

Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) Assignment

Course Location:

All Fall Field Experience/Practicum Courses—SWSS 4740, 6000, 6890

Instructor:

Faculty Field Liaisons

Assignment Rationale:

There are multiple places in any social work curriculum where students look specifically at practice skills and philosophical approaches to our work with people and systems through an anti-oppressive lens. To provide opportunities for Practice and Field curricula integration along this framework, we are asking students to initiate a conversation with their Field Instructors about the anti-oppressive practices utilized in their agency.

Assignment Description:

Faculty Field Liaisons will provide students and Field Instructors with resources that help structure a conversation that allows both partners to identify anti-oppressive practices and perspectives in their agencies/organizations and programs. To this end, two handouts to ground the discussion are included, and students/Field Instructors should be prepared to discuss these handouts in supervision. Rather than using specific questions, simply utilize the included resources “Seven Principles of Oppressive Practices” and “Strategies for Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism, Social Work Practice” (adapted from the listed work by C. Cuddy, University of Vermont, 2019) and record a summary of salient points from that discussion to submit to your Faculty Field Liaison by the assigned due date.

If students have both an On-Site Supervisor and an off-site Field Instructor, all parties should participate in this conversation, with the On-Site Supervisor providing the organizational/program lens and the off-site Field Instructor offering a bigger picture social work perspective.

Seven Principles of Anti-Oppressive Practice¹

1. **Ensure that clients are included as full participants** in the identification and implementation of the services they receive, including the goals and strategies implemented to resolve the problem or work toward a vision.
2. **When communicating with clients**, use language that is empowering, egalitarian, and respectful.
3. **Be cognizant and respectful of indigenous practices and strategies**, and encourage the use of these.
4. **Establish a just and collaborative working relationship** based on trust and power sharing.
5. **Promote education and professional development among social workers** to increase awareness of individual and institutional biases as well as discriminatory and oppressive attitudes and practices.
6. **Promote cultural diversity and a strengths-based perspective in practice** (rather than a deficit-based perspective) that recognize the clients' innate capacity to make choices and change.
7. **Promote social justice that goes beyond intellectual awareness of injustice** and instead transforms into action to challenge and reform oppressive practices that impact clients.

¹ Adapted by Cuddy, C. University of Vermont, 2019, from "My Journey Toward Anti-Oppressive Work in Child Welfare" by Brisebois & Gonzalez-Prendes, 2014.

Strategies for Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism, Social Work Practice²

How do anti-racism and anti-oppression translate into programs and practices?

Empowerment. “This is accomplished by involving service users in decisions that concern them within all components of care...Mobilizing clients’ strengths and resources are key components of empowerment. Empowerment specifically aims at assisting service users in gaining more control over their lives, in meeting their needs, having their voices heard, and helping them to gain the tools to challenge power and develop a strong positive identity.”

Education. “Anti-racism education encompasses the examination of individual and institutional racism by learning the historical roots of racism, its definitions, its manifestations within institutions, its impacts on poverty, the job market, and the treatment of visible minorities in the media...Knowledge and awareness *without action* cannot in themselves be considered anti-racist.”

Building alliances. “Establishing and developing community alliances, collaborations, linkages, coalitions, and partnerships with other oppressed groups is an important component...Building networks of people and groups working for oppressed people and groups can provide support and political visibility to efforts to challenge power.”

Language. “Working within an anti-racism framework involves the use of language that does not stigmatize or reproduce oppressive forms of power. Anti-racism and anti-oppression avoids the use of titles, ranks, or positions that can put a distance between clients and service providers, hence producing a more egalitarian relationship...In the mental health field, diagnosis should be used carefully and the emphasis should be on exploring the client’s viewpoint and culture.”

Alternative healing strategies. “Promoting, developing, and proposing a vast array of healing strategies is a way of injecting alternative discourses into the dominant model of care. Therefore, other holistic approaches to treatment may be included in an anti-racist mental health service system, like Chinese traditional medicine, Indian Ayurveda, African approaches, and yoga, in order to promote philosophies of healing that are responsive to the diversity of human experiences and worldviews.”

Advocacy/social justice/activism. “Advocacy is ensures that people are able to make informed and free choices. Advocacy is about advising, assisting, and supporting. It is not about pressurizing or persuading, which would be disempowering...Anti-oppression and anti-racism both share the goal of reaching social change, a change defined by those who suffer from oppression, based on the needs they have identified for themselves.... Promoting policies that tackle discrimination and resisting explicitly anything that can be perceived as racism are also anti-racist strategies.”

² Adapted by Cuddy, C. University of Vermont, 2019, from “More than being against it: Anti-racism and anti-oppression in mental health services” by Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012.

Fostering reflexivity. “Critical self-knowledge and self-examination are essential in order to understand the dominant system, one’s place and role in it, and how it can be challenged.”