



<b>Course Title:</b>	Engaging Social Justice, Diversity, and Oppression in Social Work
<b>Course #/term:</b>	SW505, Fall 2022 - Section 015
<b>Time and place:</b>	Wednesdays, 9 am -12 pm; SSW 2752
<b>Credit hours:</b>	3
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	N/A
<b>Instructor:</b>	Nasreen Meah (she/her)
<b>Contact info:</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:nmeah@umich.edu">nmeah@umich.edu</a> Phone: 734-353-9332 Please allow 48 hours for a response
<b>Office hours:</b>	By appointment

## 1. Course Statement

At a 2018 event in Washington, DC, [Connie Razza](#), Director of Strategic Research at The Center for Popular Democracy, famously [said](#), “Wealth is how history shows up in your wallet.” Razza was speaking to the historical causes of today’s [extreme economic inequality](#)—where resources and power are increasingly concentrated at society’s upper echelons. The top 1% holds [more](#) than 40% of the nation’s wealth: what you own, minus what you owe. And inequality has become [more extreme](#) over time.

An [intersectional](#) analysis reveals differences in how groups with varying and multiple social identities experience extreme economic inequality. For instance, the average wealth of white families is [10 times higher](#) than that of Black families, even though Black families [save](#) a higher percentage of their comparatively lower incomes. Racial inequalities in wealth widen across the life course, and they are especially striking as people near retirement. At age 60+, single white women with a college degree have \$384,000 in median wealth, [compared](#) to only \$11,000 in wealth held by single Black women with a college degree. Revealing class divides, poor white families have substantially [less wealth](#) than their high-income white counterparts. Individual experiences do not always match the patterns of group averages, so we should be aware that power and oppression operate at multiple levels and are cautious in making assumptions about individual people. And group averages offer a way to understand economic inequality at a societal level.

History can help to explain today's extreme economic inequality—including wealth inequalities by observed along lines of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, disability status, citizenship status, and more. The United States' histories of slavery, violence during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, and ongoing mutually reinforcing policies and practices have prevent(ed) Black families from accumulating wealth. As one example, the federal government [paid](#) reparations to white slave owners up to \$300 for every enslaved person that was freed at the time of emancipation, or about \$8,000 in today's dollars. The highest payout to a single slave owner was \$18,000, or nearly \$500,000 in today's dollars. [Reparations](#) were not paid to [American Descendants of Slavery](#) at the time of emancipation nor any time in the future. These policies and practices similarly prevent Native, Latino/x/e, Southeast Asian, queer, and many other families whose social identities are subjugated by a racial hierarchy from accumulating wealth. This is how history shows up in people's wallets and why racial wealth inequality has been so enduring.

And, where there is extreme economic inequality, there are people working to imagine and build more equitable futures. [Mutual aid, wealth cooperatives, community development financial institutions](#) (CDFIs), and [public banking](#) efforts attempt to construct new, more equitable realities. There are also real efforts to deliver [reparations](#) for American Descendants of Slavery, including in [California](#) and [North Carolina](#). Moreover, the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare's [Grand Challenges](#)—a call to action for redressing pernicious social problems—identifies extreme economic inequality as one of the profession's 13 challenges, including racism, health inequities, and housing and homelessness. As such, social workers have a responsibility to redress extreme economic inequality.

This course studies extreme economic inequality as a way to increase students' awareness, knowledge, and critical skills related to diversity, human rights, and social and economic justice. How does power relate and contribute to extreme economic inequality? How have institutions and policies contributed to extreme economic inequality? And how can social workers advance justice and reduce extreme inequality? This course explores these critical questions by engaging in classroom discussions, readings, and assignments. We will strive to situate traditionally excluded and marginalized groups as experts of their experiences within the context of extreme economic inequality.

## **a. Course Description**

This required essentials course is designed to increase students' awareness, knowledge, and critical skills related to diversity, human rights, and social and economic justice. The course focuses heavily on engaging diversity and differences in social work practice and advancing human rights and social and economic justice, through understanding power and oppression across micro, meso, and macro levels. We will explore the knowledge base that underlies skills needed to work towards justice. These

include types and sources of power, multiple social locations, social constructions, social processes, social identities, conflicts, and how all these interact. A major emphasis is on self-reflexivity and developing skills in critical contextual thinking and analyses, as well as learning to use knowledge and theory to recognize critique, and engage underlying assumptions, and inform working for change. Multiple kinds of understanding are especially important—across groups, between organizations and system levels, and within and between people, related to intersecting social locations.

## **b. Course Content**

Students will actively explore how societal power and diversity characterize and shape the human experience, and are critical to the formation of social structures, cultural understandings, group and organizational processes, and identities. The dimensions of 2 diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. In this course, students will learn how current experiences of privilege and oppression are shaped by historical forces, societal structures, social constructions, group and interpersonal processes, and human understandings, including an understanding of the institutional, organizational, policy, and socio-cultural arrangements that contribute to them. Additionally, this foundation course will explore formulations of human rights, including positive rights, and negative conditions that need to be eradicated. This course also studies how social justice and injustice occur in organizations, institutions, and society, relevant theories that can inform work for justice (e.g., critical race theory, and components of many theories), and how mechanisms of oppression and privilege work (e.g., marginalization, exploitation, violence, cultural hegemony, and powerlessness).

## **c. Course Objectives and Competencies**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be better able to: Recognize the extent to which structures, policies, and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, create or enhance privilege and power (Essential 14, 30, 33, 44; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 5, 6); Explain the cumulative effect of structural discrimination on people with differing and multiple social identities and locations (Essentials 11, 14, 29, 33, 38, 45; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 6); Distinguish between health differences and health disparities, and provide relevant examples of each (Essential 5, 11, 15, 30; EPAS 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8); Discuss the policy reform sought by modern social justice movements in response to police brutality (Essential 6, 13, 14, 30, 32, 44; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7); Recognize how policy decisions at the local, state, and national level can exclude and endanger the environmental health of citizens when their voices are not heard or heeded (Essential 5, 13, 22, 29, 30; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9); Utilize strategies and resources to advocate for social, economic, and environmental justice and change, while protecting human rights (Essential 1, 11, 14, 29, 33, 43; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 6, 7); Define and apply your own positionalities and the importance of their intersections (Essential 38, 42, 45; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 6); and Evaluate historical context

and its current applications within the profession and practice as an ally (Essential 6, 11, 15, 29, 39, 44, 45; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8).

## **d. Course Design**

This class will strive to foster a learning environment where each student can reflect critically on sources of power and mechanisms of oppression and privilege, construct a framework for justice, and examine sources of their beliefs and perspectives. 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 3 knowledge. It involves lectures, 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. Special attention will also be given knowledge about justice and change, and principles of change towards justice.

## **e. Relationship to Social Work Ethics and Values**

The NASW Code of Ethics will be used to give students direction about ethical issues as they relate to the experience of marginalized groups. The course will focus on social workers' responsibility as professionals to promote general welfare by working toward the elimination of discrimination, expanding choices for all persons, encouraging respect for diversity, advocating for progressive changes in 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 theories, practice and/or 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, work toward social justice processes, apply intersectionality and intercultural frameworks and strengthen critical consciousness, self-knowledge and self-awareness to facilitate PODS learning.

Specifically, this course centers entirely on engaging with, exploring, and better understanding PODS as related to social work practice on all levels. PODS is infused through this course and its assignments, which require self reflection, group work with practice of skills learned, and application of key concepts to understand social justice issues and social work responses to the myriad of needs connected to PODS, both with clients/communities, and social workers themselves.

## 2. Class Logistics

### a. Text and Class Materials

In the light of economic equality, this course does not require any text book. All the materials that are needed for this course are provided through the canvas in your schedule notes column. All course content will fall under weekly modules and can be accessed in the Canvas course under the Modules section.

### b. Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignment
Week 1 (8/31)	Introduction to the Course Syllabus / Classroom Expectations Critical Race Theory/ Anti Racism Foundation	Assignment 1 released
Week 2 (9/7)	Critical Race Theory/Anti Racism Access to Public Transportation and Socioeconomic Status	
Week 3 (9/14)	Environmental Health Impacts and Socioeconomic Status	
Week 4 (9/21)	Housing Disparities & Discrimination	Implicit Bias Certification (due on 9/21 midnight)
Week 5 (9/28)	Intersectionality of Education & Socioeconomic Status	
Week 6 (10/5)	Race, Health & Socioeconomic Status <b>Guest Speaker: Senator Stephnaie Chang</b>	Assignment 2 presentation- 5 Students
Week 7 (10/12)	Intersectionality of Mass Incarceration & Economic Inequality	Assignment 2 presentation- 5 Students
Week 8 (10/19)	Barriers for Immigrant and Undocumented Populations	Assignment 2 presentation- 5 Students
Week 9 (10/26)	Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Populations	Assignment 2 presentation- 5 Students ***All Assignment 2 Submission due on 10/30 midnight

Week 10 (11/2)	Racial Capitalism <b>Guest Speaker:Community Organizer-Osvaldo Rivera</b>	
Week 11 (11/9)	Disability & Financial Security	
Week 12 (11/16)	Unemployment & Economic Impacts of COVID-19	
Week 13 (11/23)	THANKSGIVING RECESS	
Week 14 (11/30)	Economic Inequality Gap Widening: Rich vs Poor	Assignment 1 (due on 12/3 midnight)
Week 15 (12/7)	LAST WEEK OF CLASSES Future Implications for Reversing Extreme Inequality & Social Work	

### c. Assignments

This course has 2 assignments and 1 certification on Implicit Bias. Combined, these assignments are designed to facilitate your critical understandings of diversity and social justice in social work within the context of extreme economic inequality. All assignments are uploaded to Canvas.

Assignment	Due Date	Percent of Overall Grade
Class Participation	Every Wednesday (15 points * 14 meetings = 70 points)	30%
Implicit Bias Certificate	September 21, 2022 at 11:59pm EDT (30 points)	10%
<a href="#">Assignment 1 – Life Trajectory</a>	December 3, 2022 at 11:59pm EDT (100 points)	30%
<a href="#">Assignment 2 – Campaign for Social Work Grand Challenges</a>	October 30, 2022 at 11:59pm EDT (100 points)	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>300 points</b>	<b>100%</b>

## d. Attendance and Class Participation

**Attendance.** Class is scheduled to meet in-person each Monday from 9am-12pm EST (with the exception to Thanksgiving break). Students are strongly encouraged to attend class each week where we will discuss content, review materials, and push ourselves beyond our growing edges. Moreover, class is an opportunity for us to develop a sense of community. During the semester, the instructor and students may have unexpected life events that prevent in-person class attendance. This class will strive to be understanding of these unexpected events and provide flexibility when possible. For more information, please see the Policy on Class Attendance found in the MSW Student Guide (<https://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/section/1.09.00/17/policy-on-class-attendance>).

**Missing Content.** Nearly all content is available via Canvas. Please let the instructor know if any content appears to be missing. If you missed content for a given week, you are able to return to those materials and catch up on anything you missed.

**Late Assignments.** The weeks that they are due, assignments should be submitted via Canvas. Please contact the instructor if you need to negotiate an alternate plan or deadline for submitting your assignments.

**Extra Credit or Bonus Points.** Not offered on an individual basis. Students are encouraged to submit assignments that represent their best work on their chosen projects.

## e. Grading

The total number of points earned based on your completion of the below assignments and the number of total available points will be used to determine your letter grade at the end of the semester. Please review the MSW Student Guide for policies on [Grades in Academic Courses](http://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.08/grades-in-academic-courses-and-in-field-instruction) (<http://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.08/grades-in-academic-courses-and-in-field-instruction>) and in Field Instruction (<http://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.18/student-grievances>) as well as [Student Grievance procedures](http://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.18/student-grievances) (<http://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/chapter/1.18/student-grievances>) and the [policy for grading in special circumstances](https://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/section/1.08.01/15/grades-for-special-circumstances) (<https://ssw.umich.edu/msw-student-guide/section/1.08.01/15/grades-for-special-circumstances>).

a. 97-100 = A+	73-76.9 = C
b. 93-96.9 = A	70-72.9 = C-
c. 90-92.9 = A-	67-69.9 = D+
d. 87-89.9 = B+	63-66.9 = D
e. 83-86.9 = B	60-62.9 = D-
f. 80-82.9 = B-	
g. 77-79.9 = C+	

- "A" grades are given for exceptional individual performance and mastery of the material.
- The use of "A+", "A", and "A-" distinguishes the degree of superiority.
- "B" grades are given to students who demonstrate mastery of the material.
- "B+" is used for students who perform just above the mastery level but not in an exceptional manner.
- "B-" is used for students just below the mastery level.
- "C" grades are given when mastery of the material is minimal.
- A "C-" is the lowest grade that carries credit.
- "D" grades indicate deficiency and carry no credit.

## **f. 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. This will be done in consultation with students. 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 in the [Recording and Privacy Concerns FAQ](#).

## **g. 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.

## **3. Resources for Students<sup>1</sup>**

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** This course is intended for all U-M students, including those with mental, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illness, injuries, impairments, or any

other such condition that tends to negatively affect one's equal access to education. If, at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (and not required) to contact me by email, phone, or during office hours to discuss your specific needs. I also encourage you to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office at <http://ssd.umich.edu>. If you have a diagnosis, SSD can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through SSD, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors. For more information and resources, the University's Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD), located at G664 Haven Hall and available via phone (734) 763-3000 or website <http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/>

**Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:** The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselor physically located in the School of Social Work, (Megan Shaughnessy-Mogill) at (734) 763-7894 or by email [mshaughm@umich.edu](mailto:mshaughm@umich.edu). You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs>, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see [www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources](http://www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources). The MSW student Guide to Health and Wellness can be found at [http://www.ssw.umich.edu/current/Health\\_Wellness\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.ssw.umich.edu/current/Health_Wellness_Guide.pdf)

**Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness.** The University of Michigan's Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) promotes healthy relationships, teaches non-violence and equality, supports survivor healing, and fosters a respectful and safe environment for all members of the university community. All services are free and confidential. Visit SAPAC's website <https://sapac.umich.edu/> and contact them via their 24-hour crisis line at (734) 936-3333 or office phone at (734) 764-7771.

**Safety & Emergency Preparedness:** All University of Michigan students, faculty and staff are required to familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and protocols for both inside and outside of the classroom. In the event of possible building closure (i.e. severe weather conditions, public health notices, etc.) you may contact (734) 764-SSWB (7793) for up-to-date School closure information. For more information view the annual Campus Safety Statement at <http://www.dpss.umich.edu/>. Register for UM Emergency Alerts at <http://www.dpss.umich.edu/emergencymanagement/alert/>. In the event of an emergency, dial 9-1-1 from any cell phone or campus phone.

**Dependent Care Resources:** For students with child or parenting/elder care responsibilities, please 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). For additional information on work/life support please also visit the Work/Life Resource Center site (<http://www.hr.umich.edu/worklife/>) and the UM Child Care gateway (<http://www.hr.umich.edu/childcare/>).

**Student Code of Academic and Professional Conduct:** All students should be familiar with the Student Code for Academic and Professional Conduct (<http://archive.ssw.umich.edu/studentguide/2014/page.html?section=12&volume=1>) which holds students to the highest standards of academic and professional conduct. Unacceptable academic behavior refers to actions or behaviors that are contrary to maintaining the highest standards in course work and includes such actions as cheating, plagiarism, falsification of data, aiding and abetting dishonesty and impairment. Any suspected situations of academic misconduct will be discussed with the student and then reported to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs.

<sup>1</sup> *Descriptions of these resources are slightly adapted from syllabi developed and publicly posted by University of Michigan School of Social Work faculty, including Drs. Christina Bares, Shanna Katz Kattari, and Michael Spencer.*