THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WELFARE  

Prerequisite: SW 220  
SW 555 Diversity, Oppression, and Social Justice: Culturally Competent Social Work  

Master Syllabus

I. COURSE RATIONALE  
The purpose of this course is to explore social diversity and social justice and their relationship to social work with diverse and oppressed populations. The course will provide the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical knowledge base related to difference, oppression, social justice, and empowerment. This foundation knowledge is necessary for culturally competent social work practice in a multicultural society.

This course is part of the first year BSW foundation curriculum. It builds upon the knowledge gained through an introduction to social work (SW 220, Social Work, Welfare, and U.S. Society), and links to knowledge of theories of individual behavior gained in the first course in the human behavior sequence (SW 530, Human Behavior in the Social Environment). The course provides a conceptual and personal foundation for use by students working with diverse populations in both field practicum and advanced social work practice courses.

The overall aims of the course are to have students: (a) explore the interplay of social and cultural identities, societal power relations, and other societal forces as they affect human functioning; and (b) develop culturally sensitive and competent perspectives and approaches to working with and across differences, especially those based on social group memberships.

Students will explore power issues in race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other societal forces that affect individuals, families, groups, and communities. Consequently, the course will provide a forum for students to critically examine their own race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, ability status, religion and national origin assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors and to reflect on how these personal ethics and values enhance or hinder their work with people of diverse backgrounds.

The course emphasizes special dimensions associated in working with diverse population groups. Students will be introduced to special issues and strategies for working with oppressed populations. The course will help prepare social work students to better understand and respond to systematic and interpersonal dynamics related to groups in society who have been oppressed based on social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, sexual orientation, and religion.

II. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES  
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

   a) Demonstrate critical self-awareness of one's assumptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors with regard to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion and ability. (Reflects BSW Objectives 1, 3, and 4)
b) Understand the multiple identities and intersecting diversities, including points of oppression and points of privilege, within oneself and in the larger society. (Reflects BSW Objective 4)

c) Exercise respect for one's own and others' cultural identities. (Reflects BSW Objectives 3 and 10)

d) Understand how the dynamics of difference and dominance affect human behavior and social relations among diverse populations. (Reflects BSW Objectives 4, 5, 6, and 7)

e) Recognize the interconnections and intersections among different forms of oppression. (Reflects BSW Objectives 4, 5, 6, and 7)

f) Examine and foster personal and professional values and ethics that support social justice. (Reflects BSW Objectives 2 and 5)

g) Demonstrate skills in learning about and working with differences and conflicts in a multicultural world in culturally sensitive and competent ways. (Reflects BSW Objectives 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8)

h) Develop an understanding of the processes of being an ally and engaging in alliance and coalition building to promote social and economic justice. (Reflects BSW Objectives 3, 4, and 12)

i) Identify the strengths associated with diverse and oppressed groups that are used by group members to sustain themselves in the face of oppression. (Reflects BSW Objectives 2 and 4)

j) Develop an understanding of social justice theories, with attention to the role of oppression and privilege in social justice (reflects BSW Objectives 2 and 4).

III. CURRICULUM THEMES

A. The School’s themes are:

1. **Strengths perspective:** the course places an emphasis on the talents, skills and resources that people bring to bear on their problems. This viewpoint is designed to supplant the perspective of social pathology when practicing social work with oppressed groups.

2. **Critical Perspective:** The course emphasizes the need for social workers to critically analyze and understand the multiple forms of social, political and economic oppression. It provides a variety of theoretical viewpoints on the ways that social group membership can lead to or limit access to resources that promote social and economic well-being. The development of a critical perspective is further encouraged by the examination of students’ own values and assumptions, and the consequences of their own socialization on their interaction with others.
3. **Social Justice**: This course is predicated on understanding diversity, difference and oppression as a precursor to promoting social and economic justice. Students will learn the role and importance of working across difference and the necessity of alliance and coalition building to eliminate injustice and oppression.

4. **Diversity**: The course promotes an in-depth and on-going recognition and valuation of difference and diversity. It requires that social workers understand their own social and cultural identities, and the different memberships they have in dominant and subordinate groups and its impact on their social work practice. The course further emphasizes the historic mission of social work to end institutionalized oppression and promote social justice through policies and programs that affirm and enhance the strengths and well-being of diverse social populations.

