



SOCI-2112 WDE: *Race, Homelessness and Social Justice in Contemporary Society*
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities / Department of Sociology
Winter 2026 (January – April)

Instructor Information

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Course Identification

Course Number: SOCI 2112
Course Name: *Race, Homelessness and Social Justice in Contemporary Society*
Course Location: Synchronous (Online)
Class Times: *Tuesday & Thursday 1:00-2:30 pm*
Prerequisites: N/A

Course Description/Overview

This course delves into the complex and interconnected issues of structural racism, housing insecurity, and health disparities within the Canadian context, with attention also paid to global dynamics. Employing a social justice lens, we will critically examine how entrenched systems of power and exclusion profoundly shape the lived realities of individuals experiencing homelessness, with a particular focus on those from racialized and marginalized communities. Drawing upon sociological theories, policy analysis, and the powerful insights of lived narratives, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental causes and far-reaching consequences of homelessness. We will also critically assess the effectiveness and equity of public health responses, social service provisions, and the vital work of grassroots advocacy movements. A significant emphasis will be placed on unraveling the historical and contemporary conditions that generate and perpetuate inequality. In this context, we will explore how capitalism, as a system, can produce inequality rooted in class hierarchies that confer both privilege and oppression. Furthermore, we will analyze how patriarchy functions to maintain and reproduce men's power within society, and how white supremacy operates to justify and perpetuate racial exploitation. By understanding these intersecting systems of power – capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy – alongside other forms of oppression, students will develop a nuanced understanding of the structural barriers that contribute to homelessness and health disparities. We will also explore the histories and ongoing efforts of social movements that challenge these inequalities and strive for a more just and equitable society.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze the structural determinants of homelessness and health disparities in Canada
- Evaluate the effectiveness and equity of societal responses to homelessness

- Apply sociological theories and policy analysis to understand the causes and consequences of homelessness
- Recognize the historical and contemporary conditions that perpetuate inequality and explore efforts for social change
- Articulate the intersections of multiple forms of oppression in the context of homelessness

Course Resources

- Required Course Text(s): Thistle, J. (2019). *From the ashes: My story of being Métis, homeless, and finding my way*. Simon & Schuster Canada.
 - Available for \$24.99 on Amazon
 - Available to borrow for free from the Lakehead library **OR** the Thunder Bay Public Library

Course Schedule

Date	Topic(s)	Assigned Reading(s)	Due Dates
Jan. 6 th & Jan. 8 th	Introduction: Framing Homelessness, Health Disparities, and Structural Racism in Canada		Online Intros. (5%)
Jan. 13 th & Jan. 15 th	Health Disparities among Homeless Populations	Berenbaum, E. (2019). Evidence brief: Homelessness and health outcomes: What are the associations? Public Health Ontario. https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/E/2019/eb-homelessness-health.pdf	
Jan. 20 th & Jan. 22 nd	Access to Healthcare for People Experiencing Homelessness Guest Speaker: Veronica Proper	Siersbaek, R., Ford, J. A., Burke, S., Cheallaigh, C. N., & Thomas, S. (2021). Contexts and mechanisms that promote access to healthcare for populations experiencing homelessness: a realist review. <i>BMJ open</i> , 11(4), e043091. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-043091	
Jan. 27 th & Jan. 29 th	Black & Indigenous homelessness	*Wilkinson et al., (2023). Filling in the Gaps: Estimating the Prevalence of Black Homelessness in Canada. <i>Housing, Care & Support</i> , 26(3/4), 103-114. https://doi.org/10.1108/HCS-04-2023-0006 *Kidd, S. A., Thistle, J., Beaulieu, T., O'Grady, B., & Gaetz, S. (2019). A national study of Indigenous youth homelessness in Canada. <i>Public Health</i> , 176, 163–171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.06.012	*Article Reflection #1 due on D2L*
Feb. 3 rd & Feb. 5 th	Sexual & Reproductive Health Experiences and Decision-Making	Schwan, K., Versteegh, A., Perri, M., Caplan, R., Baig, K., Dej, E., Jenkinson, J., Brais, H., Eiboff, F., & Pahlevan Chaleshtari, T. (2020). <i>The State of Women's Housing Need & Homelessness in Canada: Key Findings</i> . Hache, A.,	Media Analysis (10%)

