

SWRK 4210

Feminist Perspectives on Social Work Practice and Social Welfare Policy

Syllabus

Social work is a profession that has a unique perspective on women's issues. From social work's beginnings, women have been the major players on both sides of the profession, those of workers and as clients. Women have provided strong leadership to develop strategies for meeting the needs of persons who were oppressed, most of whom were women and their children. Today, social work's code of ethics provides us with ongoing reminders of our commitment to actively work for a society in which all persons, irrespective of their personal characteristics, condition, or status, have equal opportunity (CASW).

Although social work and its professionals have long challenged issues affecting oppressed individuals and groups, social work continues to recognize the pervasiveness and persistence of discrimination against women and other oppressed groups. It is important to recognize that women are not a homogeneous group, and the intersecting issues, such as class, race, sexual orientation, etc., contribute to a diversity of experiences, needs, and interest in women.

In this course you will examine the major social issues affecting the lives of women clients and how these issues can be and need to be addressed by both policy makers and practitioners. As social workers we need to engage in practice that is empowering to women. To understand where to go and how to get there, we need to understand where we have come from and what currently women experience. Additionally, we will emphasize and encourage women's strengths and resources and encourage anti-oppressive practices in both the professional and personal lives of social workers.

Contacting your instructor

For information on contacting your instructor as well as other important information from your instructor see the Instructor Letter link in your course website.

Course description

The *University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar* describes SWRK 4210 as follows:

An analysis of social work practice and welfare policy from a feminist perspective. Course emphasizes the integration of social work intervention with policy in the social welfare context and overlays concepts such as empowerment, ecological practice, oppression, and practice in context of cultural diversity. Prerequisites; 047.131, 047.208, 047.209, and 047.314. Students may not hold credit for both 421 and 417 or 421 and 419.

This course will entail an analysis of social work practice and welfare policy from a feminist perspective. The course emphasizes the integration of social work intervention with policy in the social welfare context and overlays concepts, such as empowerment, ecological practice, oppression, and anti-colonial, anti-racist practice in the context of cultural diversity.

The main goal of this course is to have students develop an understanding of the position of women in Canadian society, particularly as that position relates to the social welfare state and fields of social work practice. We will examine established models of practice and feminist critiques within the context of social policy. We will also focus on prevalent theories in the social work profession, those included in systems as well as ecological perspectives.

Social work intervention and social welfare policy will be integrated and emphasized. This course was developed as one of two courses (the other examines Aboriginal perspectives) that integrate policy and practice from the perspective of oppressed groups. Oppression is not limited to these groups, but they were chosen as oppressed groups over-represented in our society as recipients of social work intervention. To understand some of the issues these populations face and their

experience in the social work system, students will have an opportunity to more fully understand theories of oppression as well as the integration of social work practice and social policy.

Course goals

This course has four main goals:

- to review the position of women in Canadian society, especially as it relates to the social welfare state and to social work practice;
- to analyze the situation in order to be sensitive to the need for change in social welfare institutions and the roles of social workers in the process of continuing oppression of women;
- to discuss, with supporting examples, how local, national, and global policies and practices continue to oppress and dominate women's lives; and
- to demonstrate knowledge of and skill in antiracist, anti-oppressive, and culturally competent social work practice.

Course materials

Required textbooks

The following required materials are available for purchase from the [University of Manitoba Bookstore](#). Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your [Distance and Online Education Student Handbook](#) for instructions on how to order your materials.

Bishop, A. (2015). *Becoming an ally* (3rd ed.). Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Baines, C., Evans, P. & Neysmith, S. (1998). *Women's caring: Feminist perspectives on social welfare* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Mullaly, B. (2010). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peterson, K., & Lieberman, A. (Ed.). (2001). *Building on women's strengths: A social work agenda for the twenty-first century* (2nd ed.). New York: The Haworth Social Work Practice Press.