### IV. THE LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

As an applied social science, social work utilizes knowledge and skills from a variety of disciplines as well as from the liberal arts. Requiring students to critically evaluate systematic and interpersonal behavior with respect to oppression and its impact on individuals, groups, and communities link this course to the liberal arts perspective. The course requires the incorporation of the history and value dimension of society as part of this process. It further requires that students demonstrate an ability to both think and communicate (orally and in writing) clearly and effectively.

### V. PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES AND VALUES

The central rationale for this course is anchored in the social work profession’s commitment to social justice and the elimination of oppression based on social categories. This course requires that students examine their own multiple identities, as well as their personal values and beliefs in conjunction with those professional social workers in order to establish a value perspective consistent with those of the profession. In addition, the concept of person in environment is emphasized with respect to oppressed groups within the context of social work practice.

### VI. PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Because this course is focused vulnerable and oppressed groups, a central focus is on social work practice with diverse populations. It emphasizes groups in society who have been denied social and economic justice, or those groups whose needs have been addressed in ways that fail to promote human dignity. The course is designed to prepare social work students to understand and respond to social and interpersonal dynamics that work to deny equality to groups who have been oppressed based on social class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation.
VII. TOPICS

This course is designed to address two major themes. The first seeks to establish a theoretical perspective for understanding oppression, discrimination, and privilege in the United States and to engage in social work practice with diverse and oppressed populations. Course content in this sections moves from personal and experiential, to a theoretical and conceptual framework. The second aspect is designed to develop a practice framework that recognizes and addresses social justice and cultural competency. Course themes include:

1. Introduction to Intergroup Relations.

2. Structures of Oppression: Dominant and Subordinate Groups through a social construction framework.

3. Interrelationships between Social Diversity and Social Justice.

4. Examining Race, Race Identity, Racism, White Privilege, and White Supremacy in the U.S.

5. Heterosexism and Sexual Orientation Issues.

6. Ableism and Ability Issues.

7. Awareness of one’s own value assumptions resulting from one’s own socialization and biases, and the consequences of these biases on our interactions with others who are similar and/or different from us.

8. Knowledge and awareness of the multiple levels (personal, interpersonal, cultural and institutional) in which oppression operates.

9. Knowledge and acceptance of the multiple realities, world views, belief system, values, life styles and norms of conduct by diverse people in different cultures.

10. Knowledge and awareness of the dynamics of oppression and its impact on social functioning as they relate to social work assessment skills.

11. Knowledge, awareness and skills in the variety of ways one can act against oppression and value diversity.

12. Pathways toward Social Justice: Being an Ally, Forming Coalitions, and Alliance Building
VIII. RECOMMENDED READINGS

A. Possible Texts (Instructors should feel free to pick more than one of the following)


B. Other Readings (Instructors should feel free to add more updated articles to enhance students’ learning experience)


IX. RECOMMENDED ASSIGNMENTS

Students in SW 555 can complete a variety of assignments, such as essays, reflection papers, learning logs, and exams. These could all be used to assess Educational Outcomes a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, and i. Two recommended assignments are included at the end of this syllabus as examples of learning tools. The first, Learning about Membership in a Dominant and a Subordinate Group, can be used to assess progress on Educational Outcomes a, b, d, e, and f. The second, Media Log, can assess progress on Educational Outcomes c, d, e, and i.

X. GRADING

BSW GRADING SCALE

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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A. Incomplete grades. A temporary grade of Incomplete may be assigned to a student who, for a reason beyond the student’s control, has been unable to complete the required work in a course on time. It is the student’s responsibility to request an Incomplete from the instructor. A request signed by the student and the faculty member must be on file when grades are submitted. A student may not enroll in a course sequential to one in which he or she has an I or F letter grade. An incomplete not removed by the end of the next semester will be changed to an F.

The Master syllabi should specify:

B. Attendance policies for BSW courses. For example: Class attendance is very important. More than two absences could result in the loss of all your attendance points. More than four absences will result in failure in this class. If you have missed two classes, please arrange an appointment with me to discuss the reasons for the absence and to arrange for make-up work that will count toward your class participation points. Points are deducted for missing class and coming to class late (3 pts. for each absence/lateness).

Individual instructors’ syllabi should specify the following:

C. The weighting of each assignment in the course and the dates by which they are done.

D. For every assignment, explain the standards used for grading.

E. If class participation is part of the grade, indicate what this means. For example, if 10 points are awarded for class participation, one point will be deducted for every
class missed.

F. Indicate the policy on late assignments, e.g., they are not accepted and treated as an “F” grade or the grade is reduced by ____ for each day, week, etc.

