COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will document and critically analyze a number of major social problems in the United States, in a global as well as national context. We will seek to understand the structure of society and the underlying causes and conditions that give rise to social problems. Special attention will be given to how we define and think about social problems, including the role played by ideologies and the mass media. Students will have the opportunity to explore their personal values as they relate to a variety of issues in contemporary society, such as urban life, education, poverty, gender inequality, the world of work, immigration, and racial and ethnic relations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation

You are expected to attend class and participate actively in class discussions. Attendance will count 5% toward your course grade. In addition, students who demonstrate excellent participation in the classroom—in the form of thoughtful questions and comments about the topics we discuss—will be awarded up to 5 extra credit points for the semester.

Reading

Reading assignments should be completed in time to discuss them in class on the day for which they are assigned.

The following books are required for the course and can be purchased in the Trinity University Bookstore:

- *Economic Apartheid in America: A primer on economic inequality and insecurity* (2000), by Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskil;
- *Heat Wave: A social autopsy of disaster in Chicago* (2002) by Erick Klinenberg; and

*Economic Apartheid in America* is supported by a companion website at [http://www.faireconomy.org/research/Economic_Apartheid_Data.html](http://www.faireconomy.org/research/Economic_Apartheid_Data.html) as is *Social Problems* (go to [http://www.ablongman.com/socprobs](http://www.ablongman.com/socprobs)). Along with chapters from these books, you will be assigned a number of supplemental readings to complete for each topic. These will be made available to you during the course of the semester. In
addition, you will also find study/discussion questions for *Heat Wave* and most of the supplemental readings posted on the course web site. You should review these questions as you read each assignment and come to class prepared to discuss them.

**ALWAYS** bring copies of assigned readings with you on the day they are to be discussed in class!

**Mini-essay assignments**

Three mini-essay assignments will be given during the semester. Each assignment will consist of several questions asking you to apply key concepts discussed in the course. Assignments will be distributed by email and posted on the course web site on **Feb 12**, **Mar 25**, and **Apr 22**. You will need to send completed essays to the instructor via email. For the first two assignments, essays will be due no later than the start of the following class period. The last set of essays will be due to the instructor no later than 10:00 PM on Tuesday, May 4.

**Audiovisual presentation**

As a member of team of apprentice sociologists, you will conduct research on a contemporary social problem and its possible remedies. You will present the findings of your research and your proposals to remedy the problem in a 25-30 minute audiovisual presentation to the class. This presentation must be documented electronically so that it can be posted on the course website.

Teams must email the instructor a written proposal for their presentation no later than **Friday, Feb 20 at 5:00 PM**. Presentations will be made to the class during the last week of April (i.e., during the last week of classes). More specific instructions for how to complete this assignment will be supplied by the instructor early in the semester.

**Brief**

Each of you will write a concise sociological brief (8-10 pages, double-spaced, excluding notes, illustrations, tables, and references) presenting research findings about and proposed remedies to a contemporary social problem. You may write about the same problem as the one you researched for the audiovisual presentation. Subject to instructor approval, you may also co-write the brief with another student. **The length for co-written papers will be 15-20 pages.**

Students must email the instructor a written proposal for their brief no later than **5:00 PM on Friday, Feb 27**. Complete papers must be turned-in to the instructor no later than **5:00 PM on Friday, Apr 23**. More specific instructions for how to complete this assignment will be supplied by the instructor early in the semester.
GRADING

Grades for individual assignments will be given in accordance with the guidelines published in the Trinity University Courses of Study 2003-2004 (see “Academic Regulations,” p. 45). The final course grade will be calculated using the following weighting of assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-essays</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiovisual presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There will be no grading "curve" in this course—each student will receive the grade s/he earns without regard to the class average. All assignment due dates are firm, and exceptions will be made only under extraordinary circumstances. Unless prior consent has been obtained from the instructor, grades on assignments turned in late will automatically be lowered one full letter. In addition, the grade given for written work will be lowered for spelling and punctuation errors, poor grammar, improper style, et cetera. Extra credit assignments may be offered from time-to-time throughout the semester and will be announced by the instructor.

COURSE WEB SITE

This course is supported by a web site that contains materials used in our lectures and discussions (e.g., this syllabus, class handouts, lecture outlines, et cetera), as well as links to other resources relevant to the material we will cover this semester. The url for the site is http://www.trinity.edu/dspener/socprobfree/welcome-spring-2004.htm. Some parts of the site are secure and require a user name and password to gain entry.

EMAIL DISTRIBUTION LIST

In order to facilitate communication among participants in the seminar, there is an email distribution list. To send messages to all other seminar participants at once, use the address DSpener-a@trinity.edu. It will be necessary for you to check your Trinity email account regularly throughout the semester since important course information will routinely be communicated via this distribution list. Do NOT use this distribution list to communicate one-on-one with the instructor or fellow students--use their personal email addresses instead. If you have any trouble sending or receiving messages to/from the distribution list, be sure to contact the instructor immediately.

OFFICE HOURS

Dr. Spener’s office hours are by appointment Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00-9:30 AM and Wednesdays from 8:00 AM to noon. His office is located in CLS 312. Phone: 999-8562. Email: dspener@trinity.edu.