THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

S.W. 624 Section 002
Interpersonal Practice with Groups
Winter, 2001

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1. Course Description:

This course will build on the content presented in course 540 (i.e., Theory and Practice of Interpersonal Practice) and focus on the processes of intervention in task and individual change groups. Particular attention will be given to the recruitment and composition of group members, leadership structure of small groups, phases of group development, and such group processes as decision-making, tension reduction, conflict resolution, goal setting, contracting, and evaluation. Students will learn how to assess and address group problems, such as scapegoating, member resistance, low morale, over-active deviance, etc. They will learn to employ a variety of intragroup strategies and techniques, such as programs, structured activities, exercises, etc. Theories and methods consistent with the achievement of social justice through group work practice will be emphasized. This course will also consider how gender, ethnicity, race, social class, sexual orientation, and different abilities impact on various aspects of group functioning, such as purpose, composition, leadership, selection of intervention strategies, and group development.

2. Course Content:

This course briefly reviews the history of social group work practice in the United States and discusses the various kinds of task and individual change groups (e.g. teams, committees, consciousness raising, support, treatment, developmental, social action, self-help, internet, etc.) found in contemporary social work practice. This course will also discuss how groups can be used to promote well-being, to prevent social problems, to treat existing problems, and to rehabilitate clients with severe conditions that are not amenable to more time-limited interventions. The various factors associated with group effectiveness in both task and individual change groups will be presented as well as those factors that have been designed to reduce the potentially negative and deleterious consequences of group interventions.

Various models of stages of group development in both task and individual change groups and in both open-ended and closed-ended groups will be presented. The implications for leadership styles, the kinds of group dynamics, and the kinds of group interventions in each stage will be discussed. Various structural properties of groups such as sociometry, communication, norms,
roles, status, power, and geography will be presented as they relate to the stages of group development. Group processes such as decision making, task achievement, conflict resolution, tension reduction, and contracting will also be related to stages of group development.

All phases of the treatment process from recruitment and composition to assessment, goal formulation, evaluation, intervention, and termination will be presented with special consideration of how these phases may be modified to account for the race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability of clients. Evaluation procedures designed to determine the effectiveness of various interventions that can be incorporated into small groups will be presented that also take into account the special needs of clients. Course content will include ethical issues that relate to the practice of social work with groups and those elements of the NASW code of ethics that especially impact on group practice.

3. Course Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the differences between task, individual change, promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation groups and how these groups are employed in contemporary social work practice.

2. Assess the effectiveness of various kinds of groups and the various interventions that group leaders and facilitators utilize.

3. Operationalize various models of group development in both open and closed groups and recognize how these various stages impact on group dynamics.

4. Identify common problems that emerge in group practice and intervene to resolve these problems.

5. Plan and carry out various structured activities and group interventions that take into account the phases of group development and the special needs of group members.

6. Describe the impact of race, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, special abilities, and privilege on the dynamics of group structure and process in small groups.

7. Operationalize the NASW Code of Ethics as it applies to value dilemmas in social group work practice.

4. Course Design:

This course will employ a number of pedagogical strategies to promote knowledge and skill development, such as reading assignments, case analyses, interactive media simulations, in vivo exercises, role play simulations within the classroom, modeling and video demonstrations, and didactic presentations of theory/models/procedures. Whenever possible, graded assignments will be tied to the field placement experiences of students.
5. Relationship to Four Curricular Themes:

- **Multiculturalism and Diversity:** Race, gender, SES, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and disability have an impact on membership and composition, which in turn, influence various aspects of group dynamics. Leadership, status, sociometry, norms, conflict resolution, and communication in groups are dramatically affected by issues of diversity and must be accounted for by social workers in planning and facilitating various kinds of groups.

- **Social Justice and Social Change:** The history of social group work emerges from that part of social work’s history concerned various reform movements in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Though therapy groups have emerged as the primary venue in the last two decades, there are efforts to redirect group work to its more traditional roots. There is renewed interest in working with youth gangs, immigrants, homeless people, HIV/AIDS survivors, and with residents of SRO’s (Single Room Occupancy).

