PSYC UN2690 Frontiers of Justice
+ PSYC UN2691 recitation
4 points

Prof. Geraldine Downey
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Office Hours: TBD
Time: TBD

**Bulletin Description:** Frontiers of Justice is designed to encourage students and equip them with the skills to become active and effective “Change Agents” within their academic institutions and larger communities. Oriented by the question, *What does justice look like?*, this course aims to raise political and social awareness and engagement with the challenges facing New York City and strengthen ties between Columbia University, disadvantaged communities, and city government agencies and community organizations. Through sharing ideas about how to make structural and systemic change in ways that integrate science, law, politics, history, narrative and community engagement, the course is intended to support students in working to break down racial and ethnic barriers and toward a more fair and just society.

**Prerequisites:** An introductory course in psychology, sociology, African American studies, Human rights, or political science is recommended by not required. Permission of instructor required.

**Co-requisites:** Students should enroll in the lecture course PSYC UN2690 as well as the recitation section PSYC UN2691.

**Course Description:** Frontiers of Justice is designed to encourage students and equip them with the skills to become active and effective “Change Agents” within their academic institutions and larger communities. Focusing on the challenges facing NYC residents, this course aims to raise political and social awareness and engagement and strengthen ties between Columbia University, disadvantaged communities, and New York City government agencies and community organizations. Through sharing ideas about how to make structural and systemic change in ways that integrate science, law, politics, history, narrative and community engagement, the course is intended to support students in working to break down racial and ethnic barriers and toward a more fair and just society.

The collaborative learning environment of this course will empower a diverse group of students to share ideas and experiences, while introducing their voices into city-wide conversations that address poverty, trauma, racial inequality, the environment, and other community challenges. In
this courageous space, students and community leaders will be encouraged to discuss community conflicts openly and honestly, working collaboratively to develop effective solutions.

The emphasis throughout the course will be on what kinds of empirical questions can be asked about poverty, trauma, racial inequality, and other challenges to a just society in relation to New York City-- and how experimental, observational, and historical research as well as narrative approaches can be designed to address these questions. Together, we will explore what kinds of data can be collected and how they can be analyzed and how scientific research can inform policy changes and bring about meaningful societal change.

The emphasis is on drawing on the methods of multiple disciplines with a focus on primary sources to address the challenges facing NYC city’s youth. A particular challenge is the history and geography of this rapidly and constantly evolving global city which draws people from all over the U.S. and the world and yet continues to grapple with inequalities that are an enduring legacy of slavery. These challenges need everyone’s best efforts.

Frontiers of Justice is structured around three forms of change:

1. **Personal change:** Through course materials and in-class discussions, students will reflect on their identities, their relation to privilege, and their access to resources. As a capstone to this section, students will write a 3-5-page paper using what they’ve learned to identify an aspect of themselves they would like to improve and describing the specific work and steps they will need to undertake to achieve this personal change.

2. **Community change:** This module will introduce students to critical advocacy and intervention methods that can be used to effect structural and systemic change to transform NYC’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods. This module will culminate in a 3-5 page data-informed paper in which students will create a plan for the work they can do personally to support specific community change in NYC and students will be connected with community organizations and government agencies to gain insights into and how communities develop their own solutions.

3. **Social change:** Throughout the semester, students will work in small groups and consult with lawyers and policymakers and other guest speakers with relevant expertise to develop policy proposals to improve adverse social conditions, particularly those affecting the lives of vulnerable youth. This work will culminate in an 8-page legislative or policy proposal.

**Learning Objectives:** Through this course, we will learn to:

- Reflect on our own identities and privilege and use this critical reflection to achieve positive personal change.
- Describe research, advocacy, and intervention methods used to effect structural and systemic change, particularly as it relates to disadvantaged communities in New York City.
- Apply critical thinking skills to evaluate individual research findings, paying particular attention to the merits and limitations of different research methodologies and approaches.
• Analyze and synthesize research findings, legal precedent, history and the expertise and experiences of change agents in communities to design a policy proposal to address poverty, trauma, racial inequality or other community challenges.

**Role in the Curriculum:** PSYC UN2690/91 is a lecture course with recitation sections, open to undergraduate students and postbaccalaureate students.

It fulfills the following requirements in the Psychology curriculum:
- For Neuroscience & Behavior majors, this course could be used to fulfill the P4 advanced lecture requirement.
- For Psychology majors and concentrators, this course could fulfill the Group III or the Integrative/Applied Special Elective requirement.

Pending approval of the Committee on Science Instruction, this course could be used in partial fulfillment of the science requirement.

**Course Structure**
The course will be structured such that students will attend two 75-minute classes each week (UN2690), which will comprise some lecture/discussion led by the instructor and sometimes including a guest speaker as well.

Then, in recitation sections (UN2691) later in the week, students will work in smaller groups to further discuss the readings in depth and to collaborate on group projects.