Readings package for *SWRK 4210 Feminist perspectives on social work practice and social welfare policy* (contains reprinted articles and chapter from a variety of sources). Available from the University of Manitoba Bookstore.

Recommended videos

The following videos can be accessed from your online course site (Streamed Videos) or borrowed from the University of Manitoba Off-Campus Library Services. Click on the library link http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/services/off_campus.html or read the Distance and Online Student Handbook for information on how to borrow from the library. Before ordering from the library, check the course site to determine if your computer and internet access are sufficient to view the available videos.

Welsh, C. (Director). (1994). *Keepers of the fire*. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. Duration: 54:42.

The NFB description states "For half of a millennium, First Nations women have been at the forefront of aboriginal peoples' resistance to cultural assimilation. Today, Native women are still fighting for the survival of their cultures and their peoples—in the rain forest and the city, in the courts and the legislatures, in the Longhouse and the media. *Keepers of the Fire* profiles Canada's Native "warrior women" who are protecting and defending their land, their culture and their people in the time-honored tradition of their foremothers." (Accessed November 19, 2007 from <http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=32012>).

Nash, Terre. (Director). (1995). *Who's counting? Marilyn Waring on sex, lies and global economy*. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. Duration: 94:03.

To understand the issue of women's caring, it will be important to look at global and local issues, as well as personal and professional implications. Marilyn Waring's film and article (parts of the readings package) are essential places to begin. The assigned readings will provide additional information that will highlight this topic with Canadian examples.

Buying into sexy; The sexing up of tweens. (2005). CBC Marketplace documentary. Duration: 24:30.

As a recommended video, it provides information to the public about some of the strategies that media sources use to influence the age group (8–12 years) known as tweens.

McGee, Debbie (Director), (1992) *Toward intimacy*. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. Duration: 61:46.

The NFB's description states that, "*Toward Intimacy* is a cross-disability affirmation of the right of women with disabilities to seek, develop and sustain intimate relationships with the partners of their choice. In this moving one-hour film, four disabled women from across Canada share their personal experiences, with particular emphasis on sexuality, self-esteem, stereotyping, and parenting." (Accessed November 19, 2007 from <http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=25984>).

Optional

The following readings will enrich the topic areas in this course. These can be obtained from the library.

Bopp, J., Bopp, M., Brown, L., & Lane, P. (1985). *The sacred tree* (2nd ed.). Lethbridge, AB: Four Worlds Development Press.

Course overview

Unit 1 Introduction to the Feminist Perspective

This unit lays the foundation for the course. In this and subsequent units, we recommend that you follow the learning activities/strategies included in this section. The readings and issues presented may evoke thoughts within the context of your personal experience and social work practice. What you learn from this will add to your professional development and will prove to be assets in your practice.

Understanding feminism is learned by understanding history and major theoretical positions posed by feminist theorists. As with any issue, there are theoretical differences and similarities, some with which we may agree or disagree. Once we understand some of the basic theories and beliefs posed by feminist theories, we can view current issues that are also raised in the units that affect populations with whom we work.

Unit 2 Theories and Principles of the Feminist Perspective

Feminist theory deconstructs the errors and myths about women's abilities. It adds to our knowledge about women's experience and proposes that social change needs to be advocated politically.

Theory challenges problematic gender relations that occur as inequalities and contradictions in many areas of social life. Gender, power, race, class, and sexuality are socially constructed and impact our views of family, work, politics, education, welfare, and all other social areas of our lives. These constructs are not neutral; rather they can control and shape our experiences and beliefs about others and ourselves.

Three classic theories that address these issues are liberal, socialist, and radical feminism. Other theoretical models have made significant impact on our understanding of women's experiences and will be discussed as well; these include postmodernist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and anti-racist feminism.

Unit 3 Applications of Feminism: Feminism and the Family

There is much discussion about family in all areas of our lives. There are, however, significant biases in how we perceive families. In North America, the dominant mainstream family is nuclear

and heterosexual. Other families are perceived as other and therefore problematic. Feminism addresses the inequities and biases that contribute to oppression and discrimination of those who do not fit the norm.