	Among Homeless Women	Nelson, A., Kratochvil, E., & Malenfant, J. (Eds). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. https://homelesshub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/WG-ENKF5.1.pdf	
Feb. 10 th & Feb. 12 th	Homelessness in a Northern Context Guest Speaker: Rachel Michael	*Healey Akearok, G., Meadows, L. M., Koonoo, T., & Michael, K. (2021). Women's Health: What Does it Mean to "Be Well"? A Qualitative Case Study to Explore Inuit Women's Conceptions of Wellness. In Schiff, R., & Møller, H. (2021). <i>Health and Health Care in Northern Canada</i> (1st ed.). University of Toronto Press.	Article reflection #2 Practice Quiz (2%)
Winter Reading Week – No Classes (Feb. 16-20th)			
Feb. 24 th	Midterm Exam (25%)		
Mar. 3 rd & Mar. 5 th	Mental health, Substance Use and Harm Reduction	Milaney et al. (2021). Drug use, homelessness and health: responding to the opioid overdose crisis with housing and harm reduction services. <i>Harm reduction journal</i> , 18, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-021-00539-8 OR Jody and AZ (Hosts). <i>Breaking the Stigma: Unveiling Trauma and Addiction</i> . [Audio podcast]. https://www.ratracepodcast.com/breaking-the-stigma-unveiling-trauma-and-addiction/	Reflection #3 due on D2L
Mar. 10 th & Mar. 12 th	The impact of COVID-19 on homelessness	Richard, L., Carter, B., Wu, L., & Hwang, S. W. (2024). Disparities in all-cause mortality among people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cohort study. <i>Frontiers in Public Health</i> , 12, 1401662. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1401662	
Mar. 17 th & Mar. 19 th	Homeless Encampments, Criminalization and Policing	Olson, N., & Pauly, B. (2021). Homeless encampments: Connecting public health and human rights. <i>Canadian journal of public health</i> , 112(6), 988-991. https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-021-00581-w	Cultural Awareness Module
Mar. 24 th & Mar. 26 th	Public Health Responses and Social Service Provisions Guest Speaker: Champagne Thompson	Olson, N., & Pauly, B. (2022). 'Forced to Become a Community': Encampment Residents' Perspectives on Systemic Failures, Precarity, and Constrained Choice. <i>International Journal on Homelessness</i> , 3(2), 124–138. https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2022.2.14431	
Apr. 7 th & Apr. 9 th	Imagining and Building Solutions: Towards Housing Justice and Health Equity	Buccieri, K., Whitmore, N., Davy, J., & Gilmer, C. (2023). Ending homelessness in Canada: Reflections from researchers in the field. <i>International Journal on Homelessness</i> , 3(2), 237-251. https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2022.2.15213	Book Reflection Due
(TBD)	Final Exam (30%)		

****Schedule is subject to change****

Assessments:

Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to complete reflections on key readings and activities through online forums (i.e., D2L) to show their engagement with course content. This will be assessed throughout the term.

Comparative Media Analysis (10%)

This assignment asks you to critically examine how Canadian news media portrays racialized people experiencing homelessness, with particular attention to representations of Black and Indigenous individuals. You will compare two recent news pieces and reflect on what their portrayals suggest about broader media patterns and societal perceptions.

1) Select Two News Pieces

Choose **two** recent (published within five years) Canadian news articles or video segments from reputable news organizations. Each piece must prominently feature or discuss a **racialized person experiencing homelessness**.

You may use:

- News articles
- Video segments from recognized news outlets (e.g., CBC News)

2) Comparative Analysis:

Compare and analyze the two media pieces. Your discussion should address the following elements:

- **Visual Representation (if applicable):**
How are individuals portrayed visually? Consider framing, setting, emotional expression, and what the imagery emphasizes.
- **Language and Tone:**
What language is used to describe the person and their circumstances? Is the tone sympathetic, neutral, sensationalized, critical, or something else? Note any differences in word choice or narrative framing between the pieces.
- **Attribution of Causes:**
How does each piece explain or frame the reasons for the individual's homelessness?
 - Are systemic issues such as racism, colonialism, housing shortages, or poverty acknowledged?
 - Are individual factors (e.g., substance use, mental health, personal choices) emphasized differently?
- **Focus and Narrative:**
What aspects of their experience are highlighted?
Whose voices are centered—those of the individuals, service providers, police, community members?
What story is the piece trying to tell?

