

IST1001-1-WI14  
**Identity, Power and Difference**  
**Course Syllabus**

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## Course Description

Identity, Power, and Difference cultivates students' ability to engage in social and theological analysis, particularly about social structures, ideologies, and embodied practices that lead to domination or oppression. It helps students think critically about their own social locations, their power and privilege, and what effect these have on their professional and vocational contexts (as pastors, ministers, educators, and religious and non-profit community leaders). The course takes the perspective that this sort of analysis is crucial to serving effectively in today's complex social environment. It encourages students to deepen their commitment to dismantling privilege and oppression at individual, institutional, and societal levels. It also seeks to help students move within their varied levels of awareness about matters of power and difference to action. This course embodies Iliff's core commitments to respect difference and foster just relationships both in this context and beyond the school.

**All readings are posted on canvas. No books need to be purchased for this course.**

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## Overview and Objectives

IPD is founded on the idea that the social and theological analyses required of religious (and other) leaders is most effectively done when one is aware of one's own social location and identity within the matrices of difference and power within their cultural and religious contexts. It helps students to develop and/or enhance professional skills for working sensitively and openly across difference and becoming social justice allies. Skills include: analyzing systemic oppression, understanding one's social location in light of that analysis, becoming aware of one's own assumptions and patterns of response, becoming willing to work in the midst of uncertainty, becoming prepared to take risks and fail and still take the risks again, developing constructive practices of alliance, resistance, and resilience.

Identity, Power, and Difference is a course without easy answers that requires honest, paradoxical, and critical thinking. As we move into this work together, we find the words of Kathleen Talvacchia from her book *Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts: A Spirituality of Multicultural Teaching* particularly helpful: "I often remind myself (and others at the seminary) of an important reality: It is not that there is a solution already in existence that will assist us in

negotiating the necessary conflicts that social structural difference and diversity impose, one that we are refusing to implement. Rather, we are creating in our struggles a blueprint that we can bring to our work in the world. It is the profound work of co-creation with God and prophetic reimagining forming new models of community in a pluralistic world. We are discovering ways to live in diversity that respect difference and foster just relationships.” (3)

Accordingly, the course is organized around 5 themes. Each theme will occupy us for 2 weeks. The first week we will engage materials that are largely orienting and contextual, the second week we will engage materials that are largely theological.

## **Learning Objectives**

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By the end of the course, the student will be able to:

- Identify their social location critically and its shifting, contingent nature; move from individualistic to structural conceptualizations of the nature of identity, power and difference.
- Consider the ways in which social structures, systems, and institutions (impersonal forces) are real and have real effects on human bodies; interrogate how we exercise power through our entanglements in a web of oppression and privilege.
- Deploy theological, personal, and social tools to recognize and respond to the dynamics of privilege, oppression, and power playing out intrapersonally, interpersonally, in ministry/work contexts, and in the larger world.
- Grapple with what it means to engage in this analysis and action as a life-long commitment to effectively and intentionally implement the work of justice and peace.
- Struggle with the demands of being in solidarity/allyship across multiple axes of difference in various contexts of power and privilege in which we are connected historically and communally.

## **Expectations and Evaluation**

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Students are expected to come to each class having prepared the materials listed for that class so that they can participate fully in our discussions and activities. Preparation in many cases will require more than a once-through reading. It will require re-reading, mulling, out of class discussion, note taking, etc.

Students are expected to participate fully in class discussions. Classes like this live or die by the quality of the conversations. You have a moral obligation to the education of your colleagues to come prepared, and to participate fully. Some of the readings are hard, because they are sophisticated analyses, and/or because they touch on issues of central importance to our identities. There may be times when each of us gets angry or defensive. Students are expected to interact with each other with civility and respect (please note that respect does not mean pretending to agree with each other when we do not—in fact we will need each other’s help push each other to engage the materials as deeply as possible).

Students will complete 2 written assignments: the Social Construction of Difference Chart and the Critical Family Genealogy.

The Social Construction of Difference Chart is due on the second week of class. Please make sure you have access to your chart during class, and prepare for a discussion with the guiding questions at the bottom of the chart.

The Critical Family Genealogy is due week seven.

