

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY**

SLWK 603: SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Fall, 2001
Fridays, 12:00-2:40PM
Business Bldg 2118

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Hours by appointment

Course Description

SLWK 603. Social Work and Social Justice. 3 Credits. Examines social work's historical and current commitment to social justice as related to oppressed groups in a multicultural society. Enhances understanding of and appreciation for diversity in self and others. Addresses issues of power, inequality, privilege, and resulting oppression. Analyzes oppression resulting from persistent social, educational, political, religious, economic, and legal inequalities. Focuses on the experiences of oppressed groups in the U.S. in order to understand their strengths, needs, and responses. Uses a social justice perspective for the study of and practice with oppressed groups, including those distinguished by race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status, and class. Considers ethical dilemmas faced by social workers in empowerment and advocacy roles.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of SLWK 603, students will be able to:

1. Understand the social work profession's responsibility and commitment to social justice, social reform, and advocacy, historically and in contemporary practice.
2. Understand and appreciate diversity in oneself and others.
3. Identify ways in which individual and institutional oppression and the misuse of power constrain the legal rights and social and economic well-being of individuals and groups within American society.
4. Demonstrate increased critical self-awareness through analysis of personal values in relation to professional values as these influence practice with oppressed populations.
5. Analyze the historical antecedents of racism and other forms of oppression, the patterns and processes of power, privilege, and inequality, and their consequences for social work with oppressed groups.

6. Analyze inequalities facing at least six oppressed groups (people of color; immigrants; women; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons; individuals with disabilities; and children, adolescents and older persons) and the impact of stereotypical thinking and culturally insensitive behaviors.
7. Focus on the coping and adaptation mechanisms and the strengths of diverse oppressed populations in considering social work practice interventions.
8. Integrate theoretical and empirical knowledge of oppressed groups into social justice strategies relevant to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and policies.
9. Identify ethical dilemmas and strategies for their resolution in accordance with the NASW Code of Ethics.

VCU Honor System

Students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the policies of the VCU Honor System published annually in the University Resources Guide. These policies can be found on the web at: <http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/rg7honor.html>

Reasonable Accommodation

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires Virginia Commonwealth University to provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking academic adjustments or accommodations must self-identify with the Coordinator of Student Services for Students with Disabilities on the appropriate campus. After meeting with the Coordinator, students are encouraged to meet with their instructors to discuss their needs.

Course Units

- I. Social Justice
 - A. Introduction to Social Justice: Concepts and Definitions
 - B. Social Justice, Economic Justice, and Social Work
 1. Social Work's origins in Social Justice and Social Reform
 2. Social Work's current commitment to Social Justice: Theory, Research, and Practice
- II. Diversity
 - A. Concepts and Definitions
 1. Difference versus Inequality
 2. The Social Construction of Difference

- B. Diversity in Self and Others
- III. Power, Privilege, and Inequality
 - A. Concepts and Definitions
 - B. Power, Privilege, and Inequality in Self and Others
- IV. Strategies for Social Justice
 - A. Empowerment Strategies: Concepts and Definitions
 - 1. Individuals, Couples, Families, and Groups
 - 2. Policies, Organizations, and Communities
 - B. Advocacy: Concepts and Definitions
 - C. Ethical Dilemmas
- V. Oppression and Oppressed Groups
 - A. Concepts and Definitions
 - B. Coping and Adaptations
 - 1. Individuals, Couples, Families, and Groups
 - 2. Policies, Organizations, and Communities

Required Readings

A set of required articles will be available online. Readings relate to the concepts and topics identified in the course units.

There is one textbook required for the course that may be purchased at the VCU Bookstore:

Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W.J., Castaneda, R., Hackman, H.W., Peters, M.L., & Zúniga, (2000). Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, antisemitism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism and classism. New York: Routledge.