- **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation:** Though methods courses tend to emphasize treatment models, this course will examine at least one promotion and prevention model of groups and at least one rehabilitation model of groups. This course will also describe the similarities and differences between these kinds of groups.

- **Behavioral and Social Science Research:** This course will rely on group dynamic theory and on empirical research on the effectiveness of various group interventions and models.

6. Relationship of Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

Social workers must understand when groups are contraindicated for particular clients and must be able to assertively intervene in group processes when group experiences are harming group members. Ethical issues such as client confidentiality, forced participation, and involuntary treatment are considered as they impact social work with groups.

7. Source Materials:

A. **Books and Articles**


B. Journals

*Group and Organizational Studies*
*International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*
*Journal of Multicultural Social Work*
*Small Group Behavior*
*Small Group Research*
*Social Service Review*
*Social Work*
*Social Work with Groups*
Course Texts:

Required:


Coursepack: Ulrich’s (Grade A Notes)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan. 10</th>
<th>Introduction to Group Work: Types, terminology; group work as a practice choice in social work settings.</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Reid (text), Chapter 1</td>
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<th>Jan. 17</th>
<th>The Group Worker: Basic tasks, the personhood of the worker, the “wounded healer.”</th>
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<th>Therapeutic (curative) Factors</th>
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<td>Reid (text), Chapter 3</td>
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<td>Yalom (text), Chapters 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<th>Barriers to Group Recruitment and Composition: Agency ideology, politics, funding, societal objectives.</th>
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<th>Feb. 7</th>
<th>Group Formation and Stages of Development</th>
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<td>Reid (text), Chapters 4 &amp; 10</td>
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<td>Yalom (text), Chapter 11</td>
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Feb. 14  Multicultural Awareness: Assessing Group Members as Individuals

Reid (text), Chapter 5


Feb. 21  Working in the “Here & Now”

Reid (text), Chapters 7 & 8

Yalom (text), Chapter 6

### Feb. 28
**NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS**

### Mar. 7
**Advanced Group Dynamics: Roles, Communication Patterns, Conflict, Sub-Grouping, Self-Disclosure**

- Reid (text), Chapter 12
- Yalom (text), Chapters 12 & 13


### Mar. 14
**Transference, Countertransference: Handling Reactions Within the Group; Utilizing Supervision**

- Yalom (text), Chapter 7

### Mar. 21
**Termination and Methods of Evaluation**

- Reid (text), Chapter 13


### Mar. 28  
**Historical and Ethical Contexts in Group Work**

Reid (text), Chapter 2


### Apr. 4  
**Specialized Groups: Task, Activity, Skill-Building, Psychoeducation, Psychodrama, Prevention**

Reid (text), Chapter 11


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**Apr. 11**

13 **Self-Help Groups and Organizations: A Comparison to Professionally Led Groups. Referrals and Collaboration**

(c) Powell, T.J. (1990) Self-help, professional help, and informal help, competing or complementary systems? *Working with Self-Help* (pp. 31-49). NASW Press, Silver Spring, MD.

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**Apr. 18**

14 **FINAL EXAM**
Assignments/Grading

I. Expectations for Class participation

- Thoughtful contributions to class discussions
- Evidence to support application of content in readings
- Case examples from field placement or practice experience
- Interactive involvement in experiential, in-class group exercises/activities
- Attendance

II. Paper - 30% Due: Feb. 21, 2001

- Choose one of the following A → F
- Length – 6 to 8 double-spaced pages

A. Multicultural Competence as a Group Worker

Write a self-evaluation identifying characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, developmental experiences, values, strengths, and limitations. What makes you uniquely qualified as a group worker? How have your own cultural life experiences prepared you to work effectively with people who have a different world view? Can you identify any areas of cultural bias? If so, what steps could you take to challenge your biases? Discuss a specific interaction in a group in which you were a member or leader that involves the operationalization of diversity.

B. Group Proposal

Choose a particular population (i.e., adolescents who have experienced the death of a parent, HIV-positive gay males, women with recurring depression, elderly who are alcohol-dependent, domestic violence, children of divorce, etc.). If possible, design a group that could be offered in your practicum agency; or write about how a group already offered could be improved. Your proposal should address criteria for admission, recruitment procedures, composition, number of sessions, whether membership will be closed or open, and the physical setting. Identify potential problems or barriers within the agency that might complicate or delay starting the group. How could you resolve these complications? Describe leader and member expectations as well as what procedures and techniques you will use in your group.

