

UNIVERSITY OF JORDAN
AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM (M.A.)
2403713 Special Subject: Social Problems of Contemporary America
Prof. Patricia Siplon
Fall Semester 2011

Office: Faculty of International Studies, 2nd floor Office hours: Tuesday 3-5 PM
(with Prof. Debi Abu Algamam) Class meeting: Tuesday 5-8 PM
Email: psiplon@smcvt.edu teaching Hall 14, Faculty of Int. Studies

Course Description: This course is an introduction to some of the social problems that remain unresolved in the United States. To understand the root of these problems, we will begin with an examination of American values and some elements of American history. After this we will turn to three specific social problems areas: health, income and racial inequality, and criminal justice. Finally, students will be asked to adopt their own social issue question and present their paper and findings at the end of the semester.

Course Goals and Student Outcomes:

1. To introduce and/or reinforce core information about American values and history. This information will be provided through lecture and readings, and student knowledge of the written material will be tested through a midterm and final examination, and integrated into the paper they write.
2. To help students see the dilemmas inherent in resolving social policies and to offer them the opportunity to grapple with the values trade-offs that policy makers face. Students will actively participate in group discussions and activities around these issues.
3. To help students identify their own values as they relate to the provision of the scarce resources and the balance between tradition and change in societies. Students will be asked to identify their values in class discussions (to the extent they feel comfortable doing so) and in the final paper assignment.
4. To encourage student interest in, and strengthen evaluation skills of current events related to American studies. Once students have selected their policy topic, they will be asked to identify a news source on this topic and use it in their paper assignment, as well as bringing information into class discussion.
5. To refine English language skills in writing and discussion. The midterm and final exams will be essay format (with some short answer on terms), and all students will complete a research paper assignment and presentation as part of the course. Additionally, students will make presentations of their research and be expected to be active participants in discussion.

Course Requirements and Policies:

1. Attendance and participation: in order to work as designed, this class will require active student participation in discussion. Good attendance is required for a strong performance in this course, particularly since class is held only once a week. Students are expected to inform the instructor in advance if they have a legitimate reason for

missing class and are responsible for missed material. **Students may not miss more than two classes in order to receive a passing grade.**

2. Late work: Unless a deadline extension has been asked for and granted in advance, late work will be penalized a full letter grade for each day is late.
3. Paper submissions: students are expected to retain a backup copy (photocopy or on disc) of all written paper assignments. In the case of a lost paper or dispute, students will be expected to produce a backup copy.
4. Preparation: This class requires that the reading and any questions given in the previous class must be completed in advance of class discussion. Students who come to class without these answers or clearly not having done their reading will have points deducted from their attendance and participation grade.
5. Cheating. Students may not consult each other during exams, and must do their own work on all assignments. In writing, any time more than a sentence comes from another source **it must be attributed to that source.** We will go over this in class, and once we do, students are warned that cheating, either copying from one another or plagiarism from a source are grounds for failing the course.
6. Grades: Student grades will be based on the following factors:

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| Midterm exam (Nov 7)..... | 30% |
| Attendance and participation..... | 10% |
| Paper and presentation assignment | 20% |
| Final exam | 40% |

Week One, September 20

Topic (T): Introduction

Reading Assignment (RA): Syllabus

Writing Assignment (WA): Due Tuesday, September 27

In one or two pages, answer the following questions: when you imagine social problems in America, what do you think about and why? Where do you get your information about American social problems? Do you view these problems are resolvable, and explain why you do or do not.

Please note: there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I just want you to think about what you already know or imagine in relation to this topic.

Week Two, September 27

T: American History Review

RA: Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution

Week Three, October 4

T: American Values I: Equity and Liberty

RA: Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox*, 2 Chapters, "Equity" and "Liberty"

Week Four, October 11

T: American Values II: Security and Efficiency

RA: Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox* 2 Chapters, "Security" and "Efficiency"

Week Five, October 18

T: Review of American Political Institutions

RA: Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle *American Government* (Brief Tenth Edition), Chapters 5 (“Congress: The First Branch” and 6 (“The Presidency”))

Week Six, October 25

T: US Health Policy Overview

RA: Kaiser Family Foundation, “U.S. Healthcare Costs: Background Brief”; “Medicare: An Overview”; and “Medicaid: An Overview”.

Week Seven, November 1

T: In-class midterm exam

Week Eight, November 8

Holiday: no class

Week Nine, November 15

T: Problems of the US Health Care System

RA: Kaiser Family Foundation, “Summary of Health Care Reform Law” and “Five Facts about the Uninsured”.

WA: Deadline for selecting topic for research paper and presentation. Each student will turn in a short (less than one page) paper answering the following questions: what social problem in the United States have you selected to examine in your research paper and presentation? Why have you selected this problem? How do you plan to explore it (for example, will you conduct a comparison of the problem as it is experienced in the US and Jordan, a historical case study of how the problem has been dealt with in the United States, or some other means (which you should specify here).

Note: there are no wrong answers on this written assignment. It is designed to help you get started on the project and identify areas where you might want assistance, and to give me a sense of interests of the members of the class.

Week Ten, November 22

T: Researching and organizing an American studies research paper

RA: Identify at least two sources you are planning to use in your paper. Read through them, and bring them (or notes on them) to class.

This will be a hands-on class period where we will “workshop” your work so far. We will discuss conventions around conducting research in the written record (as opposed to interviewing or observation), citation conventions, plagiarism, developing a research question or hypothesis, and organizing a paper. The more work and thought you have already put into your paper, the more questions you will have, and the more you will get out of the session.

Week Eleven, November 29

T: Foundations of Racial and Income Inequality in the United States

RA: To be announced

Week Twelve, December 6

T: Current Dimensions of Racial and Income Inequality: Are They Receding or Growing?

RA: To be announced

Week Thirteen, December 13

T: Criminal Justice in the United States: Overview

RA: To be announced

Week Fourteen, December 20

T: Evaluation: Why Does the US Correctional System Continue to Grow?

RA: To be announced

Research Paper Due Tuesday, December 20

Week Fifteen, December 27

T: Research Presentations

Week Sixteen, January 3

T: Final Discussion and review for final examination

FINAL EXAM: Date and Time to Be Announced