Course Ground Rules

In order to assure the safest, most honest explorations of the sensitive issues in a course focusing on oppression, discrimination and their consequences for all, the following ground rules will be in force:

1. We acknowledge that social inequalities and oppression exist.
2. We acknowledge that we have all been systematically exposed to misinformation about groups to which we and others belong.
3. We cannot be blamed for misinformation we have learned, but we must take responsibility for repeating it after we have learned otherwise.
4. We will not blame victims for their oppression.
5. We will assume that people are doing the best they can.
6. We will actively pursue information about our own groups and those of others, share it with classmates and translate this knowledge into professional behavior.
7. We will not demean, devalue, or in any way "put down" people for their experiences, perceptions, questions, or comments.
8. We will respect the confidentiality of classroom discussions about specific individuals, groups, communities, and organizations that could be identified in any way. This includes information that classroom colleagues share about themselves.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Readings

Students are expected to complete reading assignments prior to the sessions for which they are assigned and be able to discuss these readings in class. Students are also encouraged to bring in current newspaper and magazine articles that highlight social justice issues.

Attendance and participation

The quality of the class sessions will be greatly effected by students sharing their ideas, opinions, and experiences. For this reason, students are expected to attend and participate in all class sessions.

Your attendance record can be used to improve your final grade if your average falls slightly below a grade cutoff. Students who attend 85% or more of the class sessions will be considered for a grade increase if their average falls within 2 points of the next letter grade. For this purpose, only attendance of complete class sessions will be considered.

Out of courtesy to the other students, please avoid coming to class late and leaving class early.

Assignments

There are three assignments for this course. The guidelines for assignments are outlined below. Assignments should include concepts discussed in class and in assigned readings. When submitting papers, students are asked to not include their names on the title page, but rather to hand write their names on the back of the last page of the paper.

Students are expected to complete and turn in assignments when they are due. Extensions and incompletes will only be granted in extenuating circumstances that are beyond the student's control and must be discussed with the instructor **prior** to the due dates. Points will be deducted for late papers. Additionally, there may be ungraded required activities or assignments in which the student is expected to participate.

Assignment #1: **Choose Option A or B below**

DUE: **September 28th**

This paper should be **6-8 pages** in length (double-spaced, 12 point font) and must adhere to APA reference style. Be sure to include references and carefully proofread your paper. This assignment is worth **100 points**.

Option A: **A Study of a Champion of Social Justice**

Select and study a person in history who has been a champion for social justice. Prepare a paper that includes a brief biography of this person, the historical context (i.e. time period or other relevant historical events), the type of oppression faced (i.e. economic, legal, political, religious, social, educational, etc.), obstacles this person faced and was charged with overcoming, strategies this person employed to battle oppression and work toward social justice, and outcomes. Include how this

person's fight for social justice relates to the concepts in Unit I as well as how this person's work has affected you and your concept of social justice.

Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Ability to provide a summary biography of the selected individual and to identify the social justice issues for which this person fought
- b. Ability to clearly articulate the type of oppression, the obstacles faced and the strategies employed to battle the oppression
- c. An analysis of the outcomes (including continuing issues)
- d. Ability to relate this person's fight for social justice to yourself as well as to class concepts
- e. Quality of writing including spelling, grammar, organization, clarity, and conceptualization

Option B: **Analysis of an Organization**

Choose one organization that is committed to fighting for social justice for an oppressed group. This may be an organization of any size such as a large, bureaucratic agency or a small, grassroots organization. Prepare a paper that includes the following: a brief description of the organization, the social justice issues that this organization addresses, the philosophy or approach with which the organization approaches its work, the action strategies the organization utilizes to achieve social justice, and areas of strength and limitations in the agency's work toward social justice. The philosophy or approach the agency uses in its social justice work should be described in terms of the readings and class discussion from Unit I (e.g. libertarian, utilitarian, egalitarian social justice perspectives—Van Soest and Wakefield articles).

Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Ability to identify social justice issues the organization addresses
- b. Ability to state the philosophy or approach with which the organization approaches its work
- c. Ability to identify the action strategies the organization utilizes
- d. Ability to review critically the agency's strengths and limitations in its work
- e. Quality of writing including spelling, grammar, organization, clarity, and conceptualization

Assignment #2: **Self Awareness/Experiential Log**

DUE: October 26th

Each entry should be approximately 2-5 pages (double-spaced, 12 point font) in length. Be sure to include references as appropriate and carefully proofread your logs.

This assignment is worth **100 points**.

