

**SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE CITY
(FYSM 1107 A)
DRAFT Winter 2026 Course Syllabus
Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, Carleton University**

Instructor: Meera Karunanathan (she/her)
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Office hours: by appointment
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Lectures: Fridays, 2:35 pm – 5:25 pm
Brightspace : <https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/365681>

Course playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3zijwoTp5Z3kSjKzkyJOyf>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this seminar course, we will explore the power dynamics that shape cities and urban life including capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism and ableism. The course blends critical urban geography theory with skill-building activities and conversations with “practitioners.” Through theoretical and practical assignments, we will study the strategies pursued and challenges faced by social movements and community-based initiatives working to create more just and equitable cities.

The course is also geared towards helping students feel comfortable, intellectually stimulated, and productive within the university environment. To this end, students will begin to develop skills in writing, critical thinking, problem solving and research. They will also improve on verbal communication skills by presenting their ideas in class.

Format and content for the winter semester were developed based on student input in the fall term. The content and activities will be organized around two broad themes: the “carceral city” and the “caring city”.

This semester, students may choose to either contribute 10 hours of volunteer time to a community or campus-based organization working on issues relevant to the course or propose an alternative self-directed learning project geared towards their own personal interests.

COURSE GOALS

Students taking this course will:

- Learn about and explore opportunities to apply critical urban theory;
- Critically examine different approaches to analyzing and creating social justice in the city;
- Develop academic skills including reading, writing, presenting, conducting research, and critical thinking;
- Apply theoretical knowledge through practical/experiential learning opportunities;
- Become familiar with services and programs to support their academic careers at Carleton.

COURSE FORMAT

This is a seminar or discussion-based course, which relies heavily on the active participation of students. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings and participate in activities.

Updates regarding assignments, field trips and lectures or workshops taking place outside the classroom will be posted on Brightspace.

Please take note of dates of graded class activities in the calendar. Students missing class on these days will need to provide a reasonable justification and make alternative arrangements with me no later than a week after the missed assignment. Multiple missed assignments will not be accommodated unless a student is experiencing extenuating circumstances.

COURSE MATERIALS

To purchase: Zoboi, Ibi Aanu, and Yusef Salaam. *Punching the Air*. Illustrated by Omar T. Pasha, First trade paperback edition., Balzer + Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2021

All other readings for the fall term are available on Brightspace through ARES, Carleton's electronic course reserve system or via links shared separately.

**Note that the lecture topics and course materials are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. You will receive updates via email and through Brightspace announcements.*

Please read your emails for updates.

EVALUATION

The table below provides a brief description of assignments and evaluation criteria. Detailed descriptions and guidelines can be found under assignments on Brightspace.

Assignment	Description	Weight
Contributions to the learning community	Evaluation is based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Attendance- Contributions to class discussions- Participation in class activities- Contributions to Brightspace discussion boards- Peer support (review the work of your classmates, share notes with classmates who missed a class etc.- Engagement with guest lecturers- Commitment to collaborative and inclusive learning environment- Contributions to student-led components of syllabus	15%

Reading reflections	<p>Each week, you will reflect on the assigned readings in your personal reading journal based on writing prompts and exercises conducted in class.</p> <p>Journals will be collected at the end of each session for review and participation credit. You will submit 500-750 word reflections on synthesizing your journal entries on multiple readings on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feb 27 (readings on Carceral Colonialism) - March 20 (readings on the Caring City) (Details on Brightspace) 	20%
Fishbowl	<p>We will continue to start each seminar with an interactive fishbowl activity. (See links to sign-up sheet for winter term on Google doc via Brightspace.)</p>	10%
Graded class activities	Feb 13 – Graded activity on “carceral colonialism” readings (10%)	30%
	February 28 – In-class activity on <i>Punching the Air</i> (10%)	
	March 28 – Graded activity on The Caring City readings 10%)	
Migrant justice literature review	<p>Group submission on migrant justice literature review.</p> <p><u>Due date:</u> January 30</p>	10%
Community engagement Or self-directed learning project	<p>Students will contribute 10 hours of volunteer time to a community organization. They will be required to submit a brief report once they have completed their volunteer work, no later than April 8.</p> <p>(See details on Brightspace.)</p>	15%

FYSM 1107 A WINTER TERM COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topics, activities, due date	Readings
Jan 9	Winter term course overview Review of key concepts	Course outline
Jan 16	Library visit and workshop	We will meet at MacOdrum Library, Rm 252B.
Jan 23	Migrant justice literature review	Group work based on readings selected in the fall semester.
THEME: The CARCERAL CITY		
Jan 30	Asynchronous Experiential activity <i>*Final migrant justice lit review project due</i>	Details to follow
Feb 6	Carceral colonialism part 1	Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik Stark. "Criminal Empire: The Making of the Savage in a Lawless Land." <i>Theory & Event</i> Vol. 19, Iss. 4, (2016). https://nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/stark-2016.pdf
Feb 13	Carceral colonialism part 2 <i>*There will be a graded activity on carceral colonialism readings</i>	M. Goldhawke, "A Condensed History of Canada's Colonial Cops: How the RCMP has secured the imperialist power of the north." <i>The New Inquiry</i> . March 10, 2020 https://thenewinquiry.com/a-condensed-history-of-canadas-colonial-cops/ Riddle,E. (2020) Abolish the Police: The Financial Cost of Law Enforcement in Prairie Cities. <i>The Yellowhead Institute</i> . https://yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/e-riddle-abolish-the-police-yi-brief.pdf

