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Soci 10R: American Society  
University of California-San Diego  
Spring 2022-23

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## Course description

This course explores key issues in contemporary America, how social scientists — as well as journalists, advocates, and policy makers — approach them, and what can be done to make things better. The course also aims to help you strengthen university-level critical thinking and writing skills.

The course is fully online and asynchronous. It is organized into 20 modules — two per week. Multiple times each week you will log into Canvas and read/watch the required materials, write discussion comments and responses, and complete quizzes. There are two exams, one in week 6 and the other in week 11. The course has no synchronous class meetings or discussion sections. If you are new to online learning, take a moment to get acquainted with Canvas and make sure you have all of the necessary materials and resources. All times listed in this syllabus and in Canvas are California time.

## Schedule

Here are the topics we'll cover. The full schedule is in the [Modules \(https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/46449/modules\)](https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/46449/modules) page in Canvas.

- Week 1, Module 1: Course introduction
- Week 1, Module 2: How do we know?
- [Syllabus Navigation](#) in week 2 and continue through week 10
- Week 2, Module 3: In what ways is the United States exceptional?
- Week 2, Module 4: Why isn't there less poverty in America?
- Week 3, Module 5: Why don't Americans live longer?
- Week 3, Module 6: Why is there so much gun violence?
- Week 4, Module 7: Should marijuana be legal?
- Week 4, Module 8: Is income inequality ruining everything?
- Week 5, Module 9: Why don't more Americans live in cities?
- Week 5, Module 10: Why don't more Americans get a four-year college degree?
- Exam 1
- Week 6, Module 11: What's gone wrong with non-college-degree whites?
- Week 6, Module 12: Are Black Americans catching up with whites or falling farther behind?
- Week 7, Module 13: How far have we come on LGBTQ inclusion?
- Week 7, Module 14: Are we near gender parity?
- Week 8, Module 15: Is work-family-leisure balance a thing of the past?
- Week 8, Module 16: Should the US have higher taxes?
- Week 9, Module 17: Should America end its "endless" wars?
- Week 9, Module 18: Does America have a loneliness epidemic?
- Week 10, Module 19: Who wins elections and why?
- Week 10, Module 20: Is America too polarized?
- Exam 2

## Course aims

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize, describe, and evaluate scientific hypotheses, evidence, and conclusions about key social issues in the contemporary United States.
- Apply critical thinking skills to academic writing, journalistic writing, and other sources of claims: identify significant questions; identify testable hypotheses; evaluate source credibility; identify and assess relevant evidence, including quantitative data presented in graphical form; evaluate counterarguments; reason from evidence to conclusions.
- Write concise analytical comments and essays assessing explanations of social processes and outcomes.

Let me elaborate a bit on the things you can expect to get from the course:

- Substantive knowledge. The course aims to improve your understanding of the issues we cover.
- Approaching issues scientifically (this is often called "critical thinking"). This means reasoning ▶ Syllabus Navigation solely on theory, ethical beliefs, or anecdotes. What kind of evidence? And what kind of reasoning? Social science often is similar to detective work, with the social scientist more like Sherlock Holmes than like a chemist in a lab. Seldom is the story simple, and rarely do we have the exact evidence we would need in order to be strongly confident about our conclusion. So we use various types of data, and we may deploy a mixture of analytical methods. We ask: "What would we expect to observe if a particular hypothesis were true? Is that what we in fact observe? If so or if not, what does that tell us about the answer to our question?" Then we piece together a conclusion from multiple imperfect and incomplete bits of evidence. For each topic we cover in the course, there will be one or more readings and videos. Focus on the question(s) being posed, the answer(s) given, the key pieces of evidence, and the way the author reasons in reaching a conclusion.
- Good argument. The course is designed to improve your ability to develop and convey effective argument. Keys include focusing on a specific question, formulating a clear proposal or position, making use of relevant evidence, addressing potential objections and counterarguments, and communicating clearly.
- Written communication. Good writing usually comes from two things. The first is clear thinking. But writing isn't just a way to express what you're thinking; it's a way to clarify your thinking. Don't wait until you have it all figured out before beginning to write. Start writing. Doing so will help you develop your thoughts. The second key is extensive editing. Write a draft. Then edit it. Then edit it again. And again. (For a helpful guide to good writing, see [this \(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/smarter-living/how-to-edit-your-own-writing.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/smarter-living/how-to-edit-your-own-writing.html).) If you struggle with writing, you're like virtually everyone else. This course aims to help you improve, by practicing. There are weekly written discussion posts and two essay exams.
- Concision. Information and opinion are plentiful these days, so brevity is a valuable skill. The discussion posts and exams for the course are short, so you'll need to focus on the information and argument that is most relevant and useful.
- Comfort with quantitative data. A generation ago there was a scarcity of numerical data. Now we have an abundance: data are everywhere. That's a good thing, because data are key to answering important questions about society. You will encounter lots of quantitative data in this course, often in graphical form. If you aren't already comfortable interpreting such data and reasoning from them, by the end of the course you should be.

