SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

AP/POLS 4410 3.0
GS/POLS 5810 3.0

COURSE INSTRUCTOR:

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Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; please email in advance for an appointment

CLASS TIME AND LOCATION:

This seminar is scheduled for Tuesdays from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Verney Room, Ross Building S674.

PLEASE NOTE: We will not meet on Tuesday 6 January 2015 or Tuesday 13 January 2015 although there is assigned reading for those weeks. The first day of class for this seminar will be Tuesday 20 January 2015.

We will also not meet on Tuesday 17 February 2015 as that date falls during Reading Week.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The focus of this course is on what political directions and strategies are needed to move us closer to the goal of social justice, primarily within the context of advanced capitalist democracies with a focus on Canada.

The objectives for this course are to:

(a) explore different conceptions of social justice and its relationship to the goals of individual liberty, capacity development, equality, inclusion, solidarity and democratic participation;
(b) examine the relationship between liberal capitalism and social justice;
(c) assess to what extent we moved closer to social justice in the era of social democracy and away from it in the era of neo liberalism;
(d) examine the political economy of social justice and injustice in contemporary Canada;
(e) critically examine the role of law and the concept of rights in advancing or impeding access to justice;
(f) critically assess contemporary political and social movements advocating for social justice; and
(g) explore to what extent moving towards the goal of social justice requires fundamental changes to our economic and political institutions.

Students will be expected to have read and reflected critically on the required reading before class, and to come to all classes prepared to actively participate in the discussion.

There is no required text book for this course. All readings will be posted on or linked to from the course website on Moodle.

COURSE EVALUATION:

The evaluation for the course will be divided into four components each of which is addressed in more detail below:

1. Class Participation: 15%
2. Course Blog: 30%
3. Mid-Term Essay: 20%
4. Final Essay: 35%

1. **Class Participation: Classroom Contributions (Attendance and Engagement) (15%)**: This portion of your participation grade will be based on attendance and the quality of your demonstrated engagement with the required readings and class discussions. All students are expected to actively participate in class discussion each week. Participation means engaged listening, offering comments and constructive critique, responding to and engaging with the comments of others, including reading the written weekly commentaries posted by your classmates, and doing so in a collegial, thoughtful way that demonstrates that you have read and reflected on the readings for the week. As the aim of an academic seminar is an inclusive group discussion with a high level of collective scholarly interaction, the quality of your contributions to class discussions is much more important than their quantity.

   The success of the seminar, and your participation grade, will be enhanced if you make one or two contributions to discussions each week that: demonstrate careful preparation; reflect attention to detail, the complexity of the issues and the range of perspectives on them; show thoughtful engagement with the themes; constructively advance debates on important questions; and are respectful of others’ views.

   If you must be absent for a particular class, please email me some of your thoughts on the week’s topic ahead of the class so I can incorporate your contribution into class discussion.

   Students who attend the seminar regularly, explain any absences, and show evidence of consistent engagement, will receive at least 11/15 on this portion of their grade.
2. **Course Blog (30%)**: A class blog will be set up on the course website (Moodle). You can sign in to Moodle here: [https://moodle.yorku.ca/](https://moodle.yorku.ca/)

Students will be expected to post written commentary about the week’s readings on at least 8 of the 9 weeks running from 27 January to 31 March. The written commentary will take the form either of a **primary commentary** or a **responding post**.

A **primary commentary** is a post that starts the online discussion for the week. During class on 20 January 2015, students will sign up for the dates on which they will be responsible for the primary commentary. **Undergraduate students will be expected to write one primary commentary. Graduate students will be expected to write two primary commentaries.**

The primary written commentary should be between 250-500 words in length and should be a thoughtful response/reflection on one of the assigned readings. You should structure your primary contribution around questions or ideas that arise for you from that reading. Without restricting how you may approach this, here are some possible questions for consideration to start you off:

- Was there a particular passage or idea that resonated for you in a powerful way either positively or negatively? What are your reflections on it?
- What was the single most powerful idea – perhaps even the most powerful sentence – in the reading for you and why?
- What are three questions you have coming out of the reading that you think deserve further discussion and why?

The primary commentary must be posted on the blog by no later than **noon on the Sunday preceding the seminar**.

