University of Massachusetts Lowell

Seminar in Social Psychology: Dr. Berkowitz
Solving Social Problems   Fall, 2006
Psychology 47.473, Section 202

Course Guide

Some Questions to Get Us Started…   (How would you answer them for yourself?)

- Why should we be concerned about social problems?

- What is a "social problem?"

- To what extent can we solve social problems?

- Should we attempt to solve social problems? And if so, how?

- What are the primary barriers to solving social problems?

- How can those obstacles be overcome?

- What can the study of psychology add to our understanding of social problems?

- And finally: What is your own role (if any) in the solution of social problems?

Some Course Goals

1. To answer the above questions to our fullest and best ability. More specifically:

2. To become more fully aware of value and ethical issues when studying social problems and attempting to solve them

3. To learn techniques, methods, and principles that will maximize the chances of success when attempting to solve social problems

4. To learn (or relearn) more about the personal qualities that will maximize the chances of success when attempting to solve social problems

5. To identify barriers to solving social problems in the real world, and strategies for overcoming them.

If you can achieve these goals by mid-December – and you <u>can</u> achieve them – you will have learned valuable lessons that may stay with you long after this course ends.

In addition to the goals above, you may have <u>your own</u> personal goals for the course. If so, that's good! What might they be? I hope you can design your work in this course so that you can achieve them.

<u>Achieving Course Goals</u>

How can you achieve these goals? We'll aim to accomplish them through several different methods, including:

1. Reading
2. Discussing
3. Listening
4. Writing
5. Thinking

Some details on each of these methods are given below.

<u>1. Reading</u>

There are five required books (or manuals) in this course, to introduce you to a variety of perspectives in the field. In the rough order that we'll read them, they are:

1. Kansas University Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development (2002). <u>CTB ™</u> [Community Tool Box] <u>training curriculum. Module 3: Analyze problems and goals</u>. Lawrence, KS: Author. [A manual providing a framework for understanding social problems. To be distributed in class.]

2. John Graham (2005). <u>Stick your neck out: A street-smart guide to creating change in your community and beyond.</u> San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. [An overview of problem solving skills and change techniques, written for general audiences, with many case examples.]

3. Pew Partnership for Civic Change (2001). <u>Wanted: Solutions for America. What we know works: An overview of research about what works (and what doesn't) in social service programs</u>. Charlottesville: VA: Author. [A manual describing successful social programs – and the principles behind them – for healthy families and children, thriving neighborhoods, living-wage jobs, and viable local economies, all with detailed examples. Downloadable from <u>www.pew-partnership.org</u>.]

4. David Bornstein (2004). <u>How to change the world. Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas</u>. New York: Oxford University Press. [Deals with case studies of social problems and change on a global level, and suggests ways in which a single person can make a positive global difference. How can this be done?]

5. Ram Dass and Paul Gorman (1985). <u>How can I help?: Stories and reflections on service</u>. New York: Knopf. [Focuses on the personal qualities involved in action and service.]

Readings #2, 4, and 5 above should be purchased from the bookstore. To get yourself off to a good start, please make sure that you purchase these books once you are registered for the course.

Additional short readings may be assigned as the course progresses. Beyond this (if you're ready!) there is <u>plenty</u> of other material on social problems and ideas about solving them. If you're looking for sources in a particular area, please let me know, and I may be able to point you to some of them.

2. Discussing

Our classes will proceed in large part through discussion. Why?
Because for this material, and for advanced undergraduate students such as yourselves, that is generally how people learn best. I will have some material to present on the main topic of the week; but your own thoughtful contributions will <u>always</u> be expected, solicited, and valued.

More specifically, for most weeks beginning with the first week of class, I will plan to pose some questions bearing upon the topic of the week. You'll be asked to respond to at least one of those questions in writing, and to share your response with other class members, prior to the next class period. To make this process work most effectively, we may do this by e-mail – both for your own responses and also for any comments you may have on the responses of others. In this way, we'll have a variety of thoughts already on the table when class discussion time comes.

In class, we'll discuss the question and your different responses to it, with the goal of arriving at the best possible answers. These class discussions will be led by student panels, of about three students each. Each student should have the chance to serve on about two panels. Panel group assignments, panel guidelines, and specific discussion topics will be forthcoming.

3. Listening

It's also possible that we will get a chance to hear about different social problems from different community guests. If we go forward with this concept, we'll need to set up these sessions ahead of time. We can talk together about the possible details, and I'll keep you posted if this idea gets developed.

