



# Independent Study | in Idaho

**SOC 230**  
**Social Problems**

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The University of Idaho in statewide cooperation with  
Boise State University — Idaho State University — Lewis-Clark State College

# Course Guide

Independent  
Study | in Idaho

*Self-paced study. Anytime. Anywhere!*

## **Sociology 230: Social Problems**

University of Idaho  
3 Semester-Hour Credits

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## Soc 230: Social Problems

3 Semester-Hour Credits: U of I

### Welcome!

Whether you are a new or returning student, welcome to the Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) program. Below, you will find information pertinent to your course including the course description, course materials, course objectives, as well as information about assignments, exams, and grading. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

### Policies and Procedures

Refer to the ISI website at [www.uidaho.edu/isi](http://www.uidaho.edu/isi) and select *Students* for the most current policies and procedures, including information on setting up accounts, student confidentiality, exams, transcripts, course exchanges, refunds, academic integrity, library resources, and disability support and other services.

### Course Description

Contemporary social issues and personal deviations; crime and delinquency, poverty and wealth, drugs, sexual variations, racism, sexism, and the environment. U-Idaho students: May be used as core credit in J-3-d.

*Recommended: Internet access, computer  
12 graded assignments, 3 graded exams*

### Course Materials

#### Required Course Materials

- Finsterbusch, Kurt. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Social Issues*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2017. Print. ISBN-10: 1259666409. ISBN-13: 9781259666407.
- Kornblum, William, and Karen Seccombe. *Social Problems*. 15<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Pearson, 2017. Print. ISBN-10: 0-13-397458-8. ISBN-13: 9780133974584

### Course Delivery

All ISI courses are delivered through BbLearn, an online management system that hosts the course lessons and assignments and other items that are essential to the course. Upon registration, the student will receive a *Registration Confirmation Email* with information on how to access ISI courses online.

### Course Introduction

This course is designed to introduce you to the realm of social problems and their proposed solutions. You will discover how social issues become labeled as social problems and how our belief systems determine the appropriate solutions. You will be required to write essays that are informed by the text and reader.

Multiple choice/essay exams will measure your understanding of the subject. As you work through this course, remember that there is no social issue that is inherently a social problem. Our key focus will be to understand why certain issues become social problems while others do not. Welcome to class!

### Course Objectives

- To have a clear understanding of how social problems are defined.
- To develop a social constructionist perspective in respect to social problems.

- To be exposed to the range of social problems that sociologists study.
- To become sensitive to the consequences of social problems to all aspects of everyday life.
- To understand how historical and political processes contribute to the recognition of, and proposed policies for, social problems.
- To develop critical thinking skills.
- To improve written communication skills.

## **Lessons**

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### **Overview**

Each lesson includes lesson objectives, an introductory lecture, and a reading and writing assignment. The written assignments consist of four essays (worth 20 points each). All answers are to be written in essay form using complete sentences. Students should write in their own words when referencing authorities, and all quotations must include complete citations of the works from which they are taken. Do not copy from the textbook or any other book.

Each lesson includes the following components:

- Lesson objectives
- Reading assignments
- Important terms
- Lecture
- Written assignment

### **Study Hints:**

- Keep a copy of every assignment submitted.
- Complete all reading assignments.
- Set a schedule allowing for course completion one month prior to your personal deadline. An *Assignment Submission Log* is provided for this purpose.
- Web pages and URL links in the World Wide Web are continuously changing. Contact your instructor if you find a broken Web page or URL.
- Chapters in the textbook (Social Problems) must be read thoroughly.
- All assigned articles in your reader (Taking Sides) are to be read thoroughly.
- The written assignments comprise 45% of the final grade for this course. It is imperative to follow the guidelines below on how to write a strong essay.
- All material for the exams is taken from the textbook and reader.

### **Guidelines for Written Assignments**

Essays will be evaluated on the student's ability to state the answer clearly, give an appropriate example, and discuss the relevance of the term or concept to the study of society. The best answers will include examples and discussions of the relevant terms and concepts addressed by the questions.

To help you get the most out of your essays, use the formula of state, show, and explain.

- State the answer to the essay question using the appropriate sociological concepts or issues.
- Show or illustrate the concept or issue by using an example from the world around you.
- Explain why this concept or issue is relevant to the study of society. In other words, why do sociologists study this issue or concept?

**Font/Spacing:** Please use 12 point Arial, double space.

**Page Heading:** Each lesson must include a heading in the upper left corner as follows:

Your first and last name  
Today's Date  
SOC 230  
Lesson #

**Essay Heading:** Please include the assigned question as the title to your essay. For example, when preparing lesson one for submission, follow this format:

1. Why does Peter Berger (page 4) assert that our patterns of behavior are socially produced? Give a specific example and discuss.

Insert your essay here.

Repeat this practice of typing in the question first followed by your answer for questions 2 – 4.

**Essay length:** Your essay must be long enough to meet the criteria of state, show, explain. We do not get the benefit of in class discussion. This is your opportunity to show me you understand the material. Use it well.