Compile a log of **four** experiences (one from each category listed below). This assignment is intended to enhance student self-awareness and appreciation of diversity in self and others. Early on in the semester, the class will generate ideas and suggestions for the experiential log, including films, books, cultural events, and interview questions.

- a. Interview family members and/or significant individuals to expand awareness of the cultural perspectives which have shaped your perceptions of self and others
- b. Review a book or a film related to an oppressed group to which you do not belong
- c. Interview a member of a population group different from oneself
- d. Attend a cultural event which expands one's understanding and awareness of a population group different from oneself (museum exhibit, concert, theatrical production, religious/spiritual service)

Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Ability to describe primary themes of a book/film, interviews, and a cultural event
- b. Ability to analyze these experiences in relation to course concepts
- c. Ability to critique personal reactions to these experiences
- d. Ability to reflect on ways in which these experiences might inform one's professional practice
- e. Quality of writing including spelling, grammar, organization, clarity, and conceptualization

Assignment #3: **Oppressed Group Presentation or Paper**

DUE: End of the semester; Schedule of presentations to be announced

This presentation or paper is worth **100** points. For group presentations, there will be only one grade given for the group. Be sure to carefully proofread all written materials and include references as appropriate.

Students will form interest groups early in the semester to explore social work's responsibility and commitment to advocacy, social justice, and culturally competent practice. Student groups of 3-4 will select an oppressed population. Groups will prepare a half-hour presentation to address the following questions:

- a. What are the contemporary social justice issues related to this population, including indicators of oppression/discrimination?
- b. What local and national advocacy groups are addressing issues of concern regarding this population group? How effective are these advocacy groups?
- c. What are the most important factors to consider for culturally sensitive social work practice with people from this population?
- d. What change strategies do you recommend to alleviate the oppression experienced by this group?

Students may opt to write a paper on the above assignment. This paper should be 10-12 pages (double spaced, 12 point font) and must adhere to APA reference style.

****Students are encouraged to strongly consider participating in group presentations as a means of developing skills in team work, which will inevitably be part of one's future social work practice.**

The presentation or paper should also include brief background information of the population, including local and/or national data. For presentations, each group will also prepare and distribute to the class an outline of the presentation and a bibliography of the literature related to the population. Additional handouts are also encouraged.

Preparation for the presentation or paper must include: library research and community research (i.e. interviews with individuals working in local advocacy organizations and interviews with social workers whose practice focuses on individuals in this population). Presentation formats will be decided by each group and may include audio-visual aids, debates, role-plays, etc. Be creative!! Also, plan carefully to avoid exceeding the 30-minute time limit.

Each group's grade will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Knowledge about and sensitivity to the target population
- b. Ability to address the assignment questions
- c. Quality of the presentation, including clarity, organization and style
- d. Quality of the outline, bibliography and other handouts in terms of clarity, organization, and thoroughness
- e. Group use of time and ability to work well as a group

The grade for the individual paper will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Knowledge about and sensitivity to the target population
- b. Ability to address the assignment questions
- c. Ability to demonstrate analytic and critical thinking
- d. Quality of writing including spelling, grammar, organization, clarity, and conceptualization
- e. Appropriate use of the literature

Grading

Grading Scale:

90 - 100 = A
 80 - 89 = B
 70 - 79 = C
 60 - 69 = D
 Below 60 = F

Plagiarized material in any assignment will automatically result in a grade of "F" for the assignment. Additional disciplinary action may also be taken. Plagiarism, as defined by the VCU Honor System, involves "representing orally or in writing, in any academic assignment or exercise, the words, ideas, or works of another as one's own without customary and proper acknowledgment of the source" (VCU Honor System, 1997).

Final course grades will be based upon the average of the three assignments.

According to VCU's Academic Calendar, the last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of "W" is October 19th.

The deadline for students to provide advance written notice of intent to observe religious holidays is October 7th.

