



SOCW 4199 Independent Study

Spring 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor:

Rich Kenney, LMSW
Professor of Practice in Social Work

Office:

College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) #152A

Telephone Number: 903-565-6431

Email Address (preferred method of communication): richardkenney@uttyler.edu

Faculty Profile:

Office Hours: Tue:10-11 AM & 4-5 PM; Fri: 10-11 AM & 4-5 PM (Other appointment times available by appointment or via video conferencing)

Course Information

Credit Hours: 1 Credit Hour

Course Format: Online

Time and Place of Class Meetings: Online

Description of Course Content:

Examines the issues of adoption, foster care, and family separation based on the historical novel, *Before We Were Yours* by Lisa Wingate. The novel is based on the real-life orphanage called the Tennessee Children's Home Society that operated in Memphis from the 1920s to the 1950s. Wingate includes glimpses of the harsh conditions of life of children living in the orphanage with themes of family and identity.

Student Learning Outcomes for SOCW 4199:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate the following outcomes:

- Demonstrate an understanding of ethical issues related to foster care, adoption, and family separation.
- Develop modern-day strategies to identify and prevent political corruption from occurring based on what happened at the Tennessee Children's Home Society.
- Reflect on how the novel challenges one's personal values and professional responsibilities in relation to child protection.
- Demonstrate an understanding of empathy by putting oneself in the shoes of the novel's characters experiencing trauma and injustice.
- Demonstrate the ability to write well-structured, insightful papers relative to the topics of adoption, foster care, and child placement.

Methods of Instruction:

An online class on Canvas in which students write several reaction papers to questions centered on the themes of adoption, foster care, and child placement.

Required Textbook:

Wingate, Lisa. (2022). *Before We Were Yours*. Ballantine Books.

Descriptions of Major Assignments

Read the novel, *Before We Were Yours*, by Lisa Wingate.
January 12, 2026 – February 9, 2026

Section One – Due by Monday, February 9, 2026 (Worth 150 Points) (*minimum of 300 words for each part*)

Part 1: When the sisters were originally reunited, they decided to keep their history to themselves rather than telling their families. Do you agree or disagree with this decision? What do you think the implications would have been if they had gone public?

Part 2: Select one of the following from the "Before We Were Yours – Questions" document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Section Two – Due by Monday, February 23, 2026 (Worth 150 Points) (*minimum of 300 words for each part*)

Part 1: While Rill sees her life on the Arcadia through the idyllic eyes of childhood, May in her old age seems to acknowledge that she wouldn't have traded the life she lived for a different one. Do you think she wonders whether Queenie and Briny's unconventional existence on the Arcadia would have been sustainable as times changed or more children were added to the family? Were Queenie and Briny responsible or careless in their choices?

Part 2: Select one of the following from the "Before We Were Yours – Questions" document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Section Three – Due by Monday, March 9, 2026 (Worth 150 Points)
(minimum of 300 words for each part)

Part 1: Child trafficking, abuse and economic disadvantage still imperil the lives and futures of children today. What can we as ordinary citizens do to prevent children from being robbed of safe, happy childhoods? What can society do to prevent people like Georgia Tann from taking advantage of the most helpless and vulnerable among us?

Part 2: Select one of the following from the “Before We Were Yours – Questions” document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Section Four – Due by Monday, March 23, 2026 (Worth 150 Points)
(minimum of 300 words for each part)

Part 1: Did you search for more information about Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children's Home Society after reading BEFORE WE WERE YOURS? What did you learn? Based on what you learned, what do you think motivated Georgia Tann? Why were so many people willing to be complicit in her schemes when they knew children were suffering? Was Georgia's network a creature of the political corruption and societal attitudes of its time or could something like this happen today?

Part 2: Select one of the following from the “Before We Were Yours – Questions” document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Section Five – Due by Monday, April 6, 2026 (Worth 150 Points)
(minimum of 300 words for each part)

Part 1: How would you describe Rill as she struggles through the abduction, the orphanage, and her decision to return to her adoptive family? Did you admire her? What changes did you see in her as a result of the experience? How is she different when she gets to the Sevier's house?