**Responding posts** should engage with the primary commentary and other responses posted, although they can also raise new ideas that connect with that week’s theme or that arise out of the discussion on the blog. All responding posts should be posted by **9:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning** so your peers have a chance to look at them before class.

The written commentaries will be evaluated with reference to quality of writing (i.e. grammar, organization), analysis and responsiveness to the reading materials/peer contributions.

3. **Mid-Term Essay (20%)**: This assignment is to write an essay on the topic “What is social justice and what are the major political obstacles to its realization in Canada today?”. **Undergraduate students are expected to write a paper of 2,000 to 2,500 words. Graduate students are expected to write a paper of 3,000 to 3,500 words.**
Your paper must involve independent academic research beyond the assigned course readings. In addition to academic research you can also draw on other relevant sources (government reports, policy reports, media reports, film, etc.)

The essay should be written in 12-point font, double spaced. You should include a title page and a bibliography (neither of which count towards your overall word count). Please include the word count on the title page.

The mid-term essay is due no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday 13 February 2015. It must be submitted through Moodle by uploading it to the Assignment folder that will be opened on the Course website. A late penalty of 1 mark out of 20 will be deducted for each day or partial day that the paper is late (including weekends).

4. Final Essay (35%): This assignment is to write an essay that provides a critical assessment of the politics of a specific movement for social justice in Canada today, or at the international or transnational level. Please speak with me by the end of February to confirm your essay topic. Undergraduate students are expected to write a paper of 3,000 to 3,500 words. Graduate students are expected to write a paper of 5,000 to 5,500 words.

You must conduct independent research beyond the course readings in support of your paper. The research cited in your paper should include at least 10 additional academic research publications (books, book chapters, and journal articles). In addition, you can draw on other relevant sources such as government reports and statistics, public policy papers, media reports and relevant websites (i.e. websites of advocacy or public policy groups). Mandatory course readings do not count towards your minimum research requirements.

The paper must be typed in 12-point font, double spaced. You should include a title page and a bibliography (neither of which count towards your overall word count). Please include your word count on the title page.

The final essay is due no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday 7 April 2015. The paper must be submitted through Moodle by uploading it to the Assignment folder that will be opened on the Course website. A late penalty of 2 marks out of 35 will be deducted for each day or partial day that the paper is late (including weekends).
### COURSE CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 January</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS:</strong> Watch Robert Reich, <em>Inequality for All</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>13 January</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS:</strong> Do readings on the theme of Social Justice that are listed for this date in the reading list.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 January</td>
<td>3. What is Social Justice?</td>
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<td>27 January</td>
<td>4. Liberal Democracy, Social Democracy, Capitalism and Social Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 February</td>
<td>5. The Political and Economic Roots and Consequences of Growing Inequality and the Rise of the Top 1%</td>
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**FRIDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2015: MID-TERM ESSAY DUE NO LATER THAN 5:00 P.M.**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>17 February</td>
<td><strong>READING WEEK: NO CLASS</strong></td>
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<td>24 February</td>
<td>7. Labour Organizing/Community Organizing</td>
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<td>3 March</td>
<td>8. Case Study: Building the Disability Rights Movement</td>
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<td>10 March</td>
<td>9. Capitalism and the Environment: SLAPP Suits</td>
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<td>17 March</td>
<td>10. 21st Century Organizing: Social Media and Political Mobilization</td>
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<td>24 March</td>
<td>11. The Politics of New Social Movements and Contemporary Activism</td>
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<td>31 March</td>
<td>12. Activating Social Justice</td>
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**TUESDAY 7 APRIL 2015: FINAL ESSAY DUE NO LATER THAN 5:00 P.M.**
COURSE SYLLABUS AND REQUIRED READINGS:

All readings will be available electronically through the course website on Moodle. This syllabus provides a preliminary listing of readings only. There will be adjustments and it will be expanded as the course progresses. I will provide you with advance notice when this happens.

The syllabus below identifies the required readings for the course. It also lists other materials that are not required reading but that are simply further materials to explore if you are interested and curious about particular topics. These other materials are listed under the heading “Also of Interest”.

Week 1: 6 January 2015: NO CLASS but there is assigned work to be done

Please note that the class will not meet this week. However, you should do the following work:

Required work:

Please watch Robert Reich’s documentary, Inequality for All (2014).

