Course Description:

In this course, we will explore the rhetorical aspects of social justice writing. As a class, we will critically analyze the strategies and ethics of a diverse range of activists and public intellectuals who use their writing as a form of social critique and to effect social change. Additionally, you will develop, negotiate, revise, and assess your own writing strategies and ethics as you write on social justice issues relevant to your interests (college-centered, communal, domestic, and international).

Negotiating the Contact Zone:

In seeking to make their classrooms more comfortable and less threatening spaces for students, what many writing teachers have ended up doing is disallowing the very expression of conflict and difference that could enhance (and make more interesting) the writing of their students. I will not take that approach for this course. I expect you to adopt communicative practices — oral and written — that allow for our classroom to be a space where everyone has an opportunity to defend, negotiate, and revise their perspectives and rhetorics relevant to social justice work. But please understand that there is a difference between having a classroom that is a comfortable and non-threatening space and a classroom that is a communicatively open space. We are going to have a communicatively open classroom space. You may not always feel comfortable in this classroom. Social justice work is not generally geared towards making people feel comfortable. Social justice work attempts to enact social change, and that can be quite threatening and uncomfortable on many fronts. Also, polemical and agitation rhetorics are strategies that some social justice writers employ. As such, I will not discourage their usage in your own writing. We will also examine in this course several iterations of these kinds of rhetorics at work in the writings of social justice activists. Like all the other strategies we will explore in terms of social justice writing, we will consider polemical and agitation rhetorics within the context of recontextualization. Working as a facilitator for this course, I will treat this classroom space as a contact zone, and all work for this course — reading, writing, and discussion activities — will be informed by this contact zone philosophy. Contact zones are often messy spaces because they bring together through conflict, struggle, negotiation, and revision a variety of different social, cultural, and political perspectives. Please be prepared to engage in these four processes — conflict, struggle, negotiation, and revision.

Required Materials:

Internet Access: I will post the readings for the course on Blackboard. You will also be creating your own Social Justice Passion Blogs to use for the course. WordPress is a free and open-source blogging tool that you can use to create your Social Justice Passion Blog. Or you may use an existing domain space as long as you create a new blog specifically for this requirement.

Spiral Notebook: For in-class and journal writing assignments.
Assessment of Course Goals:

Attached to this syllabus is a preliminary draft of a Learning Contract we will use for this course. Together we will be revising this preliminary draft of the Learning Contract and a final draft composed collaboratively will be adopted for the course.

The course is divided into five modules:

**Module One**: What is Social Justice?; Allyship and Ethics in Social Justice Writing  
**Module Two**: Examining and Analyzing the Recontextualization Strategies of Social Justice Writers  
**Module Three**: Polemical and Agitation Rhetorics in Social Justice Writing  
**Module Four**: Digital Literacy and Social Justice Writing  
**Module Five**: DO That Thang……. (Writing Workshop Intensive)

Tentative Module Schedules will be provided and posted on Blackboard. Assessment of the course goals will be based on assignments that will take several forms:

**Major Assignments**: There are 5 such assignments, varying in content, length, purpose, and genre. A detailed description of each Major Assignment will be provided:

- **Major Assignment One**: “What is Social Justice?” Essay — Due Wednesday, 2/18  
- **Major Assignment Two**: Persuasive Essay — First Draft Due Monday, 4/6  
- **Major Assignment Three**: Paradigm Shift Essay — First Draft Due Wednesday, 4/15  
- **Major Assignment Four**: Advocacy Essay — First Draft Due Friday, 4/24  
- **Major Assignment Five**: Getting' Crunk With It Piece — First Draft Due Monday, 5/4

**Final Portfolio Assessment**: Due during the final exam period. Detailed information will be provided.

**Short Writing Assignments**: Short writing assignments and in-class writing exercises will make up a portion of the writing you will do for this course. For these assignments and exercises, you will be asked to write in response to assigned readings for the course and in response to assignment prompts I have designed for the course. I will ask you on several occasions to write critically and analytically about your own writing, considering various directives that I will provide for you in the assignment prompts.

**Social Justice Passion Blog**: Many cultural observers have heralded the great democratizing possibilities of the Internet, arguing that those who were once silenced by power and resource inequities can, at least theoretically, broadcast their voices and harness new media to organize and advocate.

Blogging is one such way rhetors can get their message out there, whether they are advocating for political change, building interest communities, sharing experiences and information, or just having fun. Since most blogs are meant for an audience, blogging is an implicitly civic action. Because blogging intimately connects rhetorical practice to civic life and brings together written, oral, visual, and digital media, it’s an ideal activity for this course.

Above all, your Social Justice Passion Blog should be on issues relevant to the kinds of social justice work you are interested in and/or already immersed in. These are things which you are excited to write about and/or things you couldn’t stop writing about even in the face of persecution. When you are choosing the focus of your Social Justice Passion Blog, think carefully about how you might sustain this blog over fourteen weeks to meet the course requirement — and maybe beyond! How will you introduce new topics? How will you interest and inform your readers, engaging them in your work via the blog? How will you invite readers to comment? Writing this blog should be a pleasure and a challenge. Don’t be afraid to be quirky or creative.