Part 2: Select one of the following from the “Before We Were Yours – Questions” document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Final Paper – Due by Wednesday, April 29, 2026 (Worth 250 Points)
(minimum of 300 words for each part)

Part 1: Did you wish all seven of the Foss siblings could have found one another in the end? In your opinion, would that have been realistic or unrealistic? Why do you think the author chose not to bring all of the siblings back together?

Part 2: Will you be passing the book on to someone else? Will it remain on your bookshelf? Will you give a copy to someone you know? Explain why or why not?

Part 3: Select one of the following from the “Before We Were Yours – Questions” document located on the Files tab in Canvas and answer it in 300 words: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

Assignments: Scores will be assigned to written materials, based on the following criteria:

- a. **Thoroughness & Breadth** (Provides sufficient responses so as to provide coverage of the topic or in order to demonstrate a level of mastery of the skills)
- b. **Depth & Integration** (Demonstrates an integration of readings and understanding of the concepts through submitted assignments, portfolio and discussion forums on Sakai.)
- c. **Clarity & Understanding** (The submitted materials are easily readable or viewable and correct grammar and spelling are used on forums.)
- d. **Accuracy** (Extent to which the written responses are focused on the question and provide reliable information to colleagues.)
- e. **Critical Analysis** (The written materials demonstrate a critical analysis of the research literature studied.)

Grading Procedures:

Each exam and assignment will be graded on a point system used to calculate the final grade for the course.

Calculation of Final Grade

Sections One through Five (750 Points) +Final Paper (250 Points)

Total Points Available for Course=1000

Final Grades

900-1000 Points = A (90%-100%)

800-899 Points = B (80%- 89%)

700-700 Points = C (70%-79%)

600-699 Points = D (60%-69%)

590 or less = F (59% or less)

Late Assignments

Students are responsible for submitting all assignments on time. There will be 5 points per day deducted for each late assignment. No assignment will be accepted after 5 days following the due date. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her work is completed on time and submitted correctly.

Expectations for Out-of-Class Study:

Beyond the time required to attend each class meeting, students enrolled in this course should expect to spend at least an additional 3 hours per week of their own time in course-related activities, including reading required materials, completing assignments, preparing for exams, etc.

Attendance:

Engaged and timely participation in all assignments constitutes "attendance" for purposes of this course. This course is taught in an online format.

The **Census Date for the semester is January 26, 2026**. This is the last day students may withdraw from the course without penalty.

Schedule (see Canvas tools for specific activities/assignments)

Weeks 1 through 4 – Read *Before We Were Yours*

January 12, 2026 – February 9, 2026

Week 5 – Section One Due (2/9/26)

Section One – Due by Monday, February 9, 2026 (Worth 150 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.)

Week 6 – Review Before We Were Yours

Week 7 – Section Two Due (2/23/26)

Section Two – Due by Monday, February 23, 2026 (*Worth 150 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.*)

Week 8 – Review Before We Were Yours

Week 9 – Section Three Due (3/9/26)

Section Three – Due by Monday, March 9, 2026 (*Worth 150 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.*)

Week 10 – Review Before We Were Yours

Week 11 – Section Four Due (3/23/26)

Section Four – Due by Monday, March 23, 2026 (*Worth 150 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.*)

Week 12 – Review Before We Were Yours

Week 13 – Section Five Due (4/6/26)

Section Five – Due by Monday, April 6, 2026 (*Worth 150 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.*)

Weeks 14 and 15 – Review Before We Were Yours

Finals Week: April 27 – May 1

Final Paper – Due by Wednesday, April 29, 2026 (*Worth 250 Points – see details in Descriptions of Major Assignments listed in this syllabus as well as in the Canvas Assignments tab.*)

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO MODIFY THIS SYLLABUS AT ANY TIME. PLEASE ATTEND CLASS REGULARLY AND PAY ATTENTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENTS IN CANVAS TO KEEP CURRENT WITH ANY SYLLABUS MODIFICATIONS.

Institutional Information

UT Tyler Honor Code

Every member of the UT Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.

Students Rights and Responsibilities

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link:

<http://www.utt Tyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>

Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students 21 and over who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and

keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at <http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php>

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Statement

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool.

Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy

You can use AI programs (ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) in this course. These programs can be powerful tools for learning and other productive pursuits, including completing assignments in less time, helping you generate new ideas, or serving as a personalized learning tool. However, your ethical responsibilities as a student remain the same. You must follow UT Tyler's Honor Code and uphold the highest standards of academic honesty. This applies to all uncited or improperly cited content, whether created by a human or in collaboration with an AI tool. **If you use an AI tool to develop content for an assignment, you must cite the tool's contribution to your work.** You will not earn full credit if inaccurate, invalid, or inappropriate information is found in your work.

Format for using AI in SOCW 4199

If you use AI tools in this course for any assignment, you must address each of the following bullet points:

- What generative AI tool(s) did you use for this assignment? Be sure to cite this information in your References section.
- What was your initial prompt?
- How did you refine your initial prompt to improve your AI generated output?
- How did you evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the AI-generated content before using its output for this assignment? In other words, when you evaluated the output, what types of factors did you consider (i.e. accuracy, bias, relevancy, consistency, etc.)? For example, if you determined the output to be accurate, what steps did you take to determine the output was accurate?

AI Glossary

- Prompt: text input that provides instructions to the AI model on how to generate output. (Google, n.d.)
- Input: the prompt and/or content that the user enters into the AI model. (University of Texas at Austin, & Grammarly, (2023)
- Output: the content that the AI model creates in response to the user input. (University of Texas at Austin, & Grammarly, 2023)
- Iteration: the process of refining your prompt based on the AI's output. (Google, n.d.)

References

Google. (n.d.). *Google AI Essentials*. [Online course]. Coursera.
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/google-ai-essentials>

University of Texas at Austin, & Grammarly. (2023). *The faculty guide to getting started with generative AI*. University of Texas at Austin.
<https://campustechnology.com/Whitepapers/2024/11/Grammarly-Guide-to-Getting-Started-with-Gen-AI.aspx#:~:text=Created%20in%20collaboration%20between%20UT,and%20adaptable%20to%20various%20subjects>.

UT Tyler a Tobacco-Free University

All forms of tobacco will not be permitted on the UT Tyler main campus, branch campuses, and any property owned by UT Tyler. This applies to all members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, University affiliates, contractors, and visitors.

Forms of tobacco not permitted include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, water pipes (hookah), bidis, kreteks, electronic cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, and all other tobacco products.

There are several cessation programs available to students looking to quit smoking, including counseling, quitlines, and group support. For more information on cessation programs please visit www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free.

Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies

Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at <http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar>. Each semester's Census Date can be found on the Contract itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar.

Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. These include:

- Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a "W" grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waiver through Financial Aid State-Mandated

Course Drop Policy

Texas law prohibits a student who began college for the first time in Fall 2007 or thereafter from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. This includes courses dropped at another 2-year or 4-year Texas public college or university. For purposes of this rule, a dropped course is any course that is dropped after the census date (See Academic Calendar for the specific date).

Exceptions to the 6-drop rule may be found in the catalog. Petitions for exemptions must be submitted to the Enrollment Services Center and must be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have any questions.

Disability/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit <https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler> and fill out the New Student application.

The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with Cynthia Lowery, Assistant Director of Student Services/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at <http://www.utt Tyler.edu/disabilityservices>, the SAR office located in the University Center, # 3150 or call 903.566.7079.

Student Absence due to Religious Observance

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester.

Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

Social Security and FERPA Statement

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; grades will not be transmitted electronically.

Emergency Exits and Evacuation

Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructor's directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

Student Standards of Academic Conduct

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

- i. "Cheating" includes, but is not limited to:
 - copying from another student's test paper;
 - using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
 - failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
 - possession during a test of materials which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class notes or specifically designed "crib notes". The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if they have been specifically prohibited by the person administering the test;
 - using, buying, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program;

- collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
 - discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
 - divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
 - substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
 - paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
 - falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
 - taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and
 - misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.
- ii. "Plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit.
- iii. "Collusion" includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.
- iv. All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.

UT Tyler Resources for Students

- [UT Tyler Writing Center](#) (903.565.5995), writingcenter@uttyler.edu
- [UT Tyler Tutoring Center](#) (903.565.5964), tutoring@uttyler.edu
- The Mathematics Learning Center, RBN 4021, this is the open access computer lab for math students, with tutors on duty to assist students who are enrolled in early-career courses.
- [UT Tyler Counseling Center](#) (903.566.7254)