SOCW 541: An Introduction to Critical Social Work Practice

THIS IS A SAMPLE OUTLINE.
ACTUAL COURSE OUTLINE MAY VARY IN STRUCTURE, REQUIRED READINGS, TEXTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Description

This course introduces students to the practice of social work beginning with a critical examination of the history of the profession and the values which have shaped it. Students will become familiar with critical theories and practices that inform a socially just practice stance. The relationship between private troubles and public issues as well as the concepts of positionality, intersectionality, power, oppression, privilege, epistemic privilege and social justice, will be explored.

Throughout the course students will engage in a critical self-examination of their positionality in relation to others including and exploration of the beliefs, values and discourses which have shaped their understanding of the world.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

- have a beginning understanding of the history of the profession of social work in Canada

- be familiar with the range of activities that social workers engage in and the sites where they work

- have interrogated social work values such as helping, caring and neutrality

- understand how your social positions have informed how you have come to know what you know

- have developed the ability to question the authority of all knowledge sources including your own

- examine critical social work practices that support a socially just practice stance including mindfulness, collaboration, advocacy, response and strengths based practices, reconceptualized empathy, transparency and naming and honouring resistance

- be able to articulate the relationship between private troubles and public issues

- demonstrate an understanding of the complex nature of power including where you stand with respect to power
• articulate your ideas regarding the meaning of social justice

• understand the significance of place and territory in one’s work

• have explored group processes and facilitation skills drawing from our own group experience

• be able to identify the current challenges for community practice

• have drawn from the broadest set of diverse experiences, identities and voices to understand the importance of uncertainty in our work

• have developed a beginning sense of your role in social justice and critically reflective social work practice

**Class Format**

This class will utilize a variety of teaching methods including lectures, community presentations, experiential learning, small and large group exercises, role plays and non-traditional teaching tools such as art journaling. The class will run for six consecutive Fridays from 9 am to 4:30 pm. Students are expected to attend classes prepared to discuss the week’s readings and to actively participate in class activities.

**Course Spaces Site**

An online Course Spaces site will contain weekly course notes, readings and assignments as well as academic policies relating to accommodation, submission of assignments, grading, plagiarism and APA standards. Please familiarize yourself with these policies on our Course Spaces site.

One of the course assignments will involve engaging in a conversation with peers on Course Spaces over a one week period.

**Accommodation**

Should you require an accommodation in order to fully participate in classroom and online learning please contact me at the outset of the course so we can determine how best I might support you.

**Attendance**

It is the School of Social Work’s policy that students must attend at least 80% of the classes. Failure to meet this policy will result in a failing grade for the course.
Assignments

Assignment #1 – Whiteness Inventory & Reflection

Value: 50% of overall grade

Format
This assignment will consist of an online small group discussion and an individual journal reflection.

Purpose:
• To examine how "whiteness" is privileged and constructed as the "norm" in Canadian society.
• To identify specific examples within your community that convey "whiteness is the norm".
• To reflect on your own beliefs/assumptions/behaviours which comply with and/or disrupt the construction of "whiteness" as the norm.
• To examine the intersections of race with other markers of identity, that is gender, gender identity, class, sexual orientation, ability, and age.
• To connect your learning to course concepts/materials.
• To consider the implications of your learning for your social work practice.

Note: Whether you identify as Indigenous, Black, Brown or White, "white" practices are often internalized and acted on as the norm. The purpose of this exercise is to interrogate this norm and to make visible that which is often invisible to us.

Part A: Preparation
(i) During the first three weeks of the course take a "whiteness" inventory in your community. Your inventory might include examples from personal conversations, mass media, popular culture, lectures you attend, observations of physical space, and so on. Consider how racism is depoliticized (see de Gruy (2011) and Schick (2015).

White privilege/supremacy seldom functions in isolation. Consider how the examples from your inventory intersect with dominant ideas respecting gender and gender identity, class, sexual identity, ability and age.

(ii) Watch one of the following YouTube lectures by Dr. Joy de Gruy which examine how racism and white privilege are embedded within our personal psyches and social institutions:

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (2011) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH7tpAK8APY (1:49) – presented to a primarily white audience
Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (2004) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9ErxogbVBs - presented to a primarily black audience

Part B: Online Small Group Discussion (35%)
Instructions:
Submit a posting to your online small group that is 1000 - 1250 words in length and includes:

- identification of your own positionality
- examples from your inventory including examples of how racism is depoliticized in your community
- observations on how racism intersects with other markers of identity
- a discussion on the links between Joy de Gruy’s (2004, 2011) conversation on cognitive dissonance and Carol Schick’s (2015) ideas on affective economies (see week 3 readings).
- links to additional concepts/readings/resources you have been studying (a minimum of 5 references please)
- a discussion on direct practice implications (i.e.) how, specifically, will your learning from this exercise inform your work with others? What does Sherene Razack’s work (week 1) offer here?

Note: Late posts will be penalized.

During the remainder of the week post a response to a minimum of two classmates’ initial posts. Feel free to respond to more if you would like. Your responses could include: an acknowledgement of how others' ideas are contributing to your learning; areas where you have another perspective; any new insights you have gained. Each of your postings should build on your classmate’s post; add new ideas or new information and; reference course materials/concepts. Feel free to pose questions for your peers to consider during the discussion. Consider how group members' positionalities contribute to what each of you notice or do not notice in your community with respect to race and racism.

