

Illinois State University School of Social Work

Fall 2026

SWK 310 - Understanding Diverse Populations
Sec. 003 Tuesday 5:00-7:50 pm
Stevenson Hall 132

Professor: Dr. Angell Howard
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Campus Office: Hovey Hall 410
Office Phone: 309-438-0803

Office Hours: Please email so that we can find a time that works best for you.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

SWK 310 provides students with an understanding of social injustice, discrimination, and oppression. The nature and impact of discrimination are defined and understood from both socio-historical and sociopolitical perspectives. The impact of oppression, prejudice, discrimination, and powerlessness for individuals, groups, and communities are examined, with special attention to women, children, and families. Students will be empowered to identify and begin necessary changes in thoughts and behaviors via self-reflective processes, to promote social justice as social workers.

Course objectives will be achieved through a combination of lectures, class discussion, student presentations, readings, group exercises, and completion of course assignments. SWK 310 is required for all BSW students as part of the generalist curriculum. The course goals and student learning objectives in SWK 310 promote competencies that cut across the entire curriculum

NOTE: This class will be in person unless specifically noted.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this course, students will:

1. Develop an understanding of the historical, social, political, and economic forces that shape oppression, privilege, power, and inequity.
2. Strengthen their ability to examine identity, culture, bias, positionality, and intersectionality in relation to social work practice.
3. Build cultural humility and readiness to work effectively with diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
4. Apply social work values, ethics, and social justice principles to challenge inequity and promote inclusion, belonging, and social change.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the strengths, contributions, and lived experiences of diverse and historically marginalized communities.
2. Analyze how historical and contemporary systems of power, privilege, oppression, discrimination, and social construction affect individuals, families, groups, communities, and institutions.
3. Examine the influence of identity, intersectionality, bias, and positionality on personal perspectives and professional practice.
4. Identify barriers to equitable access, participation, services, resources, and belonging.
5. Demonstrate cultural humility through self-reflection, dialogue, and consideration of culturally responsive and inclusive social work practice.
6. Apply social work values, ethics, advocacy, and social action strategies to promote equity, inclusion, and social justice.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND RESOURCES

O'Neal, G. S. (2019). *From oppression to inclusion: Social workers advancing change*. Cognella Academic Publishing. ISBN# 978-1-5165-3781-5

NOTE: Additional readings from a variety of texts will be assigned throughout the course and uploaded to Canvas.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

As adult learners, students are expected to read all assigned readings *prior* to class so that we can discuss them intelligently. All assignments will be turned in online by the due date and the time listed in Canvas. The following are self-directed study activities that students should undertake to assist them with learning the material covered in this course: read assigned readings for each class (see course schedule); read other related materials; make notes on readings; discuss readings and class lecture material with other students; and schedule consultation time with the instructor as needed.

Plagiarism, cheating, and all other forms of academic misconduct are not only considered a violation of university regulations but are also considered a serious breach of the ethical code of conduct for the social work profession. Students are expected to remember that they are in the process of becoming professional social workers. As such, they are expected to abide by the ethical standards of the profession. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics is available to students on the Internet at www.naswdc.org.

Any student needing to arrange reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services. at 350 Fell Hall, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TDD).

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend class each week, and after 2 missed classes, your final grade may be impacted.

Assignments WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE, or by email. If you have an emergency and need an extension, you must contact me **ASAP, and I will work with you to come up with a solution.**

Written Work: Your written work should show thoroughness, accuracy, clarity, and professionalism. Such writing generally requires first writing, then reviewing, editing, and rewriting.

- All work should be carefully proofread and corrected; your final draft is expected to be free of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- All papers written from sources **must include citations** following the style requirements of the most recent *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*.
- All work must be typed, double-spaced, with numbered pages, titled and dated.
- Papers should use standard margins. The Microsoft Word default setting for margins is 1" top, 1" bottom, and 1" each left and right. The header and footer default setting is 0.5" from the edge.
- Papers should use standard font Times New Roman 12 point.

ASSIGNMENTS

Student-Led Chapter Discussion

Due: Various Dates

30 points total (10x3)

Each group will help lead our discussion of the assigned chapter. Groups will approach the chapter from a different perspective.

Your group's job is not to summarize the entire chapter. Your job is to help your classmates understand, think about, question, and apply the material. Think of yourself as helping to lead the learning for the day, not simply giving a presentation.

* Please see the worksheets for additional details.

GROUPS BREAKDOWN

Chapter	Teach It	Apply It	Challenge It	Connect It
2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
6	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8
7	Group 2	Group 1	Group 4	Group 3
8	Group 6	Group 5	Group 8	Group 7
11	Group 3	Group 4	Group 1	Group 2
12	Group 7	Group 8	Group 5	Group 6

[From Oppression To Inclusion Discussion Worksheets.docx](#)

Video Reflection #1: 13TH

Due: September 15th by 11:59 pm
20 Points

After completing Chapters 1–3 and watching the documentary *13TH*, you will record a **5–7 minute video reflection** connecting the documentary to concepts we have discussed in class so far.

The purpose of this assignment is **not to summarize the documentary**. I watched it too! Instead, I want to hear what you noticed, what challenged you, what made you uncomfortable, what helped you make a connection, and how the documentary influenced the way you think about oppression, power, history, and social justice.

Directions

Your video should:

- Be **between 5 and 7 minutes** in length.
- Include **both your video and audio**. I want to see and hear you as you reflect.
- Respond thoughtfully to the prompts below.
- Refer to **at least two specific moments, examples, statements, images, or ideas from the documentary** that influenced your thinking.
- Make at least **one clear connection to Chapters 1–3** or another course concept.
- Focus primarily on your **analysis and reflection**, rather than retelling what happened in the documentary.
- Be conversational. You may use brief notes, but please **do not read a written response or script**.

You do not need to agree with everything presented in the documentary. You are expected to thoughtfully examine your reactions and support your perspective.

Reflection Prompts

Use the questions below to guide your reflection. You do not need to answer them in order, but your video should address each of the major areas.

1. What stayed with you?

Identify a specific moment, statement, image, statistic, or argument from *13TH* that stayed with you after watching the documentary.

- Why did this particular moment stand out to you?
- What did you think or feel when you encountered it?
- Did it reinforce something you already believed or challenge something you previously understood differently?

2. History and the Present

One of the ideas explored in Chapters 1–3 is that contemporary inequality cannot be fully understood without examining history.

- Where did you see history continuing to influence the present in *13TH*?
- Identify a specific example from the documentary.
- Why is understanding that historical connection important for social workers?

3. Power, Oppression, and Social Construction

Choose one example from the documentary that illustrates **power, oppression, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, or the social construction of identity**.

- What was happening?
- Who had power?
- Who was affected by that power?
- What larger system or social belief contributed to what you observed?

4. Your Own Reflection

Think beyond what happened in the film.

- What did this documentary cause you to examine about your own knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, or understanding of society?
- Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, angry, surprised, confused, or curious? Why?
- What questions are you still sitting with?

5. The Social Work Connection

End your reflection by considering the profession.

- What responsibility do social workers have when the problems affecting individuals and families are connected to larger systems, policies, and historical inequities?

Be specific about what you believe that responsibility should look like in practice.

Remember

I am less interested in hearing what happened in the documentary and more interested in hearing:

What did you notice? What did you think? What did you feel? What did you question? And what will you do with what you learned?

Video Reflection #2: *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*

Due: October 20th by 11:59 pm

20 Points

After completing Chapters 6–8 and 10 and watching *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*, you will record a **5–7 minute video reflection** examining identity, privilege, institutional oppression, cultural humility, inclusion, belonging, and community.

This assignment is **not a summary of the documentary**. Instead, I want you to think deeply about what the experiences presented in the documentary teach us about who gets included, who gets excluded, whose voices are heard, and what it actually means to create spaces where people belong.

Directions

Your video should:

- Be **between 5 and 7 minutes** in length.
- Include **both your video and audio**. I want to see and hear you as you reflect.
- Respond thoughtfully to the prompts below.
- Refer to **at least two specific moments, people, statements, scenes, or examples from the documentary**.
- Make at least **one clear connection to Chapters 6–8 or Chapter 10**.
- Focus on your analysis, reactions, and developing understanding rather than summarizing the documentary.
- Be conversational. Brief notes are fine, but please **do not read a prepared paper or script**.

There is no expectation that everyone will have the same emotional reaction or interpretation. Thoughtful reflection means being willing to examine both the documentary and your own thinking.

Reflection Prompts

1. A Moment That Changed or Deepened Your Thinking

Choose one specific moment from *Crip Camp* that affected you personally or intellectually.

- What happened?
- What was your immediate reaction?
- Why do you think this particular moment affected you?
- Did it change, complicate, or deepen the way you think about disability?

2. From Being Present to Belonging

Camp Jened was more than a place where people with disabilities were simply allowed to attend.

Think about the difference between **access, inclusion, and belonging**.

- What did the camp provide that many of the participants were not experiencing elsewhere?
- Identify a specific scene or example that demonstrates belonging.
- What is the difference between being permitted into a space and feeling that the space was actually created with you in mind?

3. Who Is Considered "Normal"?

Chapters 6 and 7 ask us to think about identity, social construction, power, and privilege.

- What assumptions about disability or "normalcy" did you notice in the documentary?
- Were there privileges you had never thought about as privileges before watching the film?
- How did the physical environment, social expectations, or institutions create barriers for people with disabilities?

Use at least one example from the documentary.

4. Nothing About Us Without Us

Chapter 10 asks us to think about cultural competence, cultural humility, community participation, and working **with** communities rather than simply doing things **for** them.

Using the documentary:

- What happens when people directly affected by an issue are given power and voice?
- Where did you see community members identifying their own needs and advocating for their own solutions?

- What can social workers learn from this?

5. Your Own Reflection

Consider your own thinking as you watched.

- What assumption, bias, gap in knowledge, or perspective did you become more aware of?
- Was there a moment that made you uncomfortable, emotional, inspired, frustrated, or surprised?
- Why do you think you reacted that way?

Be willing to sit with your reaction rather than simply telling me what you believe the "correct" response should be.

6. The Social Work Connection

Finish your reflection by answering: What would it look like for a social worker, organization, or community to move beyond simply accommodating people and instead intentionally create belonging?

Identify at least one concrete change in practice, policy, environment, communication, or decision-making that could help make that happen.

Remember

Cultural competence is not simply knowing facts about another group of people.

As you reflect, consider: Who gets heard? Who gets to make decisions? Who is expected to adapt? Whose strengths are recognized? And who gets to define what inclusion looks like?

Community Advocacy Field Experience

Due: November 3rd by 11:59 pm

30 Points

Social workers cannot fully understand advocacy, inclusion, cultural humility, or community engagement only by reading about them. This assignment asks you to step outside of the classroom and experience how a group or organization works to support, advocate for, and build community with populations that have historically experienced oppression, marginalization, or exclusion.

Your Experience

Attend **one public meeting, event, program, training, gathering, or advocacy activity** sponsored by an organization or group whose work supports or advocates for a marginalized or historically oppressed population.

Your experience may take place **on or off campus**.

Examples might include:

- NAACP meeting or program
- LGBTQIA+ or Pride organization event
- Disability advocacy organization
- Immigration or refugee advocacy organization
- Racial or ethnic cultural organization
- Women's advocacy organization
- Faith-based social justice organization
- Indigenous advocacy or cultural organization
- Organization addressing poverty, housing, food insecurity, or homelessness
- Criminal justice or reentry advocacy organization

- Campus cultural center or identity-based student organization
- Community organizing meeting
- Social justice coalition or advocacy event
- Another organization or event that clearly connects to the purpose of this assignment

The organization does not have to be one with which you personally identify. I challenge you to attend something you know the least about.

Important

Choose a **public event or meeting that welcomes visitors**. Do not attend a confidential support group, therapy group, closed meeting, or other private gathering for the purpose of completing this assignment unless you have been specifically invited and participation is appropriate.

You are there to **learn, listen, and observe respectfully**, not to study or evaluate individual members of the group.

What to Pay Attention To

During your experience, consider three major areas.

1. The Organization and Its Advocacy

Learn about the organization and the community it serves.

Consider:

- Who does the organization support or advocate for?
- What issues or inequities is the group trying to address?
- What type of advocacy does it engage in?
- Does the organization focus on direct support, education, policy change, community organizing, awareness, resources, or multiple approaches?
- How are the people most affected by the issue involved in the organization's work?
- What strengths did you notice within the organization or community?

2. Inclusion and Belonging

Pay attention to how you experienced the space.

Consider:

- What did the group do to welcome or orient people?
- What communicated that people belonged there?
- Were there things that made participation easier or more accessible?
- Did you notice attention to language, identity, accessibility, culture, or different lived experiences?
- Who appeared to have voice in the space?
- How were different perspectives encouraged or respected?
- Did you personally feel included? Why or why not?

Remember that **being allowed into a space and experiencing belonging are not necessarily the same thing**.

3. Connections to Our Course

As you participate, think about concepts we have explored throughout the semester, including:

- Oppression
- Power and privilege
- Social justice
- Social construction
- Identity and intersectionality
- Bias and discrimination

- Institutional barriers
- Cultural competence
- Cultural humility
- Community strengths
- Inclusion and belonging
- Advocacy
- Community participation

Your goal is to recognize these concepts **in practice**, not simply define them.

Written Reflection

After your experience, submit a **2-page reflection paper**. Your paper should address the following:

Describe the Experience

- Briefly identify the organization or group, the event or meeting you attended, and the population or issue the organization supports.

Examine the Advocacy

- Explain the advocacy or community work you observed. What is the organization trying to change, challenge, improve, or provide? How does its work support the population it serves?

Examine Inclusion and Belonging

- Discuss how the organization created, or attempted to create, an inclusive environment. Identify specific things you observed that communicated welcome, participation, community, or belonging.

Connect the Experience to the Course

- Make meaningful connections to **at least two concepts, ideas, chapters, or class activities** from this course. Do more than name the concepts. Explain how your experience helped you see or understand them differently.

Reflect on Yourself

What did you learn from entering this space?

Consider:

- Did anything challenge an assumption you held?
- Did you notice something you might not have noticed before this course?
- Did the experience make you uncomfortable, curious, inspired, surprised, or more aware of something?
- What could you take from this experience into your future social work practice?

Paper Requirements

- Approximately **2 pages**
- Double-spaced
- Written in first person when appropriate
- Thoughtful reflection rather than a summary of the event
- Specific examples from your experience
- At least **two connections to course material**
- APA citations when referencing the textbook or other course sources

The Goal

This assignment is not about deciding whether an organization did everything "right." Your goal is to enter a community space with curiosity and cultural humility and ask: How are people organizing, advocating, creating community, and working toward greater inclusion and belonging? And what can I learn from them as a future social worker?

Final Group Project: From Oppression to Inclusion Presentations

Due: December 1st – You will present on this day

Submit your presentation to me by 11:59 pm

75 Points

Throughout this course, we have examined diversity, identity, oppression, privilege, institutional inequities, cultural humility, advocacy, inclusion, and belonging.

For your final project, your group will bring these ideas together by examining a real social issue or inequity and answering one larger question: **What would it take to move this issue from oppression and exclusion toward equity, inclusion, and belonging?**

This is not simply a presentation about a marginalized population. Your job is to examine **how systems, history, power, identity, and institutions influence the issue and what meaningful change could look like.**

The Project

Working in groups, select **one approved social issue, population, community concern, or area of inequity** to explore.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Homelessness and housing insecurity
- Disability access
- LGBTQIA+ youth
- Racial inequities in education
- Black maternal health
- Immigration and refugee experiences
- Mental health access
- Criminal justice and reentry
- Foster youth
- Indigenous communities
- Rural communities
- Poverty
- Food insecurity
- Healthcare disparities
- Language access
- Older adults
- Gender inequity
- Environmental justice
- Another issue approved for the project

Your group should approach the community you select from a **strengths-based perspective**. Avoid presenting people only through problems, deficits, statistics, or stereotypes.

Your Presentation Must Address Six Areas

1. What Is Happening?

Introduce the issue and help us understand why it matters.

Provide enough background for the audience to understand the concern without spending most of the presentation reviewing statistics.

Consider:

- Who is affected?
- What inequity or concern exists?

- Why should social workers care?

2. How Did We Get Here?

Use what you learned in **Chapters 1–3** and throughout the course.

Examine relevant:

- Historical events
- Policies
- Social beliefs
- Social construction
- Prejudice or discrimination
- Oppression
- Power

Help us understand how the present situation developed.

3. Identity, Intersectionality, Power, and Privilege

Consider ideas from **Chapters 6 and 7**.

Discuss:

- Important identities within the community
- Intersectionality
- Privilege and marginalization
- Who holds power
- Whose voices have historically been heard or ignored

Be careful not to treat any community as if everyone within it has the same experience.

4. Where Are the Barriers?

Use concepts from **Chapter 8 and other course material** to examine institutional and structural barriers.

These might exist within:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Employment
- Criminal justice
- Government
- Social services
- Transportation
- Technology
- Other systems or institutions

Identify barriers that go beyond individual attitudes or behavior.

5. What Does the Community Say?

This is an important part of your project. **Do not tell us what a community needs without including voices from people who are part of that community.**

Your group must incorporate at least one meaningful source of **community or lived-experience voice**.

This might include:

- An interview
- A community-led organization
- Advocacy organization
- First-person narrative

- Documentary or recorded testimony
- Podcast
- Speech
- Published personal account
- Community report
- Other credible source centered on lived experience

Consider:

- What does the community identify as the problem?
- What strengths and resources already exist?
- What solutions are community members asking for?
- Are professionals listening?

This is where **cultural humility and community participation** become especially important.

6. Move Us Toward Inclusion and Belonging

Now tell us what should change. Your group must recommend **specific actions**, rather than simply saying that society needs more awareness or education.

Recommendations might involve changes to:

- Policies
- Programs
- Funding
- Organizational practices
- Services
- Physical environments
- Communication
- Representation
- Hiring
- Access
- Decision-making
- Community participation
- Advocacy
- Laws or public policy

Your recommendations should be realistic enough that we can understand **who needs to do what differently**. Finally, answer: If these changes were successful, what would inclusion and belonging actually look and feel like for this community?

Choose Your Presentation Style

You do **not** have to give a traditional PowerPoint presentation. Your group may choose the format that best communicates your message.

Options include:

- Podcast episode
- Mini documentary
- TED-style presentation
- Mock town hall
- Panel discussion
- News investigation
- Community advocacy campaign
- Interactive workshop

- Social work training
- Policy briefing
- Traditional presentation
- Another creative format

Whatever format you choose, **all project requirements still apply**. Your creativity should strengthen the content, not replace it.

Presentation Requirements

- Groups of **4 students (1 group of 5)**
- **12–15 minutes**
- Every group member must have a meaningful role in the project
- Use credible sources to support your analysis
- Incorporate community/lived-experience voice
- Make clear connections to concepts from the textbook and class
- Include a reference list in APA 7th edition format
- Your presentation should **engage the class rather than simply read information to us**

How the Project Will Be Evaluated

Understanding and Application of Course Concepts

- Demonstrates accurate and meaningful use of concepts such as oppression, social construction, identity, intersectionality, privilege, institutional inequity, cultural humility, advocacy, inclusion, and belonging.

Depth of Analysis

- Moves beyond describing the issue to examining history, systems, power, barriers, and contributing factors.

Community Voice and Cultural Humility

- Centers strengths and lived experiences, includes meaningful community voice, and avoids assuming that professionals know what is best for a community.

Path Toward Inclusion

- Provides thoughtful, specific, and realistic recommendations and clearly explains how those changes could contribute to greater equity, inclusion, and belonging.

The Goal

By the end of your presentation, your classmates should understand more than **what the problem is**.

We should understand:

- How did we get here?
- Who is affected and whose voices matter?
- What systems need to change?
- What strengths already exist within the community?
- And what would it actually take to move from oppression to inclusion?

GRADING

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the following scale.

- A 90 % and above
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79 %
- D 60-69 %
- F 59 %and below

Grades will be assigned using the following formula:

Due Date	Assignment	Points
Will Vary	Student Led Chapter Discussions	30 (10x3)
Sept. 15	Video Reflection #1: 13th	20
Oct. 20	Video Reflection #2 Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution	20
Nov. 3	Community Advocacy Field Experience & Reflection Paper	30
Dec. 1	Final Group Project: From Oppression to Inclusion Presentations	75
Total		175

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Aug. 18	General topic – The Syllabus!!
Week 2: Aug. 25	General topic – Who are we as social workers?
Required Readings:	Course text – Chapter 1 : Social Work & Social Justice
Assignment Due:	
Week 3: Sept. 1	General topic - How did we learn "difference"?
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 2: Social Construction & Difference
Assignment Due:	Groups 1, 2, 3, & 4 lead chapter discussion
Week 4: Sept. 8	General topic - How did oppression become embedded?
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 3 : Examining History
Assignment Due:	
Week 5: Sept. 15	Movie Day – No in person class
Required Readings:	Watch: 13 th (2016) by Ava DuVernay Free on YouTube or Netflix
Assignment Due:	By 11:59 pm – Video Reflection #1: 13th
Week 6: Sept. 22	General topic - Who am I, and how do identities intersect?
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 6: Identity Development in the Context of Oppression
Assignment Due:	Groups 5, 6, 7, & 8 lead chapter discussion
Week 7: Sept. 29	General topic: Where do privilege and power enter the picture?
Required Readings:	Course text: Chapter 7: Impact on Anglo-Europeans and Others of Privilege
Assignment Due:	Groups 2, 1, 4, & 3 lead chapter discussion
Week 8: Oct. 6	General topic - How do systems reproduce exclusion?
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 8: Reflection in Social Institutions
Assignment Due:	Groups 6, 5, 8, & 7 lead chapter discussion

Week 9: Oct. 13	General topic - What does it mean to work competently across cultures?
Required Readings:	Course texts - Chapter 10: Community Competence
Assignment Due:	
Week 10: Oct. 20	Movie Day – No in person class
Required Readings:	Watch: Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution Free on YouTube or Netflix
Assignment Due:	By 11:59 pm – Video Reflection #2 Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution
Week 11: Oct. 27	NO CLASS-Poverty Simulation
Week 12: Nov. 3	General topic - How do we create inclusive practice? *YOU WILL HAVE TIME TO WORK ON PROJECTS
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 11: Facilitating Inclusion: Using Research and Developing Interventions/Micro
Assignment Due:	Community Advocacy Field Adventure & Reflection Paper Groups 3, 4, 1, & 2 lead chapter discussion
Week 13: Nov. 10	General topic - How do we create belonging within groups, organizations, and communities? *YOU WILL HAVE TIME TO WORK ON PROJECTS
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 12: Facilitating Inclusion: Developing Humility and Agility for Partnerships/Mezzo
Assignment Due:	Groups 7, 8, 5, & 6 lead chapter discussion
Week 14: Nov. 17	General topic - How do we change the systems? *YOU WILL HAVE TIME TO WORK ON PROJECTS
Required Readings:	Course text - Chapter 13: Facilitating Inclusion: Encouraging Service User Participation and Influencing Policy for Social and Economic Justice Change/Macro
Assignment Due:	
Week 15: Nov. 24	NO CLASS - Break
Week 16: Dec. 1	LAST CLASS! CLASS PRESENTATIONS
Assignment Due:	Final Group Project: From Oppression to Inclusion Presentations Submit by 11:59 pm