

SS5426: SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Social Problems

Subject Code

SS - Social and Behavioural Sciences

Course Number

5426

Academic Unit

Social and Behavioural Sciences (SS)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Additional Information

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course aims to enable students to analyse social problems in contemporary societies with sociological theories, and to critically evaluate the social policies and generate new social development strategies to tackle real world problems with a focus on Hong Kong and China.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Distinguish various concepts and principles of sociological theories for the analysis of social problems and issues;	20	x	x	
2	Recognise the scope and limitation of the theories to analyze the social problems in contemporary societies;	20	x	x	
3	Apply sociological theories to provide critical interpretation of social problems and issues; and	30	x	x	
4	Critically evaluate the social policies and generate new social development strategies to tackle real world problems.	30	x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lecture	There will be weekly lectures, with topics concerning theories and concepts on globalization, social problems, social policy, social development and social change, prepared and presented by lecturer.	1, 2, 3, 4	

2	Tutorial	In each weekly lecture, approximately one hour will be reserved for tutorial discussion. The purpose of it is to give students to discuss and connect concepts, theories, social issues, social problems and social policies in depth.	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	Student Group Paper	Students are required to form in groups and pick up one social issue or problem as their topic. They need to select one or more relevant sociological theory(ies), concept(s), or tradition(s) to analyse the issue and reflect how it relates to the global social change. They are also required to give a short description and brief evaluation of the current policies adopted to tackle the problem.	2, 3, 4	

Additional Information for LTAs

Movie report, assignments, in-class participation and discussion

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Individual paper Students are required to submit an academic paper on topics related to the subject matter. They have to identify one social problem and to apply the relevant sociological theories to analyse it as well as generating new social development strategies to tackle this problem. Max word length: 4,000.	1, 2, 3, 4	50	Allow AI to 1) conduct proof editing; 2) generate initial ideas; 3) conduct preliminary analyses.	Yes

2	Student/Team based exercises Students are required to form in groups and pick up one social issue or problem as their topic. They need to select one or more theoretical perspective(s) or theory(ies) to analyse the issue. They have to collect information from existing literature to substantiate their arguments. They are also required to give a short evaluation of the current policies adopted to tackle the problem.	2, 3, 4	40	Allow AI to 1) conduct proof editing; 2) generate initial ideas; 3) conduct preliminary analyses.	Yes
3	Class participation and discussion	2, 3, 4	10	Allow AI to 1) conduct proof editing; 2) generate initial ideas; 3) conduct preliminary analyses.	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Additional Information for ATs

NIL

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Individual Paper (50%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Application of learning in a coherent way

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence for the capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence for the capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Moderate evidence for the capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Marginal

(D) Fair to limited evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Assessment Task

2. Student/Team based exercises (40%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Application of learning in a coherent way and showing accurate knowledge

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence for the capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence for the capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Moderate evidence for the capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Marginal

(D) Fair to limited evidence capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Assessment Task

3. Class participation and discussion (10%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Students are required to attend classes weekly and to engage in more critical discussions of the social problem.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues.

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues.

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Fair to limited participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues

Marginal

(D) Limited participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues

Failure

(F) Insufficient participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues

Assessment Task

1. Individual Paper (50%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Application of learning in a coherent way

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence for the capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Good

(B+, B) Good evidence for the capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Fair to limited evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Assessment Task

2. Student/Team based exercises (40%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Application of learning in a coherent way and showing accurate knowledge

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence for the capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Good

(B+, B) Good evidence for the capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Fair to limited evidence capability to understand different social problems, examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence capability to understand and examine critically, apply innovatively the knowledge and theories in different types of social problems.

Assessment Task

3. Class participation and discussion (10%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Students are required to attend classes weekly and to engage in more critical discussions of the social problem.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues.

Good

(B+, B) Good participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Fair to limited participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues

Failure

(F) Insufficient participation in the in-class exercises, with consistent demonstration of outside-the-box thinking, very good familiarity with the lecture content and readings; ability to formulate robust responses to complex issues

Additional Information for AR

See the details of the AR.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Social Theories and Social Problems:

The concept of social problem; sociological perspectives on social problems; the theories and perspectives on contemporary globalization; an outline of major social issues and social problems in contemporary societies.