Unit 4 Understanding Oppression

There is much to learn about oppression: what it is, how it is maintained, and how it is used to maintain the dominant over the marginalized. Oppression uses power to maintain the status quo by putting us in competition with one another, forcing people to distrust and distance ourselves from each other.

This unit will assist in understanding oppression, from the individual to the family, and community levels to the larger systems. Understanding oppression is an essential step in consciousness-raising and working towards liberation.

Unit 5 Dynamics of Power

Understanding the dynamics of power is essential to understanding oppression. Many oppressed groups can clearly identify how they have been oppressed and what needs to change but have little experience with the positive effects of power and its necessity in creating change. Bishop outlines how power can be used to create healthy change in individuals and groups and cautions that power can be misused by anyone. Bishop discusses several kinds of power: power-over, power with, and power within. This unit will explore some of the challenges of power, examples of how it is used effectively, how it may be misused, and ideas from groups who are using it to effect essential change in our world.

Unit 6 Social Work Issues, Feminism, and Aboriginal Women

Feminism emerged from middle-class women who did not differentiate, nor address, specific issues of class, race, or ethnicity.

This unit will describe and discuss some of the issues of feminism and oppression that have been raised by Aboriginal women, some of whom have embraced the theoretical tenets of feminism and have developed their own lens through which to look at issues affecting them. Other Aboriginal women authors distance themselves from feminism and have developed their own liberation models, which are important for students to understand. Aboriginal persons represent less than 10% of the population of Canada, yet may represent more than 90% of service users in a social service agency. It is essential that we understand what these women have to tell us and incorporate this beneficial knowledge into our services with these persons.

Unit 7 Social Work Issues and Women of Colour

Canada's treatment of indigenous persons has been historically racist in both policy and practice. Currently, our treatment of persons of colour, particularly women, has continued to reflect negative policies and practices that have kept them silenced and forgotten. Immigrant women have documented the many barriers they face in Canada, including social isolation, racial prejudice, employment difficulties, and work-family conflicts. Immigrant women have had more trouble than immigrant men in gaining access to social services and programs designed to assist in settlement and adaptation. Lack of access to language training condemns them to menial, nonunionized, low-wage jobs.

Unit 8 Women and Caring Practice and Policy

Women are primary caregivers for children and the main caregivers for the disabled and elderly. As our national health care budget is challenged, women are often required to pick up the care that the system can no longer afford to provide. Studies report that women are more often than not required to provide that necessary care and are often expected to leave their paid positions to have unpaid caring positions in the home (Armstrong, 1993).

This unit will address the complexity of this issue, considering the politics of caring for others, the expectations, and the lack of pay. Additionally, more than one half of women with children work outside of the home. Of this group, more than one half of them report that they are solely responsible for the daily care of the children and the household chores.

Globally, this issue is compounded as women perform more than 80% of the world's work and receive less than 10% of the pay for their work. Marilyn Waring provides essential information and ideas on challenging these realities for women.

Students will develop their understanding of the oppression of women in fields of caring and how the economy supports this oppression.

Unit 9 Women and Exploitation: Age Compression, Marketing and Canada's Immigration Policies and their Impact on Women. (Live-in caregiver program, and mail order brides, and exotic dancers)

In this unit, students will learn about the various ways that girls and women are socialized and, in many cases, forced into caring roles. Media play an increasing role in creating images of exploited women and girls, and both nationally and globally girls and women are socialized to fill those roles.

The consequences of this socialization are experienced at a familial and a global level. Policies exist in Canada that further exploits women under the guise of addressing shortages in our labour market, both in the nanny role and the exotic dancer role.

Unit 10 Working with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Persons

An informed understanding of diversity is essential to the knowledge base of social work practice. Knowledge about populations who are different from the dominant culture (white, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, or male), is a critical part of the foundations that form the basis of social work. These populations are at the most risk for societal oppression; however, the presence of diverse communities enriches the cultural and communal quality of the entire society.