G. Indicate how final grades will be determined.
XI. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Students who have special educational needs of any kind, including those related to learning disabilities, other disabilities, English as a second language should discuss necessary accommodations with the instructor within the first two sessions of the course. The university and School of Social Welfare are committed to provide supportive programs and accommodations to assist students who have special learning needs to successfully meet course expectations. In particular, students who feel that they have a disability that may require accommodation should advise the instructor of such disability and desired accommodation as soon as one obtains written documentation of the disability. The instructor will work with the student and the office of Services for Students with Disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations.

Please notify the instructor if your religious observances conflict with class or due dates for class assignments so we can make appropriate arrangements.

XII. RECORDING AND SHARING RECORDINGS OF LECTURES

Course materials prepared by the instructor, together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. On request, the instructor will usually grant permission for students to audio tape lectures, on the condition that these audio tapes are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

XIII. HIPAA REGULATIONS

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires that any personal information that may identify a person must be removed to protect confidentiality. Confidentiality applies to both classroom discussions and to written work. Please follow these simple, yet essential guidelines:

- Always disguise the name and other personal identifying information when you speak and write about a person, following the guidelines established by HIPAA.
- If writing in great detail about a client, ask permission from the client.
- Share nothing about specific clients, agencies or other students outside of the classroom.

Any information shared with the class/instructor will be confidential, within the limits defined by the Code of Ethics and state guidelines.

**Individual instructors’ syllabi should be exactly the same as in the master syllabus.**

XIV. INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY

Provide students with information on how to see and/or reach you.
XV. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather students should call

- Lawrence: the University (785) 864-SNOW, or if hearing impaired and have TTY/TDD equipment, (800) 766-3777
- Edwards Campus: (913) 897-8499
- KCKCC Campus: (913) 334-1100

to determine if classes have been cancelled. Class will be held if classes have not been cancelled, and students should contact the instructor if weather or driving conditions make it impossible for them to get to class.
Recommended Assignment I
Learning about Membership
in a Dominant and a Subordinate Group

In class, we will be discussing one particular way in which intergroup relations (relations between different groups) can be characterized by domination and subordination. In thinking about the various groups that we are or have identified ourselves as part of, we realize that we can be members of both dominant (privileged) and subordinate groups (oppressed or disadvantaged) simultaneously. This assignment asks you to focus on two particular social identity groups from the original multicultural map--one, an identity group that is dominant in this society, and another that is subordinate.

Some “tips” on working on this assignment:

- The questions presented below are only guidelines; we don’t expect you to answer them all. They really are “thought questions.” Please also use your experiences and discussions from the class lectures and class dialogues if they are helpful in this assignment.
- Think about specific events or critical incidents in your life that have contributed to your awareness about the dynamics of dominant-subordinate relationships.
- Think about the historical incidents in society that also influence your membership and understanding of either the subordinate or dominant group.
- The assigned readings for the course will be helpful in this assignment. Additionally, there are a number of readings in the class text (Rothenberg text, Part IV) that provide testimonial accounts of different people’s experiences of domination-subordination. Readings in Part V of the text provide some key legal issues and decisions that affect race and gender issues.
- As you reflect and write about your membership, think about how you experience being dominant and subordinate at both the individual and institutional levels.

1. **Being a subordinate group member:**

- What is the subordinate group that you are a member of? What is the dominant group in relation to this? What feelings do you experience as a member of a subordinate group?

- Relate your experience in terms of some facets of subordinate group membership:
  - in what ways do you feel powerless ?
  - in what ways is your group made visible or invisible ? in what circumstances?
  - what kind of stereotypes exist of your group?
  - what kind of prejudices have you experienced?
  - what forms of discrimination, marginalization and/or exploitation have you been exposed to?

(over)
Include examples of your experience to illustrate the characteristics.

- How does this experience affect your daily lifestyle? For example: How does it affect your sense of both group identity and self-identity? What are some costs and benefits? What are some joys and struggles you experience being in a subordinate group?

- What are some parts of today's society (that is, institutions, organizations, events and so on) you feel that you don't have access or entry to as a member of the subordinate group?

- What are some issues of differences and/or conflicts between your group and the dominant one?

- What parts of this dominant-subordinate relationship would you like to see changed? And how? Who would be involved in this change process?

2. **Being a dominant group member:**

- What dominant group do you identify with? What are some groups that are subordinated in relation to yours? What kind of feelings do you experience as a member of a dominant group?

