

# **SOC 255 – Social Problems in Modern Western Societies:**

## **Ireland in Comparative Perspective**

### **Fall 2017 Term Abroad, Galway, Ireland**

**Hobart and William Smith Colleges/Union College  
Partnership for Global Education**

**Prof. H. Wesley Perkins**

The focus of this course is the examination of fundamental social problems confronting contemporary Western societies. How social problems have emerged or have been perpetuated in recent years, and how social problems are defined and perceived by particular social groups are important issues for this course, as is the consideration of various types of attempts to address these problems. In particular, the course poses the following questions: In what ways does a focused look at Ireland reveal particularly distinctive problems or essentially mirror larger patterns of problems facing most modern Western nations? And to what extent do the social problems reflect distinct or overlapping issues confronting the peace and stability of local communities and the nation of Ireland as a whole. What are the sources or causes of a social problem and what are the local and national programs and policies that emerge in attempts to address them, and how effective are these interventions?

The course will look in depth at three specifically selected social problems in modern Ireland of particular import—1) religious/ethnic conflict, 2) adolescent violence and bullying, and 3) alcohol abuse—as case studies of different types of social problems in Irish society. Though somewhat distinct in who is adversely affected and what attempts are made to reduce them in Ireland, significant violence and distress are produced by each or these problems, and each is affected by other social problems such as poverty and youth unemployment. The course will examine how sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, public health advocates, public policy analysts, and other social scientists view these three persistent problems in Ireland and compare the findings with how other modern Western nations deal with these particular problems.

Although the three topics noted above will be the primary examples, other topics such as racism, care of the aged, drug abuse, access to health care, pornography, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, family violence, abortion, children's rights, unemployment, pollution, global warming, and illegal immigration are other examples of social problems that students may wish to consider when they write a final course paper.

Note: An introductory social science course in sociology, anthropology, political science, economics or social psychology is recommended as preparation for this course.

Example Readings (selections from the following texts):

Healy, Sean and Brigid Reynolds (Editors), Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems, 2007.

Lalor, Kevin and Perry Share (Editors), Applied Social Care: An Introduction for Students in Ireland, 2013.

Dempsey, Eoin, The Bogside Boys, 2015.

Heath, Dwight, Drinking Occasions: Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture, 2000.

MacLachlan, Malcolm and Caroline Smyth (Editors), Youth Culture and Binge Drinking.

Holiday, Laurel, Children of "The Troubles": Our Lives in the Crossfire of Northern Ireland, Simon and Schuster (Pocket Books), 1997.

Cochrane, Feargal, Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace, Yale University Press, 2013.

Trigg, Roger, Religion in Public Life: Must Faith Be Privatized? Oxford, 2008.

Example Documentary Films Screened During the Course:

"Mirror Mirror: Northern Ireland" (from Blood and Belonging Series on Nationalism)

"Understanding Northern Ireland"