The film is available through the Sound and Moving Image Library in the Scott Library. The link to the catalogue is here: https://www.library.yorku.ca/find/Search/Results?mylang=en&lookfor=inequality+for+all&submit=Find&type=AllFields

It is also available through various online streaming services such as Google Play, iTunes and Netflix.

Week 2: 13 January 2015: NO CLASS but there are readings to do

Please note that the class will not meet this week. However, you should do the following work:

Required work: Begin readings on the theme of social justice:

(a) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
(b) UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Canada, (22 May 2006)
(d) Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis”, in Ethics and Economics: Canada’s Catholic Bishops on the Economic Crisis, Gregory Baum, ed. (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985) at pp. 3-18


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**Week 3: 20 January 2015: What is Social Justice?**

In addition to the readings outlined above under Week 2, the required readings for this week are:


(b) Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist Age”, (July-August 1995) New Left Review

(c) “Taking Inequality Seriously: The Lost Interview with Brian Barry”, http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/taking_inequality_seriously_lost_interview_with_brian_barry

Plus choose one of the following two articles to read (your choice):

(d) David S. Meyer and Susan Staggenborg, “Movement, Countermovement and the Structure of Political Opportunity” (May 1996) 101:6 American Journal of Sociology 1628


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**Highly recommended:**

(a) Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom (New York: Random House, 2000), chapters 1-3

(b) Martha Nussbaum, Sex and Social Justice (Oxford University Press, 1999) at pp. 3-25
Week 4: 27 January 2015: Liberal Democracy, Capitalism, Social Democracy and Social Justice

Required readings:


(c) Ellen Wood, “Capitalism and Social Rights” Keynote Address 19th World Conference of Social Work, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil (August 2008)

(d) Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Extracts)


Also of interest: (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):


Week 5: 3 February 2015: The Political and Economic Roots and Consequences of Growing Inequality and the Rise of the Top 1%

Required readings:

(a) Joseph Stiglitz, The Price of Inequality (New York: Norton, 2012), Chapter 3 (Chapters 1-4 highly recommended)

(b) Broadbent Institute, Towards a More Equal Canada (October 2012)

(c) Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Why Inequality Matters in 1,000 Words or Less (December 2007)

(d) Armine Yalnizian, The Rise of Canada’s Richest 1% (CCPA, 2010)

Also of interest (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):

(a) David Hulchanski, Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization within Toronto’s Neighbourhoods, 1970-2005 (Cities Centre: 2006)


(c) Sheila Block, Toronto’s 2013 budget: The impact of zero on city services (Toronto: Wellesley Institute, 2013), online:
(e) Keith Banting and John Myles, “Introduction: Inequality and the fading of redistributive politics” in Keith Banting and John Myles eds, Inequality and the Fading of Redistributive Politics (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013)
(f) Canada Without Poverty, website


Required readings:

(a) Judy Fudge, “What Do We Mean by Law and Social Transformation?” (1990) 5 Canadian Journal of Law and Society 47
(b) Alan Hunt, “Rights and Social Movements: Counter-Hegemonic Strategies” (1990) 17:3 Journal of Law and Society 309
(d) Joel Bakan, “What’s Wrong with Social Rights?”, in Just Words: Constitutional Rights and Social Wrongs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) at pp. 134-141
(e) Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Know your rights during the G20, pamphlet

Highly recommended:

(a) Patricia Williams, “Alchemical Notes: Reconstructing Ideals from Deconstructed Rights” (1987), 22 Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review 401-434

Also of interest (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):

(a) To reconnect with the social, economic and cultural rights addressed in the Week 2 readings, you may want to see how different constituencies in Canada have fared. UN Special Rapporteurs have conducted multiple visits and studies to Canada in the past decade and have issued reports critically examining Canada’s performance under its international human rights commitments. These reports, focusing on the rights of indigenous peoples, the right to food, the
rights of ethnic, racialized, religious and linguistic minorities, and the right to adequate housing are all accessible on the website of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the following link: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/LACRegion/Pages/CAIndex.aspx

(b) *Progress on Women’s Rights: Missing in Action A Shadow Report on Canada’s Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (CCPA, October 2014)

(c) Gwen Brodsky and Shelagh Day, *Poverty is a Human Rights Violation* (The Poverty and Human Rights Project, 2001)