**Course Expectations and Grading:**
1. **Class preparation and participation:** The assigned readings, which will be selected from the list below, are designed to expand your knowledge of the field and to hone your critical thinking skills. Strong preparation and participation will enable us to have high-level, thought-provoking discussion, both as a full class and in our discussion sections. We rely on each other to actively and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions. To ensure that everyone is accountable for thoroughly engaging with the material during class discussions, your active participation in these discussions will contribute to your final grade. For some people participating regularly in class discussions can be difficult. Those students who might be concerned about their ability to contribute to class discussions should see me. Generally speaking, effective class preparation and participation could include:
   a. Asking insightful or clarifying questions.
   b. Connecting each week's reading to other reading we’ve done in the course or reading you’ve done on your own or in other classes, with your engagement in the community and current affairs, and by drawing parallels and/or contrasts among findings.
c. Actively listening to fellow classmates and responding to their ideas.
d. Offering thoughtful critiques of the research methodology and providing suggestions for how it might be improved.
e. Bringing in outside sources—potentially from the news media, your own experience, or other sources—that shed light on these questions.

2. **Weekly response paper**: To help prepare for discussions, you will be asked to turn in a weekly 500-word response paper that engages with the assignments for that week, e.g., offering personal reflection, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, synthesizing evidence presented in the readings and other multimedia assignments. We expect you to keep up with current affairs, especially, with what is going on in the NYC and broader community. There will be a number of exercises related to the weekly readings and preparation for discussions.

3. **Personal change paper**: A 3-5-page paper using what you’ve learned to identify an aspect of yourself you would like to improve and describing the specific work and steps you will need to undertake to achieve this personal change. More details to be provided in class. Due date: TBD

4. **Community change paper**: A 3-5-page paper in which you create a plan for the work you can do personally to support specific community change in NYC. More details to be provided in class. Due date: TBD

5. **Legislative/policy proposal**: An 8-page legislative or policy proposal co-authored with your group, drawing on course materials, outside research, your areas of expertise, and completed in consultation with policy makers, lawyers, and other experts in the field. More details to be provided in class. Due date: TBD

Class participation & preparation (including weekly responses).......................20% of grade
Personal change paper....................................................................................20% of grade
Community change paper..............................................................................20% of grade
Legislative/policy proposal..............................................................................40% of grade

**Course materials**: Readings will comprise empirical papers, review papers, and articles from popular media sources. In addition to course readings, there will be assigned videos and/or podcasts. Pdfs of readings and links to podcasts/videos will be posted on Courseworks (Canvas).

**Schedule**: The schedule below details themes and key topics, along with assignments for each week. Required readings/assignments will be selected from these lists; other readings/assignments will be posted as supplemental but not required. This list remains subject to revision and guest speakers’ availability.

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<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Course Materials &amp; Assignments</th>
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Week 1:

What defines who we are and what justice looks like to us?

In recitations, you’ll discuss the social change project -- In week 3 you will be assigned to groups to work together on a project

Monday –


Wednesday –


Archer, J. “A Matter of Time.” *TEDxSingSing.* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJuqFmBt0)

Assignment: Apply the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory to yourself. Complete your life history using the life course theory framework in the Elder article.

Supplemental resources:

Why your worst deeds don’t define you (https://www.ted.com/talks/shaka_senghor_why_your_worst_deeds_don_t_define_you)

“What is Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory?” (Psychology Notes HQ)
Week 2: Privileged vs. oppressed identities  
[In-depth discussion of readings in recitation]

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<th>Day</th>
<th>Reading Details</th>
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**Guest discussant:** Professor Valerie Purdie Greenaway, Associate Professor, Psychology

**Supplemental resources:**
- What is Privilege?  
- Latino Civil Rights Timeline  
- Native American Timeline

Psychology still skews western and affluent. Can it be fixed? By Michael Schulson 1.20.2020 The Atlantic (undark.org)
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<th>Week 3:</th>
<th>What are the legacies of slavery?</th>
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<td>Week 4: Mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline</td>
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<td><strong>Recitation:</strong> discussion of community change project.</td>
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**Monday** –


*Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Angela Davis) Ch. 1 and Ch. 6

TED Talk: “What Prosecutors and Incarcerated People Can Learn from Each Other” (Jarrell Daniels)

TED Talk: “We Need to Talk About an Injustice.” (Bryan Stevenson)

**Wednesday** –


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Normalizing Injustice: The Dangerous Misrepresentations that Define Television’s Scripted Crime Genre (January 2020)

*Spirit of Justice: Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander in Conversation*

*National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction (NICCC)*

The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of Change)
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<th>Week 5: Understanding systematic disparities and political implications</th>
<th>Monday –</th>
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TED Talk: “How We’re Priming Some Kids for College and Others for Prison” (Alice Goffman)

**Supplemental resources:**

Short Documentaries

- ‘Kids for Cash’ Documentary
- "13th" Documentary
- Conversation with a Cop about Race

**No Child Left Behind** Law


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<th>Week 6</th>
<th>What does justice look like? Informed policy development [In-depth discussion of readings in recitation]</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Evidence-based policy development PPT from Casie Addison (Public Advocate's office)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guest discussant</td>
<td><em>Lucy Lang, Director, Institute for Innovation in Prosecution, John Jay.</em></td>
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<th>Week 7:</th>
<th>Environmental vulnerability and community outcomes [In-depth discussion of readings in recitation]</th>
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*www.blacklivesmatter.com* (Explore the Homepage, “About”, etc. Get a feel for BLM’s history and current resources.)