Here are a few things you *won't* get from this course:

- It's not all awful. Social scientists and journalists often emphasize our problems and shortfalls. That's helpful, because it spurs us to do better and (hopefully) helps us figure out how. But it also can give us the impression that things are getting worse. Sometimes that's accurate, but in other instances it's misleading. In fact, in many areas of life it's true both that we could be doing better

and that things have been improving.

- We won't focus on sociological concepts such as norms, roles, socialization, habit, groups, [Syllabus Navigation](#) structure, social reproduction, stratification, status, power, deviance, discrimination, segregation. We'll come across some of these, but I won't attach any special importance or centrality to them.
- We won't make use of the functionalist, conflict, and interactionist theoretical perspectives that are prominent in some sociology textbooks.
- We'll pay little attention to influential theorists. For this, consider taking a sociological theory or history of sociology course.
- In some social science and humanities courses, a key objective is to learn how to decipher complex or abstract texts — to convert them into understandable terms and concepts in order to gauge their usefulness for analyzing contemporary issues. We won't spend time on this.

## Course materials

All readings and videos are available in digital form and are accessed in the [Modules](#) (<https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/46449/modules>) page in Canvas.

- Digital textbook: Lane Kenworthy, *The Good Society*. (Free)
- Selected additional readings from the *New York Times* and other outlets. (Free) Note that the *NYT* allows non-subscribers to access a limited number of articles for free. If you exceed that number and they cut off your access, you can sign up for [free access via the UC San Diego library](#) (<https://ucsd.libguides.com/newspapers/nyt>). Or you can get a [student subscription for \\$1 per week](#) (<https://www.nytimes.com/subscription/education/student>) (\$11 total for this 11-week course). You can cancel the subscription at any time.
- Lecture videos. Each module includes short lecture videos that align with the readings. (Free)
- Selected additional videos. (Some are free; a few cost \$3 or \$4 to stream)

## Grading

Course grades will be determined as follows. See below for details on each of the components.

- 30%: quizzes
- 30%: discussions
- 20%: exam 1
- 20%: exam 2

Each of these will be graded on a scale of 0 to 100. So your numerical course grade is calculated as: (quizzes average grade x .30) + (discussions average grade x .30) + (exam 1 grade x .20) + (exam 2

grade x .20).

Your letter grade for the course will be determined as follows:

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- 96.67 to 100 = A+
- 93.34 to 96.66 = A
- 90 to 93.33 = A–
- 86.67 to 89.99 = B+
- 83.34 to 86.66 = B
- 80 to 83.33 = B–
- 76.67 to 79.99 = C+
- 73.34 to 76.66 = C
- 70 to 73.33 = C–
- 60 to 69.99 = D
- below 60 = F

There will be no extra-credit projects or assignments.

## Quizzes

For each module (twice per week), beginning in week 2, you will take a short quiz on the readings and videos. Each quiz will have 10 multiple choice or true/false questions. There will be 18 quizzes; only your 15 highest grades will count.

