Social Problem Research Project

From the syllabus:

How You Earn Your Grade

Your grade will be determined through the following weighted categories:

Research Project (15%)

More information is included below about each of these areas.

C. Research Project

You will complete a research project on a social problem of your choice. This is your opportunity to explore an issue you care about and demonstrate your mastery of our course learning objectives through application of your sociological knowledge. For this project you will select a social problem to research. You will explore the empirical situation relevant to your social problem, analyze its accompanying cultural mythology, and consider it from a sociological perspective. You will also evaluate proposed solutions, including their correspondence to your understanding of the social problem. You will select a particular proposed solution that you agree with and identify a target that can help decide whether to implement that solution. You will write and send a letter/e-mail to your target about your social problem and proposed solution. During our final class you will present this letter to the class.

Please make sure you stay on top of your project; do not wait until the last minute to attempt to complete the assignments. Final versions of each project part should conform to the rules of Edited Standard Written English (e.g. avoid slang, do not use profanity unless you are discussing it as a subject matter, use standard spelling and proper punctuation, do not use shorthand (e.g. write you not u, are not r, "I found that humorous" not lol, etc.). More details about the project will be given out. Weekly assignment titles have been included in the course schedule.

Course Schedule

Project refers to the project assignment to be completed that week for the following class (e.g. Project Assignment #1 should be completed prior to class on 3/7).

Week	Date	Project
1	2/22	#1 Social Problem Proposal
2	2/29	
3	3/7	#2 The State of the Problem
4	3/21	#3 The Cause of the Problem
5	3/28	
6	4/4	#4 Comparative Solutions & Addressing the Problem, Opposing Viewpoints
7	4/11	
8	4/18	#5 Firsthand Accounts
9	4/25	#6 Advocacy Documents
10	5/2	
11	5/9	#7 Advocacy in Action

Assignments

Research Project Assignment #1 Social Problem Proposal

1. Select a social problem that you want to focus on for your project. This can be any contemporary issue at the campus, local community, state, regional, national, or international level.

If you are having trouble brainstorming a possible social problem, one place to start would be to explore the websites of some advocacy groups. You can also look through broad topics by checking out a list of [Society for the Study of Social Problems divisions](#), [American Sociological Association sections](#), or [the table of contents of any Social Problems textbook](#).

2. Read something about the topic/issue related to your social problem. This could include skimming the Henslin textbook if there is a section on it, reading a news article, a blog post, an academic article, a report, etc. You are even welcome to use Wikipedia for this assignment.

3. Submit this assignment with the following information:

A: The topic you selected

B: Why the topic interests you

C: What you read (include a stable URL/link or appropriate bibliographic information)

D: At least three sentences sharing something you learned or thought about from that reading

Research Project Assignment #2: The State of the Problem

Explore the empirical situation relevant to your social problem, What are the manifestations of this social problem? Its scope and scale? Who does it affect? What are its impacts?

Write at least two meaningful paragraphs, but no more than five. Use at least two credible sources. Include in-text citations and the appropriate bibliographic information – whether you use ASA, APA, Chicago, MLA, or another style is up to you.

Grading Criteria

Criterion	Performance Characteristics
Content	▪ Persuasively provides insight into the state of the problem ▪ Rich, up-to-date, correct evidence to address research question
Clarity	▪ Well-written, understandable (can understand on first read) ▪ Uses correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting throughout ▪ Adeptly communicates content ▪ Strong organization, focus, and flow.
Complete	▪ Follows guidelines ▪ Fully answers all prompts within assignment ▪ Two to five meaningful paragraphs
Sources	▪ At least two credible sources used ▪ Provides all needed citations and references, properly formatted.

Research Project Assignment #3: The Cause of the Problem

Why does this problem exist? How is the problem produced? What are barriers to solving this social problem? What role do social structures, systems, and institutions in this social problem?

Write at least two meaningful paragraphs, but no more than five. Use at least two credible sources. At least one must be a peer-reviewed scholarly journal article that is either written by a sociologist, published in a sociology journal, or makes substantive use of sociological theory. Include in-text citations and the appropriate bibliographic information – whether you use ASA, APA, Chicago, MLA, or another style is up to you.