3) Reflection:

Reflect on what your comparison reveals. Consider:

- Do you notice any patterns, differences, or biases in how homelessness is portrayed across racial groups?
- What might these portrayals suggest about societal attitudes toward homelessness and racialized communities

Length: Maximum 3 pages (double-spaced)

Indigenous Relationship and Cultural Awareness Module (10%)

Complete one Indigenous Relationship and Cultural Awareness [module](#) from Ontario Health. You may choose any topic from the list provided. After completing the module, submit your certificate of completion **and a one-paragraph reflection**. In your reflection, briefly describe one key insight you gained, why it stood out to you, and how it connects to your understanding of Indigenous health, healthcare relationships, or the broader systemic issues we are discussing in class. You may also reflect on how the module challenged or expanded your own assumptions or prior knowledge.

Midterm Exam (25%)

Book Reflection Assignment (20%)

Jesse Thistle's *From the Ashes* offers a deeply personal account of homelessness, addiction, family separation, and the ongoing effects of colonialism on Métis peoples and communities. This assignment asks you to engage thoughtfully with Thistle's story and connect it to both broader systemic issues and your own lived experiences.

1. Deep Reflection on *From the Ashes*

Identify themes, moments, or ideas in the book that resonated with you. Consider:

- Experiences of displacement, family, identity, resilience, or conflict
 - Encounters with institutions (schools, child welfare, police, shelters, healthcare)
 - The impacts of colonialism, racism, and poverty on Thistle's life
- Explain why these moments stood out and how they helped you understand the complexity of Jesse Thistle's experiences.

2. Connection to Your Lived Experiences

Reflect on your own life and discuss **how your background, experiences, or social location** shaped the way you interpreted the book.

You may consider:

- Personal experiences with community, belonging, or identity
 - Encounters with systems or institutions
 - Observations from your family, community, or work/volunteer roles
 - Moments when the book challenged or affirmed what you previously believed
- Your reflection should focus on **insight**—share only what feels appropriate and meaningful to you.

3. Linking Personal Insight to Structural Issues

Connect your personal reflections to the broader systemic themes we've discussed in class, such as:

- Colonialism and intergenerational trauma
- Homelessness and housing precarity
- Criminalization and surveillance
- Poverty, racism, and social inequality

Discuss how your own perspective deepened your understanding of these structural issues as they appear in Thistle's story.

**Optional*:* You may include a small visual component (i.e., personal photos) if it enhances your reflection

Length: Maximum 4 pages (double-spaced)

Final Exam (25%)

Late Assignments

If you are registered with Accessibility Services and want to request an extension of time for an assignment in advance of the due date based on an accommodation letter, please reach out ahead of time. If there are extenuating circumstances that impact your ability to complete your work, please do not hesitate to contact me. Late assignments without authorized extensions will be penalized at the rate of 5% for each calendar date past the deadline. No assignment more than one week late will be accepted.

University Related Requirements

Regulations

It is the responsibility of each student registered at Lakehead University to be familiar with, and comply with all the terms, requirements, regulations, policies and conditions in the Lakehead University [Academic Calendar](#). This includes, but is not limited to, Academic Program Requirements, Academic Schedule of Dates, University and Faculty/School Policies and Regulations and the Fees and Refund Policies and Schedules.

Academic Integrity

A breach of Academic Integrity is a serious offence. The principle of Academic Integrity, particularly of doing one's own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students are strongly advised to familiarize themselves with the Student Code of Conduct - Academic Integrity ("[The Code](#)") - and, in particular, **sections 26 and 83 through 85**. Non-compliance with the Code will NOT be tolerated in this course and the Code will be adhered to in terms of disciplinary action. The Code provides a full description of academic offences, procedures when Academic Integrity breaches are suspected and sanctions for breaches of Academic Integrity.