Students will develop an understanding of the issues facing gay, lesbian, transgendered, and two spirited persons and the skills needed as social workers to begin to work with these populations in a respectful, positive manner. The richness that diversity brings to a society is important to illustrate, and all social workers need an informed critical perspective on issues of oppression and diversity. Many groups experience oppression, and until recently, social work excluded knowledge about these populations from their curricula focusing instead on heterosexual male models of behaviour.

Unit 11 Women and Violence

Violence against women has become widely recognized as a major human rights issue, with growing awareness of the impact of violence on women, children, and the physical and mental health of both. Although violence of men against men is significant, the perpetrators of violence against women are almost exclusively male. Women are at greatest risk of violence from men whom they know.

Women and girls are the most frequent victims of violence within the family and between intimate partners; physical abuse in intimate relationships is almost always accompanied by severe psychological and verbal abuse. Professional and social institutions respond by blaming or ignoring the victims.

Social workers are the professionals who have extensive involvement with victims of violence, and therefore, have the opportunity to address and help change attitudes in society that ignore the impact of this violence on women and children.

Unit 12 Women and Disabilities

Women are most often the caregivers in their relationships with family and others. Because women are often in this position, and this work is unpaid, they face poverty. As women age, and with their generally longer life expectancy, women are the group who receive this care.

Students will address the issues that face women as they age and will need to ask the question. How do we provide for the needs of all and not at the expense of women? The solutions to this dilemma lie in challenging economic and social constructs.

Unit 13 Understanding Anti–Oppressive Social Work Practice, and Changing Oppression

Anti-oppressive practice is not unique to social work; it is occurring in many professional and grassroots locations globally. This unit will highlight feminist and other anti-oppressive social work models of practice, which continue to shape social work as a profession. Feminist and anti-oppressive paradigms embrace empowerment as a key component to reconnect and transform through political activity.

Learning activities

- Journal development, in which you will complete entries for six units as outlined in the syllabus. You are encouraged to discuss the questions online with others in your class before you write and submit your personal journals to your instructor.
- Follow assigned readings in each unit as well as analysis of selected readings.
- Complete the study and reflection questions outlined in the manual. Feel free to discuss questions with others in your class using the online discussion tool.
- Complete practice exercises as outlined in the course.

Evaluation and grading

Plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Grading scale

Letter grade	Percentage range	Description
A+	>93	Exceptional
A	86 – <93	Excellent
B+	79 – <86	Very good
B	72 – <79	Good
C+	65 – <72	Satisfactory
C	58 – <65	Adequate
D	50 – <58	Marginal
F	less than 50	Failure

Please note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

Assignments

Grades in this course will be based on the following:

- completion of six unit journal entries;
- an essay assignment; and
- a major position paper.

Assignment due dates

Assignment	Description	Sept.–Apr. Submission deadline	Jan.–July Submission deadline	May–Aug. Submission deadline
1	Unit journal entry 1	Sept. 26	Jan. 25	May 11
2	Unit journal entry 2	Oct. 17	Feb. 15	May 23
3	Essay assignment	Nov. 28	Mar. 28	June 13
4	Unit journal entry 3	Dec. 3	Apr. 4	June 18
5	Unit journal entry 4	Jan. 28	Apr. 25	June 27
6	Unit journal entry 5	Mar. 10	May 30	July 6
7	Major position paper	Mar. 24	June 13	July 13
8	Unit journal entry 6	Apr. 5	July 4	July 25

Review the guidelines on assignment due dates in the *Student Handbook*.

Extensions

All assignments are due on the dates given above. **Note that assignments 1 and 2 will be marked and returned together after the assignment 2 submission deadline; assignments 4 and 5 will be marked and returned together after the assignment 5 submission deadline; and assignments 6 and 8 will be marked and returned together after the assignment 8 deadline.**

Any extensions for completion of the assignments can only be given in advance and for good reason. An assignment that has not been given an extension by the instructor will be penalized by deduction of half a letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B).

