



Course title:	Social Problems and Social Work Today	
Course #/term:	SW 400, section 001 – fall 2021	
Time and place:	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-1 in b798 SSWB	
Credit hours:	3	
Prerequisites:	None	
Instructor:	Joseph A. Galura, Lecturer and Alejandra Alvarez, Graduate Intern	
Pronouns:	He, him and She, they	
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Office hours:	Wednesdays 1-4, and by appointment	

Course description. This course is considered an advanced, undergraduate elective which is designed to familiarize students with the profession of social work and also to recruit undergraduate students into the school's MSW program. The particular social problems selected for discussion will change from year to year depending on faculty and student interest and the contemporary context. The opening sessions of the course will briefly overview the social context for the kinds of roles, interventions, and fields of service that the profession generally operates from, before exploring in depth the profession's response to each selected social problem. Important professional themes like: multicultural sensitivity to various diversity dimensions such as ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation; empowerment; prevention; and value-based intervention will also be reviewed in this course. Note: this course is distinguished from a more traditional course on social problems since it focuses specifically on a limited number of selected social problems and probes social work's professional involvement in preventing and assuaging each problem.

Course objectives and competencies. Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the various roles, levels of intervention, and fields of service from which social workers practice.
- Describe the various value dilemmas, political controversies, and societal challenges that the profession of social work faces when it approaches selected social problems.
- Explain why diversity, empowerment, and strengths-based perspectives are critical to the way social workers approach social problems.

- Critique the social work profession's response to selected social problems.

Course design. Class sessions are scheduled for an hour and a half, twice weekly. Varied pedagogical strategies are utilized in this course including, but not limited to: traditional lecture/discussion format, small group activities, guest lectures from experts in the field, films and other audiovisuals.

CASC minor mission statement. The CASC minor is for students interested in developing knowledge, skills, and experiences in community action and social change. The multidisciplinary 16 credit minor will prepare students to:

- examine community action and social change using a multidisciplinary framework;
- address community action and social change in multilingual and multicultural communities;
- integrate social justice values into the community action and social change processes; and
- engage in service learning to promote community action and social change.

CASC guiding principles.

- The core values of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence) frames our interactions with students inside and outside the classroom. <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Highlighted-Revisions-to-the-Code-of-Ethics>
- PODS: Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice are taught to similar degrees in every class. We represent Social Work – both the School and the profession – in our interactions with students, including academic and career advice. <https://ssw.umich.edu/privilege-oppression-diversity-and-social-justice>
- We strive to respond appropriately to student inquiries in a timely and personally engaging manner.

Curricular themes.

- Multiculturalism and Diversity issues will be explored as students identify self-knowledge and skills for regularly monitoring their practice within the context of their work. The PODS (Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice) lens will be applied to practice situations and students will have an opportunity to discuss relevant field issues related to the diversity dimensions (ability, age, culture, economic class, ethnicity, family structure, gender, gender identity and expression, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation). Social Justice and Social Change issues will be addressed by helping students to critically assess their commitment to and skills for enacting change towards social justice goals. The role of the social worker will be discussed as reflected by their individual experiences and reflection.
- Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation approaches will be addressed within the context of the student's orientation to practice. Small group discussions will allow the student to discuss, review, compare, and contrast alternative approaches and frameworks while reflecting on their individual work and experiences.

- Behavioral and Social Science research approaches will be addressed within the context of the student's orientation and method. Small group discussions will allow the student to discuss, review, compare, and contrast alternative approaches and frameworks while reflecting on their individual work and experiences.

Course Requirements: Text and class materials. Two books are required: *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Remeaa Menakem (ISBN 9781942094470), and *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration* by Reuben Jonathan Miller (ISBN 978-0-316-45151-2). All readings will be posted to Canvas. To fully engage in the course topic and, perhaps as aspiring social work practitioners, it is expected that students will complete all required readings. Posted readings are to be discussed on Canvas in Discussions, and further discussed in class as time permits. Instructors reserve the right to assign 1-2 additional readings each week. These will be posted to Canvas before noon on Monday for work due that Friday.