*Wednesday –*


Harris, F.C. (2016). The invisible hand of racial inequality in the U.S.A. World Social Science Report academic.edu

*Guest: Professor Fred Harris, Dean of Social Sciences, Professor of Political Science*
Bullard, R. D. Solid Waste Sites and the Black Houston Community.

**Wednesday –**


**Guest discussant: Dr. Rainer Romero Canyas, Environmental Defense Fund**

**Supplemental:**

Alexeeff, S. E., et. al. (2018). High-resolution mapping of traffic related air pollution with Google street view cars and incidence of cardiovascular events within neighborhoods in Oakland, CA. *Environmental Health*, 17(38).


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<th>Week 8:</th>
<th>Medical apartheid</th>
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<td>[In-depth discussion of readings in recitation]</td>
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**Monday –**


**Wednesday –**


differences between blacks and whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 113*( 16), 4296-4301.

**NPR episode: The Dark History Of Medical Experimentation On Black Americans From Colonial Times To The Present**

**Guest: Professor Lisa Rosen-Metsch, Dean of the School of General Studies**

Supplemental resources:


Sabin, J. A. (2020). How we fail black patients in pain. AAMC.

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<th>Week 9:</th>
<th>Collateral consequences of COVID-19</th>
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<td><strong>Recitation:</strong> Submit personal change paper and discuss in class</td>
<td><strong>Monday</strong> –</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday</strong> –</td>
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**Supplemental resources:**

“How ICE Exported the Coronavirus.” *The Marshall Project*, 10 July 2020,  

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<th>Week 10:</th>
<th>Community generated solutions to violence, trauma, and scarcity: How can science help or harm</th>
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**Monday –**


**Wednesday –**


Velazquez, J. “The C.H.O.I.C.E.S. Connection.” *TEDxSingSing.* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDPN50xIEEE)

**Guest discussants:** Camara Jackson, Elite Learners, and Meg Reiss, Chief of Social Justice, Brooklyn DA Office. K Bain, Cure Violence

**Supplemental resources:**


Motivational Interviewing as a Counseling Style
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<th>Week 11:</th>
<th>How Columbia can lead a path towards community reconciliation [In-depth discussion of readings in recitation]</th>
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**TURN IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT AND DISCUSS**

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*Guest discussant: Dr. Kecia Hayes, Columbia Double Discovery center*
Week 12:

How Columbia can lead a path towards community reconciliation (continued)

**Monday & Wednesday**

Discussion of community engagement projects. Student teams will present their policy proposals followed by a panel discussion.

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Week 13

Our collective action to achieve justice:

**Monday & Wednesday** –

Wrapping up and integrating lessons learned inside and outside the classroom in support of justice.

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**Course Policies:**

**Fostering an Inclusive Classroom:** Our aim is to foster a learning environment that supports a diversity of perspectives and experiences and honors your identities. Please reach out to us with any concerns or suggestions you may have to better address your learning needs and to improve the effectiveness of this course. We look forward to working together to create a classroom community built on mutual respect and inclusivity.

Students who may require classroom/test accommodations should make an appointment with me before or during the first week of class. You should also contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Lerner Hall before the start of the course to register for these accommodations. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found at [https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services](https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services) or by calling (212) 854-2388.

**Promoting Wellness:** Many of us have periods in which our mental health and well-being suffer. Please take care of yourselves – and of each other. Please prioritize your mental health and wellbeing and know that there are many resources available to you both within our classroom community and throughout the university:
We are in this together. Please reach out for help if you need it, and, if you see others who are struggling, please make sure they know how to find the support they need.

**Ensuring Academic Integrity:** As members of this academic community, we are responsible for maintaining the highest level of personal and academic integrity, which includes presenting only our own work on assignments and exams. You can find detailed definitions and examples in Columbia University’s Academic Integrity site (https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/integrity). Any questions of academic integrity will be automatically referred to Columbia’s office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. The semester progresses very quickly, and there is a lot of material to learn. If you find yourself in a situation – e.g., starting an assignment too late – in which it seems like the best option may be to violate your academic integrity, please see me. Together, we can work out a solution. Plagiarism—whether intentional or inadvertent—is a serious violation of academic integrity. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or how to properly cite sources, please come to me. I am more than happy to help.

*Syllabus is subject to change: Revisions will be posted on Courseworks*