Social Issues and Social Problems in Hong Kong:

Major social problems and policy debates in Hong Kong, e.g. aging, gender inequality, poverty and social security, working poor and wage policy, work and employment, social mobility and social stratification, family violence, crime and punishment, immigration and ethnic groups, development and environment.

Social Problems and Social Development in China:

Key issues in the social development of China, e.g. rural development, sweatshop, sex and sexualities, queer studies, crime and human trafficking, labour regulations and social protection for migrant workers, family, aging, pollution and environmental issues.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Henslin, J. M., & Fowler, L. A. (2009). Social problems: A down-to-earth approach. New Jersey: Pearson.
2	Hudson, J., & Lowe, S. (2009). Understanding the policy process: Analysing welfare policy and practice. Bristol: Policy Press.
3	Macionis, J. (2007). Social problems (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson.
4	Ritzer, G. (Ed.). (2004). Handbook of social problems: A comparative international perspective. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
5	Sernau S. R. (2009). Global problems: The search for equity, peace, and sustainability. New Jersey: Pearson.
6	Walker, A. et. al. (Eds.). (2010). The Peter Townsend reader. Bristol: Policy Press.

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Aspalter C. (2001). Conservative welfare systems in East Asia. Westport: Praeger.
2	Baker, P. J. (1993). Social problems: A critical thinking approach. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
3	Bennholdt-Thomsen, V., Faracías N., & Werlhof C. W. (2001). There is an alternative: Subsistence and worldwide resistance to corporate globalization. London: Zed Books.
4	Chiu, S., & Lui, T. L. (2009). Hong Kong: The global city. London: Routledge.
5	Coleman, J. W., & Kerbo H. R. (2003). Social problems: A brief introduction (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey : Prentice Hall.
6	Feagin, J. R., & Feagin, C. B. (1997). Social problems: A critical power-conflict perspective (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
7	Finsterbusch K. (Ed.). (2003). Social problems 03/04. Guilford, Conn.: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.
8	George, V., & Page, R. M. (Eds.). (2004). Global social problems. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity.
9	Giddens, A. (1996). Introduction to Sociology. New York: W.W. Norton.
10	Heiner, R. (2006). Social problems: An introduction to critical constructionism. New York: Oxford University Press.
11	Kendall, D. E. (2004). Social problems in a diverse society (4th ed.). Boston, Mass.: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
12	Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (2010). Population ageing and international development: From generalisation to evidence. Bristol: Policy Press.
13	Lopata H. Z., & Levy, J. A. (Eds.). (2003). Social problems across the life course. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
14	Mazur, A. (2007). Global social problems. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
15	Midgley, J. (1997). Social welfare in global context. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
16	Murphy, R. (Ed.). (2008). Labour migration and social development in contemporary China. London: Routledge.
17	Neubeck, K. J., & Neubeck, M. A. (1997). Social problems: A critical approach (4th ed.). New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies.
18	Nolan, P., & Lenski, G. (1999). Human societies: An introduction to Macrosociology. London: McGraw-Hill.
19	Rubington E., & Weinberg, M. S. (Eds.). (1995). The study of social problems: Seven perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
20	Rubington E., & Weinberg, M. S. (Eds.). (2002). Deviance: The interactionist perspective. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
21	Sanderson, S. K. (1999). Macrosociology: An introduction to human societies. New York: Longman.
22	Townsend, P., & Gordon, D. (2002). World poverty: New policies to defeat an old enemy. Bristol: Policy Press.
23	Yan, H. R. (2008). New masters, new servants: Migration, development, and women workers in China. Durham: Duke University Press.
24	Yeates N. (2001). Globalization & social policy. London: Sage.
25	Zastrow, C. (2000). Social problems: Issues and solutions (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

26	Key Journals
27	Sociology
28	British Journal of Sociology
29	American Journal of Sociology
30	Critical Social Policy
31	Journal of Social Policy
32	Social Policy and Society
33	Global Social Policy
34	Community Development Journal
35	Social Policy Review