SOC 120 – 01: SOCIAL PROBLEMS & CRITICAL THINKING
Winter, 2014
Online (Section 60, CRN 11004)

Instructor: Dale Willits
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday: 10:00-11:30am, Wednesday: 2:00-4:00pm
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces logical reasoning and social scientific methodology as applied to selected contemporary social problems. Specifically, this course introduces elements of critical thinking (including deductive and inductive reasoning, argument analysis and evaluation, fallacies) and elements of social research (focusing on issues related to credibility, data and the status of evidence, and experimental and non-experimental methodologies for examining hypotheses). Throughout the course, these skills are introduced and then applied to contemporary social problems which adversely affect the quality of life for individuals and communities within society.

REQUIRED TEXT:


Additional readings will be posted in modules on Blackboard.

GRADING POLICY:

For general education credit, this course must be completed with a grade of “C” (2.0) or higher.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Orientation Quiz = 10
LearnSmart Exercises (10 @ 5 points each) = 50
Module Quizzes (4 @ 25 points each) = 100
Blog Assignments (4 @ 10 points each) = 40
Online Participation = 40
Final Written Assignment = 60
Final Exam = 100
Total Points: 400

Orientation Quiz (10 points)

After completing the orientation module and reading this syllabus, students are required to complete an orientation quiz. The orientation quiz assesses students' basic knowledge of the
purpose and structure of the course, how to navigate the course, and the general course requirements. The first module will not be released until students complete this quiz.

LearnSmart Exercises (10 @ 5 points each)

There are 10 LearnSmart exercises assigned over the course of the quarter. Each LearnSmart exercise is associated with a specific Chapter of the Moore and Parker textbook. As most modules cover two chapters, there will generally be two LearnSmart exercises per module. The LearnSmart exercises assess student learning on the primary learning objectives for this course, provide feedback on errors and mistakes, and highlight areas of the book related to specific learning objectives. All LearnSmart exercises are linked within the weekly modules and must be completed in order for the module assignments to be released. In general, LearnSmart exercises are due during the first week of each module (see the Course Schedule for specific due dates on Learn Smart exercises). LearnSmart exercises are not timed and assignments can be repeated (though please note that your grade is based on the average of your submissions).

Module Quizzes (25 points X 4 modules = 100)

After completing the LearnSmart exercises for a given module, additional Module Quizzes will be released. Please see the Course Schedule for a list of specific assignments per module. All quizzes are timed (you will have at least 30 minutes per quiz).

Blog Assignments (10 points X 4 modules = 40 points)

Each week, students will complete a Blog assignment which links critical thinking skills to the study of contemporary social problems. These blog assignments require students to apply critical thinking skills from a given module to the study of a specific social problem. Each blog assignment is connected and the goal of the course of the quarter is produce a critical thinking position paper on a social problem of the student's choice. The first blog assignment (in Module 1) asks students to select a social problem and to provide a brief argument that the topic they have selected is, in fact, a social problem. Subsequent blog assignments in Modules 2, 3, and 4 require students to locate credible sources of information regarding the social problem, to identify common rhetorical devices and fallacies applied to the discussion of this social problem, to evaluate existing arguments regarding this social problem. Students will finalize the paper in Module 5 and turn in a completed "Critical Thinking Social Problem Paper" (instructions in that section below).

Students should note that this is an exercise in semi-public writing. Students in this online course are divided into a set of small groups of 8 to 12 students. You will post these assignments using the "Blog" function in Blackboard in the "Groups" section of the course (the instructions, however, are located within the modules). When submitted in this fashion, all other members of your group will be able to see your writing assignments. Therefore, do not write anything in your assignments that you are not comfortable sharing with others. As discussed in the Online Participation section of the course, students are required to read each other's blog assignments and to provide constructive critical feedback to each other. Blog assignments are generally due at the end of the first week of each module. This allows one week per module for group
discussion on blogs. For the final paper, students will take the material that they have written over the course of five blogs, the feedback from their peers, and put together a comprehensive position paper on the social problem.

