1. COURSE STATEMENT

a. Course description

The U.S. legal system impacts social work in important ways. It frames barriers and opportunities for social workers and the clients we serve. This course will provide social work students with a foundational understanding of the relationship between the U.S. legal system and social work practice through a variety of current events and emerging hot topics, including immigration reform, healthcare reform, voting rights, evolving definitions of discrimination, and policing of communities of color. Students will learn important advocacy tools that they can leverage through the U.S. legal system—at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice. This course will underscore themes of privilege, oppression, diversity, and social justice throughout all three days while building foundation-level social work skills.
Through interactive classroom activities and reflective assignments that build on real-world practice, this course will create and strengthen knowledge and skills in several core competencies, including Competency 2 (Values & Ethics), Competency 3 (Critical Thinking), Competency 4 (Diversity & Difference), Competency 5 (Social & Economic Justice), Competency 8 (Social Policy), and Competency 9 (Context). Interactive and reflective discussions and assignments will also strengthen connection and community among students.

At the end of the course, students will better understand basic concepts of the law and their relationship to social work. Students will also gain foundational tools on how to invoke the legal framework to serve their individual and/or organizational clients and push for stronger social reforms through a social work lens.

b. Course content

This course will invoke several current events/emerging hot topics to illustrate how merging a social work lens and basic understanding of the U.S. legal system can strengthen anti-racism and anti-oppression advocacy skills. Given the impending election, we will address voting rights, voter suppression laws, and how they impact marginalized clients social workers serve. The U.S. Supreme Court’s recent decision (June 2020) on whether “sex” discrimination includes sexual orientation and gender identity will also foreground ways that social workers can creatively advocate for LGBTQ+ clients. Growing concerns about police practices, particularly in communities of color, immigration reform, and healthcare reform will allow students to reflect on anti-racism and anti-oppression through classroom activities. Students will also be exposed to intersectionality through discussions of these events, and how to creatively advocate for clients that recognizes the complexities of their lives and intersecting positionalities (e.g. race, sex, ability, gender identity) within the confines of our U.S. legal framework.

c. Course objectives and competencies


d. Course design

This course will consist of virtual hybrid learning through combined synchronous (online learning in real time) and asynchronous learning (online learning outside a scheduled “live” time). This class strives to develop a learning environment where each student can critically reflect on their own experiences, values, and goals to construct a framework for supporting individuals and communities through a lens that merges an understanding of both social work and law. This course will work to create a climate that supports critical analyses, mutual learning, engaging within and across differences and examining sources of power and knowledge. It involves lectures, discussion, videos, readings, and participation in experiential activities.

e. Relationship to social work ethics and values

Students will use the NASW Code of Ethics to guide ethical questions that arise when reflecting on ways that social work and the law intersect in serving individuals and communities. This course will focus on social workers’ responsibility as professionals to promote general welfare by working toward the elimination of discrimination, promoting equity, expanding choices for all persons, encouraging respect for diversity, advocating for inclusive social policies, and encouraging informed participation by the public.

f. Intensive focus on PODS

This course integrates PODS content and skills with a special emphasis on the identification of practice, theories, and/or policies that promote social justice, illuminate injustices, and are consistent with scientific and professional knowledge. Addressing anti-racism and anti-oppression are core themes in this course. Given the U.S. legal system’s history of de jure (in law) and de facto (in practice) racism, race will be foregrounded, along with discussions about privilege, oppression, diversity, and social justice. We will also address social work’s history of supporting de facto (and sometimes de jure) forms of oppression, and students will have opportunities to reflect on creative problem-solving as social workers interacting with a U.S. legal system permeated with oppression. Intimate and reflective conversations on these topics will strengthen connection and community among students.
2. CLASS REQUIREMENTS

a. Text and class materials

Required and suggested readings, videos, and handouts will be posted on Canvas, arranged by date. To fully engage in the course topic and become a competent and skilled social work practitioner, students are expected to view all required materials.

b. Class schedule

DAY 1: **Tuesday, August 25 (2:15-5:15pm)**

Agenda

- Introductions
- Syllabus Review
- Review Readings / Videos (Individual)
- Key Concepts and Principles: Social Work and the Law
- Jeopardy Worksheet (Teams)
- PODS in our American Legal System
- Assignment Overview

**Required Readings / Viewings (read/viewed during class) (available in Canvas folder)**

- **Video:** PBS Digital Studios. (2015). Legal System Basics: Crash Course Government and Politics #18, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXw-hEB263k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXw-hEB263k) (8 minutes)
- **Video:** PBS Digital Studios. (2015). Bureaucracy Basics: Crash Course Government and Politics #15, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8EQAnKntLs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8EQAnKntLs) (7 min)
- **Website:** U.S. Constitution: [https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/index.html](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/index.html)