- In what ways are some dominant group characteristics part of your experience:
  - how is your group powerful? what forms of power does your group hold? who are some agents of this power?
  - what institutions are used to exert this power? in what ways?
  - at what level (individual or group) do you primarily define/identify yourself?
  - what privileges do you have as a member of the dominant group?
  - in what ways do you see the culture of the dominant group setting the norms/standards?

Give examples of these characteristics that help illustrate your experience.

- How does being in a dominant group affect your lifestyle today? What are some costs and benefits? What are some struggles and joys you have had being in this group?

- What parts of this dominant-subordinate relationship would you like to see changed? And how? Who would be involved in this change process?

3. **Some questions to reflect on at the end:**

What did you learn about yourself in doing this assignment? How does this assignment add to your understanding of yourself, dominant-subordinate relationships and society? What issues did this assignment raise for you?

**The paper should be 8-10 pages, typed and double-spaced.**
Recommended Assignment II
Media Log

It is important to be aware of the myriad ways in which our social world influences our values, attitudes, and behaviors about "differences" and "others." In order to become more critical and reflective about how oppression and oppressive practices predominate our environment, students will develop a media log. The purpose of the media log is to strengthen critical observation and thinking skills with regard to culture and diversity. We assume that prejudice, oppression, and discrimination (whether conscious or unconscious) exist in virtually every social setting, interaction, and milieu of human life. By becoming more sensitive and attentive to the various ways in which we are influenced by oppressive practices--primarily in ways that are often "unconscious" or obscure to us--we may begin to change some of those conditions as part of our professional and personal commitment as social workers.

Students should begin to pay very close and critical attention to all sources of information that impinge upon them. These sources may include, but are not limited to: television, radio, videos, movies, newspapers, magazines, billboards, textbooks and other books, the Internet, music, public performances (speeches, plays, lectures, readings, concerts), and art exhibits. Flyers on bulletin boards, informal discussions between students or faculty (whether participated in or "overheard"), public or school policy statements, and even legislation or Supreme Court decisions are all examples of information that shapes and is shaped by our pre-existing values and attitudes about people that we consider different, inferior, or aberrant in terms of some kind of social norm.

Observations to be included in this assignment are those that demonstrate some overt or implicit value, attitude, behavior, or judgment that you consider to be prejudicial, oppressive, or discriminatory against a particular individual or some group of people. For example, if I read in the paper that legislators have passed a bill to ban recognition of same-sex marriages for the purposes of state or federal benefits, I would bring that to class and discuss what the implications might be not only for same-sex couples, but also for heterosexual couples who work or live in the same state or nation. If I read in the paper that a U.S. representative has suggested that the U.S. Congress issue an apology for slavery, I would bring that to class and discuss what the possible implications might be not only for descendants of individuals who were enslaved, but also for other African Americans and for non-African American residents of the U.S.

In preparing your media logs, students will analyze two observations, dealing with portrayals of members of two different groups. (For example, one observation might deal with the portrayal of low-income women and one with African American men; or one with lesbian mothers and one with people with disabilities).

In presenting your logs in class, your dialogue will be enhanced if you can also connect the logs to class readings and bring in other information--statistical, historical or events--that support your observations.
Each contribution will address the following questions:

1. What is the observation or information of interest?

2. How is that observation related to or an example of oppression, discrimination, or prejudice? If it is an attempt to change some oppressive condition, what was/is that condition?

3. Who--both directly and indirectly--is currently affected by this behavior, practice, or event? Why? Why do you think this is an example of oppression? How do you "know" that the "target" of this oppression is unduly affected?

4. Why do you think that this particular practice, value, or attitude was developed? What historical or contextual factors influenced not only the origins of this practice, but its present-day continuation or prevalence? Who or what types of institutions are most responsible for the present-day maintenance of this practice?

5. How will your awareness of this practice change the ways in which you understand, but more importantly (if applicable), how you behave with regard to those individuals and groups who are most negatively affected by it?

You may, of course, address any other points you think are helpful in developing your thinking and reflection about the issues in your entries. Please bring to class the materials that you use in your media log, i.e. copies of the advertisements, newspaper articles, etc.

**Evaluation criteria.** You may earn up to 15 points for this assignment. The evaluation of this assignment will be based on:

a. Evaluation of your presentation and ensuing dialogue by fellow students (7.5 points possible)

b. Your feedback to fellow students (7.5 points possible)

A peer feedback form will be provided in class that will give guidelines for the evaluation. The form will ask for written feedback about your assessment of and learning from your peers’ contributions.