Class schedule. An overview of our class sessions follows. Please note that due to the number of invited guest speakers, some adjustments to the Agenda are possible over the course of the semester. Students will also be paired with a guest speaker to contact for a brief interview to be used as the speaker's introduction to the class. Any changes to the course schedule will be posted to Canvas – please check Announcements 24 hours before class.

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Assignments
Weeks 1-4 31 Aug – 23 Sep Tu & Th 11:30-1	Module 1: What is Social Work? Guest speakers invited from: CASC (Community Action and Social Change), OSSEM (Office of Student Services and Enrollment Management), OFE (Office of Field Education), and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion).	Syllabus Web Page for Each Office Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions My Grandmother's Hands, Parts I and II
Weeks 5-7 28 Sep – 21 Oct Tu & Th 11:30-1	Module 2: Addiction and Recovery. Guest speakers invited from the Center for College Recovery, and practicing LMSWs.	Web Page for Collegiate Recovery Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions Attending Open 12-step Meeting My Grandmother's Hands, Part III

30 Sep, 19 & 21 Oct	No Class (Fall Break: 19 Oct), and Release Times	“Realm of the Dead” Performance and Open 12-step Meeting
Weeks 8-10 26 Oct – 9 Nov Tu & Th 11:30-1	Module 3: Interpersonal Practice in Integrated Health with Children, Older Adults, and Families. Guest speakers will be invited from these MSW pathways.	Web Page for MSW Pathways Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions CSWE Web Page on Antiracist Perspectives Halfway Home, Parts I and II
Weeks 11-14 11-30 Nov Tu & Th 11:30-1	Module 4: Macro Practice. Guest speakers will be invited from CASC, the Jewish Community Leadership Program, the MSW Community Change, and Policy and Political Social Work Pathways, as well as experienced labor organizers.	Web Page for MSW Pathways Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions Halfway Home, Part III

Assignments. The following text and chart explain required coursework. Please expect to upload a series of reflections for both Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions (Fridays) and Campus Events (three throughout the term).

Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions: Example from Module 1

Browse the designated archive in Social Work Today (link below). Pick 3 articles to peruse (please overlap with only one classmate per article), then:

1. In your own words, summarize the author’s main point.
2. What are one or two of your main takeaways – how does this fit with your developing understanding of Social Work, your interest in a particular Social Problem, your growing toolkit as a change agent?
3. If this article were to be assigned to the class, what are one or two questions you would pose that would spark an engaging dialogue?

https://www.socialworktoday.com/eye_on_ethics_index.shtml

Midterm Paper: Social Issue, Personal Qualifications, Core Value (due 28 Oct)

Provide one double-spaced three (3) page statement (12 pt.) that addresses all three of the following topics:

- 1) Discuss a social justice issue you would like to address in your career. What skills and knowledge would you like to obtain in the MSW program to support your career objectives?
- 2) Describe how your personal and intellectual qualifications, past human service experience and/or future goals are relevant to furthering social justice. Please use specific examples.

3) The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers. The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

After reviewing the NASW Code of Ethics Core Values, discuss a core value that you have demonstrated in the past. Then discuss a core value that you would like to develop while completing the MSW program. Please use specific examples. In preparing your statement, we recommend that you also review the Criteria for Admission.

Campus Events (participation in 2 due before 9 Dec)

Historically, the University of Michigan has hosted a number of social justice-themed events on campus of direct relevance to the objectives of this course. Two examples of this are a CASC's "Art and Activism" workshop or a lecture in Poverty Solutions' Speaker Series. Further details and more options will be given by instructors throughout the term: Basically, students, outside of class time, will participate in THREE events they coordinate with the instructors, post reflections on said event to Canvas, and if time permits, also discuss with the class.