Grading Criteria

Criterion	Performance Characteristics
Content	- Persuasively provides insight into cause(s) of the social problem - Causal explanation makes use of sociological theory/perspective(s) - Rich, up-to-date, correct evidence to address research question
Clarity	- Well-written, understandable (can understand on first read) - Uses correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting throughout - Adeptly communicates content - Strong organization, focus, and flow.
Complete	- Follows guidelines - Fully answers all prompts within assignment - Two to five meaningful paragraphs
Sources	- At least two credible sources used - At least one source is either written by a sociologist, published in a sociology journal, or makes substantive use of sociological theory - Provides all needed citations and references, properly formatted.

Research Project, Assignment #4:
Comparative Solutions and Addressing the Problem, Opposing Viewpoints

Include in-text citations and the appropriate bibliographic information – whether you use ASA, APA, Chicago, MLA, or another style is up to you.

1. Briefly re-state the social problem you are working on.

2. What has been done to attempt to address your social problem? What do folks in different communities in the U.S. and around the world advocate for and actually do to address this issue? To what extent are these different solutions successful? This question requires at least one credible source and at least one paragraph.

3. Based on what you have researched regarding the state of the problem, its cause, and comparative solutions, identify one concrete and specific effective and pragmatic way to move forward in addressing your social problem.

4. Explain how this proposed solution addresses the problem and its cause. How does it reflect a sociological understanding of the social problem?

5. What are arguments for and against the proposed solution you identified? If possible, identify an organization working in support of your proposed solution and one that opposes your proposed solution (or at least funding or prioritizing your proposed solution). What arguments do these organizations put forward? This question requires at least two credible sources and at least one paragraph.

6. What do people think about your social problem? In what ways are these conceptions correct and incorrect? Are there particular myths associated with the problem or ideologies that help perpetuate misconceptions? This question requires at least one credible source and at least one paragraph.

Research Project Assignment #5: Firsthand Accounts

1. Briefly re-state the social problem you are working on.

2. Find and read first-hand accounts regarding your social problem from people who are affected by it. Choose from one of the following options:
- One journal article that is based on participant observation and/or interviews of target population (about the social problem you identified).
- One documentary that includes people sharing their stories (about the social problem you identified) who are members of the target population
- Two media items (newspaper stories, radio interviews, podcasts, blog posts, etc.) that include people sharing their stories (about the social problem you identified) who are members of the target population

Share the appropriate bibliographic information for the item/items you selected and read – whether you use ASA, APA, Chicago, MLA, or another style for formatting your references is up to you.

3. Write at least one paragraph summarizing what you learned. How did it compare and/or contrast to the information research you have conducted so far about your social problem?

Research Project Assignment #6: Advocacy Document

You will write (and hopefully send) a letter/e-mail to your target about your social problem and proposed solution. During our final class period, you will read your letter to the class.

1. List the information below regarding your letter:

A. Social problem:

B. Ask / Proposed solution:

C. Target (who you are trying to influence that could make a difference in your social problem / help make your proposed solution happen):

D. List the e-mail information, URL to a webform, or mailing address for your target:

2. Letter
Write a letter that is at least one page single spaced but no more than two pages single spaced to your target advocating for your issue. Include the text below.

3. Reflection
Explain the choices you made about your writing (e.g. framing, addressing misconceptions, etc.). What makes your letter effective? One paragraph should suffice.

4. Action
Do you plan to send or e-mail your letter to your target? Why or why not?

Grading Criteria

Criterion	Performance Characteristics
Clarity	• Adeptly communicates content; understandable upon first read. • Strong organization, focus, and flow. • Uses correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting throughout.
Sociological Perspective & Relevance	• Demonstrates deep understanding of the sociological perspective.
Content & Analysis	• Provides sufficient context and information regarding social problem. • Effective use of framing, narrative. • Makes sense given audience (oriented towards target). • Effectively addresses cultural mythologies / misconceptions. • Information is valid and informed by research.
Complete	• Follows guidelines. • Fully answers all prompts within assignment. • Appropriate length.

