Pedagogy for Liberation in Social Work: Power, Privilege and Oppression
A GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK SYLLABUS
Co-developed by Diana Melendez and Tiffany Younger

Class time TBD (3 hours)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course aims to provide students with an overview of the basic knowledge and skills to
generalist social work practice within the context of the profession’s commitment to social
justice. Key themes and concepts include critical inquiry around dynamics of power, privilege
and oppression, reflexivity, community engagement, relationship building, accountability and
collective empowerment. Students will strengthen their assessment, strategic planning, and
facilitating skills as they relate to strengths-based community-based practice with individuals,
families, and communities, as well as their professional role working within the context of
organizations and institutions. The course introduces practice models and an overview of social
policy and social movements for social justice and liberation.

The field of social work requires students to gain clarity about the ways dynamics of power
impact communities at historical, systemic, institutional, community, familial and individual
levels. In addition, the learning process must make effective use of a range of pedagogical
methods which do not replicate Euro-centric, hegemonic structures of dominance in the
classroom. This course will integrate interactive modalities of pedagogy including the use of
popular media, interactive digital technology, experiential didactics and other student-centering
practices.

Personal and professional values will be discussed, along with the use of self as social
workers are challenged to look at themselves in this work, the importance of utilizing a critical
lens in using and producing evaluations and research as well as the role of ethics from a
decolonizing perspective. Attention is given to the historic development and contribution of
social work practice in relation to a push to social justice and liberation; in particular positioning
the helping process of engagement, assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation in contrast
to the ways oppressed peoples have mobilized for change. Emphasis is on a Social Work
generalist approach to engaging with others through the person-in-environment perspective of
services- although this also being contextualized within an intersectionality framework and with
the understanding that as professionals, social workers are also impacted directly by
social-political positionality.

Methods:
Media sources will be used as the backdrop for readings, decentering academic text as our only source of legitimate knowledge. The reason why we use media is to allow for a more comprehensive open dialogue. The selection of films/shows will be open to student adaptation and used to enrich dialogue about the way power, privilege and oppression are at the basis of the social problems the profession is tasked with addressing (example: poverty, inequality). The focus will be on identifying examples of the ways of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion and other socially constructed identity markers function to either support, interrupt or complicate our understanding of oppression as well as equity, justice and liberation.

The scope of our analysis will go beyond the content of the film to include an examination of the context in which films were developed and produced, (including the invisible labor), the film’s own location within the world of media upon release, the reading of plots and characters by multiple audience perspectives, as well as the way identities are being performed. The use of media is meant to integrate a human component to what may otherwise become overly intellectualized conversations or conversely, rely on the sharing of personal experiences of students themselves.

Students will be invited to bring their own media selections into the learning process and develop critical pedagogical and facilitation skills which are translatable to their work with individuals and communities.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
• Engage in critical examination of the professional identity of social work in relation to coloniality and liberation.
• Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice, centering social action as necessary from a liberatory approach which interrupts hierarchical domination.
• Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate the way the current and historical impact of systems and institutions impact individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities and the existing strategies, barriers and possibilities for social change.

COURSE GUIDING PRINCIPLES
The content of this syllabus is the reflection of cumulative knowledge from across multiple areas of experience within the field of social work including higher education, direct clinical practice, policy practice, research and community-based work. This course is designed and will be implemented following the following principles for Liberation based work and Anti-racist practice. These principles are woven into the course in a nonlinear fashion as part of the metacognitive foundation of liberatory pedagogy. These principles are adapted from the Liberation Based Healing Model developed by Dr. Rhea Almeida, founder of the Institute for Family Services and from the Undoing Racism-Community Organizing Workshop developed by
Ron Chisom and Jim Dunn, founders of the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. It is a goal of this course that students completing this course will have learned, engaged and applied the following principles for liberatory practice:

2. Learning History
3. Leadership Development
4. Undoing Social Constructs of Domination (the internalized, cultural and institutional manifestations of these)
5. Understanding Power and Gatekeeping
6. Building a Network
7. Culture Sharing

“ Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time, and the arena, and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle where we are standing.” — Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches

STUDENT LEARNING IN RELATION TO SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES

After successful completion of this course, students will be competent to:
• Engage in Generalist Practice
Educational Policy 2.0—Generalist practice is grounded in the liberal arts and the person-in-environment framework.
• Practice ethically and professionally
Competency 1–Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
• Engage diversity, power and privilege in practice
Competency 2 –Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity.
• Promote social justice
Competency 3 –Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
• Engage in practice informed research and research informed practice
Competency 4 –Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice.
• Engage clients
Competency 6 – Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
• Assess clients
Competency 7 – Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
• Intervene with clients
Competency 8 – Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
• Evaluate your practice
Competency 9 – Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

EXPECTATIONS

“I'm worried that students will take their obedient place in society and look to become successful cogs in the wheel - let the wheel spin them around as it wants without taking a look at what they're doing. I'm concerned that students not become passive acceptors of the official doctrine that's handed down to them from the White House, the media, textbooks, teachers and preachers.”

— Howard Zinn

This course requires a commitment to active learning, reading, writing, and analytical skills. This course may include lectures, discussions, assigned readings, written assignments, group interactions and projects, in-class activities, guest speakers, audio-visual materials, and opportunities for experiential learning. This class requires active participation, students maybe asked to lead discussions based on readings, bring in a piece of media to supplement the readings or critique current scholarship around the ideologies. Please note that lectures/class discussions are designed to clarify and supplement the assigned readings. It is critical that you remain current with the readings in order to participate fully in class discussions, group activities, role play, and other experiential learning exercises. The professor reserves the right to make ongoing adjustments/changes to any part of this syllabus and/or class throughout the semester.

Proposed Class Structure
The classroom is being envisioned as an interactive workspace for social workers to practice critical self-reflection and group dialogue, sharing and brainstorming ideas for social change, social justice language development, teamwork, support, and solidarity toward becoming allies and leaders within our profession and communities we serve.

A proposed format for each class consists of the following:
1st hour:
• Focusing Exercise through use of media (critical Karaoke, and/or art artifact reflection)
• Brief check-in: current events, actions on/off campus
• Student selected readings (discussion based on provocation posting of scheduled reading by student on Hastac)
2nd hour:
• Class Plan (Interactive class experience and review of reading/viewing/experiential assignments)
Last 15 mins:
• Check-in, Summary, Plan/Challenges for the week Ahead
• Focusing/Grounding Exercise

SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO YOUR FINAL GRADE (100 Points)
Assignment #1: Self Historical Analysis Reflection Paper “Who are you?” 2-3 pages (10 Points)
Assignment #2: Public engagement through Critical Inquiry & Dialogue Project & Reflection paper 5-8 pages (30 points)
Group Project-Assignment #3: Integration of self-historical analysis onto digital timeline (Groups of 3-4 students) (15 points)
Final Presentation: Show-case of Assignment 3 (10 points)
Participation: Facilitation of student selected reading and online post (see selection below) & leading of Focusing activities for one class (start of class & end of class) (20 points)
Class Attendance: 15 points for in-class attendance - Including two excused absences (15 points)

Assignments and Grading for the Course:
Grade Assignment:
A 94-100% C+ 77-79
A- 90-93 C 74-76
B+ 87-89% C- Fail
B 84-86
B- 80-83

Digital Requirement:
Access and some familiarity with Google, YouTube and access to wifi is required for some of this course’s assignments. In addition, students are required to post provocations based on readings on a publicly facing blog.
ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1
Students will take an Implicit Bias online survey & Self Reflection Assignment. This is a 2-part assignment.

Part 1: Please take the Implicit Association test (IAT) (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/). You must take at least 2 of the following Implicit Association Tests: Race, Religion, Sexuality, Skin-Tone, Weight, Gender-Career, Disability, Arab-Muslim, Native American, Asian American, Weapons.

Part 2:
Students will write a 2-3 page reflection based on the feedback from the tests, readings and class discussion. This reflection must include a historical analysis of your origins (family history, people’s history, individual life history). Use the following questions as a guide:
- What was your initial response to the test? How do you feel about the results?
- What is the relationship of the results on the areas of privilege and the areas of oppression you experience with your multiple identity dimensions/positionality?
- In thinking of you story (going as far back as you are able to), what are some ways that historical events have created experiences of privilege or oppression for your ancestors in ways that have impacted where you are today?
- How can you use this information as you move forward in your role as a social worker with accountability to those you serve?