**Additional Resources on Federal Rulemaking**

• **Website:** Regulations.gov (search for rules, comments, and documents)
• **Article:** Regulations.gov. (n.d.) Tips for submitting effective comments, available at [https://www.regulations.gov/docs/Tips_For_Submitting_Effective_Comments.pdf](https://www.regulations.gov/docs/Tips_For_Submitting_Effective_Comments.pdf)

**Required Reading for Assignment**


**DAY 2: Wednesday, August 26 (8:30am-noon)**

**Agenda**

• Jeopardy Game
• Social Justice
• Health Care and Mental Health
• Class activity: Examining PODS in Insurance contracts
• Flipgrid and Ted Talks
• Assignment Overview
**Required Readings / Viewings** (read/viewed during class) (available in Canvas folder)


**Homework**

- **Article:** Menand, L. (2020). The changing meaning of affirmative action. *The New Yorker*, available at [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/01/20/have-we-outgrown-the-need-for-affirmative-action](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/01/20/have-we-outgrown-the-need-for-affirmative-action)


- **Website:** ReDistricting Game
  - Click on Mission 1: Fundamentals “basic”
  - Select the mission you want to try (population equality, partisan gerrymander, bi-partisan gerrymander, voting rights act, and reform)
  - Play at least one basic game.
DAY 3: Thursday, August 27 (8:30am to 3pm)

Agenda

- Voting rights
- Class Activity: Gerrymandering / ReDistricting Game
- Affirmative Action
- Policing
- Immigration reform
- Management
- Conflicting Rights
- Advocacy Tools

Required Readings / Viewings (read/viewed during class) (available in Canvas folder)

- **Website**: Voting laws. [https://www.usa.gov/voting-laws](https://www.usa.gov/voting-laws)


- **Video**: Jackson, D. (2016). Problem-oriented policing: Where social work meets law enforcement, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK8glFZuQw8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK8glFZuQw8) (9 min)

- **Video**: Fox13 Memphis. (2020). Social work experts say larger conversation needed before defunding the police, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8THkJvcKoEY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8THkJvcKoEY) (2:30 min)


c. Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Percent of overall grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1</td>
<td>Monday, August 31 at 11:59pm via Canvas</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video / Blog</td>
<td>Monday, August 31 at 11:59pm via Canvas</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Product &amp; Advocacy Reflection Paper</td>
<td>Monday, September 7 at 11:59pm via Canvas</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paper #1**

Instructions:

- Read Tema Okun’s Antidotes to White Supremacy Culture, which lists thirteen characteristics of white supremacy culture and several examples of ways to combat these characteristics.

- In 500 words, identify three examples from our American legal system that embody white supremacy culture and three ways that you could address that in your role as a social worker now and/or moving forward?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary Performance</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on Three Examples of White Supremacy Culture</td>
<td>The paper insightfully explores the topic in a thoughtful and/or original way. Ideas, evidence, and conclusions are accurately, fairly, and eloquently represented. It shows a firm understanding of the core concepts of white supremacy culture presented in Tema Okun’s article.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on Solutions</td>
<td>The paper insightfully explores potential solutions in a thoughtful and/or original way. Ideas, evidence, and conclusions are accurately, fairly, and eloquently represented.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
represented. It shows a firm understanding of how to apply antidotes to white supremacy culture presented in Tema Okun’s article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brevity, Clarity, and Presentation</th>
<th>The paper consistently uses precise and unambiguous wording. It has minimal use of quotations and virtually no spelling or grammatical errors. It is clean, correctly formatted (12-point font, Times New Roman or Arial, 1” margins) and presents citations when needed.</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Total** |                                                                         | **20** |

### Video Assignment

Students must select an issue that social work should address to create positive change. Students will then select a hypothetical audience that they want to view the video that has the power to make the desired change (e.g. doctors, government workers, policymakers, other social workers, etc). Each student will create a 2-minute video making a “pitch” to this audience. Students can create videos in whatever medium they prefer (e.g. TED Talk, Flipgrid). We will discuss several potential mediums in class. As virtual advocacy continues to grow, this video assignment will provide key tools to help students connect concepts from law and social work to real-world practice to advocate for change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary Performance</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of Issue</td>
<td>The video concisely explains the background and context for the issue addressed while incorporating concepts from PODS.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch</td>
<td>The video insightfully and persuasively makes a “pitch” to an intended audience by citing key facts and evidence to support the proposed change.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevity, Clarity, and Presentation</td>
<td>The video presents the points concisely and clearly and has strong overall presentation.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | **20** |
Advocacy Product & Advocacy Reflection Paper

This final assignment comprises two components. Students must apply the tools learned from this three-day course by selecting one avenue of advocacy and then write a 750-word reflection paper about the experience.