	Supplementary readings	<p>Group A: Chapters 1&7 in Herzing, Rachel, and Justin Piché. <i>How to Abolish Prisons : Lessons from the Movement Against Imprisonment</i>. First edition., Haymarket Books, 2024.</p> <p>Al Jazeera English. (2021, December 17). <i>Angela Davis on the argument for police and prison abolition</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnRUHYkjsx4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbSqlQmT2gc</p>
Feb 16-20	Reading week	Zoboi, Ibi Aanu, and Yusef Salaam. <i>Punching the Air</i> . Illustrated by Omar T. Pasha, First trade paperback edition., Balzer + Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2021.
Feb 27	<p>*Graded activity on book</p> <p>* Carcel City reading reflections due.</p>	Zoboi, Ibi Aanu, and Yusef Salaam. <i>Punching the Air</i> . Illustrated by Omar T. Pasha, First trade paperback edition., Balzer + Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2021.
THEME: THE CARING CITY		
Mar 6	Caring cities: urban policy and planning	Müller, H., Huning, S., & Böcker, N. (2025). <i>Caring Cities: Towards a Public Urban Culture of Care?</i> Urban Planning, 10(4), 255–265. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning/article/view/10016
Mar 13	Caring cities: neighbourhood organizing	Botha, L., Druta, O., & van Wesemael, P. (2025). <i>Prefiguring the Caring City: Everyday Practices and Postcapitalist Possibility in Neighborhood Living Rooms</i> . Urban Planning, 10(4), 278–289. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning/article/view/9940
Mar 20	<p>Climate justice and the city</p> <p>* Caring City reading reflections due.</p>	<p>Passidomo, C. (2014). Whose right to (farm) the city? race and food justice activism in post-katrina new orleans. <i>Agriculture and Human Values</i>, 31(3), 385-396. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9490-x</p> <p>Acorn (2024). <i>Engaging tenants in Climate Justice: A report on tenant's biggest climate issues, barriers and solutions</i>. Ottawa. https://acorncanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Ottawa-Climate-Report-2024.pdf</p>
Mar 27	Student-led	Details to follow
Apr 3 Statutory holiday (no class)		
April 8	*Community engagement reports/self-directed learning reports due	Details to follow

COURSE POLICIES

Submission of written assignments and late penalties

Assignments must be submitted on Brightspace on the due date. I do not accept assignments via email, google doc or in-person.

Late penalties will be enforced to ensure fairness in grading. Late assignments will be subject to a reduction of the overall mark at the rate of 5% for each calendar day past the due date. Assignments will not be accepted more than a week past the due date (after the beginning of the following class). Uploading will be programmed accordingly.

Communications

Questions of a general nature (i.e. requests for clarification on assignments or course content) should be posted on Brightspace in the discussion forum titled “questions for Meera”. The forum will be reviewed regularly and I will strive to answer your questions within 24 hours from Monday to Friday. For urgent matters and questions of a personal nature, email me using your Carleton email account, placing “FYSM 1107” in the subject heading. Please note that I may not respond to emails over the weekend.

Email is an acceptable medium for simple inquiries, but not complex questions. If your question cannot be answered in a sentence or two, please schedule a meeting.

Grades

In accordance with the Carleton University Calendar, the letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C + = 67-69	D+ = 56-59	F = Below 50
A = 85-89	B = 73 - 76	C = 63-66	D = 53-56	
A - = 80-84	B - = 70-72	C - = 60 -62	D- = 50-52	

To be considered in good standing, students must receive a grade of D- . Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Drop date

Please consult the Carleton University Calendar for the last day in the term to withdraw from a course with full fee adjustment at: <https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>

Netiquette

All students are expected to adhere to Carleton University's Expectations of Student Behaviour Online while participating in Brightspace discussion boards. For more details see: <https://carleton.ca/online/online-learning-resources/netiquette/>

If you have any questions or concerns about [online conduct](#), please contact the Manager of Student Conduct and Harm Reduction, Dillon Brady, at DillonBrady@cunet.carleton.ca.

You will find more information at:

- <https://carleton.ca/online/online-learning-resources/online-discussion-tips/>

Copyright of Course Content

Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copyright protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s)."

INSTRUCTIONAL AND CONDUCT OFFENCES

Carleton University has clear and firm policies regarding instructional and conduct offences. Instructional offences include among other activities cheating, contravening examination regulations, plagiarism (see details below) and submitting similar work in two or more courses without prior permission. Further information about University regulations which define and regulate these offences can be found at:

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Plagiarism

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own; and

- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Using AI tools to generate content for assignments, and presenting it as one's own original work, as well as copying or paraphrasing the content produced by AI tools without proper citations or the instructor's consent, are both considered to be in violation of academic integrity.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

ACADEMIC ACCOMODATIONS

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, please review the [Student Guide to Academic Accommodation \(PDF, 2.1 MB\)](#)

Religious obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, please review the [Student Guide to Academic Accommodation \(PDF, 2.1 MB\)](#)

Academic Accommodations for students with disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the [Paul Menton Centre website](#).

Survivors of sexual violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit the [Equity and Inclusive Communities website](#).

Accommodation for student activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for

accommodation is known to exist. For more details, see the [Senate Policy on Accommodation for Student Activities \(PDF, 25KB\)](#)

CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

For information about resources and services for students including counselling services, academic support and writing tutorial services please visit: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/current-students/student-resources/>

Student Mental Health

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

Services for Indigenous Students:

The Centre for Indigenous Support and Community Engagement (CISCE), formerly known as the Centre for Indigenous Initiatives, supports First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis students, staff, and faculty by providing culturally safe spaces for dialogue and learning. The Centre provides weekly, monthly and annual programming for students and also develops and delivers resources and training to educate the Carleton community about Indigenous histories, worldviews and perspectives. To learn more about the services offered, please visit <https://carleton.ca/indigenous/cisce/students/>. If you have any questions, you can email Indigenous@carleton.ca