COURSE CALENDAR

August 31	Course Overview and Introductions
September 7	Unit IA: Introduction to Social Justice: Concepts and Definitions <u>Readings</u> <i>Online e-reserve:</i> Swenson; Van Soest; Wakefield
September 14	Unit IB: Social Justice, Economic Justice, and Social Work Social Work's Origins in Social Justice and Social Reform Social Work's Current Commitment to Social Justice <u>Readings</u> <i>Online e-reserve:</i> Carlton-LaNey; Kogut,; Lundblad
September 21	Unit IB: Social Justice, Economic Justice, and Social Work Social Work's Current Commitment to Social Justice. <u>Readings</u> <i>Online e-reserve:</i> Saleeby; Solomon
September 28	Unit IIA & B: Diversity: Concepts and Definitions, Diversity in Self and Others <u>Readings</u> <i>Adams et al.:</i> Bem (p. 228+); Harro (p. 15+); Lorber (p. 203+); Omi (p. 73+), Takaki (p. 67+); Tatum (p. 9+) <i>Online e-reserve:</i> Kondrat; Ridlen & Dane <u>Assignment #1 Due</u>
October 5	Unit IIIA & B: Power, Privilege and Inequality: Concepts and Definitions. Power, Privilege, and Inequality in Self and Others. <u>Readings</u>

Adams et al.: Langston (p.397+); Larew (p. 418+); Ransford (p. 412+);
 Tatum (p. 79+); Thompson (p. 104+); Wildman & Davis (p. 50+)
Online e-reserve: McIntosh

October 12

Unit IVA: Strategies for Social Justice Empowerment Strategies

Readings

Adams et al.: Bernards (p. 191+); Bowman & Buford (p. 356+);
 Bryan (p. 324+); Deacon (p. 290+); Lewis,
 Holland, & Kelly (p. 421+); Root (p. 120+)
Online e-reserve: Parsons, Gutierrez, & Cox

October 19

Unit IVB & C: Strategies for Social Justice Advocacy and Ethical Dilemmas

Readings

Adams et al.: Anzaldua (p. 475+); Associated Press (p. 190+);
 Blumenfeld (p. 267+); Collins (p. 457+); Edelman
 p. 436+); Edginton (p. 127+); Harro (p. 463+);
 hooks (p. 238+); Law (p. 254+); Love (p. 470+); McClintock
 (p. 483+); Pharr (p. 450+); Sheroover-Marcuse (p. 486); Steinman (p. 256+);
 Thompson (p. 477+)
Online e-reserve: Birkenmaier; Figueira-McDonough; NASW Code of Ethics;
 Palmore

October 26

Unit V: Oppression and Oppressed Groups Coping and Adaptations

Readings

Online e-reserve: Frye

Assignment #2 Due

November 2

Unit V: Oppressed Groups Overview of Common Elements of Oppression

Readings:

Adams et al.: Blumenfeld & Raymond (p. 21+); Pincus (p. 31+);
 Young (p. 35+).
Online e-reserve: Pharr

November 9 **Unit V: Oppressed Groups**
Common Elements: Economic Power and Control, Lack of Prior Claim, The Norm, The Other

Readings

Adams et al.: Brouwer (p. 382+); Cooper (p. 99+);
 Dinnerstein (p. 144+); Heinz & Folbre (p. 391+);
 Oliver & Shapiro (p. 402+); Scheller (p. 430+); Wyman (p. 163+)
Online e-reserve: Caudill; Kelchner

Group Presentations

November 16 **Unit V: Oppressed Groups**
Common Elements: Violence, Invisibility, Stereotyping, Blaming the Victim

Readings

Adams et al.: Bray (p. 425+); Deegan (p. 359+); Deihl & Ochs (p. 276+),
 Feagin (p. 83+); Fine & Asch (p. 330+); Haubegger (p. 242+); Minkowitz
 (p. 293+); The Rape of Mr. Smith (p. 246+); Truth (p. 241)
Online e-reserve: Anonymous (What do you see, nurse?); Molidar; Thompson

Group Presentations

November 23 **THANKSGIVING BREAK---NO CLASS**

November 30 **Unit V: Oppressed Groups**
Common Elements: Horizontal Hostility, Isolation, Assimilation and Tokenism, Emphasis on Individual Solutions

Readings:

Adams et al.: Bornstein (p. 220+); French (p. 364+); hooks (p. 283+);
 Langman (p. 169+); Rodriguez (p. 114+), Schniedewind & Davidson
 (p. 129+); West (p. 177+)

Online e-reserve: Silverstein

Group Presentations

December 7 Wrap Up and Evaluation