Advocacy Product

Students must choose an issue that they want to pursue for advocacy in their social work practice (e.g. voting rights, client autonomy, dignity in death, policing, immigration reform, insurance advocacy, etc). Students will then engage in an advocacy activity based on that topic.

Students can select one of several activities based on their specialization and focus (e.g. drafting a client advocacy letter to a local, state, or federal agency [e.g. Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, Bureau of Prisons, local jail, Department of Education]; drafting a letter to an insurance company to support health coverage for a particular issue; drafting a concise policy brief handout or executive summary on a key issue; drafting legislative testimony; drafting an administrative public comment; etc.). Students must submit this product (e.g. handout, letter) along with their reflection paper. The goal of this written product is to try to create change among the intended audience (e.g. legislator, agency bureaucrat, administrator, etc).

Reflection Paper

The reflection paper must concisely summarize the activity, briefly analyze the background and context for the issue and why it matters for social work, apply at least two class concepts to the paper, and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the activity itself (including insights on how (or if) you may use this tool in your future practice).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Exemplary Performance</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Product</td>
<td>Student provides evidence of the advocacy activity (e.g. handout, letter, public comment, etc)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Activity</td>
<td>The paper accurately and concisely summarizes the advocacy activity, including why this particular activity was chosen.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis

The paper concisely explains the background and context for the issue(s) addressed and uses at least two class concepts. The paper also effectively incorporates concepts from PODS.

6

Application to social work practice

Student concisely and thoughtfully reflects on how this issue and the activity challenged them to consider how to use this method in the future as a social worker. Student effectively analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of using this method to spark change in their profession. Student effectively describes how they can apply this method for engaging in their future career.

6

Brevity, Clarity and Presentation

The paper is concise and uses precise and unambiguous wording. It has minimal use of quotations and virtually no spelling or grammatical errors. It is clean, correctly formatted (12-point font, Times New Roman or Arial, 1" margins) and properly uses citations.

3

Total

30

d. Class participation

Participation includes showing up to class (as able), asking questions, applying course concepts to questions about your own experiences, contributing to the learning of others, participating in discussions, providing accurate and respectful feedback to others, identifying any access needs or concerns to the professor, and using virtual office hours/email communication when necessary to ask for clarification or assistance in fulfilling course expectations and assignments. Class contributions should focus on relevant course concepts and professional practice experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary Performance</th>
<th>Points (30 max)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of participation in class</td>
<td>Student initiates contributions more than once in each class. Quality of comments / posts is weighted over quantity. Student responds actively when invited by the professor to contribute. Student does not comment overzealously or to the exclusion of other learners.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of comments</td>
<td>Comments / posts are insightful &amp; constructive. Student uses respectful terminology when referring to individuals, communities, and cultural contexts. Comments / posts are balanced between general impressions, opinions, and</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
specific, thoughtful criticisms or contributions. Evidence is used to support arguments when possible. Comments / posts are informative and relevant to the discussion at hand.

| Listening skills | Student listens attentively when others present and contributes comments / posts that build on others' remarks. Student expresses disagreement in a professional and respectful manner. | 10 |

| Total           | 30 |

* Modified from the Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence

e. Grading

This course will be graded as Pass/Fail, Satisfactory/unsatisfactory.

When grading, I aim to provide clear, thoughtful feedback that advances your writing, critical thinking, and professional development. If you have any questions about comments or questions I pose in a submitted assignment, please make an appointment to discuss them.

Occasionally, unforeseen circumstances may arise (e.g. illness, mental health, personal or family-related) that may make it difficult to complete an assignment by a designated date and time. If this happens, please notify me as soon as practicable to determine whether an extension is permissible and/or how we can best accommodate you. Please aim to request any extension at least 24 hours in advance, if possible. Extensions, if granted, usually occur for no longer than one week past the original due date. All extensions should be submitted via writing (email is permissible).

For more information, please review the MSW Student Guide policies on Grades in Academic Courses and in Field Instruction as well as Student Grievance procedures and the policy for grading in special circumstances.

f. Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be submitted online via Canvas at or before the time is due as indicated on the syllabus. If you are unable to submit online for any reason, please email me your assignment directly. If you do not contact me and your assignment is not
submitted, I will consider your assignment late. Any late assignment will lose 1 point for each day it is late, unless arrangements are made for an extension.

g. University Design for Learning

I am committed to creating a universal design for learning (UDL). Students are welcome to eat and drink during this course, take breaks and move one’s body as needed, and choose where to sit, etc.