C. Roots of Group Work

Visit a settlement house (e.g. in Detroit, the Franklin Wright Center; in Chicago, Hull House; in New York, Henry Street Settlement) or a community center (e.g. Ann Arbor Community Center, YMCA, YWCA, JCC, Brightmoor Community Center, Detroit; Friendly Center, Toledo). Try to get an appointment with the program director.
and interview them to discover the kinds of services being provided today. Find out about the group-oriented services in operation. Learn what you can about how an agency that played a role in the development of social group work incorporates groups into their current programming. In your paper, describe what you have learned and relate this to historical material in the readings.

D. The “Future” of Group Work?

Participate or observe (lurk) in a telephone or electronic group and reflect on how the process in that group compares to what you would experience in a live group. Do similar developmental stages occur? What group structures develop (leadership, norms, etc.)? What problems or advantages result from the lack of face to face contact in the group? For example, do composition issues change in the electronic or telephone context? Is communication hampered by the lack of visual feedback? What unique aspects of groups emerge in these technological settings?

E. Teams

The two most common task groups for social workers are “teams” and “case conferences”. Unfortunately, these common group experiences are sometimes the most negative experiences for practitioners. If you are placed in an agency setting that utilizes interdisciplinary teams or frequently holds case conferences about clients, then you will have an opportunity to apply your knowledge of group dynamics to analyze the effectiveness of these kinds of professional groupings. In this assignment, analyze those aspects of group structure (leadership, norms, status, etc.) and group process (cohesion, decision-making, conflict resolution, etc.) that clarify some of the struggles that this group experiences when it tries to function, or shed light on why it functions effectively. Address issues of ethnicity and gender. Suggest how you might go about improving the groups’ functioning.

F. Group Evaluation

Attend a minimum of two sessions of a professionally led or self-help group. Secure permission ahead of the meeting. If possible, “de-brief” with the group leader following the session. Describe group composition, norms, physical setting, leader style, and member roles. What similarities/differences did you observe between sessions? What benefits or challenges to individual members, or to the group as a whole, were evident? How was conflict resolved or avoided? Which leader techniques had the most impact? Did the group experience have any negative effects on you? Imagine yourself leading this group. What interventions might you employ toward assisting individuals or the group toward positive change?
III. **Group Demonstrations - 40%**

Some class time will be provided to form groups, discuss ideas, and determine presentation dates and times if applicable. Each student’s contribution—verbally, behaviorally, and in writing—will be graded individually. There will be no group grades. Recommended group size is 5-7 members including the group leader.

**CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING A → D:**

A. In-class demonstration of a treatment/therapy group. Content may be student-related (real) issues or roles can be assumed. Leadership can rotate or one person can lead the group exclusively. “Here and Now” techniques and process illumination should be evident as well as other intervention strategies from readings and class discussions. Group duration should be a minimum of 20 minutes. The written assignment is for each student to write a “group note” (summary) on each group member, due one week after the presentation. Group note format will be provided by the instructor.

B. Same as “A” above except your group will videotape the session (minimum 20 minutes) to be shown in class. The written assignment is for each student to discuss and evaluate the session according to readings and class discussions. This paper should be 4-6 pages in length and submitted on the day the video is shown.

C. In-class demonstration of a specialized group application (i.e., task, activity, skill-building, psychodrama, etc.). This project should show evidence of creativity and imagination. Once you have decided on a particular group/population, consider how you might use art, music, games, physical activity, or role playing to accomplish goals. The demonstration should be a minimum of 20 minutes accompanied by a 4-6 page paper describing and evaluating your approach.

D. Same as “C” above except your group will videotape the demonstration, a minimum of 20 minutes, to be shown in class accompanied by a 4-6 page paper describing and evaluating your approach.

IV. **Final Exam - 30%**

This will be a comprehensive take-home examination. Questions will be distributed on April 11. Your completed exam is due at the regular class time on April 18. **No exceptions.** Some class time on 4/11 will be devoted to review in the form of small group discussions. Further exam details to be provided in class.