In this four-week seminar course we explore multiple traditions (theories and practices) of social justice, including some current social justice movements but also some religious traditions and how they approach social justice. Our central goal is to deepen our understanding of social justice by exploring a broad range of perspectives and by engaging in thoughtful group conversation as we do so.

Calendar of Our Seminar Sessions:

Tuesday, June 27  
Let us explore this central question: What experience and awareness shape our current understanding of social justice? Each of us will share from our experience and awareness. Special attention will also be given to insights gleaned from Religion and Social Justice, edit. By Michael Palmer and Stanley Burgess (Blackwell, 2012)

Thursday, June 29  
In preparation for today’s discussion, each student will have carefully read one of the sources provided to you (on loan by prof.) on the opening day. Be prepared to report to class on the main ideas and insights you have found in studying the source.

Tuesday, July 4  
No class – Please think about the meaning of social justice in relation to the U.S. celebration of Independence Day.

Thursday, July 6  
We will begin with a focus from ‘Democracy Now: The War & Peace Report’ (video selections and discussion). A poignant and thought-provoking example exploring the meaning of social justice; find in our careful search of the Internet – In preparation for today’s session search the Internet to find one outstanding example (this can be a video clip, an essay, a poem, an artistic rendering, an oral history interview, a song, a symphony, a dramatic portrayal, or something else, from any place in the world and any time in history; consider a whole range of ways in which the struggle for social justice can be conveyed, many ways of knowing, and select just one which you will then pull up on the Internet and show us and explain to us how this short selection provides insight into the complexities involved in social justice).
Tuesday, July 11    Religions and Social Justice – Digging deeper into this theme today.
Please read in preparation for today: “The Significance of Religions for Social Justice and a Culture of Peace” by Patricia Mische (find article on Internet)

Thursday, July 13   Power and Social Justice – In preparation for today’s discussion, please read: “The Power of the Powerless” by Vaclav Havel (find article on Internet)

Tuesday, July 18   Your Favorite Book on Social Justice – In preparation for today’s discussion, bring your favorite book on our course theme; the book you believe best helps you to understand the meaning of social justice. Bring it to class and come prepared to tell us what you have learned from this book.

Thursday, July 20   Today each of you will share the results of your research and writing project (plan for about 20 minutes for your sharing). See assignment below.

Assignments and Basis for Evaluation of Your Contributions to Our Community of Learning:

1) Regular attendance and participation are vital in this seminar, and count toward one half of your total course grade. Do the readings as assigned and do each of the preparations for each class session as assigned; please be ready for thoughtful seminar conversation together each time we meet, thank you.

2) Research and write a 10 page (double-space) paper and then share with us the results of your work when we hold our final session. The paper is due on the final day of our summer session—at the beginning of class, July 20. This paper is worth half of your total course grade. Here are the guidelines: Find an organization (can be located any place but it will be important for you to be able to arrange for an interview with a member of this organization) which has some sort of social justice mission as central to its work. Determine what the members of this organization believe to be the most noteworthy manifestation of social injustice which they are working to overcome. Find out why they have chosen this focus for their work. Learn what you can about all the aspects of their social justice conceptualization both in vision and in practice. Do all that you can in an effort to understand the sources which inform their working definition of social justice. Put all of this research and analysis together in a 10 page paper. As to references to cite, note the following: The interview(s) which you will conduct; background study of the organization’s website and any other source materials you can
obtain from the organization for your review; key theoretical works in the philosophy and sociology of social justice (draw from any of the sources we will have explored during the course and also other sources you discover on your own). I will be looking for a) quality research, b) quality cited sources, c) clarity in your writing, and d) deep examination and constructive critical analysis of the whole approach this organization takes to thinking about social justice and engaging in social action. Be sure to include in your paper the most significant questions which have arisen for you in the process of our course and especially in the process of your study of this organization; questions you will take with you as you move forward in your own journey of social justice in theory and practice. Edit your draft with great care. Edit, edit, and edit again.

Here are just a few pertinent sources:


*All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (South End Press, 1999), by Winona LaDuke

*Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), by Martha C. Nussbaum

*The Global Justice Reader* (Blackwell, 2008), Edited by Thom Brooks


*Justice Rising: The Emerging Biblical Vision* (Orbis, 2010), by John Heagle

*I Have A Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed The World* (Harper Collins, 1992), Edited by James M. Washington (Writings and Speeches by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

*A Theory of Justice* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), by John Rawls

*Why Social Justice Matters* (Polity, 2005), by Brian Barry

*Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Cornell Univ., 2006), by W. James Booth

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Seabury, 1970), by Paulo Freire

*Development As Freedom* (Anchor Books, 1999), by Amartya Sen