Final Presentation: One social problem, three recent articles plus your self-reflection (2, 7, 9 Dec)

During the last days of class, you will present the culmination of your learning from the semester to the class. You will have 5-10 minutes to present to the class and this can take any format that you wish, however, it must be an individual presentation, addressing the two points that follow below. Feel free to use audio or visual aids and let me know if you need any assistance. You are required to meet with an instructor to review topic and references prior to presenting. There will be a brief question and answer period following the presentation.

- Focusing on one social problem, identify at least three recent articles in social work professional journals that help shed light on the core challenges related to the social problem. In what ways did reading these articles shed light on your understanding of your identified social problem (e.g., history or background in terms of severity, who it impacts the most, why it's a problem, potential causes and risk factors, potential protective factors, and strategies/methods that have been used to address this problem e.g., major interventions)? Articles should be dated 2015 or more recent and you must include references using APA format.
- Self-reflection of the social problem. Reflect on your specific interests in this social problem and how you see yourself as a change agent in this area. Consider your social identities and how they might impact your work in this area, both in terms of strengths and in terms of challenges. What is your vision for social justice in this area? How can you promote social justice in this area in your own life? How might you learn more about this area in the future?

Assignment	Due date	Percent of overall grade
Weekly Posting in Canvas Discussions	Please post in Canvas Discussions every Friday by noon, starting 2 Sep	45 (included in class participation)
Midterm Paper	Please upload a Word.doc to Canvas Assignments before midnight on 28 Oct	15
Campus Events	Please participate in 2 and upload reflections to Canvas before midnight on 9 Dec	15
Final Presentation	Please present in class on 2, 7 or 9 Dec	25

Attendance and class participation. In-class discussions and participation in exercises are considered an essential part of your learning experience. In addition, some of the material considered essential to achieving the objectives of the course will only be presented in class. I expect you to be in class, on time and ready to participate fully. If unanticipated circumstances arise that prevent you from attending or cause you to arrive late or leave early, you must notify me as soon as possible. Missing more than two class periods requires a meeting with the instructor. Also see the [Policy on Class Attendance](#) found in the MSW Student Guide.

Grading. In this course, grading will consider class participation (attendance, and weekly posts in Discussions - a combined maximum of 45 points in all), the Midterm Paper and Final Presentation (15 or 25 points each or 40 total), plus 3 Events (15 points total). Written assignments will be credit or no credit. Credit will be assigned to written work that is complete. For incomplete assignments I do offer an opportunity to receive credit if revisions are made within a one-week turnaround. However, without pre-arrangement, any work uploaded to Canvas 24 hours past due will not be accepted. Also see Social Work's policies on [Grades in Academic Courses and in Field Instruction](#) as well as [Student Grievance procedures](#) and the [policy for grading in special circumstances](#).

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

- A 100-94/A- 93-90
- B+ 89-87/B 86-84/B- 83-80
- C+ 79-77/C 76-74/C- 73-70
- D+ 69-67/D 66-64/D- 63-60

Class Recording and Course Materials. *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 a recording is occurring. 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. Additional information on class recordings can be found the [Recording and Privacy Concerns FAQ](#).

COVID-19 Statement. For the safety of all students, faculty, and staff on campus, it is important for each of us to be mindful of safety measures that have been put in place for our protection. Your participation in this course is conditional upon your adherence to all safety measures mandated by the state of Michigan and the University, including [properly wearing a face covering in class](#) and compliance with the [University COVID-19 Vaccination Policy](#). Other applicable and additional safety measures may be described in the [Campus Maize & Blueprint](#). Your ability to participate in this course may be impacted by failure to comply with campus safety measures. Individuals seeking to request an accommodation related to the face covering requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act should contact the [Office for Institutional Equity](#) and those seeking an exemption related to the vaccination requirement should submit an exemption request through [WolverineAccess](#). I also encourage you to review the [Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) and the [COVID-related Addendum to the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

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.

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*