Assignment #2
Public engagement through Critical Inquiry & Dialogue Project. This is a 3 part assignment.
You will engage a group of individuals in critical dialogue, using the content of your choice and methods of your choice (relevant to your audience).

The only requirements are:
1. Power, privilege and oppression are addressed at some point during your group dialogue with the objective of raising the participants’ critical consciousness and
2. You offer your participants a method of providing you with feedback regarding their experience.

Part 2- Implementation of Project

Part 3- Reflection Paper Due one week from last class. Paper must incorporate showcase of project into reflection. (5 pages) This paper is to be written with the goal of future publication and must integrate the theoretical concepts guiding your choices, an analysis of the social work competencies and skills you used during the process of planning and implementation (example: assessment, evaluation, etc), a description of the actual dialogue and inquiry session and a reflection of what you took away from this experience that can inform your practice going forward. Students are invited to publish online on HASTAC course page.

Assignment #3:

Group Project Description: Using a Digital Timeline to connect personal stories to social policies (working in pairs or groups of 3)

As your final assignment you will further explore how “personal is political” and work as a group to put together a timeline of events of your life story (based on Assignment 1) and at least 3 significant policy level changes or events which impacted the trajectory of your life or that of your ancestors. The goal of this assignment is to use all that we have learned and discussed in class regarding privilege, power and oppression as well as empowerment and accountability to identity how policy, shifts in governments and movements impacted each of you as an individual and as a member of a collective.

Assignment outline:

1. Research your own story by using oral history, photographs, etc. so that you can trace your story back as far as you can- there is no right or wrong place on a timeline, some will have access to more or less information than others. This will determine the scope of your timeline. You can use Assignment 1 as your foundation. (20 points)

2. Select at least 3 major events you think are significant in your particular family story and/or your story (example: moment of migration, starting a new school/job, moving, rituals celebrated or observed, etc.) Choose events you are comfortable sharing publicly or that may already be public knowledge- do not share events personal to family/friends. (20 points)

3. As a group/pair- create one timeline (using the scope of the timeline which goes the furthest back in history from among your group). Use Knightlab’s open source timeline tool TimelineJS: http://timeline.knightlab.com (20 points)

4. Select 3 major social policy changes or socio-political changes which impacted your family history. Be ready to explain the link. This may or may not coincide with the 3
events you picked in the step above. Share the link with your classmates and professor. (20 points) In identifying these policies think about: who had the power to make changes, who was impacted the most by changes, who benefited from changes?

Final presentation/showcase of Assignment #3: Select a form of media through which you want to tell your pair/group story to the class in 3 minutes (song, spoken word, images, movement, film clips, etc.) Include some of the connections you learned between social policy/macro level changes and your own story. (20 points)

total=100 points

Digital requirement:
Watch TimelineJSI Tutorial video (2 min 30 sec) https://vimeo.com/143407878

This project is meant to be publishable online so students can share with their families, friends, etc. This is not mandatory.

Presentations graded on:
  ● Creativity for final presentation
  ● Clarity of intended message
  ● Peer grading will be utilized for grading presentations/showcases and provided feedback from other students in class via google forms and survey.

Student Selected Readings (counts toward participation grade)

Select 1 of the readings (selections below) and prepare to facilitate a class discussion based on the readings. Come ready to present/facilitate dialogue addressing the the following points: what are the highlights, or take away points from a student perspective? From a practitioner perspective? How is the intersectionality of power, privilege and oppression being addressed/missed? What critique/follow up questions would you offer to the authors? What theoretical concepts apply from the semester’s earlier discussions? Prepare a facilitated dialogue in which you pose at least 3 critical questions to your fellow classmates about your reading and post on course HASTAC blog page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th><strong>Introduction: Review of Course Structure and Assignments</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Readings:</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Complicating Social Work’s role in systems of race and class.</em></td>
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<td><em>Come to class ready to discuss:</em></td>
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<td><em>What is the role of social work in relation to the wealth gap?</em></td>
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<td><strong>Capitalism Analysis</strong></td>
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<td><em>Terence Nance’s</em></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.whitepeoplewontsaveyou.org">http://www.whitepeoplewontsaveyou.org</a></td>
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<td><em>In-class exercise: Engage a class member in a 10-minute interview where you explore their family history and its relationship to colonization. Reverse roles.</em></td>
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<p>|        | <strong>Recommended readings prior to 1st class:</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Colonality</th>
<th>Assignment # 1: Part 1 Due</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Watch: Rebel Music</td>
<td>Native America: the 7th Generation Rises (MTV episode, 2015)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aRwpNai4A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aRwpNai4A</a></td>
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<td><em>In class think, pair, share exercise: How does social work function as an extension of coloniality? How can it function as a space of liberation? How does this manifest for different students in your program?</em></td>
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<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Intersectionality</th>
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<tr>
<td>Watch:</td>
<td>No single issue struggle: making all black lives matter</td>
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<td>Race the Power of an Illusion Pt 1: The Difference Between Us</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXEV0tqox9k">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXEV0tqox9k</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race the Power of an Illusion Pt 2: The Story We Tell</td>
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Readings:


Recommended reading:


*In-class dialogue (think-pair-share): How have socio-political identities functioned to both create solidarity and served as barriers to organizing or social movements?*

### Week 4

**Implications for Direct Practice with individuals and families**

"Precious Knowledge" Trailer

Readings:

Social Service or Social Change? Who Benefits from Your Work? -Paul Kivel

**Assignment #1 Part 2 Due**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th><strong>Examining Systems: The need for Policy Strategies</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13th (Ava DuVernay, 2016)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WU608Z2678">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WU608Z2678</a> (or available on Netflix)</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
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<p>| Proposal for Assignment #2 Due |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th><strong>Intersections of Systemic Violence</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The First Purge (Gerard McMurray, 2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(*students may opt out of watching film)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Readings:</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td><strong>Complicating Strategies for Change</strong></td>
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<td>“Sorry to Bother You” (Boots Riley, 2018)</td>
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<th>Week 8</th>
<th><strong>Technology: Social Justice in the Digital Era</strong></th>
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<td>Watch selections from livestream recording of <em>Refiguring the Future Conference 2018</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Readings:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moya Z. Bailey, <em>All the Digital Humanists are White, All the Nerds are Men, But Some of Us are Brave</em>, Journal of Digital Humanities, 2011.</td>
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### Week 9

**Disrupting Sources of Knowledge- Expanding Spaces for Critical Dialogue:**

Watch any popular film (or series) which you identify deal with issues of power, suggested selections include:

“The Hate You Give”

“Imperial Dreams”

“Black Klansmen”

“See You Yesterday”

“She’s Got To Have It”

*Come to class ready to discuss both the content and context of the film and its production. We will use the tool Power & Control Wheel to examine ways misuses and abuses of power show up within and around your selections.*

**Readings:**

[3 Student Facilitated Readings]

### Week 10

**Readings:**

[3 Student Facilitated Readings]

*In-class lab time to complete Group Project Assignment # 3: Timeline of self and historical analysis*

### Week 11

**Decentering whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity and the “middle class” experience**

Watch selected episodes from:

“Pose” (Fx or Netflix)

**Readings:**

[3 Student Facilitated Readings]

*In-class exercise: Position yourself on the diagram of the Hierarchy of Power, Privilege and Oppression (Almeida, 2016). (Diagram will be laid out on the classroom floor). Discuss what factors you considered in choosing your spatial location and observations of others’ choices.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th><strong>Activating Social Change</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[6 Student Facilitated Readings]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class:</td>
<td><em>Student 3 minute report back on Dialogue &amp; Critical Inquiry Project Status</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>Readings:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[3 Student Facilitated Readings]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class:</td>
<td><em>Select a media artifact which you can share with the class which represents justice for you and it’s relevance to your personal and professional identity. (5 minute presentation)</em></td>
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| Week 14 | *(Students may choose to complete their Dialogue & Inquiry Project with our class- this date is reserved for those students to have this opportunity) (Alternative: Reading Day)* |

| Week 15 | Group Project Showcase Due |

**Student Selected Readings Options:**


9. Willa Friedman, Michael Kremer, Edward Miguel & Rebecca Thornton (2016). Education as Liberation?


20. Rhea Almeida, Diana Melendez, and José Miguel Paez (2015) Liberation-Based Practice


