SOCIAL PROBLEMS
SOCI 1520-700 | Fall 2025

Instructor: Emery Kennedy
Email: emery.kennedy@unt.edu
Office: Sycamore Hall 288U
Phone: (940) 565-2296 (Sociology Department)
Office Hours: Wednesdays 4-5 pm and by appointment in person or via Zoom

Teaching Assistant: Angela Zarama Salazar
Email: AngelaZaramaSalazar@my.unt.edu
Office: Sycamore Hall TA Lounge
Office Hours: By appointment in person or via Zoom

Course Description

This course introduces contemporary social problems in the United States, with a focus on communities in Texas. It explores broad conditions that are especially important to the lives of Texas residents, youth, and workers, including those that are seen as problematic and those that violate social norms. Among the topics we will discuss are poverty, racial and gender inequality, residential segregation, mass incarceration, climate change, and labor market transformations, among others. Students will learn major concepts used by sociologists to explain various social problems, and then they will apply these concepts to investigate social problems in their local communities using visual methods. We will conclude by considering proposals to address social problems and how sociology has informed visions of a more just and equal future.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Understand how sociologists approach the study of contemporary social problems.
- Consider major social problems affecting Texas residents, youth, and workers.
- Apply sociological concepts to explain social problems in Texas.
- Document social problems using visual methods in their local communities.
- Develop creative ways to address contemporary social problems.

Course Structure & Format:

This course takes place 100% online. Your interaction with the instructor and with your fellow students will take place in Canvas. There are eight weeks of accelerated content that you will move through at your own pace.

Prerequisites: None

This course satisfies the liberal arts and social sciences core social science requirements. It is also advised for students planning sociology graduate work.

In order to be successful, you must be able to:

- Describe major social problems in Texas using sociological concepts.
- Cite sources, giving credit to where you obtain information.
- Make the commitment to spend at least 10 hours a week reading, reflecting on the material covered, and participating in activities and assessments.

Required Materials:

The required book is available at the UNT Bookstore and online retailers:

> Auyero, Javier, ed. 2015. *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Additional required readings will be available through the UNT Library website. For all readings, I will ask you to access them directly through the library since posting full PDFs directly to Canvas violates copyright laws. You will need to use your EUID and password to access them. Please reach out in advance if you are having any issues with access. To complete the course assignments, you also need access to a device that can take digital photographs. Students may use a smart phone or an actual camera.

This course contains some copyrighted material, the use of which has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. I have determined this to be "fair use" of the copyrighted material as referenced and provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use any copyrighted material from this course for purposes of your own that go beyond fair use, you must obtain express permission from the copyright owner.

Course Technology & Skills:

Below is a list of the minimum technology requirements for students in this course:
- Functioning computer
- Reliable internet access
- Speakers
- Microphone
- Microsoft Office Suite
- Zoom
- Camera

Below is a list of course-specific technical skills learners must have to succeed in the course:
- Familiarity with Canvas
- Familiarity with Zoom
- Regularly checking email
- Ability to download image files from digital camera or cell phone

Course Requirements & Grades:

The final grade in the course evaluates student learning in multiple ways, including quizzes, assignments, and exams.

A quick look at the point breakdown tells you what is most important in this class. Half of your grade (50%) is earned through the quality of your assignments. These assignments ask you to make connections between your communities and the social problems we learn about in class.

Weekly participation is worth 40% of your final grade. This is measured through your completion of the introduction discussion board and the syllabus quiz (5%) in Week 1, and then weekly quizzes (35%) that review key concepts and evaluate reading comprehension.

Finally, there is a final exam worth 10% of your grade. The final exam is cumulative.

Type	Details	Points	%
Syllabus Quiz + Introductions	1 quiz x 25 points 1 discussion x 25 points	50	5
Weekly Quizzes	7 quizzes x 50 points ea.	350	35
Assignments	2 assignments x 250 points ea.	500	50
Final Exam	1 exam x 100 points	100	10
Total		**1,000**	**100**

The following scale is used to calculate final grades:
    A = 89.5-100
    B = 79.5-89.4
    C = 69.5-79.4
    D = 60-69.4
    F = <60

Syllabus Quiz and Introductions

During the first week of class, students are required to complete the syllabus quiz and the introductory discussion board. Each are worth 25 points, and combined, they are worth 5% of your final grade.