Note: Please post throughout the week rather than simply at the beginning and end. This will create space for others to engage with your ideas and you with theirs. As a group, please also ensure that every member of your small group receives a response post. You are expected to adhere to our class working principles at all times.

Criteria for Evaluation

- **Depth of reflections** - an assessment of the depth of your three posts, including your integration and critical reflection on course concepts/theories/readings; your ability to link theory to practice. (70%)

- **Engagement** – an assessment of your ability to communicate thoughtfully; to respectfully challenge ideas; and to post in a timely manner (20%)

- **Writing Ability** - an assessment of your ability to write in a clear, organized manner, including proper grammar, spelling, citing of sources in APA style etc. (10%) Part C: Individual Journal Reflection (10%)

Part C: Individual Journal Reflection (15%)
Length: 900 - 1100 words
Submit Paper: Assignment Drop Box – Course Spaces Site

In essay format respond to the following:

- As you reflect on your small group online experience, what new learning has emerged for you out of this conversation?

- Discuss your own identity formation with respect to race including your learning about your beliefs/assumptions/behaviours which comply with and/or disrupt the construction of whiteness as the norm. What have you noticed about your emotional responses as you have engaged with this topic?

- Discuss your personal work in relation to anti-racist social work practice. Be sure to reference course materials in your journal reflection.

Criteria for Evaluation

- **Depth of reflections** - an assessment of your ability to engage in critical self-reflection and to critically reflect on course concepts/theories/readings; your ability to link theory to practice. (90%)

- **Writing ability** - an assessment of your ability to write in a clear, organized manner, including proper grammar, spelling, citing of sources in APA style etc. (10%)

Assignment #2 – Critical Reflection Paper

Value: 50% of overall grade

Length: 2000 - 2500 words, double spaced (papers which exceed this length will be penalized)

Submit: Assignment Drop Box – Course Spaces Site

Purpose:

- To reflect on and articulate your learning from our classroom experience
- To integrate critical social work theories with lived experience and personal knowledge
- To articulate your understanding of the social work practices which support social justice
- To engage in a process of critical self-reflection

In essay format reflect on each of the following discussion points (not necessarily in this order). Please use headings to organize your material.

**Classroom Experience**
• Which classroom experiences were most significant for your learning about self and social justice? What, specifically, made these experiences significant?

• David Takacs (2002) claims that theories should “reflect the positions of a maximum diversity of knowledge makers” (p.180). How have classmates’ and community presenters’ stories influenced your theories about social justice and assisted you in better understanding your own world views?

• When did you feel the most challenged during our classroom experience? Most empowered? Comfortable? Uncomfortable? Consider the concepts of safety, situated knowledge, rank and learning edges when responding.

• Li Li (as cited in DiAngelo and Sensoy (2011), suggests, “A truly liberating pedagogy must be based on a conjoint effort to listen to the silences and to reclaim the silenced voices” (p.451). Discuss your observations with respect to silence in our classroom including your observations about self. What are the implications of this learning for your social work practice?

• What did you learn about group processes and group facilitation as a result of our classroom experience? What did you learn about yourself as a group member? How will these observations inform your own group work practice in the field?

Critical Practice Stance
• Articulate your social work practice stance. What type of practitioner do you aspire to be? Identify the concepts, principles and skills related to the critical practice theories presented in the course that have informed your thinking.

Social Justice
• Journalist, author and activist Chris Hedges states that each of us has a moral responsibility to act against global capitalism and injustice. Read or listen to a piece of Hedges’ work (*see below for listening/reading/viewing possibilities). Select two major ideas and discuss how these ideas inform your thinking about the meaning of social justice and your role within it.

• Audre Lorde (1990) asks, “What are the particular details within each of our lives that can be scrutinized and altered to bring about change?” (p.286). What changes are you prepared to make in your life to better reflect anti-oppressive living?

• How are you positioned to act on your beliefs with respect to social justice? Consider Akua Benjamin (2011) ideas here.

• As you prepare for your social work field placement identify three intentional actions you will take in your practice to reflect your commitment to social justice.

Please note: You are expected to integrate course readings/resources throughout your paper, including weekly readings/notes; class handouts/materials; presentations; and
reflections from exercises in your art journal. Your paper should also reflect your learning from peers.

Please include a minimum of 9-10 course authors in your paper and incorporate a minimum of one new reading.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- **Self-reflection** – an assessment of your ability to think about how your positionality biases your epistemology and the implications for your social work practice; demonstration of your ability to articulate a clear set of intentions for practice (45%)

- **Critical thinking and integration of theory** – an assessment of your ability to think critically and to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of relevant theories and course concepts in the context of our classroom experience; an assessment of your ability to articulate a beginning practice framework which supports social justice (40%)

- **Writing ability** – an assessment of your ability to write in a clear, concise, organized and creative manner, utilizing standard APA referencing etc. (15%)

*Chris Hedges resources:

- Book: Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt (2012)
- Book: Death of the Liberal Class (2010)
- Video: Wages of Rebellion - Town Hall Seattle (June 8, 2015) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA41ggsdeXE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA41ggsdeXE)

(Please identify the resource used and incorporate it in your reference list).

References