h. Health-Related Class Absences

Please evaluate your own health status regularly and refrain from attending class and coming to campus if you are ill. You are encouraged to seek appropriate medical attention for treatment. School of Social Work students who miss class due to illness of any kind will be given opportunities to access course materials online or provided with alternative learning opportunities. Please notify me by email about your absence as soon as practical, so that I can make accommodations. Please note that documentation (a Doctor’s note) for medical excuses is not required.

i. Recording Class

Audio and video recording of in-class lectures and discussions is prohibited without the advance written permission of the instructor. Students with an approved accommodation from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities permitting the recording of class meetings must present documentation to the instructor in advance of any recording being done. The instructor reserves the right to disallow recording for a portion of any class time where privacy is a special concern. If the instructor chooses to record a class, they will decide which classes, if any, are recorded, what portion of each class is recorded, and whether a recording is made available on the course management website. On days when classes are recorded, students will be notified in advance that a recording will occur and be provided with an option to opt-out. Class recordings and course materials may not be reproduced, sold, published or distributed to others, in whole or in part, without the written consent of the instructor.
3. RESOURCES

Accommodations for students with disabilities

If you need an accommodation for a disability please let me know as soon as possible. Many aspects of this course, the assignments, the class activities, and teaching methods can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress throughout the course. I will make every effort to use the resources available to us, such as the services for Students with Disabilities, the Adaptive Technology Computing Site, and the like. If you disclose your disability, I will (to the extent permitted by law) treat that information as private and confidential. For more information and resources, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office at G664 Haven Hall, (734) 763-3000 or go to https://ssw.umich.edu/student-life/services-for-students-with-disabilities. You may also contact Nyshourn Price at the SSW at (734) 936-0961.

Health and Wellness Services

Health and wellness encompasses situations or circumstances that may impede your success within the program. The Office of Student Services offers health and wellness services that are directed to the MSW student body. The School of Social work includes resources for students at the following webpage: https://ssw.umich.edu/student-life/health-safety.

In light of COVID-19 developments, the University of Michigan Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has updated its services and resources and is offering urgent and crisis services (primarily through tele-counseling with in-person as needed), after hours and psychiatric emergency services (24/7), counseling (734-764-8312), online screenings, self-help resources, virtual care packages, an anxiety toolbox workshop online, and has more resources in development. You can learn more by visiting its website: https://caps.umich.edu/article/your-mental-health-and-covid-19.

Rackham Resources for Graduate Students in Response to COVID-19

The University of Michigan has announced measures in response to evolving developments with COVID-19. University of Michigan’s Rackham Graduate School has developed various resources for graduate students including information about
research, housing, programming, student well-being, and campus space. 
https://rackham.umich.edu/COVID-19/

Social Work Communities of Support in Response to COVID-19

The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) is using its discussion platform SPARK for discussions about COVID-19 and its impact on social workers and the communities we serve: https://spark.cswe.org/home?_zs=5N0Uf1&_zl=Mnjc6.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has created a webpage dedicated to COVID-19 with resources, information, and webinars. 
https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus.


Emergency Funding

Emergency funding is available through the U-M Dean of Students Office for students who are unable to meet immediate, essential expenses due to temporary hardship related to an unforeseen or emergency situation.

In addition, the University of Michigan’s School of Social Work has a student emergency fund for emergency expenses related to basic needs such as health, mental health, housing, food, and transportation. For more information, contact the Office of Student Services (734-936-0961) or ssw.oss@umich.edu.

Dependent Care Resources

For students with child or parenting/elder care responsibilities, feel free to consult the Students with Children website (http://www.studentswithchildren.umich.edu). This site is dedicated to the needs of students at UM who juggle parenting/elder care, study, and work. Resources include child care, financial assistance, social support, housing, and health care information. The website was created by the former Committee on Student Parent Issues (COSPI).
You are also welcome to bring your children or others to whom you provide care to class as needed. However, please do your best to keep them settled and from disturbing other students' learning processes. Social

Religious Observances

Please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance, participation, or due dates for assignments so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Student Code of Academic and Professional Conduct

All students should be familiar with the Student Code for Academic and Professional Conduct (https://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.11/standards-of-academic-and-professional-conduct). Unacceptable academic behavior refers to actions that are contrary to maintaining the highest standards in course work and includes cheating, plagiarism, falsification of data, aiding and abetting dishonesty and impairment. Any suspected misconduct will be discussed with the student and then reported to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs.

Additional School and University policies, information and resources are available here: https://ssw.umich.edu/standard-policies-information-resources. They include:

- Safety and emergency preparedness
- Mental health and well-being
- Teaching evaluations
- Proper use of names and pronouns
- Accommodations for students with disabilities
- Religious/spiritual observances
- Military deployment
- Writing skills and expectations
- Academic integrity and plagiarism