Weekly Quizzes

Students will complete weekly comprehension quizzes to assess learning objectives. Each has 16 questions about the course content that are worth 3 points each, and one question that you're you about your experience in the class that is worth 2 points (for 50 points total). Weekly quizzes make up 35% of your final grade. You will have 7 opportunities to earn credit. Your lowest quiz score will drop at the end of the semester.

Quizzes will review course content, readings, videos, and any other materials presented in class that week and will include a combination of multiple choice, and true/false questions. Each week, there will also be one question about your experience in the class, which does not have a wrong answer.The quizzes are open-book and open-note. Quizzes are untimed but students get just one attempt to complete them. You will be able to see the correct answers after you submit them. Please use these as a study tool for your final exam.

Assignments: Documenting Social Problems in Local Communities

To deepen your understanding of contemporary social problems, students will complete two assignments that document social problems that are relevant in your everyday life. These are worth 250 points each and combined, they count for 50% of your final grade.

For these assignments, students will take original photographs (between 2-3 per assignment) and then analyze the images using at least one class concept of your choice. Accommodations will be made as needed. Please reach out to the instructor as soon as possible if you require support.

As part of the assignment, all students will engage in a peer review process, reviewing one of your classmates' submissions. Your score will be based on your assignment (200 points) and your engagement with other student's work (50 points each). Full assignment expectations and guidelines can be found on Canvas. Please review the rubric for a detailed point breakdown.

Remember, this is an accelerated class. If you have questions about your grade on Assignment 1, it is critical that you reach out to the professor before submitting the second assignment. Please be proactive if you have questions!

Final Exam

There is one final exam, worth 100 points. This will be open only during the final exam period. The exam is cumulative, and includes a combination of 40 multiple choice and true/false questions, each worth 2.5 points each.

Course Policies:

Communication Policy

The instructor will reply to emails within 24 hours and within the time frame of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Please plan accordingly before exams and due dates. Before emailing, please 1) check the syllabus; 2) refer to your class notes; and/or 3) ask a classmate directly or via the General Q&A discussion board on Canvas. Students are expected to regularly check Canvas. Please set your communication preferences so that you are notified of announcements and grade submissions.

Student Behavior & Classroom Environment

At the University of North Texas, we strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility in both in-person and virtual classrooms. I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. I encourage students to participate by expressing your opinions, asking questions, and presenting outside information to deepen your engagement with course material.

Please do your part to facilitate a stimulating and rewarding learning environment. This involves being respectful of one another, having an open mind, and being willing to have your ideas challenged. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. This includes racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or ableist language.

Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please let me know immediately.

Like UNT, I do not tolerate identity-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation so we will work as a class to collaborate in ways that encourage inclusivity. I may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's Code of Student Conduct (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) to learn more.

In the online environment, please take extra care, as your writing constitutions interaction with other people. Here are some guidelines for appropriate online interaction. Please make sure to review these Engagement Guidelines (https://digitalstrategy.unt.edu/clear/online-communication-tips.html) for more information.

- Treat your instructor, teaching assistant, and classmates with respect in any communication online or face-to-face, even when their opinion differs from your own.
- Ask for and use the correct name and pronouns for your instructor and classmates.
- Speak from personal experiences. Use "I" statements to share thoughts and feelings. Try not to speak on behalf of groups or other individual's experiences.
- Use your critical thinking skills to challenge other people's ideas, instead of attacking individuals.
- Use standard, readable fonts, sizes, and colors and avoid using all caps. This may be interpreted as "YELLING!"
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm in emails or discussion posts as tone can be difficult to interpret digitally.
- All communication needs to be professional. Use correct spelling and grammar and always double-check your response before hitting send or reply. Do not use slang or "text-talk," and limit the use of emoticons.
- Proofread your writing and fact-check your sources.
- Keep in mind that online posts are permanent, so think first before you type.

Due Dates and Grading

All due dates, assignments, and rubrics will be posted in Canvas and will not change without advanced communication from the professor. You earn the grade you receive in this class. I do not curve or scale exams, assignments, or final grades. If you become concerned about your grades, meet with me immediately.

There is no extra credit in this class.

Except in extreme circumstances, I do not give incompletes. Students must request an incomplete in writing at least one week before final exam week. Please include documentation of the reason that the course cannot be completed before the end of the semester. Please note that I can only considered these requests if at least 50 percent of course exams and assignments have been completed with a passing grade.

Late Work

Under ordinary circumstances, no late work will be accepted. If you need extensions, please reach out *in advance*. Course work may be rescheduled only under exceptional circumstances (instances of disability, illness, or emergency) and with *prior* instructor consent. Due dates may also be rescheduled based on university excused absences such as active military service, a religious holy day, or an official university function as stated in the Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF) (https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.039_StudAttnandAuthAbsence.Pub2_.19.pdf). Please let me know as soon as possible if you would like to reschedule an exam or change an assignment due date.