The following assignments were not part of the above project, but I've used it in the past:

Project Part Three: Inquiry Plan

Interview a proponent and opponent of the proposed solution you are researching
- Name, title, and organization of persons you are planning to interview

<mark>1. Proponent and opponent:</mark>

Find and read first-hand accounts regarding your social problem from people who are affected by it
- Options:
  - Bibliographic reference for one journal article that is based on participant observation and/or interviews of target population (about the social problem you identified)
  - Bibliographic reference for one documentary that includes people sharing their stories (about the social problem you identified) who are members of the target population
  - Bibliographic references for three media items (newspaper stories, radio interviews, podcasts, blog posts, etc.) that include people sharing their stories (about the social problem you identified) who are members of the target population

<mark>2. Bibliographic information:</mark>

Analyze popular discourses used regarding your social problem from popular media stories or information statements from political people or groups.
- Options:
  - Bibliographic references for two popular media stories (e.g. newspaper articles, news video segment, radio show segments, etc.). If one is more liberal or conservative, you should try to balance this out by having the other be on the opposite side of the spectrum.
  - Bibliographic references for two political people/group communication statements/documents (e.g. candidate statements, platforms, debate transcripts or video segments, etc.; or think tank, advocacy organization, non-profit, or political party policy briefs, fact sheets, statements, action alerts, etc.). If one is more liberal or conservative, you should try to balance this out by having the other be on the opposite side of the spectrum.

<mark>3. Bibliographic information for popular media stories:</mark>

or

<mark>4. Bibliographic information for political communications:</mark>

Grading Criteria

Criterion	Performance Characteristics
Quality of Sources	▪ Sources are relevant to your research project ▪ Sources allow for useful inquiry
Clear	▪ Bibliographic information is properly formatted
Complete	▪ Follows guidelines regarding number of and type of sources/publications

Project Part Three: Applying Inquiry and Further Reflections

You will interview a proponent and an opponent of the proposed solution you are researching. You will find and read first-hand accounts regarding your social problem from people who are affected by it. You will analyze the discourses used in popular media stories regarding your social problem. You will take these scientific investigations and revisit your earlier analyses.

You are only required to complete #4 or #5, not both. You can list your answers briefly for #1, #2a, #3a, and #4a or #5a. For #2b, #3b, and either #4b or #5b, write at least two meaningful paragraphs in response to each question. Do not write more than five paragraphs in response to any question.

1. What is your social problem? What is the solution you are advocating for?

2. Proponent & Opponent Interviews
2a. List the names, titles, and organizations of the persons you interviewed.

2b. What did you learn from the proponent and opponent of the solution you are researching? How did what they say complement, reinforce, or differ from your research in Part 2 of this project? What framing did they use to discuss the solution? Did you think it was effective? Did their responses reflect or contest any cultural mythologies about your issue and/or the solution you identified? Is there anything you would change about your proposed solution based on these interviews?

3. First-hand accounts
3a. List the bibliographic references for the sources you used.

3b. What did you learn from the first-hand accounts regarding your social problem from people who are affected by it? How did what they say complement, reinforce, or differ from your research in Part 2 of this project? Did their responses reflect or contest any cultural mythologies about your issue and/or the solution you identified? Is there anything you would change about your proposed solution based on these first-hand accounts?

4. Popular media stories
4a. List the bibliographic references for the sources you used.

4b. What did you learn from the popular media stories regarding your social problem? How did what they say complement, reinforce, or differ from your research in Part 2 of this project? In what ways did these stories reproduce or contest any cultural mythologies about your issue and/or the solution you identified?

5. Political communications
5a. List the bibliographic references for the sources you used.

5b. What did you learn from the political communications regarding your social problem? How did what they say complement, reinforce, or differ from your research in Part 2 of this project? What framing did they use to discuss the solution? Did you think it was effective? Did their responses reflect or contest any cultural mythologies about your issue and/or the solution you identified?

Grading Criteria for Final Version

Criterion	Performance Characteristics
Clarity	• Adeptly communicates content; understandable upon first read. • Strong organization, focus, and flow.

	• Uses correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting throughout.
Sociological Perspective & Relevance	• Demonstrates deep understanding of the sociological perspective. • Sociological relevance is clear and consistently reinforced throughout.
Supporting Evidence	• Rich, up-to-date, and valid evidence supports all points • Uses relevant and credible sources. • Uses required number and type of sources (see the Inquiry Plan assignment for requirements)
Content & Analysis	• Persuasively provides insight into the questions asked.
Bibliographic information	• Provides all needed references, properly formatted.
Complete	• Follows guidelines. • Fully answers all prompts within assignment. • At least two meaningful paragraphs written per specified questions. No more than five paragraphs written per question.