**READING WEEK: NO CLASS ON TUESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2015**

**Week 7: 24 February 2015: Labour Organizing/Community Organizing**

Required readings:


(c) Guy Standing, *The Precariat* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), Chapter 1


**Also of Interest (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):**

(a) Workers Action Centre, Minimum Wage Campaign, online at: http://www.workersactioncentre.org/issues/minimum-wage/

(b) Josh Mandryk, *The Case for a Stronger Fair Wage Policy in Ontario* (CCPA: April 2014)

(c) Trish Hennessy, Kaylie Tiessen and Armine Yalnizyan, *Making every job a good job: A benchmark for setting Ontario’s Minimum Wage* (CCPA: October 2013)

(e) J Stapleton, B Murphy & Y Xing, *The “Working Poor” in the Toronto Region: Who they are, where they live, and how trends are changing* (Metcalf Foundation: 2012)

(f) Mary Cornish, *A Living Wage as a Human Right* (CCPA: October 2012)

**Week 8:** 3 March 2015: Building the Disability Rights Movement

Required readings:


Of further interest:

In 2014, David Lepofsky conducted a series of twelve lectures about the history, strategies, goals and gains of Ontario's Disability Accessibility Movement from the Late 1970s to Early 2014. The lectures, along with a range of supplementary materials, can be accessed on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance website here: [http://www.aodaalliance.org/strong-effective-aoda/03272014.asp](http://www.aodaalliance.org/strong-effective-aoda/03272014.asp)

**Week 9:** 10 March 2015: Capitalism and the Environment: SLAPP Suits and CRA Review

Special Guest: Shane Moffatt, Greenpeace, Forest Campaigner

Required readings:

(a) Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything* (Knopf Canada, 2014) (extracts)

(c) Greenpeace, *Resolute Forest Products’ Lawsuit Against Greenpeace Canada: Backgrounder*

(d) Greenpeace, Statement of Defence in Resolute Forest lawsuit


(f) Susan Lott, *Corporate Retaliation Against Consumers: The Status of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) in Canada* (Ottawa: Public Interest Advocacy Centre, 2004) [skim only]

(g) Bill 52, *Protection of Public Participation Act, 2014*. [skim only]

**Also of interest:**

On the course website I will post copies of the court decisions in the *Resolute Forest Products v. Greenpeace* litigation.

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**Week 10:** 17 March 2015: **21st Century Organizing: Social Media and Political Mobilization**

Special Guest: Amara Possian, Leadnow, Campaign Manager, Organizing and Engagement

Required readings: (to be posted)

**Also of interest: (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):**

www.leadnow.ca

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**Week 11:** 24 March 2015: **The Politics of New Social Movements and Contemporary Activism**

Required readings (additional readings to be posted):

(a) Naomi Klein, “Farewell to the End of History: Organization and Vision in Anti-Corporate Social Movements” (2002) *Socialist Register* 1-14

(c) Thomas Naylor, "Who is Occupying Whom?", *Counterpunch* (27 March 2012)

Also of interest: (not mandatory – for your curiosity only):

(b) *The winter we danced : voices from the past, the future, and the Idle No More movement*, edited by the Kino-nda-niimi Collective (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2014)
(c) *Whose Streets: The Toronto G20 and the Challenges of Summit Protest*, Tom Malleson and David Wachsmuth, eds. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011)
(d) Joel D. Harden, *Quiet No More: New Political Activism in Canada and Around the Globe* (Toronto: Lormier, 2013)

**Week 12: 31 March 2015: Activating Justice/Building Movements**

Special Guest: Michelle Dagnino

Required readings:

(a) Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, “Transcending Pessimism: Rekindling Socialist Imagination” (2009) 242 *The Bullet*
(b) Dave Meslin, “An Antidote to Apathy” in TedX Talk, online: [http://www.ted.com/talks/dave_meslin_the_antidote_to_apathy](http://www.ted.com/talks/dave_meslin_the_antidote_to_apathy)
(c) Dietlind Stolle and Cesi Cruz, “Youth Civic Engagement in Canada and Implications for Public Policy” (Sept 2005) *Social Capital in Action* 82

Also of interest:

(a) Apathy is boring, [website](http://www.ted.com/talks/dave_meslin_the_antidote_to_apathy)