Students requiring accommodations for exams should speak with me after obtaining an accommodation form from the Office of Disability Access. This should be done within the first two weeks of class.

Technical Assistance

Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Please reach out to UNT Student Tech support (https://techsupport.unt.edu/students) to troubleshoot problems with the Canvas platform.

Mental and Physical Health and Safety

Your safety and well-being are of utmost importance to me. Please self-monitor and do not come to campus or go out in public if you have any symptoms of COVID-19, or any contagious illness. If you are ill or have extenuating circumstances that impact your attendance, please reach out to me as soon as possible—ideally before missing a due date—and I will make appropriate accommodations. Please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Team at COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

If you are struggling in other ways that impact your academic performance, please reach out to the UNT CARE team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team), which connects students with resources and services. You can reach out individually or make a report for someone you are worried about at https://report.unt.edu.

Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:
- Student Health and Wellness Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- UNT Care Team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)

- UNT Psychiatric Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
- Individual Counseling (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)

Chosen Names

A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know. Below is a list of resources for updating your chosen name at UNT.

- UNT Records (https://registrar.unt.edu/transcripts-and-records/update-your-personal-information)
- UNT ID Card (https://sfs.unt.edu/idcards)
- UNT Email Address (https://aits.unt.edu/eagleconnect)
- Legal Name (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/programs-and-services/student-legal-services/)

Note that UNT EUIDs cannot be changed at this time. The collaborating offices are working on a process to make this option accessible to UNT community members.

Pronouns

Pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) are a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction, both virtually and in-person. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's pronouns.

You can add your pronouns to your Canvas account so that they follow your name when posting to discussion boards, submitting assignments, etc.
Below is a list of additional resources regarding pronouns and their usage:

- What are pronouns and why are they important?
- How do I use pronouns?
- How do I share my pronouns?
- How do I ask for another person's pronouns?
- How do I correct myself or others when the wrong pronoun is used?

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit the instructor and then the departmental chair. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident.

Grade Disputes

You are required to wait 24 hours before contacting me to dispute a grade. Within that time, I expect that you will review the assignment details and reflect on the quality of the work you turned in. If you would still like to meet, email me to set up a meeting (I cannot discuss grades over

email). You should come to our scheduled meeting with specific examples that demonstrate that you earned a higher grade than you received. If you miss your scheduled meeting, you forfeit your right to a grade dispute. If you do not contact me to schedule a meeting within seven days of receiving your grade, you also forfeit your right to a grade dispute.

GenAI Use

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) refers to software systems and platforms that create new content, such as text, images, audio or video using generative models. These models identify patterns from large datasets, enabling them to generate data in response to specific prompts, which in many ways can resemble human-created content. At the University of North Texas, we value creativity and aim for all members of our community to thrive in an ever-changing world. In line with these values, it is critical that we prepare our academic community to embrace AI literacy by intentionally incorporating the use of GenAI into relevant learning experiences.

In this course, however, the use of GenAI tools is not permissible. No matter the approach, any attempt to represent GenAI output as your own work will be considered cheating and the appropriate steps for reporting and addressing academic dishonesty will be taken. Please see the "Academic Honesty" section of this syllabus for more information.

Given the evolving services of GenAI, there may be questions as to what is and is not allowed for this class. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions about the tools you are using. You must do this before submitting any work for a grade.

Accommodations:

Students with Disabilities

It is my goal to foster an inclusive learning environment in this class. UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website (https://disability.unt.edu/).

If you require accommodations, please notify me during the first week of classes, or as soon as possible, by presenting a letter from Office of Disability Access. If you need more information about accommodations, please review the UNT Policy 16.001 or contact Office of Disability Access (http://disability.unt.edu) at 940-565-4323.

Student Athletes

Athletes must provide me with a game schedule for the semester, signed by the coach, in the first week of class in order to be eligible for an excused absence.

Religious Holy Days

If you plan to miss class to observe a religious holiday, UNT policy states that you must notify the instructor with as much advanced notice as possible. If, with proper notice, you miss a class, assignment, or exam, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable timeframe. For more information, see the University-wide policy of religious observances (https://edo.unt.edu/religious-observances).