You **are required** to post one weekly writing entry on your Social Justice Passion Blog, although you may write and post as much as you like. Your weekly writing entries will be due **before** each Friday class. I will post everyone’s blog addresses on Blackboard so we will all have access to your Social Justice Passion Blog. I will periodically encourage you to comment on each other’s blogs, although I hope you will take that initiative on your own, viewing yourselves as a
community of social justice writers. Additionally, I will also read and comment on your posts. It is my hope that we will have very lively and nuanced discussions about a diverse range of issues relevant to social justice work (college-centered, communal, domestic, and international).

Writing Workshops and Peer Review: You should expect to produce multiple revisions for some of the writing you compose for this course. Therefore, your active participation in Writing Workshops and Peer Review is important for this course, and thus mandatory for your success in this course. Weeks 10-14 are Writing Workshop Intensive, as you will be exclusively engaging the labor of social justice writing, composing and thinking critically, analytically, and recursively about the writing strategies you will be employing for Major Assignments Two-Five.

Writing Associate:

I am pleased that we have Kasey Cheydleur working with us throughout the semester. Kasey will be available to discuss and work with you on your writing one-on-one. You will also have mandatory conferences with Kasey for some of (or perhaps all of) the Major Assignments. Kasey will make hours available to you for these appointments.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance in this class is mandatory. Each student will be allowed three absences with no penalty or questions asked (although this does not excuse you from turning in work on time). After that, however, absences or frequent tardiness will negatively affect your grade (see the Learning Contract for details). It is your responsibility to inform me of an absence beforehand. **The earlier I know about a problem, the more flexible I can be.** There is always something happening in class, so even if I inform you beforehand about what will be covered it is still your responsibility to acquire notes or other important information from your classmates if you are absent.

Late Work Policy:

All work is due when assigned. I will only receive late work when an arrangement with me has been made prior to the class meeting for which the assignment is due. If you have a significant problem getting assignments in on time, (EX: an ongoing medical issue), talk to me as early as possible because **the earlier I know about a problem, the more flexible I can be.**

Cell Phones and Laptops:

Laptops may be used in class for class work only. Exceptions for keeping a cell phone on will be made in extreme circumstances and I should be informed before class if this is the case.

Physical and/or Learning Differences:

If you have physical or learning differences that may affect your work in this course, please inform me as soon as possible. Also, the office of Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; x5-5588), can provide lots of help in addressing them.
Learning Contract

Dear Class:

I believe that grades create false hierarchies that are counterproductive to an educational environment. As such, I use Learning Contracts to create in the classroom what is often called a *culture of support*. Instead of a classroom made up of an instructor assuming the authoritative role and students competing (often against each other) for grades and the approval of the instructor, a *culture of support* fosters an environment where we all function as collaborators in the learning experience.

I offer to you this first draft of a Learning Contract for this course that focuses on the responsibilities we’ll assume for our work in this course. As the instructor, I will not assign a grade to individual pieces of writing you generate for this course. Now, don’t worry. You will receive lots of assessments via feedback on your work from me and your fellow peer-colleagues. My comments on your work will provide you with a sense of my assessment of your commitment to your work processes for this course (reading, drafting, revising, and self-assessments and self-reflections). I will also give you a midterm grade.

If you actively engage and continue to improve upon the work we engage during the semester based on the learning objectives for the course, then you will earn a “B” in this class.

**To Earn a B in this course, you must:**
- Complete all 5 Major Assignments and the Final Portfolio Assessment
- Complete all of the weekly writing assignments for your Social Justice Passion Blog
- Complete all short writing assignments and in-class exercises and assignments on time
- Attend (and come prepared for) all required conferences
- Comply with the standards of the Honor Code (You must write/type the Honor Code statement at the end of every assignment: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”)
- Arrive on time and keep regular attendance (No more than 3 absences)
- Participate regularly in all in-class activities, discussions, writing workshops, and peer reviews
- Be civil and respectful to your classmates and to me as the instructor

**To Earn an A or A+**
- Demonstrate exceptional commitment to your work processes (reading, drafting, revising, and self-assessments and self-reflections) on all 5 Major Assignments, the Final Portfolio Assessment, your Social Justice Passion Blog, short writing assignments, and in-class exercises and assignments.
- Contribute thoughtfully, collaboratively, and frequently to class discussion
- Satisfy all other B-level minimum requirements

**Final Grades Below a B**
- Failure to meet the terms of the Learning Contract (due to missing and/or incomplete work, excessive absences and late arrival to class sessions, lack of preparation, and lackluster performance on assignments) will lower your grade.
- If you accumulate 4 or 5 absences, your final grade will automatically drop to a C.
- If you accumulate 6 or 7 absences, your final grade will automatically drop to a D.
- If you accumulate 8 or more absences, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it. I (Joy Karega) also agree to abide by the contract, and administer it fairly and equitably.