The quizzes are posted on Canvas. Each quiz will be available for 48 hours, from 12:01am on the first day until 11:59pm on the second day. Once you begin a quiz, you'll have 30 minutes to complete it.

The quizzes are open-note open-computer.

If you have the Canvas app, you can take the quizzes using your phone.

You can skip a quiz, which will reduce the number of quizzes that count for your overall quiz grade, if you have to miss it for any of the following three reasons: (1) holidays or special events observed by organized religions (for students who show affiliation with that particular religion); (2) absences pre-approved by the UCSD Dean of Students (or Dean's designee); (3) extended illness (this requires a doctor's note). I will need written verification of the circumstances.

## Discussions

Once per week, beginning in week 2, you'll write a short comment on assigned readings/videos and post it to a discussion board on Canvas. These are due at 11:59pm on Tuesdays. You will also write

brief responses to the comments of two other students. These responses are due at 11:59pm on Thursdays. You have to post your own comment before you're allowed to see the comments posted by [▶ Syllabus Navigation](#)

Comments should address something in the course materials for that module, should engage with evidence, and should be written well. Here are a few examples, just to give you a feel. You don't need to follow these examples; this is just to give you some ideas in case you aren't sure what is expected.

- The op-ed for this module was interesting, but I wasn't convinced, because the author didn't consider ...
- The textbook reading for this module says that Figure 3 supports gun control. But it seems to me that's wrong because ...
- In the video, the narrator argues that women's freedom increased because more were entering paid work. If that were true, I think we'd expect to see ..., but there's no mention of this.

If you have the Canvas app, you can post your comment and responses using your phone. But don't write as though you're texting or tweeting. Write real sentences and use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Grading for each discussion comment and responses:

- 100: comment and two responses submitted, excellent quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 95: comment and two responses submitted, very good quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 85: comment and two responses submitted, good quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 75: comment and two responses submitted but low quality or poorly written or comment doesn't include evidence
- 60: comment submitted but only one response
- 50: comment submitted but no responses
- 0: no comment submitted

There will be 9 discussions; only your 8 highest grades will count.

## Exams

There are two exams. Exam 1 will cover modules 1-10. Exam 2 will cover modules 11-20.

Each exam will have one question. The question will be posted on Canvas one week before your answer is due.

The exams are open-note open-computer. You should draw on the course materials. You can also

use outside sources if you wish, but that isn't required.

Grading will be based on the following:

▶ Syllabus Navigation

- Answer the question.
- Refer to relevant evidence.
- Address potential objections. What would a critic say are the weak points in your case? How do you respond?
- Write clearly.
- Use proper grammar and punctuation ("I," "me," and contractions are fine) and adhere to the following length, formatting, and citation instructions. Length: No more than 1,000 words (excluding charts, tables, and footnotes). List your word count on the first page, along with your name and the date. Formatting: single-space, 12-point font size, 1-inch top and bottom margins and 2-inch side margins. Use footnotes (not a reference list or bibliography) to give credit to anyone from whom you borrow evidence or argument. The footnotes aren't included in the word count. I'm not picky about the formatting of the footnotes, but include the author(s), title, and year rather than just an internet address.

If you need help with writing, consider seeking assistance from the UC San Diego Writing Hub (see below).

Upload your exam answer on Canvas. Emailed or hard copy exam answers won't be accepted. Submit your answer as a Microsoft Word document (doc or docx), not as a pdf.

The due dates are listed in Canvas. An exam turned in late but within 48 hours of the deadline will be penalized 25 points (out of 100). An exam turned in more than 48 hours late, or not turned in at all, will receive a grade of zero.

Don't plagiarize. If you aren't sure what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, see the UC San Diego Library's [guide to preventing plagiarism \(https://ucsd.libguides.com/CAT2/plagiarism\)](https://ucsd.libguides.com/CAT2/plagiarism). Turnitin software will be used to check originality.