**Online Participation (8 points X 5 modules = 40 points)**

Engagement is a key concern in online courses. In this course, students are organized into groups of 10 students. In these groups, students will provide feedback to each other's blog assignments and will have the opportunity to collaboratively work on the study guides for each module quiz. In order to receive full participation points, students must log into the website at least three times each week, must read and provide meaningful comments on all of the blogs written by group members, and should make an effort at contributing toward the group completion of the study guides for each quiz. Participation is graded per module with a total of 8 points available per module. In order to earn all 8 points, students must providing meaningful comments on group mates' blogs. Please note that "meaningful comments" means that students must go beyond comments like: good job, I agree, or great paper. The goal is to provide critical and constructive feedback that hopefully leads to a discussion regarding social problems (and, ideally, in the collective improvement of all student papers).

**Final Paper: Critical Thinking Social Problem Paper**

As discussed in the "Blog Assignments" section above, all students in this course are required to write a critical thinking position paper about a social problem of their choice. Students will work on this major assignment throughout the quarter in the form of the weekly blog assignments. Students will turn in a completed paper during the 5th and final module. This paper assignment is worth 60 points (this assignment is graded on both writing and content).

**Final Exam**

There is a cumulative online final exam during finals week. This will contain both short-answer and multiple choice questions. This is worth 100 points. This exam is also timed.

**COURSE GRADES:**

Your course grade is determined by the sum of points you received on all of your assignments. You can monitor this in Blackboard by examining the "Total" column in the My Grades section of Blackboard.

A: 369-400
A-: 360-368
B+: 352-359
B: 328 - 351
B-: 320-327
C+: 312-319
C: 288-311
C-: 280-287
CLASSROOM POLICIES AND ETIQUETTE

Messaging the Professor:  You can contact me through email (at dwillits@csub.edu), through the "Message the Professor" link on the left-side menu, or by coming to office hours. I will do my best to respond to emails within 48 hours (note, emails sent to me Friday afternoon or later may not be addressed until Monday morning).

Technical Problems:  From time to time, everyone has a technical issue. I will reset one quiz for each student for free. After this, students are required to provide documentation (in the form of screen captures and a written explanation) in order to request a reset (please note that the actual reset is at my discretion). Students are responsible for maintain access to reliable internet and a computer to complete course assignments and tasks.

Attendance:  Though this is not a face-to-face class, the concept of attendance is still relevant. Students should check the course regularly (at least three times per week) and should expect to spend a significant amount of time in the class. There will be no makeup opportunities provided for missed exercises or exams, meaning that you could miss substantial points by not logging in to complete work.

Academic Integrity:  Cheating and plagiarism are both violations of the student code of conduct and will not be tolerated. The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities at CSUB defines cheating as “a broad category of actions that involve fraud and deception to improve a grade or obtain course credit.” OSSR defines plagiarism as “a specific form of academic dishonesty (cheating) which consists of the misuse of published or unpublished works of another by claiming them as one’s own.” For additional details on both of these behaviors, see the statement on academic integrity available at OSSR: CSUB Statement of Academic Integrity

Evidence of either of these behaviors will result in a zero on the given assignment. Repeated violations will result in a failing grade in the course. Moreover and as per University policy, I will turn over evidence of either of these behaviors to OSSR. This report will go on your student record and may carry additional consequences. For additional information, please visit http://www.csub.edu/osrr/.

Please be aware that this course will use SafeAssign to evaluate written work. This software package automatically scans your assignments for unoriginal and uncited elements. Between this software package and my personal evaluation of your writing, it is very likely that you will be caught should you commit plagiarism. Save both of us the time, emotional energy, and discomfort associated with this set of behaviors: Do not cheat.
Respect: Sociological inquiry often involves examining sensitive and controversial issues. This will be the case for our class in that we will discuss sensitive issues and arguments. Many of us have strong personal feelings about and/or experiences with these issues and as we will find during this course, there is often conflict in society over these issues. Consequently, we can expect to find differing perspectives across individuals in our classroom discussions. It is important to always remember during the course of the semester that ALL students are expected to treat other students (and their opinions) with respect. No personal attacks in the discussions will be tolerated. In addition to respecting the opinions and perspectives of others, I ask that you also respect the classroom environment. Turn off or silence all electronic devices before class begins, pay attention (meaning, do not come to class to nap or to read for another class) and avoid talking when another person is addressing the class. Disrupting the class (using any of the above methods or via new and innovative techniques) will force me to further disrupt the class, as I will ask the student(s) to cease this behavior. Persistent disrupters will be asked to leave the class and will lose their participation and attendance points for the day.