4. Writing

A. Discussion papers

A specific course goal is for you to learn something about social problems every week. To encourage this, you will be asked to write a number of short papers about the discussion topic of the week, which will be distributed in advance. These typed and proofread papers should be roughly 500 words in length, and should focus on your thoughts about the discussion topic. They should be handed in as hard copy (not e-mailed) in class on the discussion date.

In these papers, I will be somewhat less concerned with beautiful prose (though that is always welcomed), and more concerned with your ideas. In your writing, you want to show evidence that you are **engaged in the question**, and **thinking** about the topic at hand.

These papers will be ungraded, but they will be read and they will be recorded. We may also develop arrangements for sharing your papers with other class members (e.g., through e-mail), so that they can learn from your own thinking before class discussion.

A minimum of **seven** such papers will be required. However, if you wish, you can choose to write additional papers for a higher grade. This is optional. (See the section on Grading, on the next page.)

B. Application paper

In addition to your weekly discussion question responses, you'll be asked to design, execute, and write a longer report on solving social problems in practice.

In this paper, you should **propose a social problem that in your view needs changing**; and then, drawing in large part upon course material, attempt to **bring about the change that is desired**. Minimum length guideline: about 10 pages, in most cases following usual social science report format (i.e., Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion).

You will have considerable freedom in choosing what that social problem is; but given the framework of a one-semester course, your change attempt should be relatively small in scale, and local in nature. It should also be feasible to complete by the end of the course, Some additional key criteria for choice are that your choice should be **meaningful**, **measurable**, and (especially) **interesting** to you.

Your application paper will be preceded by a written and ungraded (but required) paper proposal, due on **Monday, October 16.** Your application paper itself will be due on **Monday, December 11,** the last day of class.

Further guidelines for both your paper and your proposal will be given in class. We will also spend some time discussing each other's application papers, so that we can learn from each other's work.

5. Thinking

Over and above these formal course requirements, you are strongly encouraged to notice and to reflect upon social problems that you read about and encounter personally outside of class.

This may seem obvious to you, but let's make it explicit: You are encouraged and expected to be   *** **thinking about and using the material we study here** ***
in other areas of your life, over and above your direct connection to school.

Why is that? Because one of the many great things about psychology in general, and social psychology in particular, is that the subject matter is always there, whenever you walk out the door. The opportunity to think about and act upon social problems is present around the clock; that door never closes. So please work at building and strengthening the linkages between what we're studying here and other situations and events in your life outside the classroom.

Course Requirements

1. Completion of the assigned reading

2. Active participation in class and in discussion group assignments

3. Submission of short discussion papers, as noted above

4. Submission of an application paper, also as noted.

Grading

<div align="center">

1. Discussion papers -- 50%

</div>

Submitting seven such papers by the appropriate class date, of acceptable (i.e., high) quality, will earn a grade of "B" for this part of the course.

However, if you would like to earn a grade higher than "B," you may choose to write additional papers. Each additional paper of acceptable quality will increase your letter grade for this part of the course by one grade step (e.g., 8 papers = B+ ; 9 = A- ; 10 = A.)

<div align="center">

2. Class participation, which includes: -- 25%

</div>

(a) attendance
(b) active participation in classroom and panel discussions, and
(c) classroom initiative

→ [Please see also the box following]

<div align="center">

3. Application paper -- 25%

</div>

Please note: As you can see, there is a strong emphasis on class participation in this course. Please also note that **your attendance is expected at all class meetings**. In addition, **your active participation, comments, and questions are both expected and strongly encouraged**. They are an important part of the class, and **they will be an important part of your grade**.

→ If you cannot commit to attending class meetings regularly, to meeting the course requirements, to being an active learner, and to making a sincere and wholehearted effort to learn about social problems, you are advised not to take this course.

Additional Course Policies

* Late papers are subject to penalty.

* Grades of Incomplete will not normally be given.

* Extra credit work on topics related to the course may be done and is also encouraged. Please check with me before beginning such work.

☺ Tips for Doing Well

Every student in this course should be capable of doing well. Here are some thoughts to help you do so:

- Stay on top of your assignments. Block out the time to do them. Try not to fall behind.

- Read for the bigger ideas (the ones that will stay with you), rather than for tiny facts.

- Speak up when you have a question, a comment, or an idea.

- Come to class, bring your curious mind with you, and be an active learner!

