

# Learning Plan: Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare

In this class, you help shape teaching and learning to meet the course objectives.

## Instructional Scaffolding

I will provide instructional scaffolding by introducing key foundational concepts in social work:

- a. using a person-in-environment systems approach to critically analyze and address individual/family/ community/social well-being and problems, including structures of oppression
  - applying the cycle of socialization framework to study structures of oppression
  - introducing the conceptual distinction between private troubles and public issues
- b. studying the contexts and ideologies of U.S. social welfare policy and social services by doing an in-depth study of Civil Rights and Great Society legislation of the 1960s
- c. introducing a global and intercultural perspective to better understand the global interconnections of contemporary problems and increase exposure to how other parts of the world are experiencing common problems and the novel solutions that they are developing in order to inform social work.

## Learning Communities

I will reduce the scaffolding as you move to your case studies in your learning communities. You will do most of your classwork in your learning communities, conducting case studies based on assigned conceptual social work readings and creatively developing a plan of study to culminate the semester's work. Each learning community will become the expert in their field of practice based on their case studies of their books. The 30 books for the class represent a range of themes and could be categorized in multiple ways. I categorize them by broad social fields of practice. The work in the learning communities will include both individual member roles and group roles.

Roles of individual members of the learning communities. Each member of the learning community will bring input from the angle covered in their book (for example, some may focus more on the hardships faced by families and others on the policies that support or create barriers). At least one book in each learning community includes providers in their stories. I have carefully selected and curated the books for each field of practice so that together they provide a panoramic view of content that speaks to what we will learn about social work in this class.

*When you and others in your field of practice learning community shares what each of you has learned from your books, discuss the connections you see between the books. You will notice that the books speak to each other, or build on each other, or brings different angles that together with the other books form a more complete picture of your field of practice. For example, one book may address working with families and another may address social action.*

Learning community intragroup work. As a group, each learning community will make decisions about how to approach their case studies and submit a proposal for implementation and presentation to the full class. Within each group (intragroup), students will work individually first connecting conceptual materials related to the course objectives and identifying multimedia

resources (interviews with the book authors, videos, reports, scholarly articles, etc.) to engage in deep learning about your field of practice. The learning community members will then come together to share what they have found. We will brainstorm additional types of learning activities, interviewing social workers, for example.

Intergroup work across learning communities. Intergroup discussions (and or activities) between learning communities (by reconstituting fields of practice groups to form new temporary groups with one member of each field of practice group) to share what has been learned are expected throughout the semester and could be part of the final project. The class, through the learning communities will discuss an assessment process with the instructor for the work from the learning communities. *In these discussion look intersections across the books. For example The Spirit Catches is both about health care of a refugee community in the US, a poor family.*

Instructor facilitation. I will provide facilitation and consultation as well as other learning support. Our Graduate Teaching Assistant will also provide support. As facilitators, we build on the knowledge base of each group of students, helping you explore your cases, apply concepts, and develop learning activities. Facilitation is based on the prior preparation of the groups. You are expected to having done the readings and to initiate group discussions.

### **What is a case study?**

A [case study](#) is an “approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context.” In this class we use a case study approach to understand the lived experiences of people drawn from our books, using the lens of social work concepts and intervention modalities. Learning using cases expands our skills in: discernment, bias recognition, judgment, curiosity, and self-confidence (read “The Lifelong Skills” on [page 3](#)).

### **Self-awareness: Bringing your identity and values, background, wisdom, sense of wonder**

Learning is not about being given knowledge, but about truly discovering it for ourselves. As such, it needs to be anchored in our lives. I invite you to bring your [identity](#) and values, background, wisdom, sense of wonder. All of those things matter. Use them to enrich your learning: they are necessary elements to think critically and to empathize with others. Strive to be reflective about what you are learning but also introspective. We co-create the course. We start with people’s own concrete stories rather than definitions or lists of abstract concepts or descriptions of the lives of communities that are superimposed on them. We do a lot of our learning in learning communities that provide a space to exchange ideas.

Finally, central to this course is the use of literature as a way to learn about social work issues. While someone can give us data or theories about something, *there are things that others can’t imagine for you.* Through literature, we share the emotions and aspirations of other human beings in their social contexts. We approach reading as a transaction between you and the book. You bring your experiences, interests, concerns, insights, ideas, sense of wonder, sensations, images, and emotions. The book brings images of the world, yourself, the human condition; sources of people’s actions and attitudes; social, cultural, economic contexts—and so much more. See more details in the graphic representation of reading as a transaction on [page 4](#).



Source: Harvard Business Publishing Education, [January 25, 2022](#)

## The Lifelong Skills Students Really Learn from the Case Method

Adapted from "[What the Case Study Method Really Teaches](#)" by Nitin Nohria, former dean of Harvard Business School

### 1. Discernment

"Many cases are long. Some material may be digressive or inessential. Cases often have holes—critical pieces of information that are missing," says Nohria. "The case method forces students to identify and focus on what's essential, ignore the noise, skim when possible, and concentrate on what matters...."

