

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS
University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

Voyage: Summer 2014

Discipline: Sociology

SEMS 3500-108: Contemporary Social Issues and Political Debates

Upper Division

Faculty Name: David J. Toscano

Credit Hours: 3; Contact Hours: 38

Pre-requisites: None.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Our country was born in, and born to, debate. This course will subject the social problems and political debates of our time to sociological analyses, focusing specifically on how culture affects policy and politics, how present problems have emerged from historical trends and how critical inquiry can inform our analyses of the key issues facing this country and the world. The course will draw on readings in sociology, politics, and law, including, when appropriate, actual legal cases which have either brought some resolution to a debate or serve to fuel it. We will also explore and discuss how these issues are addressed and resolved through decision making structures, using our experiences in various countries to draw comparisons to how we resolve problems in the United States.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Others to be determined.

AUTHOR: Miroff, et al
TITLE: Debating Democracy (Debating)
PUBLISHER:
ISBN #:
DATE/EDITION: 7th Edition

AUTHOR: Friedman
TITLE: Hot, Flat and Crowded
PUBLISHER:
ISBN #:
DATE/EDITION:

AUTHOR: Skolnick & Currie
TITLE: Crisis in American Institutions (Crisis)
PUBLISHER:
ISBN #:

DATE/EDITION: 14th Edition

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

READINGS

June 16: Depart Southampton

June 17: Orientation

C1-June 18:

Introductions

The Media and Social Problems

Where Do You Get Your News?
Politics and Policy; “Where Are You?”

How Do We Measure “A Good Society”?
“Without Data, You Are Just Another
Person With An Opinion”

Personal Troubles and Public Issues;
Theory and Reality;

Thomas Friedman, Chapter 1, (“Citibank, Iceland’s
Banks, Ice Banks of Antarctica”)

Pew Research, “The State of the News Media”
Debating, Chapter 9 (Digital Media) Chapter 10
(Political Polarization)

Mills, “The Sociological Imagination” (reserve)

C2- June 19:

Reviewing Various Indices in Nations
where we will dock
Cultural Context of the Voyage

Friedman, Chapter 2

“The Future of the European Union”, The
Economist
Debating, Chapter 5 (Political Economy)
“The Crisis This Time”, NY Times Opinion

C3- June 20:

Economy and Politics

Does Austerity Affect Social
and Political Institutions?

Role of Corporate Power

Sachs, “Diagnosing America’s Economic Crisis”
Draut and Silva, “Generation Broke”, Crisis,
Chapter 6

Kuttner, “The Squandering of America”, Crisis,
Chapter 8

Postman, “The Commercial”, Crisis, Chapter 3
Debating, Chapter 6 (Civil Liberties & Campaign
Spending)

Article on *Citizens United v. FEC* (reserve)

June 21-24: Lisbon

C4- June 25:

Poverty and Wealth
Distribution of Wealth and Income
Taxation and its Role
Why So Many Poor in America
Policy and Poverty

Debating, Chapter 16 (Economic Inequity)
Baker, “Increasing Inequality in the U.S. “, Crisis,
Chapter 9
Articles on European Inequality

C5- June 26:

Race & Inequality
“Who is a Person?”
Prejudice v. Discrimination
Affirmative Action

Plessy v. Ferguson (reserve)
Brown v. Board of Education (reserve)
Brown, et al, “The Roots of White Advantage”,
Crisis, Chapter 13
Golden, “At Many Colleges, the Rich Kids Get
Affirmative Action”, Crisis, Chapter 15

June 27-30: Bilbao

C6- July 1:

Ethnic Turmoil Internationally

Chomsky, “They Take Our Jobs”, Crisis,
Chapter 16

Immigration Issues in U.S. and Europe

Debating, Chapter 4 (Immigration)
Article on Swedish immigration issues

POSSIBLE DEBATE ON IMMIGRATION

C7- July 2:

Crime & Violence
Violent v. White Collar

Sentencing Project, “Schools and Capital
Punishment Prisons”, Crisis, Chapter 14
Cume, “The Myth of Leniency”, Crisis, Chapter 37
Skolnick, “Three Strikes, You’re Out”,
Crisis, Chapter 38
Pew Foundation, “One in 100”, Crisis, Chapter 39
Webb, “Why We Need to Fix Our Prisons”
(reserve)

C8- July 3:

DEBATES – MARIJUANA

July 4-7: Glasgow

C9- July 8:

Physical & Medical Health
Global Problems—AIDS and Mortality Sered, “Sick out of Luck”, Crisis, Chapter 30

C10-July 9:

Obamacare After the Supreme Court Commonwealth Fund, “Why Not the Best”,
Crisis, Chapter 31
Exploding Medicaid & State Budgets Rubin, “The Untold Health Care Story: How They
Crippled Medicare”, Crisis, Chapter 32
Deinstitutionalization Article on Supreme Court Decision on Health Care
(reserve)

July 10-13: Dublin

C11- July 14:

DEBATES

C12- July 15:

Technology and the Environment
Energy and Resource Supply and Demand Friedman, pp. 53-139
Petropolitics Union of Concerned Scientists,
Climate Change “Smoke, Mirrors and Hot Air”, Crisis, Chapter 25

C13- July 16:

Technology & the Environment
Biodiversity & Energy Issues in Europe Friedman, pp. 140-414

July 17-20: Bergen and Oslo

C14- July 21:

MIDTERM

C15- July 23:

The Family Skolnick, “Beyond the ‘M’ Word”,
Crisis, Chapter 20
Lerner, “The Kids Aren’t All Right”,

Crisis, Chapter 21
Shahmehri, “More Than Welcome: Families Come First in Sweden”, Crisis, Chapter 22

July 24-28: St. Petersburg

C16- July 29:

Gender & Sexual Inequality

Griswold v. Connecticut (reserve)
Roe v. Wade (reserve)
“Conundrum of Glass Ceiling”, Crisis, Chapter 18

DEBATES – SAME SEX MARRIAGE

Debating, Chapter 7 (Civil Rights & Same Sex Marriage)

C17- July 30:

Population Change & Global Equality

Jack Goldstone, “The New Population Bomb” (reserve)

July 31- August 3: Stockholm
July 31 – Field Lab – Stockholm

Attendance Mandatory

C18- August 4

America’s Educational System: Model For the World or Our Achilles Heel

Crisis, Chapter 10, including Kozol, Mutariod Lake, Michel and Rothstein, and Washburn

C19- August 5

Articles on Finnish Model of Education

August 6-9: Helsinki

C20- August 10

Debrief Finland / Debates

C21- August 11

America’s Future in the World

Crisis, Chapter 12, including Johnson, “Blowback”, and Klare, “Oil, Geography & War”, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (reserve)
The Declaration of Independence

Debating, Chapter 17 (Foreign Policy and U.S. as Imperial Power)

August 12-15: Gdansk

C22- August 16

War, Terrorism & Civil Liberties

9/11 Commission, "What to do?" from Crisis Debating, Chapter 12 (Federal Budget) and Chapter 13 (Congress)

C23- August 17

America's Institutions – Are We Up to the Challenge?

Debating, Chapter 1 (The Founding); Chapter 2 (Democracy); Chapter 15 (The Judiciary)
The Declaration of Independence (reserve)
Sachs, "Paying for Civilization"

C24- August 19: Final Exams

FIELD WORK

Field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Please do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of our field lab.

Field Lab Description

This field lab will take place in Stockholm on Thursday, 31 July. Sweden is often viewed as a model of the social welfare state, but much like the US, Sweden is beset by problems related to immigration. For example, the country experienced riots in the spring of 2013 and the Sweden Democrats, an anti-immigrant party, was recently reported to be the third most popular party in the country. We will begin with a US Embassy briefing to introduce students to the Swedish political system. Following that, we will visit Parliament and meet with representatives of various political parties. Finally, we will be exposed to the immigrant communities themselves and to activist groups who work with them.

Objectives:

1. To expose students to the complexity of immigration law in Sweden
2. To compare the Swedish model with US practices
3. To discuss immigration with individuals who are involved in its implementation

Field Assignments

Students will write a graded paper that explores the differences between the US and Sweden immigrant "problem" and the extent to which the stated goals of policy are being upheld in each

country. Students will be asked to draw upon their own personal experiences during their Stockholm visit.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

1. Abide by the Honor System.
2. Attend class and participate. (I will take attendance and failure to attend will affect your grade.)
3. Read materials prior to sessions. Lectures will complement the readings, not repeat them.
4. Read a newspaper or magazines that address European and U.S. issues, such as The Economist. Check out www.world-newspapers.com by country. We will be discussing events and trends in countries we visit and classes following various visits to countries will begin by discussing an element of the culture in that country or region. We will draw on articles in the press.
5. Presenting Issues. The class will be divided into groups which will debate critical issues facing the United States and how those issues are addressed in the countries we visit. As part of the project, each individual student will submit a paper no more than 5 pages in length arguing for or against a propositions and participate in oral discussion where students will take different positions on the debate proposition and discuss how one of the countries we visit addresses the issue. Debate topics will be determined in the first week and chosen from the list below. Each of you will need to submit topics that you would like to debate from the list below to my mail box by **10:00 PM on June 24, 2014**. Please list your top 4 choices and whether you support or oppose the proposition from the following list:
 - a. Capital Punishment should be abolished.
 - b. “Immigration Reform is Needed for U.S. Economic Growth”
 - c. The U.S. should deregulate controls on Stem Cell research.
 - d. *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned and Regulation of Abortion should become the exclusive province of the states.
 - e. The U.S. Use of Torture Should Be Restrained to Maintain Civil Liberties and Our Moral Stature in the World.
 - f. Same-Sex Marriage should be legalized.
 - g. The U.S. should reemphasize nuclear power as a way to bring energy independence to the country.
 - h. Marijuana should be legalized.
 - i. The U.S. shall pass campaign finance reforms to limit the power of big business, and overturn *Citizens United v. FEC*.
 - j. In light of our economic challenges, the U.S. should be more concerned about job creation than climate change.

I will then organize which students will be in which debates and their positions. Each student will be responsible for participating in the debate and producing the paper.

6. Participating in my field lab experiences, or upon approval, in another field lab experiences offered by a colleague. You will be asked to write a 3 page summary of

what you learned from the lab experience which illustrates one of the concepts or issues discussed in class.

7. There will be an in-class midterm and final exam which will include both objective and essay questions. Exam questions will involve reflections on your experiences and observations in port during the field experience.

8. Grading:

Class participation, including summary/analysis of field lab experiences (3 page summary)	-	20%
Debate / Presentation (5 page summary)	-	30%
Midterm	-	20%
Final exam	-	30%

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST: TBD

HONOR CODE

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."