Due Dates and Makeup Policy: Please complete all assignments on time. The due dates for assignments are listed in the course schedule. In general, modules run from Tuesday morning (at 8:00am) to Monday (at 4:59pm) the following week (that is - modules are typically two weeks in length). As a general rule, I do not allow for make-up exams, nor do I accept late assignments. I will only consider doing so in cases involving extreme circumstances (medical emergencies, court dates, etc.) and I always require some sort of official documentation as evidence.

Disability Accommodations: To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) as soon as possible. Their office is located in SA 140, and they may be reached online at http://www.csub.edu/ssd/ or by telephone at 661-654-3360 (voice) or 661-654-6288 (TDD). If you have an accommodations letter from the SSD Office documenting that you have a disability, please present the letter to me during my office hours as soon as possible so we can discuss the specific accommodations that you might need in this class.

COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE):

Course Orientation (Monday, January 5)

-Assignment: Orientation Quiz (due Monday, January 12th, 5:00pm)

Module 1 (Tuesday, Jan. 6 - Monday, Jan. 19)

-Topics: Defining critical thinking. Introducing inductive and deductive reasoning.

-Readings: Chapters 1 and 2 of Critical Thinking by Moore and Parker.

-Assignment: LearnSmart Exercises 1, and 2. Due Wednesday, January 14 at 5:00pm.
Assignment: Blog Assignment #1: Presenting an Argument Regarding a Social Problem. Blog Due Monday, January 12 at 5:00pm. Comments on Blogs due by Monday, January 19th, at 5:00pm.

Quiz 1: Blackboard Quiz. Released Thursday, January 15 at 8:00am. Must be completed by Monday, January 19th at 5:00pm.

Module 2 (Tuesday, Jan. 20 - Monday, Feb. 2)

-Topics: Clarity, Credibility, and Evaluating Sources.

-Readings: Chapters 3 and 4 Critical Thinking by Moore and Parker.

-Assignment: LearnSmart Exercises 3 and 4. Due Wednesday, January 28 at 5:00pm.

-Assignment: Blog Assignment #2: Locating, summarizing, and information regarding a social problem. Blog Due Monday, January 26 at 5:00pm. Comments on Blogs due by Monday, February 2nd, at 5:00pm.

-Quiz 2: Blackboard Quiz. Released Thursday, January 29th at 8:00am. Must be completed by Monday, February 2nd at 5:00pm.

Module 3 (Tuesday, Feb. 3 - Monday, Feb. 16)

-Topics: Rhetoric and Fallacies.

-Readings: Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Critical Thinking by Moore and Parker.

-Assignment: LearnSmart Exercises 5, 6, and 7. Due Wednesday, February 11 at 5:00pm.

-Assignment: Blog Assignment #3: Identifying and describing typical fallacies applied to social problems. Blog Due Monday, February 9 at 5:00pm. Comments on Blogs due by Monday, February 16th, at 5:00pm.

-Quiz 3: Blackboard Quiz. Released Thursday, February 12 at 8:00am. Must be completed by Monday, February 16 at 5:00pm.

Module 4 (Tuesday, Feb. 17 - Monday, Mar. 2)

-Topics: Evaluating deductive and inductive arguments.

-Readings: Chapters 9 and 11 of Critical Thinking by Moore and Parker.

-Assignment: LearnSmart Exercises 9 and 11. Due Wednesday, February 25 at 5:00pm.
-Assignment: Blog Assignment #4: Evaluating existing arguments regarding your social problem. Blog Due Monday, February 23 at 5:00pm. Comments on Blogs due by Monday, March 2nd, at 5:00pm.

-Quiz 4: Blackboard Quiz. Released Thursday, February 26 at 8:00am. Must be completed by Monday, March 2nd at 5:00pm.

Module 5 (Tuesday, Mar. 3 - Monday, Mar. 16)

-Topics: Applying critical thinking to the contemporary social problems:


-Assignment: No LearnSmart exercises this module. Please utilize this extra time to complete your paper, and to study for the final.

-Assignment: Final Paper Due Monday, March 9th at 5:00pm.

-Quiz: No quiz this module. Please utilize this extra time to finish your final papers and to study for the final exam.

FINAL EXAM: Released Wednesday, March 18th at 8:00am. Must be completed by Friday, March 20th by 5:00pm.