

NCLC 540: Contemporary Issues in Social Justice and Human Rights

3 credits

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Office Hours: by appointment

Students will examine, study the sociohistorical significance of, and consider solutions for some of the most pressing social justice and human rights issues in the world today. In doing so they will draw on both integrative and interdisciplinary sources of theoretical and applied scholarship from theoretical traditions ranging from peace studies to critical studies and from disciplines ranging from environmental science to philosophy. The issues examined will cut across identity, region, and scope, and may include concerns as varied as human trafficking, structural racism, animal abuse, child labor, and poverty.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who take this course will:

1. form and articulate deeper theoretical and practical understandings of a wide range of contemporary social justice and human rights issues;
2. comparatively analyze the effectiveness of localized and international strategies for responding to social injustices and human rights abuses; and
3. develop effective, evidence-based localized and international strategies for eliminating injustice and protecting human rights.

Required Texts

All readings are posted on Blackboard.

Learning Activities (Assignments)

Participant and Engagement (10%)

Show up and participate.

Reading Journals (10%)

Group Presentation and Facilitation (30%)

Groups will present on and lead a conversation about a contemporary social justice and human rights topic to be assigned the first week of class. Each group should choose a specific regional context on which to focus their presentation and facilitation. Your presentation and facilitation should take about 45-50 minutes and include, at a minimum, the following components:

1. A summary of the issue in the regional context. Make sure you frame the issue in structural terms drawing on concepts and frameworks discussed in class and in readings.

- Who are the perpetrators? Who are the targets? Who is complicit, even if not directly involved? Who profits? What are the societal conditions that allow the issue to persist?
2. A brief summary of the most important organization attempting to respond to the issue. What is the organization doing? What is the organization not doing? What are the organization's successes and failures when it comes to the issue?
 3. A multimedia component – a brief (no more than 10 minute) film or film excerpt, photographs, music, etc.
 4. An interactive component – an activity that engages your classmates beyond a formal presentation.
 5. One or more readings not to exceed 20 total pages (but not fewer than 10 pages), which you will send to me no fewer than 8 days before your presentation date.
 6. A connection between your issue and one of the other social justice and human rights issues discussed in class.
 7. Discussion facilitation including deep and compelling non-surface-level questions regarding what you've presented and the readings.

You must draw on at least 10 sources for your project. (That's a minimum, not a maximum.) They must be *dependable* sources rather than random blogs, Wikipedia, and that sort of thing. Doing a Google search will not be sufficient. Use the library databases to find publications that focus on these issues specifically. At least 5 sources must be *scholarly* sources, meaning academic journal articles.

By the time of your presentation you should have electronically shared with me a list of your sources in a proper reference format along with a 2-page summary of your major points. (Bullet points are fine.)

Your presentation/facilitation will be graded based on the extent to which:

- (1) You incorporate all the listed elements;
- (2) You draw *explicitly* and *sophisticatedly* on concepts and frameworks discussed in class and in readings;
- (3) You dig deeply into your topic, addressing it complexly rather than sharing with us what we already know about it—ask yourself what your unique contribution to the conversation on this issue is;
- (4) You come prepared and organized, having practiced your presentation/facilitation;
- (5) You engage your peers effectively; and
- (6) You draw on relevant scholarship, demonstrating that you spent time informing yourself about the topic rather than just grabbing the first 10 articles you found.

Choice Assignment (30%; due December 9 midnight but feel free to turn it in any time during the semester)

This assignment is your opportunity to choose a way to apply knowledge you've gained in the course in a way that makes sense for you in your other academic or vocational pursuits. Here are a few options, but feel free to pitch a different one to me:

1. Create an artistic expression in support of social justice and human rights related to a particular social justice or human rights issue – a painting, a song, a poem, a sculpture, or something else. Include with it a one-page summary describing why you did what you did and how it connects to the concepts related to social justice and human rights we discussed in class.
2. Write a scholarly essay on a social justice or human rights issue of your choice. Choose a compelling angle; don't try to write about the entire issue. Choose depth over breadth.
3. Write a couple op-eds about a local social justice or human rights issue. Provide evidence that you submitted them to local newspapers.
4. Develop an educational “campaign” in print or on social media to raise awareness about a particular social justice or human rights issue.
5. Create a human rights or social justice education curriculum focusing on one of the issues discussed in class. Develop original learning resources and exercises to go along with the curriculum. Make sure you develop it with a particular age group in mind.
6. Analyze a specific social justice or human rights organization or movement. How does its work reflect or not reflect the concepts and ideas we have discussed in class? How would you recommend improving the work of the organization or movement?
7. Pitch something else.

What is most important is that you demonstrate in your project a firm understanding of the issue upon which you're focusing and that you're applying knowledge from class in ways that are obvious to me when I see your project.

Declaration or Manifesto (20%; due December 5)

In the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, various social justice related manifestos, and other public statements of what is right and just, you will work, individually or in groups (your choice), to compose a “declaration” or “manifesto” based on a specific human rights or social justice issue. It can take any form you choose and it can focus either on a big-level issue (such as a Manifesto on Racial Justice or a Queer Rights Manifesto or an Animal Liberation Manifesto) or on a more specific concern (such as a Declaration on the Rights of Workers or a Manifesto on the Elimination of the School-to-Prison Pipeline). Feel free to express your manifesto both through language and through art if you're inspired to do so. Choose a platform that will make your manifesto as widely available as possible. There are no limits on length, format, or target audience.

However, your manifesto *must* reflect the concepts discussed in class and the overall spirit of the class, guided by principles of justice (over conflict resolution or peace or celebrating diversity), the elimination of structural inequality, and the redistribution of opportunity and voice. Remember that you're creating this for a general audience, so you don't necessarily have to use the more academic language like “intersectionality” or “interest convergence theory.” The idea is to capture the spirit of these ideas for a broader audience.

We will share our manifestos during a celebration of learning on the final day of class. They will be graded based on the extent to which you:

- (1) compose a manifesto that captures the spirit of the central themes in class—that speaks truth to power;
- (2) share a well-written, well-organized manifesto that is publish-ready; and
- (3) share your manifesto in class, taking no longer than 4 minutes, along with a *brief* introduction about why you chose the topic you chose.

Grading

A = 94-100	A- = 90-93	
B+ = 87-89	B = 83-86	B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79	C = 73-77	C- = 70-72
D = 60-69	F = 59 or lower	

Tentative Class Schedule (*NOTE: From semester to semester, the topics will change depending on what is prevalent in current events.*)

Date	Topic(s)	Readings & Assignments
8/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introductions of course and each other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Community agreements (Stuart) 	
9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historical and contemporary conceptions of social justice and human rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Local, national, global views o Tensions and relationships between social justice and human rights 	
9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging a critical perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Power, privilege, oppression o Interpersonal, institutional, structural o “Tree of Power” – Stuart & Kalia 	
9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Settler colonialism in Gaza <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Visit from Noura Erakat 	
10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human trafficking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Visit from Al Fuertes and friends 	
10/11*	<p><i>Note this is a Tuesday</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industrialized farming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Intersectional analysis: human, animal, environment 	
10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The School to Prison Pipeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Jayna, Mary, and Stuart 	
10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploitation in international “aid” and disaster capitalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Stuart 	
10/31	NO CLASS	
11/7	Groups 1 and 2	

11/14	Groups 3 and 4	
11/21	Groups 5 and 6	
11/28	Groups 7 and 8	
12/5	Readings of Manifestos	Manifestos due in class; Choice projects due Dec 11 at midnight

Policies and Information

1. Please arrive to class on time. Two tardies will be considered an absence for the purpose of participation grading.
2. Feel free to bring technology, but note that if you are seen using social media or otherwise focused on your phone or laptop or other technology for any non-class-related purpose, you will be considered absent.
3. Please attend class. Each member of the Community is allowed one absence, no questions asked. Because the class is built around interaction and dialogue, attendance by each member of the Community is critical. So when you miss more than one class, your grade will be affected. An absence is excused when it is due to serious illness, religious observance, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, or compelling circumstances beyond your control.
4. When you miss class, it is *your* responsibility to arrange to make up the day's work. You must approach me about the absence and inquire about ways of making it up.
5. Engaged and respectful dialogue is encouraged. Demeaning, intolerant, and disruptive behavior or responses at any time will affect your participation grade.
6. You are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time. Assignments submitted late will lose one letter grade for each day they are past due, including Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.
7. All turned-in work must be typed, double spaced on 8.5" x 11" paper using 12 point Times New Roman font with 1" margins. Additionally, all papers and other assignments should be documented properly in accordance with an accepted citation manual (e.g. The Chicago Manual of Style, The APA Manual of Style, The MLA Style Manual).

GMU Student Resources

Social Action and Integrative Learning: This center is a central contact point at George Mason University for information on experiential learning, service learning, and leadership development. The Center's webpage provides exciting and useful material including the Student Service Learning Handbook, information on writing learning objectives, instructions on completing a learning objectives contract, and lists of experiential learning opportunities.

New Century College On-Line Writing Guide—<http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/index.html>

This on-line guide is tailored specifically to New Century College students.

GMU Writing Center: Robinson A116; 993-1200; writingcenter.gmu.edu

<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Office of Disability Services: Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance, should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 222; 993-2474) to determine the accommodations you might need; and 2) talk to me to discuss reasonable accommodations.

<http://www.gmu.edu/student/drc>

Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Center: Johnson Center 229; 993-8990; <http://www.media.gmu.edu>