PROBLEM (OED) literally, a thing thrown or put forward; hence, a question propounded for solution.

1) A difficult or puzzling question proposed for solution, a riddle, an enigmatic statement, obs.
2) A question proposed for academic discussion or scholastic disputation.
3) A doubtful or difficult question, a matter of inquiry, discussion thought; a question that exercises the mind: 1795: Burke, Th. Scarcity Wks. VII 416: “It is one of the finest problems in legislation ... ‘What the state ought to take upon itself to direct ... and what it ought to leave, with as little interference as possible, to individual discretion.”
4) Geometry - a proposition in which something is required to be done: opposed to theorem.
5) Physics and Math - a question or inquiry which starting from some given conditions investigates some fact, result, or law.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Joel Best: *How Claims Spread: Cross-National Diffusion of Social Problems*

Joel Best and Donileen R. Loseke: *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*

John C. Burnham: *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History*

James Davison Hunter: *Culture Wars*

Cynthia Kuhn, et al.: *Buzzed: The Straight Facts about the Most Used and Abused Drugs from Alcohol to Ecstasy*

Nisbet, Lee: *The Gun Control Debate: You Decide*
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

General Expectations:

All students are expected to attend class. I do not calculate an exact percentage of the grade based on attendance and participation, but I will take attendance occasionally and keep note of participation and use that record when making close decisions about a final grade. Class participation in the form of raising questions and furthering discussion is a vital part of an interesting class. **Your enrollment in this course means that I may call upon you at any time in class.**

Newspaper Subscriptions:

It is impossible to think sociologically unless one is thinking about concrete historical or contemporary issues that affect large numbers of human beings, most often in their daily lives. A course in social problems can help students to confront those issues more critically and with greater self-confidence, if they acquire the habit of reading a newspaper daily. For the purposes of this course, students are asked to read one of three papers: *The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times*, or *The Boston Globe*. You may subscribe to the paper versions of these media, or review the web-based versions on a daily basis.

Examinations: All examinations are take-home and open-book.

A. Midterm Exam (short essay questions on readings):

   **Distributed March 12, DUE March 15 (by 5PM)**

B. Final Exam (Distributed the Last Day of Class)

Papers: All assignments are due on the date indicated and must be typewritten. Papers handed in late will automatically be penalized, a third of a grade per day.

1) 5 page paper on social problems of dependence and their proposed solutions

   **NO PAPER MORE THAN OR LESS THAN 5 PAGES WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

   **DUE: February 22.**

2) 5 to 8 page paper on social problems of independence and their proposed solutions

   **DUE: April 19.**
COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

January 29:  Introduction to the course. Explanation of assignments.

February 1:  What is a social problem?


Michael Crichton, “Aliens Cause Global Warming” (e-reserve)

George Will, “Global Warming? Hot Air” (e-reserve)

I. Problems of Dependence: Trust Close to Home


II. Problems of Dependence: Trust at a Distance


**FIRST PAPER DUE**


**MIDTERM EXAMINATION DISTRIBUTED**

III. Problems of Independence: The New Risk Culture

March 15: Why are some problems, problems of independence?

**MIDTERM DUE (5PM)**

March 26: John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits*, chapters 1, 2, and 3: Drinking


April 2: Burnham, chapter 4: Smoking


April 9: Burnham, chapter 6: Gambling


April 12: Lee Nisbet, *The Gun Control Debate*:

Read the opening Introduction and the introductions to Parts 1-5 of the book: pp. 13-21; 23-28; 95-107; 175-181; 303-314; 541-542.
April 17: The Gun Control Debate, concluded

IV. The Convergence of Social, Political, Economic and Moral Problems

April 19: Burnham, chapters 9 and 10.

SECOND PAPER DUE

April 23: James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars*

April 26: Hunter, *Culture Wars*, continued

April 30: Hunter, *Culture Wars*, concluded

May 3: NO CLASS

May 7: Review for Final Exam, Take-Home Exam Distributed in Class

**DATES TO REMEMBER: SOCIAL PROBLEMS 2007**

**February 22:** First Paper Due

**March 12:** Midterm Exam (DUE March 15)

**April 19:** Second Paper Due