In addition, essays must be written using proper punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Many errors can be caught with a simple proofread. Please send in only your best work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For the University of Idaho's rules on plagiarism, see the Student Code of Conduct policy at [www.webs.uidaho.edu/fsh](http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/fsh), the Faculty-Staff Handbook, Chapter 2: Student Affairs Policies, Student Code of Conduct, 2300, Article II, Academic Honesty.

### Helpful Hints

- If this is your first time taking a self-paced distance education course, you may find learning the material from the textbook without attending in-class lectures to be difficult at first. I went through the same thing. Don't give up. You'll find that learning to use a textbook as the primary source is an invaluable skill.
- Your textbook has inserts of helpful information on nearly every page. Please read these inserts as you come to them.

Refer to the **Course Rules** in BbLearn for further details on assignment requirements and submission.

## Exams

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- You must wait for grades and comments on assignments prior to taking subsequent exams.
- For your instructor’s exam guidelines, refer to the **Course Rules** in BbLearn.

Refer to *Grading* for specific information on assignment/exam points and percentages.

## Grading

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The course grade will be based upon the following considerations:

Twelve lessons (20 points each)	45% of final grade =	240 points
Three exams (100 points each)	55% of final grade =	300 points
		540 total points possible

Final Grade	Points Earned	Percentage Earned
A	486–540	90–100%
B	432–485	80–89%
C	378–431	70–79%
D	324–377	60–69%
F	0–323	Below 60%

Lessons will be awarded grades as follows:

A: This grade will be given to essay answers that state the answer clearly, illustrate with appropriate examples, and discuss the relevance of the term or concept. A papers will be relatively free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. On BbLearn an A grade is between 18-20 points.

B: This grade will be assigned to essay answers that use the formula of state, show, and explain, but are missing a clear understanding of the term or concept. B papers will have some errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation. On BbLearn a B grade is between 16-17 points.

C: This grade will be assigned to essays that show a weak understanding of the concept or term and may be missing one of the three steps of state, show, and explain, and/or show a lack of proofreading. On BbLearn a C grade is between 14-15 points.

D: This grade will be assigned to papers showing limited or no understanding of the concepts or terms. On BbLearn a D grade is between 12-13 points.

F: This grade will be assigned to papers that show no informed discussion of the material. On BbLearn an F grade is 11 points or less.

Submissions that do not meet the font/spacing or lesson and essay heading requirements will be penalized five points.

Rewrites are not an option.

**Exams** will be 55 percent of the final course grade. Each exam is worth 100 points. Each exam consists of 35 multiple-choice questions worth 2 points each, and three essay questions worth 10 points each. Essays must

be written in blue or black ink. Exam essays are evaluated on their inclusion of the state, show, explain formula that is required on all essays in this course. Note: Students must earn a **minimum** of 225 points on the exams combined (a C average) to pass the course.

The final course grade is issued after all lessons and exams have been graded.

Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating or plagiarism are considered a very serious transgression and may result in a grade of F for the course.

### **About the Course Developer**

Shawna Huggins has been an instructor for Independent Study in Idaho since 1994. She also teaches courses at Southern Oregon University and provides seminars on SAT and college prep for local high schools. She tutors students of all ages in most academic subjects. Shawna is happiest when she is learning something new, so she enjoys the access to information afforded by the Internet. Shawna earned her baccalaureate in sociology/anthropology at Southern Oregon University in 1989, and her Master of Arts in sociology at Washington State University in 1992.

### **Contacting Your Instructor**

Instructor contact information is posted on your BbLearn site under *Course Rules*.



<b><u>Assignment Submission Log</u></b>				
<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Projected Date for Completion</b>	<b>Date Submitted</b>	<b>Grade Received</b>	<b>Cumulative Point Totals</b>
1				
2				
3				
4				
<b>It is time to take Exam 1.</b>				
<b>Exam 1</b>				
5				
6				
7				
8				
<b>It is time to take Exam 2.</b>				
<b>Exam 2</b>				
9				
10				
11				
12				
<b>It is time to take Exam 3.</b>				
<b>Exam 3</b>				

## Lesson 1 Sociological Perspectives

### Lesson Objectives

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After completing this lesson, you should be able to:

- Distinguish between personal problems and social issues.
- Understand how social problems are socially constructed.
- Explore how sociologists use theory (functionalist, conflict, symbolic interaction) to study social problems.
- Understand that sociological theories are ways to explain and understand society.

### Reading Assignment

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*Social Problems*, Chapter 1, “Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems” pages 1-27.

*Taking Sides*, Introduction, “Debating Social Issues” pages 8-12.

### Important Terms

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culture war	functionalist perspective	conflict perspective
symbolic interactionist perspective	comparative perspective	social policies
quantitative methods	qualitative methods	secondary deviance
social construction	natural history approach	empirical approach
role	institution	social structure
status	social issue	social disorganization

### Introductory Lecture

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In our culture, we value individualism. We congratulate the successful on their achievements and blame the poor for their problems. The sociological study of social problems helps us to see how society itself affects how we as individuals act, think and feel and how the social structure has an influence on our life experiences.