On the first day of class each student will sign up to lead our discussion of one of the class readings/movies/videos/poems. Discussion should be designed to encourage a habit of discussion that is open, respectful, and rigorous. This is best accomplished when leaders and discussers take a charitable stance towards the readings. As in any good conversation, it is important first to try to see where the writer is coming from, rather than to be dismissive of his or her ideas. Only when that is accomplished are you in a position to decide what is useful to you and what is not. We must begin with an accurate understanding of what is actually going on in the material.

### **Grading**

Class participation:	30 %
Social Construction of Difference Chart:	10 %
Critical Family Genealogy:	30 %
Leading class:	30 %

## Course Schedule

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### I. The Social Construction of Difference

**W 1/8**

Reading:

Johnson, "What It All has to do with Us"

Omi and Winant, "Racial Formations"

**W 1/15**

Deloria, "Thinking in Time and Space"

Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, excerpt

### II. The Relationship Between Privilege and Oppression

**W 1/22**

Reading:

Harding, "American Bondage, American Freedom: Shaping the Struggle"

Hernandez, "Becoming a Black Man"

Tanis et al, "The Tragedy of a Failed Politic"

**W 1/29**

Reading:

Anzaldúa, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness"

Hawley Gorsline, Robin. "Shaking the Foundations: White Supremacy in the Theological Academy."

### III. How Oppression/Privilege Works Intersectionally

**W 2/5**

Reading:

Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy"

Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"

**W 2/12**

Reading:

Vasquez, "Rethinking Mestizaje"

Movie:

"Crash" (students must view before class. It is available on Netflix; instructors will also arrange a viewing)

### IV. Modes of Resistance

**W 2/19**

Reading:

Wise, "Resistance"

Case, "Claiming White Social Location as a Site of Resistance to White Supremacy"  
Olsson, "Detour Spotting (for white anti-racists)"

**W 2/26**

Reading:

Jennings, "Introduction" to *The Christian Imagination*

Merton, "Toward a Theology of Resistance"

**V. Solidarity/Allyship, Action**

**W 3/5**

Reading:

Evans and Washington, "Becoming an Ally: A New Examination"

Video:

West, "On Solidarity" Breaking the Shackles of Capitalism and the Occupy Movement"

**W 3/12**

Reading:

Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities* (chap. 5)

Spoken Word Poetry:

Mark Gonzales, "As With Most Men"

Suheir Hammad, "On the Brink of... for Rachel Corrie,"

## **Policies And Services**

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### **Academic Integrity and Community Covenant**

All students are expected to abide by Iliff's statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook. All participants in this class are expected to be familiar with Iliff's Community Covenant.

### **Accommodations**

Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at [advising@iliff.edu](mailto:advising@iliff.edu) or by phone at 303-765-1146.

### **Writing Lab**

Grammar and organization are important for all written assignments. Additional help is available from the Iliff Writing Lab, which is available for students of any level who need help beginning an assignment, organizing thoughts, or reviewing a final draft.

### **Inclusive Language**

It is expected that all course participants will use inclusive language in speaking and writing, and will use terms that do not create barriers to classroom community.

## **Degree Learning Goals**

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MDiv Degree Learning Goals supported by this class

1. Demonstrate personal and professional self-awareness and emerging competency in characteristic practices of religious leadership
- 4.1 Articulate a vision for increased social justice in relationships, communities, institutions, and systems and structures of power
- 4.3 Demonstrate an awareness of the importance of social location (race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability/disability, etc.) for self-understanding and professional practice
- 4.4 Complete a power analysis of systems and relationships and make strategic decisions for how one intervenes as a religious leader

MAPSC Degree Learning Goal supported by this class

1. Students will identify and critically evaluate the ways in which their personal, religious, and cultural experience, along with their activities in pastoral and spiritual care, shape their theology, moral orientation, and vocational formation.

MASC Degree Learning Goal supported by this class

1. Students will demonstrate personal and professional self awareness, including strategies for continued spiritual development and self-care, an awareness of the importance of social location for self-understanding and professional practice, and an ability to clearly interpret one's beliefs and behavior to the community one serves.

\* Note: The instructors reserve the right to change the syllabus or other parts of the course as needed.