Course description: The goal of the course is to introduce students to contemporary issues surrounding social justice in the U.S. Social justice refers, most broadly, to reducing unfair inequalities facing members of a society. We will go beyond the rhetoric surrounding relevant issues and investigate them from the ground-up through texts written by scholars and public intellectuals. We will also challenge the texts with other points of view. The issues covered are controversial and opinions on the proper actions vary. More important than your actual opinion is the degree to which it is based on sound data.

Required Readings:

Other readings on Blackboard or distributed in class.

Office hours: I am available by appointment. I will have a sign-up sheet outside my office door for office hours. Priority will be given to those who have signed up. Office hours are Monday, 2-3pm; Tuesday, 2:45-3:15pm; and Thursday, 2:45-3:15pm. Email and phone also convenient ways to communicate.

Course Requirements:
Student responsibilities:
1) Regular attendance to all classes and outside events. Students anticipating lengthy absences should contact me in advance.

2) You should arrive on time for class and remain for the entire period unless you make arrangements with me prior to class. All cell phones need to be off (not on vibrate).
3) Completion of each week’s readings by the beginning of class on Tuesday. You will not be able to successfully complete this class without reading the assignments on time. This class is a seminar, which makes student input essential to a worthwhile experience.

4) Completion of all required assignments. All assignments must be completed by the beginning of class, not during or after class. If you anticipate that you may miss a due date because of illness or a personal emergency, I require a doctor’s note or some other documentation before the assignment is due. If you do not supply this documentation, your assignments will be penalized one third of a grade (for example, an A will slip to an A-, a B+ to a B, etc.) starting the day of the assignment and for every calendar date past the due date.

Required assignments:

1. Class participation. This is measured not simply by how much you say, but how reflective you make your comments. The success of this seminar depends on class participation. 10% of final grade.

2. Paragraphs response to readings. This should not be a summary but instead your reaction to the reading. The main goal of the responses is to raise questions you want discussed in class. Also necessary to include is an explanation of why you think your questions are important for us to consider. Be prepared to share them with the class. These will be collected on occasion. 10% of final grade.

3. In teams of two, you will write a paper, about 8 pages, and give a 20 minute presentation (including time for questions). This will involve you finding four or more articles or books, as a team, that contradict or challenge some important element of the assigned book. The purpose is to take into account critiques of the assigned reading and come to a synthesis of the points of view. Your paper and presentation will be an assessment of the readings and your conclusion on the point of contention based on the available data. You are encourage to make a lively, multimedia presentation. 25% of final grade.

4. Short paper in response to one of the readings, about 5 pages. The assignment is equivalent to the team response you will make to a reading, without a presentation and that you do by yourself. You get to choose which reading you respond to, but it will not be the same reading that your present on in teams of two. You need to find at least three sources to critique the reading. This assignment gives you more freedom to decide when to turn in the paper, and can help you not have too many assignments due at the end of the semester. 25% of final grade.

5. Longer paper on a topic you choose, about 8 pages. What question based on the readings do you want to learn more about? Part of the research for the paper can be interviewing a local leader on the topic. Is it school funding? Is it the effectiveness of private/public collaboration in dealing with hunger? You are to make an argument regarding your topic that brings together various readings and your own primary research. This can be a “liberation sociology” (explained in class) kind of paper, if you want. This is due at the end of classes. You have the opportunity to turn in a paper draft and then revise. 30% of final grade.
Other notes:

1) Standard university guidelines and rules of academic integrity apply for this course. This pertains to cheating, plagiarism, and other acts of academic dishonesty. Please consult your student handbook or see me for details.

2) If you have a learning disability or other disability you are entitled to assistance and accommodations through the university. This assistance includes evaluating your medical documentation, conducting appropriate tests, and contacting your professors to arrange for the recommended accommodations. You must, however, contact me at the beginning of the semester to ensure that you receive these services. If you fail to do this, I cannot make special accommodations for you.

3) Jacob Lamoureux is the Writing Associate for this class. You are encouraged to meet with him one-on-one for each paper, regardless of your concerns on any specific paper. Failing to meet with him at least once before your first paper is due will result in a one third of a grade loss on the paper. I am also available to discuss writing and paper assignments during my office hours.

Tentative course schedule:

Sept. 7: Introduction to the course and to one another

Sept. 9: Defining Social Justice

Sept. 14:

Sept. 16: Immigration
   - Immigrant Rights in the Shadow of Citizenship, chapters Introduction, 1, 4,

Week of Sept. 21: Immigration (cont.)
   - Immigrant Rights in the Shadow of Citizenship, chapters 5, 8, 9, 13, 16.

Week of Sept. 28: Immigration (cont.)
   - Writing discussion
NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and team presentations due Sept. 30

Week of Oct. 5: Hunger and the Working Poor
   - Ehrenreich, Introduction and chapters 1, 2
Week of Oct. 12: Hunger and the Working Poor (cont.)
  • Schwartz-Nobel, Preface, Introduction
  • Hunger in Ohio
  • Writing discussion

Oct. 19: Hunger and the Working Poor (cont.)
NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and team presentations due Oct. 19

Oct. 21: Library session

Week of Oct. 26: Fall Break.

Week of Nov. 2: Environmental Justice
  • Pellow and Park, chapters 1, 4, 5, 6

Week of Nov. 9: Environmental Justice (cont.)
  • Pellow and Park, chapters 8, 9
  • Writing discussion

Nov. 16: Short paper reading critiques and team presentations

Nov. 18: Final paper discussion in class

Nov. 23: Education
  • Kozol, chapters 1, 3, 4.

Nov. 25: Thanksgiving Break

Week of Nov. 30th: Education (cont.)
  • Kozol, chapter 6
  • Writing discussion
NOTE: Short paper reading critiques and team presentations due Dec. 2

Week of Dec. 7: presentations of final research projects.

Dec. 14: Wrap up.