We may look at a family in poverty and blame the family for their circumstances. We may believe that they are lazy, unambitious and uneducated. But, we may be wrong. The Sociological Imagination (C. Wright Mills) helps us to see how this family’s situation has been formed by the social structure. You will learn throughout this course about the power of society to affect the lives of individuals and groups. In this course you will repeatedly be shown how social problems are socially constructed. This means that there are no social issues that are inherently social problems. Social problems are defined by those with the power and influence to label issues as problems. The sociological study of social problems focuses on how social problems are defined and labeled.

Chapter 1 provides you with the basic tools to study society. First of all, the sociologist must approach the study of society objectively. Sometimes it is difficult to be value-free in the study of society as we are all members of the population of interest. The sociological perspective encourages us to step back, out of our personal experience, and to view the world through social scientific lenses. In order to do this, it is critical to understand the basic theories and methods sociologists use. Theory and method must always go together. Methods provide the way to collect data, but theory is how we give meaning to this data. Basically, there are three general theoretical paradigms in sociology. In the past, sociology has been criticized for being “multi-paradigmatic” meaning that we have no single over-arching approach that can explain all of society. We know,

however, that human behavior is highly variable and the use of different theoretical approaches actually strengthens our discipline. For the benefit of the beginning sociology student, the three sociological theories are discussed from what your instructor calls the formal, visual and popular culture definitions.

**The Formal Definition:** Functionalist is the most macro of approaches. It is also one of the oldest theories in sociology. Comte, Spencer and Durkheim are often referred to as the founding fathers of functionalism. Conflict approaches may be micro or macro and have their roots in the work of Karl Marx. Where functionalism assumes that parts of society work together harmoniously, conflict theorists argue that inequality generates change. On the micro level, we find symbolic interaction. Developed in the 1930s by George Herbert Mead and his students, this social-psychological theory has its philosophical roots in the work of Max Weber.

**The Visual Definition:** Understand that each theory sees society in a different way. I like to think of the theories as different colored sun glasses. When you "wear" your functionalist theory glasses (green - the color of living organisms), you see how the social structures of society work together for the benefit of society. Thus, you focus on how formal education contributes to the operation of society. You focus on how the family functions as an institution of socialization and sexual regulation, and how this benefits society, and so forth. When you "wear" your conflict theory glasses (red - the color of conflict), you focus on the consequences of the unequal distribution of education in society. You focus on the difference of financial power between men and women and the consequences of this for children of divorce. When you "wear" your symbolic interactionist glasses (purple - the color of feelings, meaning), you focus on the meaning of education to the individual. For example, what are the consequences to the student if he/she is labeled as gifted or challenged? You focus on the experience of family life and how men and women experience marriage differently.

**The Popular Culture Definition:** For those of you who are Star Trek fans, or have at least seen the original series or The Next Generation, here are some helpful tips: A member of Star Fleet Academy would define functionalists as similar to Data or Spock. Always asking, "What function does this serve? What is its function?" Always remembering that this is a macro level view (in the star ship looking down at the social organizations as a whole) so it keeps the focus on social structure, social institutions, or groups within society. A conflict theorist would be likened to Worf or the Ferengi. Worf is chief security officer. He would ask, "Who is in charge? Who has the power? Who makes the rules?" The Ferengi would say, "I have all the money and you don't, so how do I make more and what rules can I make that prevent you from getting what I have?" Again, this is a macro approach, so the focus is on the group - what group is in power, what group in in charge? Symbolic interactionist theory is very much embodied by Deanna Troy, the ship's counselor. She always asks, "What is the meaning? How do you feel? What is your interpretation?" This theory is set at the micro level (you are off the ship and interacting on the planet with individuals) which makes it very appropriate for Deanna's representation as she is a counselor. So remember, we focus on the meaning people give to labels, experiences and situations.

If you have yet another method of understanding these theories, please pass them on to your instructor. In the meantime, have fun with them.

## **Written Assignment**

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Before beginning the first written assignment, refer to the *Course Rules* in BbLearn for your instructor's assignment requirements. Assignments must be uploaded into BbLearn for grading (see BbLearn Tutorial for directions).

### Tips

- Essay questions 1-3 are drawn from the textbook *Social Problems*. Essay question 4 is generated from the *Taking Sides* readings.
- Answer all four essays using **Guidelines for Written Assignments** on page 2 of this course guide.

### Essay Questions

1. Why does Peter Berger assert that our patterns of behavior are socially produced? Give a specific example and discuss.
2. Outline the three sociological perspectives: Functionalist, symbolic interactionist, and conflict. How does each perspective frame criminal deviance?
3. Compare/contrast the conservative and liberal ideologies discussed in the Social Policy section of chapter 1. Why is it important to understand both points of view when studying social problems?
4. Based on the *Taking Sides* reading, why do you need to understand the social construction of reality to be a critical reader?