**Course Title:** Contemporary Cultures in the United States  
**Course # and Term:** SW 620, Winter 2022  
**Time and Place:** Wednesdays, 2PM - 5 PM  
**Credit Hours:** 3  
**Prerequisites:** N/A  
**Instructor:** Vitalis Im (“V”), LLMSW  
**Pronouns:** he/him  
**Contact Information:** vitalis@umich.edu  
**Office Hours:** Office hours are by appointment only and will occur over Zoom. Please see the course Canvas page for the links to my scheduling app and Zoom room (“Home” → “Office Hours”).

**Course Description**  
This course will explore the origins and development of selected social variables characterizing the diversity dimensions (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) in contemporary U.S. society. Social and behavioral science theories and research findings on the allocation of different roles, status, and opportunities to these populations will be studied. Students will use a multidimensional, social justice, and multicultural framework to examine power, privilege, discrimination, and oppression. This course will emphasize that effective social work practice with diverse cultural groups involves understanding professional ethics in the context of the values of both the dominant society and the ethnic community.

**Course Content**  
The course content will include an exploration of historical, social, and political contexts for the study of diverse cultural groups as gleaned from contemporary social texts and frameworks. The current status of these cultural groups will be reviewed, including constructs such as the family, economic and educational attainment, development of informal and formal institutions within the cultural community. This course will also explore the impact of multiple social group memberships on social roles, help seeking and coping behavior, attitudes, and values. In addition, this course will contain a review of the contemporary conceptual frameworks influencing social science knowledge about intergroup relations and conflict, including but not limited to culturally sensitive and culturally conscious practice. The relationships among privilege, discrimination, and oppression for selected cultural groups, and the implications of these forces for social work practice, the administration of human service organizations, and the formulation of public policies will be covered. Individual and small group activities related to the construction of critical consciousness and praxis in social work will also be included.

**Course Objectives**
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be better able to:

1. Identify the historical, social, and political forces influencing the social constructions of diverse cultural groups in the United States by:
   a. evaluating social science frameworks for the discussion of culture;

2. Gain and apply knowledge about social group memberships and identities, their histories and meanings, how they interact with each other in people’s lives and the larger society, and how they are affected by particular social contexts;

3. Reviewing one’s own social group memberships and how they have influenced opportunities and challenges.

4. Discuss the influences of discrimination, oppression, and privilege on life experiences of diverse cultural groups by:
   a. Labeling forms of discrimination, prejudice, and oppression as these differentially affect U.S. cultural groups, including gay/lesbian/bisexual, racial/ethnic, gender, transgender, religious/spiritual, differently abled, and social class groups;
   b. Identifying sources of intragroup and intergroup conflict stemming from cultural group membership;
   c. Describe the forces that create and maintain individual, group, organizational, and community differences in power, privilege, and oppression;
   d. Demonstrate skills in negotiating differences and conflicts at system interfaces.

5. Review the characteristics of selected ethnic and racial groups in the United States and identify key variables to be considered by social workers attempting to work with these populations by:
   a. Examining historical, social, and political forces influencing the construct of family for these groups;
   b. Locating the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, political implications, and socioeconomic status for these groups; critiquing the social science literature on social identity groups; examining variables, such as immigration and migration, cultural norms and roles, acculturation and assimilation, help seeking behaviors, employment and income, educational attainment, and the establishment of informal and formal institutions within these cultural groups.

Course Design
This class will strive to foster a learning environment where each student is challenged to think critically on sources of power and mechanisms of oppression and privilege, construct historically-informed arguments, build intellectual rigor around the examination of race, and examine sources of their beliefs and perspectives. It involves lectures, a range of contemporary readings, video, and participation in experiential activities. Additionally, this course will provide a forum to critically examine how our multiple status locations, societal constructions, and social processes shape our beliefs, assumptions, behaviors, and life experiences.

Theme Relation to Multiculturalism & Diversity
Multiculturalism and diversity is addressed from the perspective of critically considering how diverse dimensions (such as ability; age; class; color; culture; race/ethnicity; family structure; gender - including gender identity and gender expression; marital status; national origin; race; religion, spirituality or worldview; sex; and sexual orientation) are socially constructed, embedded in societal
structures across system levels, and maintained through social processes and intra and interpersonal relationships and schemas.

**Theme Relation to Social Justice**
Social justice is addressed from the perspective of critically analyzing theories and conceptualizations of justice, current trends and ethical issues and their implications for promoting social justice and social change, by considering the influence of normative rules and conditions. Additional focus will be directed towards how structural and institutional conditions affect the opportunities and well being of different populations (advantaged and disadvantaged groups) in society.

**Course Competencies & Practice Behaviors**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Practice Behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.CO</td>
<td>Synthesize and differentially applies theories of human behavior and the social environment such as theories of social change to guide community practice decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.IP</td>
<td>Synthesize and differentially applies theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide clinical practice decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.MH</td>
<td>Synthesize and differentially apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide management practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.SPE</td>
<td>Apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide policy and evaluation practice decisions</td>
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**Intensive Focus on PODS (Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice)**
This course integrates PODS content and skills with a special emphasis on the identification of policies that promote social justice, illuminate injustices and are consistent with scientific and professional knowledge. Through the use of a variety of instructional methods, this course will support students developing a vision of social justice, learn to recognize and reduce mechanisms that support oppression and injustice, apply intersectionality and intercultural frameworks and strengthen critical consciousness, self knowledge and self awareness to facilitate PODS learning.

**Course Assignments**
- You will be assigned a weekly set of texts; our classes will be predicated on the discussion of those assigned readings. All readings will be provided in PDF format on Canvas. You do not have to purchase material for this course.
• Your readings are accompanied by a weekly synthesis that must be posted to the course Canvas page by 11:59 PM on Saturdays. Your syntheses must meet a minimum of 250 words and include two discussion questions that you would like to pose to your colleagues in the following class. The guidelines for the weekly synthesis may be found on the course Canvas page.

• Each week’s discussions will be led by a student facilitator. The student facilitator is not expected to prepare a lecture or to summarize the content of the week’s readings. Instead, they will facilitate the discussion for that week using the discussion questions submitted with the weekly syntheses. A student may choose to prepare—with instructor permission—a 7 to 10-minute lecture for extra credit.

• Final Presentations: Students will be expected to present a 15-minute TED Talk based on a topic of their choosing that relates to the course content and objectives. Students will discuss their topics with the instructor prior to the presentation date. There is no written component for the final project; the rubric for the TED Talk may be found on the course Canvas page. Final presentations are due, in class, on April 13, 2022.

• Please note that items in the syllabus are subject to change as the semester progresses. Students will receive advance warning (at least one week in advance) should items in the syllabus be altered in any way. In these instances, please follow the course assignments as outlined on the course Canvas page.

Attendance
The structure of this seminar is built around participation through class discussion of the assigned readings. As a result, two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade; alternatively, you may be asked to withdraw from the class. You will not be penalized for absences if you communicate your absences in advance and if those absences have adequate justifications.

Hy-Flex (i.e., some students Zooming into lecture and some students attending in person) is not an option for this class. Participation and attendance points may be made up either through a 15-minute Zoom meeting with the instructor or a 1-page, single-spaced response to your colleagues’ discussion questions for the week, the assigned readings, or a topic related to the week’s theme. These make-up assignments will be decided in collaboration with the instructor.

I am always happy to chat—either by email or via Zoom—so please feel free to reach out with any concerns that you might have at any time!

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.

Weather and COVID-19 Addendums
Due to the possibility of inclement weather, as well as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, please note that certain classes may be held online rather than in person. The School of Social Work has informed instructors that in-person classes may hold up to 50% of their classes in an online format this semester. This option may be exercised at the instructor's discretion throughout the course of the semester.

**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. By returning to campus, you have acknowledged your responsibility for protecting the collective health of our community. Your participation in this course on an in-person/hybrid basis is conditional upon your adherence to all safety measures mandated by the state of Michigan and the University, including maintaining physical distancing of six feet from others, and properly wearing a face covering in class. Other applicable safety measures may be described in the [Wolverine Culture of Care](#) and the [University's Face Covering Policy for COVID-19](#). Your ability to participate in this course in-person/hybrid 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](#). If you are unable or unwilling to adhere to these safety measures while in a face-to-face class setting, you will be required to participate on a remote basis. 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](#).

**Grades**
- **Canvas Syntheses**: 36 points total
- **Participation**: 24 points total
- **Final Presentations**: 20 points total

Your grades are based on a point-based system. Your weekly syntheses are worth up to 3 points (36 points total), your weekly participation up to 2 points (24 points total), and your final presentation is worth up to 20 points.

Exceptional syntheses may earn extra points; likewise, participation that exceeds expectations may earn extra points. Syntheses will lose .5 points each day they are delayed for a maximum of 2 points off; syntheses will be graded with a 0 if they are not completed by the following Wednesday at 11:59 PM.

Your percentage grade will be calculated based on the cumulative total points earned on your syntheses, participation, and final presentation divided by the total numbers of points possible to earn (80 points). Your percentage grade will be translated into a letter grade using the chart below:

- 101%+ = A+
- 94% - 100% = A
- 90% - 93% = A-
- 87% - 89% = B+
- 83% - 86% = B


80% - 82% = B-
77% - 79% = C+
73% - 76% = C
70% - 72% = C-
67% - 69% = D+
63% - 66% = D
60% - 62% = D-
< 59% = E

Links and Student Resources Related to Grading:
- Grades in Academic Courses and in Field Instruction
- Student Grievance Procedures
- Policy for Grading in Special Circumstances.

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
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
Course Content

Week 1 (01/5): Introductions

Week 2 (01/12): Sex
Podcast: Invisibilia — The Power of Categories
1. Martin. The Egg and the Sperm.
2. DiAngelo. “New Racism”.
3. Salon. What is the female orgasm for?

Week 3 (01/19): Hesitation
Film: A Class Divided
1. Yancy. White Gazes: What it Feels Like to Be an Essence (pp. 43-62).

Week 4 (01/26): Narratives
1. DSM-5. Borderline Personality Disorder.
3. Young. How Narratives Work in Psychiatric Science: An Example from the Biological Psychiatry of PTSD.

Week 5 (02/02): Pedophilia
Film: A Place for Pedophiles
1. DSM-5. Pedophilic Disorder.

Week 6 (02/09): Schizophrenia
Film: Shadows and Illuminations

Week 7 (02/16): Suicide
Film: Boy Interrupted
1. DSM-5. Major-Depressive Disorder. Index entry on “suicide risk”.
3. Ellis and Patel. Client Suicide: What Now?
Week 8 (02/23): Sexual Orientation Disturbance

Film: *Pray Away*

Week 9 (03/02): Spring Break
   - There are no readings this week; there is no synthesis due this week.

Week 10 (03/09): Addiction

Film: *Heroin(e)*
   1. DSM-5. Overview of substance use disorders.

Week 11 (03/16): The Anti-Vax Movement

Week 12 (03/23): Art
   - There are no readings this week; there is no synthesis due this week.

Week 13 (03/30): Trauma

Film: *The Wisdom of Trauma*
   1. DSM-II. Overview of “trauma”.
   4. Herman. Trauma and Recovery (Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Conclusion).

Week 14 (04/06): Police

Film: *The Innocence Files*

Week 15 (04/13): Final Presentations