Academic Honesty:

All students are expected to abide by the UNT Code of Student Conduct:

> The University has established the Code of Student Conduct to promote the well-being, honor and dignity of all who live, learn and work in our educational community. The Code of Student Conduct is intended to foster a safe environment conducive to learning and development, as well as to hold students accountable through an educational process that balances the interests of individual students with the interests of the University. Students and student groups are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates respect for the rights and property of others and upholds the integrity and values of the University community.

You are responsible for understanding the Code of Student Conduct in its entirety (http://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012).

Please maintain a high standard of individual honor and integrity. All work you produce on activities and assignments must be your own. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. Any form of "unauthorized assistance" constitutes cheating, according to the Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003).

Collaboration of any kind on exams will result in a failing grade for the exam. Cheating of any kind of assignments will also result in a failing grade. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on an exam or assignment, and submitting a written assignment from a previous course without prior permission of both instructors. Scholastic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate administrators in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

The use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is not authorized for the assignments in this class. If used, the violation constitutes cheating. All written assignments will be evaluated with Turnitin (https://www.turnitin.com), which sends both the student and instructor an originality report.

You a responsible for understanding what constitutes such violation, according to UNT Policy 6.003, available here: https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003. If you are not familiar with a citation method, seek assistance from the instructor or the free University writing lab: http://www.unt.edu/writinglab/.

Getting Help:

Technical Assistance

This class is in person relies heavily on Canvas. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UIT Help Desk: http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm
Email: helpdesk@unt.edu
Phone: 940-565-2324
In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130
Walk-In Availability: 8am-9pm
Telephone Availability:
- Sunday: noon-midnight
- Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 9am-5pm

Laptop Checkout: 8am-7pm

For additional support, visit Canvas Technical Help (https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)

Student Support Services

- Registrar (https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
- Financial Aid (https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
- Student Legal Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
- Career Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
- Multicultural Center (https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center)
- Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- Student Affairs Care Team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
- Student Health and Wellness Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)

Academic Support Services

- Academic Resource Center (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
- Academic Success Center (https://success.unt.edu/asc)
- UNT Libraries (https://library.unt.edu/)
- Writing Lab (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

Understanding Sexual Harassment:

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UNT community have a responsibility to uphold this mission of the university and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. For more information, see the policy: https://policy.unt.edu/policy/16-005.

Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies make it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, please refer to the appropriate resources: http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/sexual-misconduct

If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

Emergency Notification & Procedures:

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency; for example, related to severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence. In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records:

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect:

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail Eagle Connect (https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect).

Student Evaluation Administration Dates:

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during the final weeks of class to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Please look for the email in your UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website (http://spot.unt.edu/) or email spot@unt.edu.

Important Notice for F-1 Students taking Distance Education Courses:

To read detailed Immigration and Customs Enforcement regulations for F-1 students taking online courses, please go to the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations website (http://www.ecfr.gov/). The specific portion concerning distance education courses is located at Title 8 CFR 214.2 Paragraph (f)(6)(i)(G).
The paragraph reads:

> (G) For F-1 students enrolled in classes for credit or classroom hours, no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter may be counted toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken on-line or through distance education and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. An on-line or distance education course is a course that is offered principally through the use of television, audio, or computer transmission including open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing. If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no on-line or distance education classes may be considered to count toward a student's full course of study requirement.

Acknowledgements & Attribution

This online class was designed and created by Dr. Katherine Sobering in 2025 and was approved by UNT's Center for Learning Experimentation, Application and Research. It was updated for the 8-week format in 2025. A faculty member at UNT, Dr. Sobering is an expert in qualitative research methods and studies gender, work, and organizations. She received her Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin in 2018.

We would like to thank Julia Robinson, Javier Auyero, and the collaborators on the *Invisible in Austin* project for their resources, materials, and feedback included in this course.

Course Overview – 8W Coursera:

Part 1: What constitutes a social problem?
- Week 1: What is a social problem? // History, place, and structural inequality
  - Syllabus Quiz
  - Introductions
  - Quiz 1

Part 2: Social problems in Texas
- Week 2: Poverty & social mobility
  - Quiz 2
- Week 3: Gender and work
  - Quiz 3
- Week 4: Visual sociology & the politics of sight
  - Assignment 1
- Week 5: Race & racism
  - Quiz 4
- Week 6: Criminalized drugs & mass incarceration
  - Quiz 5
- Week 7: Immigration & climate change
  - Quiz 6

Part 3: Addressing social problems today
- Week 8: What can we do? // Conclusions
  - Quiz 7
  - Assignment 2
- Final exam period: Final Exam

  -