Copyright (Information to consider including for online [asynchronous or synchronous] course delivery to assist in preventing the unauthorized distribution of course materials)

Students should be aware that all instructional, reference, and administrative materials prepared for this course are protected in their entirety by copyright. Students are expected to comply with this copyright

by only accessing and using the course materials for personal educational use related to the course, and that the materials cannot be shared in any way, without the written authorization of the course instructor. If this copyright is infringed in anyway, students may be prosecuted under the Lakehead University Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity, which requires students to act ethically and with integrity in academic matters and to demonstrate behaviours that support the University's academic values.

Instructors can use the following statement in your mycourselink/D2L site:

Copyright Compliance:

I understand and agree that all instructional, reference, and administrative materials to which I am given access in this course (the "course materials"), whether they consist of text, still or kinetic images, or sound, whether they are in digital or hard copy formats, and in whatever media they are offered, are protected in their entirety by copyright, and that to comply with this copyright and the law

(1) I may access and download the course materials only for my own personal and non-commercial use for this course; and

(2) I am not permitted to download, copy, or store (in any medium) any text, image, or sound component of the course materials for any other purpose whatsoever, or to forward or share, transmit, broadcast, show, post or play in public, adapt, or change in any way any text, image, or sound component of the course materials, except as expressly authorized, and only to the extent authorized, in writing, by the course instructor."

I further understand and agree that, if I infringe the copyright of the course materials in any way, I may be prosecuted under the Lakehead University Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity, which requires students to act ethically and with integrity in academic matters and to demonstrate behaviours that support the University's academic values.

Supports for Students – there are many resources available to support students. These include but are not limited to:

- [Health and Wellness](#)
- [Student Accessibility Centre](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Academic Support Zone](#)
- [Indigenous Student Services Centre](#)
- [International](#)
- [Student Central](#)

Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities and/or medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (Thunder Bay: SC0003, (807) 343-8047 or sas@lakeheadu.ca Orillia: OA 1030, (705) 330-4010 ext. 2103 or oraccess@lakeheadu.ca)

Mental Health Syllabi Statement

As a university student, you may sometimes experience mental health concerns or stressful events that interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily activities.

All of us can benefit from support during times of struggle. If you or anyone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events or feelings of anxiety or depression, Student Health and Wellness is here to help. Their services are free for Lakehead Students and appointments are available. You can learn more about confidential mental health services available on and off campus at lakeheadu.ca/shw.

Remember that getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do- for yourself, for those you care about, and for those who care about you. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

Example of an Evaluation Rubric for Social Sciences Research Paper				
Element	85-100	75-84	60-74	< 60
Writing Mechanics	- conforms to APA standards with no errors (headings, manuscript header, margins, page numbers, referencing style) - good spelling and grammar - very good sentence structure - paragraphs are well planned and have excellent flow	- conforms to APA standards (headings, manuscript header, margins, page numbers) - limited spelling or grammatical errors - good sentence structure and paragraph flow	- some mistakes in APA format - some spelling and grammatical mistakes - sentences are somewhat difficult to understand - paragraphs have too many ideas	- mistakes in APA format - mistakes in spelling and grammar take away from understanding - sentences are poorly structured - paragraphs are confusing
Research/ Referencing	- excellent referencing within the text - large number of journal articles - wide variety of sources (different journals, books and other information sources)	- good referencing within the text - more than 5 journal articles - variety of sources (different journals)	- missing some referencing in the text - only 5 journal articles - limited variety of sources (multiple use of same journal or edited volume)	- very limited referencing within the text - less than 5 journal sources (or includes web sources) - no variety of sources
Content	- all aspects of the assignment are completed - information is accurate, up to date and goes beyond what is required - information is synthesized and connected to course material, as well as connections being made between literature sources	- all aspects of the assignment are completed - information is accurate and up to date - good synthesis of information and connection between literature sources - well constructed argument and connects to conclusion	- missing some required elements of the assignment - some information is inaccurate or out of date - the information is summarized but not well connected to literature - argument is difficult to follow to the conclusion	- several missing elements - information is often inaccurate - there is limited connection between literature or purpose of paper - limited development of argument; no real conclusions

	– argument is well constructed and connects strongly to conclusion			
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