### 2. Bias recognition

"Students often have an initial reaction to a case stemming from their background or earlier work and life experiences," says Nohria.... "If someone has a natural tendency to favor one viewpoint over another, discussing dozens of cases will help reveal that bias. Armed with this self-understanding, students can correct that bias or learn to listen more carefully to classmates whose different viewpoints may help them see beyond their own biases. Recognizing and correcting personal bias can be an invaluable meta-skill...."

### 3. Judgment

"Cases put students into the role of the case protagonist and force them to make and defend a decision," says Nohria. "The format leaves room for nuanced discussion, but not for waffling: Teachers push students to choose an option, knowing full well that there is rarely one correct answer. This enables them to develop the judgment of making decisions under uncertainty, communicating that decision to others, and gaining their buy-in...."

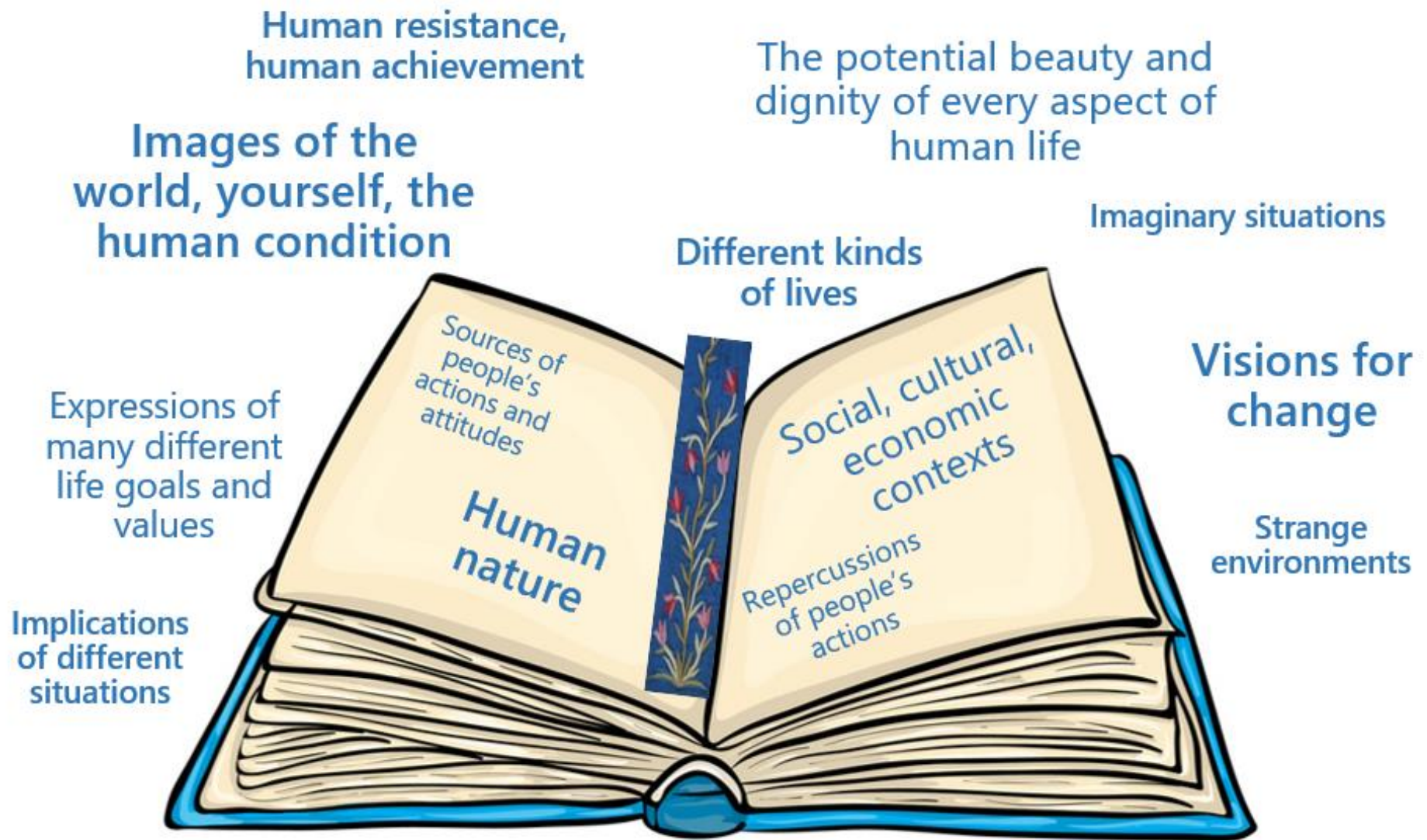
### 4. Curiosity

"Cases expose students to lots of different situations and roles.... "Each case offers an opportunity for students to see what resonates with them, what excites them, what bores them, and which roles they could imagine inhabiting in their careers. Cases stimulate curiosity about the range of opportunities in the world and the many ways that students can make a difference as leaders. This curiosity serves them well throughout their lives."

### 5. Self-confidence

"Students must inhabit roles during a case study that far outstrip their prior experience or capability.... *What would you do if you were the case protagonist?* is the most common question in a case discussion.... Even though they are imaginary and temporary, these 'stretch' assignments increase students' self-confidence that they can rise to the challenge."

Literature as a transaction between what you bring and the book



*Your insights, ideas, emotions, images, sense of  
wonder, interests, concerns, experiences*