## Student resources for support and learning

### Learning Resources

- [Writing Hub \(https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html\)](https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html)
- [Supplemental Instruction \(https://aah.ucsd.edu/supplemental-instruction\)](https://aah.ucsd.edu/supplemental-instruction)
- [Tutoring \(https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/math-chemistry-tutoring/index.html\)](https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/math-chemistry-tutoring/index.html)
- [CAPS Student Health and Well-Being \(https://wellness.ucsd.edu/CAPS/Pages/default.aspx\)](https://wellness.ucsd.edu/CAPS/Pages/default.aspx)
- [Chat with a librarian for research and library help \(https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/index.html\)](https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/index.html)

## Technical Support

- For help with accounts, network, and technical issues: [UC San Diego ITS \(https://acms.ucsd.edu/contacts/index.html\)](https://acms.ucsd.edu/contacts/index.html)
- For help with electronic library resources: [How to connect from off campus \(https://library.ucsd.edu/computing-and-technology/connect-from-off-campus\)](https://library.ucsd.edu/computing-and-technology/connect-from-off-campus)
- For help installing Zoom for virtual office hours: [Zoom help page \(https://blink.ucsd.edu/technology/file-sharing/zoom/index.html\)](https://blink.ucsd.edu/technology/file-sharing/zoom/index.html)

## Community Centers

- Learn about the different ways UC San Diego explores, supports, and celebrates the many cultures that make up our diverse community at [Student Life Diversity \(https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html\)](https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html)

## Accessibility

- Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the UC San Diego Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged. Contact the OSD for further information: <https://disabilities.ucsd.edu> (<https://disabilities.ucsd.edu/>)

## Inclusion

- I am committed to creating a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspective, experience, and identities, and I encourage students to participate in discussion and contribute to the field from their perspectives.
- Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: 858.822.3542 | [diversity@ucsd.edu](mailto:diversity@ucsd.edu) | <https://diversity.ucsd.edu> (<https://diversity.ucsd.edu/>) | [Student Life Diversity \(https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html\)](https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html) | [Policy on University of California Diversity Statement \(https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html\)](https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html)

## Basic Needs

- Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in this course, is encouraged to contact: [foodpantry@ucsd.edu](mailto:foodpantry@ucsd.edu) | [basicneeds@ucsd.edu](mailto:basicneeds@ucsd.edu) | 858.246.2632

## Religious Accommodation

- [EPC Policies on Religious Accommodation, Final Exams, Midterm Exams \(https://senate.ucsd.edu/operating-procedures/educational-policies/courses/epc-policies-on-courses\)](https://senate.ucsd.edu/operating-procedures/educational-policies/courses/epc-policies-on-courses)



### [/policy-exams-including-midterms-final-exams-and-religious-accommodations-for-exams/](#)

- It is the policy of the university to make reasonable efforts to accommodate students having bona fide religious conflicts with scheduled examinations by providing alternative times or methods to take such examinations. If a student anticipates that a scheduled examination will occur at a time at which his/her/their religious beliefs prohibit participation in the examination, the student must submit to the instructor a statement describing the nature of the religious conflict and specifying the days and times of conflict.
- For final examinations, the statement must be submitted no later than the end of the second week of instruction of the quarter.
- For all other examinations, the statement must be submitted to the instructor as soon as possible after a particular examination date is scheduled.
- If a conflict with the student's religious beliefs does exist, the instructor will attempt to provide an alternative, equitable examination that does not create undue hardship for the instructor or for the other students in the class.

### Discrimination and Harassment

- [Nondiscrimination Policy Statement \(http://ophd.ucsd.edu/policies-procedures/nps\\_student.html\)](http://ophd.ucsd.edu/policies-procedures/nps_student.html)
- CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center: 858.534.5793 | [sarc@ucsd.edu](mailto:sarc@ucsd.edu) | <https://care.ucsd.edu> (<https://care.ucsd.edu>)
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 858.534.3755 | <https://caps.ucsd.edu> (<https://caps.ucsd.edu>)

## Subject to change policy

Note that the information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be — under certain circumstances such as a modification to enhance student learning — subject to change with reasonable advanced notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.