Distribution of marks

6 unit journal entries and online discussions (5% each)	30%
- Unit journal entries, assignments 1 and 2	10%
- Unit journal entries, assignments 4 and 5	10%
- Unit journal entries, assignments 6 and 8	10%
Essay assignment 3	30%
Major position paper assignment 7	40%
Total	100%

General regulations for essay assignments

Written work should adhere to the instructions for the essay assignments; please review these carefully. The work should be clear, logical, and organized (using headings can help). Grammar, spelling, and style form part of the grading criteria. When using references and reference lists in your work, follow the *American Psychological Association (APA)* guidelines.

Evidence of critical thought and understanding of issues is important. Make appropriate use of assigned course readings and optional readings for your essay assignments.

Plagiarism is a serious matter. Quotations from any author's work or paraphrasing of it must be given credit through appropriate referencing. Plagiarism in an assignment will lead to automatic failure. Review the section on academic honesty in the *Student Handbook*.

Assignments

Refer to your assignments located under Assignment Widget for the specific directions, the assignment questions, guidelines for preparation, and marking criteria. The following is only a brief overview of the assignments.

Assignments 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8: Online journal entries

Discuss the unit questions with other students online and then complete your own personal journal entries.

Assignment 3: Essay assignment

The essay assignment consists of several essay questions that have been developed from the required readings up to the point of the due date of the assignment.

Assignment 7: Major position paper

You will be directed to select a topic central to the lives of women and develop a position paper about the topic. The topic can include issues, such as violence, poverty, childcare, sexuality, employment, welfare, and/or specific issues that affect Aboriginal women or women of colour.

Distance and Online Education (DE) Student Resources

In your course website there are links for the following:

- Contact Distance and Online Education Staff
- Distance and Online Student Handbook
- Distance and Online Education Website

Acknowledgments

Content specialist:

Marlene Richert (2007)
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Marlene Richert is a sessional lecturer and adjunct professor in the Faculty of Social Work. Marlene teaches primarily on campus but also regularly teaches in Thompson. She conducts social work cohort programs and teaches through distance education. Since 2000, she has taught Interpersonal Communication Skills, Introduction to Social Work Policy, Field Focus: Child Welfare, Contemporary Social Welfare Policy and Feminist Perspectives in the BSW program, and Social Work Policy and Administration in the MSW program. In 2005, Marlene taught a Community Mental Health course in Moscow, Russia and Omsk, Siberia as part of the Canadian Centre for Disability Studies/ Faculty of Social Work/CEDA project.

Marlene has a BSW and MSW from The University of Manitoba. Her graduate degree is in the clinical stream, and in her practicum work she looked at family therapy from a structural perspective. Her areas of interest are in policy and clinical services for women and children, social work practice that promotes social change, and assessment and treatment services for sexually assaulted children and their families. Her interests also include the developing field of children and their families that are affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. She has worked in child welfare, disability services for children and families, women's sexual abuse and addictions treatment services, sexual assault and family therapy programs, and a program serving families with fetal alcohol exposed children.

Marlene continues to work as the Program Manager of the Families Affected by Sexual Assault Program at New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults and Families, as well as the Clinical Consultant to the Interagency Fetal Alcohol Program in Winnipeg.

Instructional designer:

Bonnie Luterbach, Ph.D. (2007)
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Louis Svenningsen, M.Sc. (2007)
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Pat Mochnacz, M.Ed. (2007)
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Editor:

Joan Ste-Marie (2007)
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Desktop publishing:

Lorna Allard
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Joy Wei
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Copyright © 1998. Revised 2007, 2008. Updates 2016.

All rights reserved. No part of the material protected by this copyright may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission from the copyright owner. The University of Manitoba, Distance and Online Education