Issues and Public Policy (3 credits)
Fall 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Amy D'Unger, Ph.D.

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General Course Information

Description

This course will examine a variety of issues considered to be “social problems.” In order to do so, we must first understand how particular issues come to be considered “problems” in the first place, while other issues do not. We will begin with the critical constructionist perspective, which centers around one question: why do we recognize some social conditions as “problems” while simultaneously ignoring other conditions? Additionally, why do we recognize some social conditions as problems at one time, while during a later period we do not consider them problems?

After examining how things become social problems, we will be considering a variety of social issues in detail, including access to voting and racial redistricting, criminal justice and mass incarceration, the heroin epidemic in the United States, and a topic that the class will get to decide (choose your own adventure!). To do this, we will be using social science research and “real world” examples from reputable journalistic sources.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to explain how problems are socially constructed.
- Students will compare and contrast major social problems impacting the United States.
- Students will analyze how social, political, and/or economic forces shape the American response to social problems.

Required Course Materials

There is one *REQUIRED* book for this class. It can be rented for approximately \$15 or purchased new or used online. Please make sure to get the *correct publication year/ISBN*.

- Heiner, Robert. 2015. *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism, Fifth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN# 978-0-19-023672-4.

Grading Policy:

How the Final Grade Will be Determined:***

Written Assignment #1	10%
Written Assignment #2	10%
Written Assignment #3	10%
Quiz #1	5%
Quiz #2	5%
Group Project	20%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Attendance	<u>+ 5%</u>
	100%

A	90 – 100
B	80 – 89
C	70 – 79 (<i>passing grade for pass/fail</i>)
D	60 – 69
F	0 – 59

*****Note: I do not round up. An 89.9% is a B.**

If you are taking the class Pass/Fail, the minimum grade to pass the class is a 70.0% (a C).

Description of Graded Components

(1) Writing Assignments: Students will complete three short written assignments, with due dates noted on the syllabus. Each paper is to be approximately 3 – 4 pages long and will be posted in the “Assignments” section of Canvas. ***Late assignments will not be accepted.***

Instructions and guidelines for completing the assignments will be posted in Canvas.

The assignments will cumulatively count for **30%** of your grade.

(2) Examinations: There will be two in-class examinations for this course, administered in Canvas. Each of these exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions, which will require students to draw on course readings, lectures, and discussions. The midterm examination will count for **15%** of your grade and the final examination will count for **20%** of your grade (**EXAMS = 35% TOTAL**).

(3) Quizzes: There will be two quizzes for this course. They will be low-stakes “check-ins” to make sure that you’re continuing to understand and engage with the class material. They will be multiple choice and identification questions and will be completed in class via Canvas. The quizzes will cumulatively count for **10%** of your grade.

(4) Group Project: Students will be assigned to a group to produce an in-class presentation about a selected social issue. Each presentation is to be 20 minutes in length followed by an additional five minutes for questions from the class audience (25 minutes total). ***Detailed instructions and guidelines for completing the group project will be posted in Canvas.*** Students will receive a grade that includes self-assessment, assessment by their group peers, and assessment by the instructor. The group project will count for **20%** of your grade.

(5) In-Class Activities: On a variety of days throughout the semester, there will be small, ungraded in-class activities in which you are expected to participate. These will be added throughout the semester and do not require advance preparation. The first activity will be August 27 (“Important Social Problems”). You will see them in the Canvas “Assignments” section and the course calendar at the bottom of this page, but they will not count towards your final course grade.

(6) Attendance and Class Participation: On the following pages is a schedule of the readings required for the course. **You are expected to have read the assigned material prior to the class.** Discussion will correspond to the material in the readings but may not review it in detail. Some days may include guest speakers or films and will not cover the readings at all, so both reading and attendance are important. Class participation includes two elements: **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSION**.

Course Policies

Attendance and/or Participation

I will take attendance most class periods. Excused absences will not be counted against you. Excused absences will be granted if there is documentation of attendance at an academic event, participation in an athletic event, illness, or family emergency. *Other excused absences will be granted at my discretion.*

In addition to attending class, you must participate in class discussion. Using attendance as the baseline grade (e.g., a student who attends 75% of the class sessions will have a 75% base grade), good class discussion participation can adjust the final participation grade **upward** by up to 5%. For example, a student with a 75% base attendance grade who consistently has informed things to say in class could improve their participation grade to 80%. The final class participation grade (attendance + class discussion) will count for **5%** of your final grade.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the policies of the Georgia Tech Honor Code with respect to behavior and academic honesty. Anyone engaging in acts that violate these policies, such as cheating, will be penalized. For more

information on the Honor Code, see the [Office of Student Integrity website](#) and the [text of the honor code](#). If you are not familiar with what constitutes plagiarism, ASK! *Being uninformed of the policies does not absolve you from the responsibility of following them!*

Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the social sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad orienting question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following learning outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following career-ready competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Use of Generative AI

Generally speaking, you are not authorized to use artificial intelligence engines or software (e.g., ChatGPT) to produce work for this class EXCEPT on assignments that I have identified

and for which you will have received guidance on appropriate use of such technologies. If relevant, I will provide more information about the specific assignment when the time is appropriate in the course. You may not, however, construe this limited use as permission to use these technologies in any other facet of this course. Using AI to generate response papers, presentations, or answers to exam questions constitutes a violation of the Georgia Tech Honor Code and will be treated as such. ***All work that you submit must be your own. You should never include anything in your assignment that was not written by you without proper citation.***

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

The use of tablets and computers is permitted in class ONLY IF USED FOR CLASS WORK and DOES NOT DISTRACT OTHER STUDENTS OR ME. Students may lose the privilege of using electronics in the classroom if they prove to be disruptive. NO TEXTING. Those who violate this policy will be asked to leave the class that day and will not be counted as in attendance.

Campus Resources for Students

Undergraduate Student Academic Success Resources:

Academic Support: Academic Success and Advising (a unit in the Office of Undergraduate Education & Student Success) provides free support for your courses. Students can attend scheduled supplemental review (PLUS) sessions, stop by Drop-In Tutoring, or schedule a one-on-one appointment through Knack. To explore what options work best for you, please visit us online at success.gatech.edu/tutoring, email us at tutoring@gatech.edu, or come see us at Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons, Suite 283.

Student Well-Being:

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A comprehensive list of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being ([student-resource-guide \(gatech.edu\)](https://student-resource-guide.gatech.edu))