- Finally, **think** about how what you are studying might relate to your own life outside the classroom, and to social problems in general.

__Topical Outline__

A tentative outline of course topics, readings, and due dates is found below. More specific assignments may be made as the course continues.

__Please note__: Readings should be completed __before__ each assigned topic is discussed in class. Please also be thinking about your best answer to each assigned exercise or problem __before__ the relevant class begins.

__Week__	__Monday's Date__	__Topic__	__Assignments and Due Dates__
1	September 11	Introduction: Starting propositions	

Basic Concepts in Social Problem Solving

2	September 18	Values and Ethics: (What are yours?)	CTB Curriculum, M #3: CTB, 3.5 (downloaded)
3	September 25	Methods: Problem-solving models The role of creativity	CTB Curriculum: Graham, Ch. 1-2
4	October 2	Barriers and obstacles: Surmounting barriers	Graham, Ch. 3-5
5 (Tues.)	October 10 _(No class Oct. 9)_	Basic principles (1)	Graham, Ch. 6-9: CTB, 6.2 (downloaded)
6	October 16	Basic principles (2)	__(Paper proposals due__)
7	October 23	Basic principles (3): Critique	Graham, Ch. 10-12, & Epilogue

Applications

8	October 30	Your chosen problems	
9	November 6	Community problems	<u>What We Know Works</u> (downloaded)
10	November 13	Global problems	Bornstein (1)
11	November 20	Evaluating and sustaining the work	Bornstein (2)
12	November 27	Class choice!	(TBA)

Personal qualities

13	December 4	Personal qualities (1)	Dass & Gorman (1)
14	December 11	Personal qualities (2): Review and summary	Dass & Gorman (2) **<u>Final paper due</u>**

Topical Outline

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Sept. 8	Introduction: The Possibility and Desirability of Change	PCC, Ch. 1-3
2	Sept. 15	An Overview: Some Principles of Successful Community Building	Community Building

_____

Some Major Skill Areas

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
3	Sept. 22	Assessment and Issues	PCC, 6, 12 (351-359)
4	Sept. 29	Visioning and Planning	PCC, 8
5	Oct. 6	Participation and Membership	PCC, 9 **Paper Proposal Due**
6	Oct. 13	Leadership and Action	The Heart of Change PCC, 7, 12 (348-351; 359-395)
7	Oct. 20	Publicity and Promotion	PCC, 11, 5
8	Oct. 27	Advocacy and Conflict	PCC, 13, 16
9	Nov. 3	Evaluation	(TBA)

_____

Applying Principles of Change

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
10	Nov. 10	…To Organizations	The Heart of Change (review) PCC, 15
11	Nov. 17	…To the Whole Community	Smart Communities
12	Nov. 24	…To Global Settings	How to Change the World

_____

<u>Sustaining the Work</u>

13	Dec. 1	Personal Qualities	<u>How Can I Help?</u>, 1-4 <u>PCC,</u> 4
14	Dec. 8	Review and Summary: The Prospects for Change	<u>How Can I Help?</u>, 5-8 **<u>Term Paper Due</u>** **<u>Final Exam</u>**

All of us spend time trying to persuade other people, directly or indirectly. And others spend time trying to persuade us. It's a social fact; persuasion plays a major role in our lives. We already know something about it – yet there's a lot more we can learn. This seminar provides an opportunity for such learning.

More specifically, we can learn more about how skilled (and unskilled) persuaders attempt to persuade us; but also about how we can become more skilled at persuasion ourselves, at the right times, with the right people, and in accordance with our own values. That might be useful knowledge, knowledge that we can retain, refine, and continue to develop for the rest of our lives.

Do you agree? If so – or even if you're not yet sure – let's see what we can find out.

Course Goals

1. To learn accepted facts about and explanations for persuasion (that is, some basic principles)

2. To understand how these principles have come into being (that is, some basic methods)

3. To show how these principles can be applied to real-life situations – i.e., to show how you can apply them yourself, again in accordance with your own values, to achieve the goals you want in an ethical manner (that is, some basic applications)

If you can achieve these goals by mid-May – and you can achieve them – you will have learned valuable lessons that may stay with you for long after this class ends.

4. In addition, you may have your own personal goals for this course. What do you want to learn? It will help if you think about what your own goals might be, and how you might best go about achieving them.

How can you achieve these course goals? Basically, through reading, classwork, writing, and observation and thinking outside of class. Here are some details:

Achieving Course Goals

…Readings

There are five required books: