



Course Syllabus: Human Diversity

College of Health Sciences and Human Services

Social Work Department

SOWK 3953- X20

Spring 2026

Contact Information

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Fridays: 3.30-4.30 p.m.

Course Description

This course is designed to increase students' sensitivity and competency when interacting with people of various cultural backgrounds, values and issues of diversity. Students will explore how their own background, culture and values may color their perceptions and communication with others. Students will also be exposed to theories of how cultural diversity, racism, and oppression affect social work practice and clients. Further, students will learn of various assessment tools useful when working within a culturally sensitive framework.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, the students should be able to:

Knowledge dimension:

1. Describe how various populations have historically been discriminated against and oppressed (EPAS 2).

Value dimension:

2. Examine current societal trends that impede upon people's access to services and justice (EPAS 2).

Skills dimensions:

3. Apply strengths- based approach that promotes social work practice among vulnerable populations (EPAS 2).
4. Utilize various systematic evaluation, and intervention strategies with respect to culture (EPAS 2).

Cognitive and affective dimensions:

5. Analyze their own life experiences, the coloration of values and perceptions pertaining to human diversity (EPAS 2).
6. Demonstrate understanding of a culturally sensitive and competent approach in dealing with human diversity (EPAS 2).

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Marsiglia et al. (2021). *Diversity Oppression and Change: Culturally Grounded Social Work* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

AI-Generated Submissions:

Writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are core learning outcomes of this course. Accordingly, all writing assignments must be completed independently by the student. The use of AI-generated content (including, but not limited to, tools such as ChatGPT) is not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism, in accordance with college academic integrity policies.

Course Assignments

Exams: There will be two exams, each worth 40 points. Exam questions will be drawn from the assigned chapters. Although the instructor will assign specific pages from the textbook for weekly discussions, students are responsible for reading all assigned chapters thoroughly to ensure they are well prepared for the exams. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and true/false statements.

Assignment # 1: Case Study (Meets EPAS 2)

The Meza family had been getting along well in the United States until the birth of their daughter, Minerva, who was born premature and, now at age 2, experiences some developmental delays. In 1986, Mr. and Mrs. Meza applied to the amnesty program to legalize their immigrant status. They had been in the United States for many years, and their three oldest children, Enrique age 17, Myra age 15, and Esau age 11, are all U.S. citizens, having all been born here. During the application process, Mrs. Meza's mother, in the interior of Mexico, became very ill, and Mrs. Meza returned to Mexico to stay with her mother until her death 6 months later. Because of this visit, Mrs. Meza was not able to get her legal documents processed, although her husband was able to develop legal status.

Mr. Meza is grateful for the health insurance coverage he receives from the construction company that employs him; it covered much of the extensive hospitalization expense demanded by Minerva's premature birth. However, Mrs. Meza is not covered because she is not documented. Her lack of legal status often causes stress both for herself and her family, especially when she becomes ill and they have to pay for all her family, especially when she becomes ill and they have to pay for all her medical expenses. Also, the children are aware of other situations where parents are forced to return to Mexico due to lack of legal immigration status, and in many cases children are left in the United States with relatives. They fear that their mother can be deported if the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) finds out. The family also has been afraid to report unethical landlords who failed to return rental deposits as agreed or who had failed to address hazardous plumbing problems that violated housing codes and jeopardized family health. They were afraid that the landlords would report them to the INS.

Mrs. Meza, 42, worked until Minerva's birth at a dry cleaning establishment, where she was exposed to the fumes of toxic cleaning fluids. She feels that she should have obtained a safer job when she discovered she was pregnant. However, her undocumented status prevented her from easily finding other employment. In addition, her employer knew about her lack of documentation, yet paid her as well as others who worked there and were citizens. Moreover, the family had just recently purchased their first home and she was hesitant to seek new employment because she felt that no one would hire a pregnant woman.

Minerva has been hospitalized several times this year, just recently due to pneumonia. The doctor has also recently informed Mrs. Meza that Minerva very likely has cerebral palsy, and Mrs. Meza needs to attend meetings of the multidisciplinary team that oversees Minerva's care. Mrs. Meza feels that this disability is a way for God to punish her for not placing the health of her unborn over her concern about meeting new house payments. Although she took good care of herself- took vitamins regularly, watched her diet, and tried not to work too hard- she only saw a doctor twice during her pregnancy.

Two months ago, Mrs. Meza returned to work, because the family desperately needed her income. Mr. Meza's mother, age 65, came from Mexico to babysit Minerva and help out with housework and meals. Although Grandma has really helped to lift the care giving burden from Mom, there have been communication issues and conflicts about methods of child care between Mrs. Meza and her mother-in-law. These problems are now causing marital conflict between Mr. and Mrs. Meza because he often sides with his mother. Because his mother raised 10 children, all of whom are healthy, according to her health care beliefs, he argues that she knows what she is doing.

Recently, a real problem arose when Mom picked up Minerva from Grandma, who had been asked to bathe and ready Minerva for a late afternoon appointment Mom had scheduled with the doctor, so she would not lose too much work. When the nurse asked Mom to undress Minerva, Mom discovered Minerva's chest had been wrapped in a poultice that smelled quite strongly. When the doctor asked what the poultice consisted of, Mom was embarrassed that she could not tell him. When the mustard-like substance was wiped away, the physician noted bruising on Minerva's rib cage. Mom was just as surprised as the physician and was not able to explain how the bruising occurred. A referral to Child Protective Services (CPS) resulted in a home call to the Meza household. Both Mr. and Mrs. Meza stayed home from work to try to sort out this embarrassing situation and to explain what had happened.

When Mom returned from the doctor's office, she nervously grilled the grandmother about the poultice. She discovered that the senior Mrs. Meza had taken it upon herself to take Minerva to a huesero (traditional healer) in a nearby barrio (neighborhood). This man is essentially a masseuse. Grandmother felt that if Minerva's chest was massaged, the phlegm that was causing so much congestion would be loosened and Minerva could breathe more easily. Mr. and Mrs. Meza went to visit the huesero, and he explained that he had only rubbed her chest as he normally would any client. He claimed that the child's lack of weight resulted in the bruising.

When all this information was shared with the CPS worker, he informed the family that they could never use this huesero again, and if they did, they would be charged with child abuse. Mr. Meza has informed his mother that she cannot undertake any kind of intervention without his knowledge. Mrs. Meza fears that more interactions with CPS might cause her to be identified as undocumented.

Although Mr. Meza is now more supportive of his wife, Mrs. Meza is constantly fearful about the care of Minerva. She calls home several times during the day and has demanded that both Enrique and Myra come home immediately after school each day to attend to Minerva's care. Enrique is a top student and is hoping that his grades and extracurricular activities, like his membership in the Science Club, will result in scholarship opportunities for college. He has a Saturday job tutoring children, which provides a little income. He understands his parents' concerns about Minerva, but feels it should be enough if Myra takes care of Minerva after school. He feels that he has been a good son and has not caused any problems for his parents. He also feels that his parents are not concerned about intruding on his college plans, and he has become irritable and almost disrespectful to his parents and to his grandmother.

Myra, on the other hand, is scared to take care of Minerva by herself, especially when Minerva is ill. She feels that she cannot depend on her grandmother to make correct choices about Minerva's care, particularly if Minerva starts to cough a lot. She also feels that Enrique is trying

to dump all responsibility on her and feels that her parents have always let him get away from doing household chores because he is a boy. She has always had to do more around the house, like care for her younger brother, Esau, because he was very small. She feels it is really unfair that Mexican families do that with their children. The one time she voiced this sentiment her father told her she was acting like she no longer wanted to be Mexican.

Mrs. Meza has lost eight pounds in the 6 weeks since the child abuse report. She has noticed that the night sweats she was already experiencing have increased; she wakes up three to four times a night soaked with perspiration and finds herself exhausted at work the next day. She also feels overwhelmed and has had crying spells both at work and at home. She has tried to hide her feelings from her husband, but he is concerned that something is wrong with her. He wants her to see a doctor, but she feels that she does not want to call any attention to herself after what happened with the child abuse report. Often when she wakes up at night, she thinks about what would happen to her family if she were forced to return to Mexico. She feels that this would destroy her family. Meanwhile, the visitor's permit Grandmother has used to come to the United States will expire soon. Should they try to renew it? Should she stop working? How will they pay their expenses with less income, especially now with the two oldest children costing more money? Maybe buying their home was a bad decision. Maybe the family is becoming too Americanized.

Source: Hutchison, E.D. (2003). *Dimensions of Human Behavior* (2nd ed.). CA: Sage Publications.

Guidelines:

Analyze the case study using the guidelines below. In addition to addressing these guidelines, you are encouraged to integrate relevant course materials throughout your analysis.

1. This family has encountered a wide range of problems and concerns. Identify and concisely describe these issues, and explain how you would prioritize them if you were working with this family as a social worker.
2. This family represents many others facing similar challenges. In addition to analyzing the issues experienced by this family, examine the challenges faced by undocumented immigrants as documented in empirical literature. References to empirical studies should be directly connected to the specific issues faced by the Meza family. Use concrete examples from the case study to support your analysis. The use of relevant terminology and key concepts from the textbook is strongly encouraged.

Requirements:

The assignment must meet the following requirements:

1. Include a title page, and a references page.
2. Abstract is NOT required.
3. Double-space throughout, leaving a one-inch margin on all sides.

4. As permitted by APA, use an easily readable font such as, Times New Roman (12-point), or Calibri (11-point), or Arial (11-point), or Lucida Sans Unicode (10-point), or Georgia (11-point). Whichever font you choose, you should use the same font and font size throughout the assignment.
5. Provide relevant section headings.
6. The required writing style is that of the *American Psychological Association* (APA) Publications Manual (7th ed.).
7. The assignment **should not exceed 5-7 pages**, including the cover page and the references page(s).
8. Review scholarly articles (or peer-reviewed journal articles) (***not less than 4**) published within the last 5 years. Further details (if needed) will be provided either via email to individual students or to the class who need further clarification. Besides scholarly sources, the textbook should also be referred to. Hence, the **total number of references should not be less than 5. APA format (7th ed.) is required throughout** the assignment.
9. ***Please note that assignments that do not meet the criterion in terms of the required number of sources (including the required number of peer-reviewed journals) will be given a “C” grade.**
10. Review carefully the RUBRIC given at the end of the second assignment.

Assignment # 2: Group Assignment- Comparative Analysis of Health Care Systems- United States and a Country of Your Choice (Meets EPAS 2):

Students will be assigned to **small groups of two or three**, depending on class size. Groups will be formed based on the **class roster**. If you experience any difficulty working within your group, please inform the instructor **promptly**.

The purpose of this assignment is to help students critically examine the structure, accessibility, financing, and outcomes of the U.S. health care system in comparison with another country's health care system. Through this comparison, students will develop a deeper understanding of how health care systems reflect social values, political priorities, and economic conditions.

Instructions

Select **one country (other than the United States)** and compare its health care system with that of the United States. Your analysis should be well-organized, evidence-based, and supported by credible academic and policy sources.

Your paper should address the following components:

1. **Overview of Both Health Care Systems**
 - Brief description of the U.S. health care system
 - Overview of the selected country's health care system
2. **Financing and Organization**
 - How health care is funded (e.g., private insurance, public insurance, taxation)
 - Role of government vs. private sector
3. **Access and Coverage**
 - Who is covered and who is not
 - Barriers to access (e.g., cost, geography, eligibility)
4. **Quality of Care and Health Outcomes**
 - Availability of services
 - Health outcomes (e.g., life expectancy, infant mortality, preventable deaths)
5. **Equity and Social Justice**
 - Impact on vulnerable or marginalized populations
 - How each system addresses (or fails to address) health disparities
6. **Strengths, Weaknesses, and Lessons Learned**
 - Key strengths and limitations of each system
 - What the U.S. could potentially learn from the other country's approach
7. **Conclusion**
 - Summary of key findings
 - Your critical reflections on which system better promotes health and well-being, and why

Note: The assignment must be submitted through the **D2L DropBox**. The **same group assignment should be submitted by each group member**.

Requirements: The assignment must meet the following requirements:

1. Include a title page, and a references page.
2. Abstract is NOT required.
3. Double-space throughout, leaving a one-inch margin on all sides.
4. As permitted by APA, use an easily readable font such as, Times New Roman (12-point), or Calibri (11-point), or Arial (11-point), or Lucida Sans Unicode (10-point), or Georgia (11-point). Whichever font you choose, you should use the same font and font size throughout the assignment.
5. Provide relevant section headings.
6. The required writing style is that of the *American Psychological Association* (APA) Publications Manual (7th ed.).

7. The assignment **should not exceed 5-7 pages**, including the cover page and the references page(s).
8. Review scholarly articles (***not less than 4**) published within the last 5 years. Further details (if needed) will be provided either via email to individual students or to the class who need further clarification. Besides scholarly sources, the textbook should also be referred to. Hence, the **total number of references should not be less than 5**. **APA format** (7th ed.) is **required throughout** the assignment.
9. ***Please note that assignments that do not meet the criterion in terms of the required number of sources (including the required number of peer-reviewed journals) will be given a “C” grade.**
10. The grade given to the group is the grade for each member of the group.
11. Review carefully the RUBRIC given below:

Rubric for ALL the Assignments

Criteria	Unsatisfactory	Struggling	Good	Proficient
Clarity	0-3 Ideas confusing, disconnected, and purpose is unclear.	3-6 Ideas somewhat clear, somewhat connected, and purpose is somewhat clear.	6-10 Ideas fairly clear, fairly connected, and purpose is fairly clear.	10-15 Ideas clear, well connected, and purpose is clear.
Content	0-5 Less adequate or inadequate; citations are not connected or connected poorly	5-10 Somewhat adequate; citations are connected somewhat well	10-20 Adequate; citations are connected well	20-30 Comprehensive; citations are connected very well
Relevance	0-5 Sources are not relevant. Poor connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	5-10 Relevance of the sources is not obvious. Fair connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	10-15 Relevance of the sources is somewhat obvious; good connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	15-20 Peer-reviewed journal articles are within the last 5 years; relevance of the sources is obvious; excellent connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).
Logic	0-5 The transition between ideas is extremely weak.	5-10 There are several weak transitions between ideas.	10-15 There are very few weak transitions between ideas.	15-20 There are clear and effective transitions between ideas.
Writing Mechanics	0-3 4 or more violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	3-6 No more than 3 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	6-10 No more than 2 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	10-15 Appropriate use of APA formatting and appropriate use of grammar and punctuation.

Grading:

Table 1: Assignments and Points

Assignments	Points
Exam 1	40
Assignment # 1	100
Assignment # 2	100
Final Exam	40
Weekly discussions (9x100)	900
Total	1180

GRADING SCALE

The total grade for the course is an accumulation of the points earned on each assignment. **The following letter grades are used:**

- A=90% of available points
- B=80-89% of available points
- C=70-79 % of available points
- D=60-69% of available points
- F=0-59% of available points

Social Work Program Grade Policy (this is ONLY for social work majors):

A course grade of **below a C** or an average of below 70% will be considered a **failing grade**. Students **must repeat** social work **courses** in which they receive a grade of **D or F**.

Note: This grade policy is in effect since the Fall of 2020.

Homework

For **twelve weeks**, weekly discussions will be posted on the D2L Discussion Board. Participation in the discussion board is a **mandatory component** of the course. Students are expected to actively engage in the discussions each week during this period.

All discussion posts must be written in a **formal academic style** (no shorthand or text-message abbreviations) and should follow **APA format**, including appropriate citations and references where applicable. Students are expected to provide thoughtful initial posts, offer constructive and respectful responses to classmates, and demonstrate meaningful engagement with course content.

Please note that the discussion board is a **formal graded assignment**. **Students who fail to complete the initial post and peer responses for any two weeks during the course will be dropped from the course.**

Late Work

Late assignments (including discussion posts) will negatively affect the final grade. **Only assignments submitted through D2L will be accepted and graded.** Late submissions will incur a penalty of **5 points per day**.

Students are encouraged to begin assignments early to avoid issues related to technology, printing, or personal emergencies. Students who need assistance with writing are strongly encouraged to seek support from the **University Writing Center**.

Weather Closure Practice:

During inclement weather, notification occurs through official campus channels and in communication with the local news networks. MSU channels include MSU Alert, MSU Safety app, Postmaster, and website headers. MSU Police and the Office of Marketing and Public Information. As this is an online class, there will be no cancellation of the course assignments due to inclement weather. In case of difficulties arising as a result of inclement weather, students should request the instructor for an extension on the course assignments. Nevertheless, the instructor reserves the right to provide or not provide extension.

Important Dates

Final Deadline for May graduates to file for graduation: February 26, 2026

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" April 29, 2026

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Online Computer Requirements

Taking an online class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ***Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.** Computers are

available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center.

***Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

Instructor Class Policies

In weekly discussions, students are expected to respect one another's perspectives. Any feedback provided on classmates' posts should be constructive, professional, and respectful.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Northwestern State University (NSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to NSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Northwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Student Life - Disability](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#)

Notice

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
Week 1- Week 4 January 20, Tuesday- February 15, Sunday, 2026	Part I: Cultural Diversity and Social Work: Read Chapters 1-3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 1: Culture • Chapter 2: Cultural diversity, oppression, and action: A culturally grounded paradigm • Chapter 3: The intersectionality of race and ethnicity with other factors 	N/A
Week 5- Week 8 February 16, Monday- March 22, Sunday, 2026 Spring Break- March 9-14, 2026	Part II: Theories and Perspectives on Oppression: Read Chapters 4-7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 4: Evolutionary and structural functionalist theories • Chapter 5: Theoretical perspectives on diversity • Chapter 6: Intersecting social and cultural determinants of health and well-being • Chapter 7: Social work perspectives: Social context, consciousness, and resiliency 	Assignment # 1 due by 11.59 p.m. on February 21, Saturday (to be submitted in D2L DropBox) First Exam (Chapters 1-6) March 21-22, Saturday-Sunday (exam will open at 12.01 a.m. on Saturday and will close at 11.59 p.m. on Sunday)
Week 9- Week 14 March 23, Monday- May 8, Friday, 2026 Holiday Break- April 2-4, 2026	Part III: Cultural Identities: Read Chapter 8: Chapter 8: The formation and legacies of racial and ethnic minorities Part IV: The Profession of Social Work Grounded in Culture: Read chapters 11-12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 11: Cultural norms and social work practice • Chapter 12: Culturally grounded methods of social work practice 	Final Exam- (Chapters 7,8,11, and 12) May 8-9, Friday- Saturday (exam will open at 12.01 a.m. on Friday and will close at 11.59 p.m. on Friday) Assignment # 2 due by 11.59 p.m. on May 10, Sunday (to be submitted in D2L DropBox)

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