Syllabus—Methods Focus

Work has been called the “master role” because of its central place in the lives of individuals and families. Work structures our days, shapes our self-concept, and is the primary source of income for most people. Work problems—because of poor preparation, discrimination, or other factors—can mean long-term poverty. Even in well-paid jobs, personal or social difficulties arise that threaten our ability to meet the demands of work and family.

For human service practitioners generally, the realities of work and work-related problems are a key consideration in understanding clients and the problems they face. Problems at work can often alert the practitioner outside of the workplace of the need for intervention. In this course, we seek to understand the dynamics of the work relationship and how we can develop programs to improve employment opportunities and to successfully balance the demands of work with other spheres of our lives.

The course begins with an overview of the structures and process of the work environment. We then turn to a range of programs related to the interplay between work and well-being, such problems for the “hard-to-employ,” problems experienced on the job, and community-based problems because of lack of employment opportunities.

The principal written assignment for this course is to design a work-related program intervention for a setting of your choice. This is intended to provide an experience in program formulation, including presentation skills needed to advocate for the creation of a new program initiative.

Course Objectives

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

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the employment context, including: basic concepts of employment/unemployment, the roles and perspectives of employers and unions; the processes of hiring, promotion, and termination; the nature of employee benefits; and the implications for social work practice within the context of the work environment

2. Demonstrate an understanding of how the structure, interests, and priorities of the workplace provide a context for workplace-based programs that reflect social work goals and ethical standards.

3. Identify and apply strategies for addressing problems of individuals seeking employment and/or experiencing problems on the job.
4. Identify and communicate programmatic interventions to address problems experienced by individuals or groups because of issues of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability.

5. Use needs assessments and program evaluation techniques in the design of program applications.

6. Use presentation (written and oral) to communicate the rationale and design of a program in an effective manner.

**Course Requirements**

Most of the reading for this class will be on the Ctools course site, usually in PDF format. My intention is that you can read the materials online or print out copies. I will also make a hard-copy of the readings available for individuals who would like to have it copied on your own.

There is one required text for this course:


I am also assigning reading of the *Wall Street Journal*. This is for daily reading and it will also be used for Memo #1 (see below). I want you to read the *WSJ* for two reasons. First, it is important to understand business perspectives when considering workplace-related programming. *WSJ* tends to reflect these views and it is the paper of choice of many in the business community. Second, the *WSJ* regularly has high quality feature articles on workplace issues (and social policy). Although I usually strongly disagree with their editorials/Op-Ed pieces, it provides a perspectives on social policy (and government policy, more generally) that is an important part of the national dialogue.

The requirements for the course are:

1. Weekly class preparation and participation, including

   a. reading assignments for the individual class sessions (it is expected that students will regularly attend and participate in class), including daily reading of *Wall Street Journal*

   b. leading the discussion on selected reading assignments (as assigned in class)

   (Class participation will constitute 10 percent of the final grade.)

2. Two (2) “policy memos” -- each is a short (two-page max.) paper

   a. Memo #1: Critique a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece of your selection that addresses an issue relevant to work and wellbeing. Your memo should
      - summarize the article
      - provide a critical analysis
Due: February 1 (15% of course grade)

b. Memo #2: Compare three (3) EAP programs based on their websites.

Assume that you have been requested to help with the selection of an EAP provider for a company. The memo is a response to the request of your board of directors to identify and select an EAP provider for your company. The memo should summarize the services available from the EAP, how those services are provided, and the nature of the contractual relationship (e.g., per capita costs, etc.). Identify what relevant information is not available from the websites, identify the nature of the services Identification of the implications for social work/social welfare policy or practice.

Due: February 22 (15% of course grade)

3. A paper proposing an intervention related to employment issues

This paper is to:
   a. present the case for the need and contributions of the proposed program
   b. identify the relevant parties (“stakeholders”) who must be considered in gaining support for the program and for its implementation
   c. lay out the steps in actually creating the program
   d. indicate how you would measure/evaluate the success of the program

Due: April 19 (65% of course grade)

Course Outline

Jan 11 1. Introduction and overview of the course

This initial session introduces the class, its structure, requirements, and rationale. A flow analysis is used as an organizing feature understanding the employment process and connections with policy and practice. During the course of the semester, we shall address the connections between employment and social work in several areas:

1. work in our lives and the lives of clients
2. problems/services on the job
3. welfare, poverty, and work
4. work-community connections
Jan. 18  2  Jobs, Wages Structures, Employee Benefits

In this session, we examine the major structures of jobs in order to understand the broad terrain of employment. We look at key job concepts, such as occupation and industry, with attention to changes over time, geographic distribution of jobs, and the impacts of globalization. We then turn to the other half of the employment relationship—the labor supply—with particular focus on low-wage work.

Readings:

American Bar Association (ABA), Guide to Workplace Law
  Ch. 1: “How Law Affects the Workplace”
  Ch. 3: “Terms and Conditions of Employment”

Root, Lawrence, “Unemployment and Underemployment: A Policy and Program-Development Perspective,” Ch. 18, in Kurzman and Akabas, Work and Well-Being:


Applebaum, Bernhard, and Murnane, Chapter 1 " Low-Wage America: An Overview" in Low-Wage America

Jan 25 3. Role of unions and patterns of employment relations in the human services

In this session, we examine the role of unions and their relationship to both employment conditions (wages, benefits, conditions of work) and their application to the human services. Focus on the role of unions in the context of human services.

Readings:

ABA, Guide to Workplace Law, Ch. 6, “Unions in the Workplace”

Economic Policy Institute (EPI), "How Unions Help all Workers--Briefing Paper"


Feb 1 4. Employment programs from a community perspective, economic development programs, job development

This session addresses programs designed for community economic development. It will consider public as well as private-sector programs designed to increase economic activity and job options on the community/neighborhood level.
Readings:

New York Times, Special Report: the Downsizing of America, Chapter 4
"The Fraying of Community" by Sara Rimer;

[add additional readings]

Feb. 8  5.  **Linking individuals with jobs**

This session addresses job placement programs, with attention to programs designed to move people from welfare to work and to re-integrate individuals after institutionalization (e.g., from hospitals and incarceration). Jobs programs also are relevant to others just entering or re-entering the job market (e.g., newly arrived immigrants, women returning to work, and displaced workers).

Readings:

American Bar Association, Guide to Workplace Law
Ch. 2: “The Hiring Process”

Hays, Sharon, *Flat Broke with Children*, Chapter 2 "Enforcing the Work Ethic;"


Philip Moss and Chris Tilly, *Stories Employers Tell* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), Chapters 1 and 7


Feb. 15  6.  **Career Counseling: Helping individuals to think about options**

Career counseling, while sharing many common elements with social work practice is not an explicit part of most social work programs. In this session, we examine career counseling with a focus on how the general principles can be applied to low-income individuals, as well as particular groups.

Readings:

Selected articles from *Career Development Quarterly*:
Feb. 22  7.  The “human resource” function—overview

Within the workplace, the “person-environment” fit—a focus of social work—is primarily carried out through the human resource programs. In this session, we look at the range of responsibilities associated with the modern human resource function in work organizations.

Readings:


[add additional readings]

Feb 28  Spring Break

March 8 and 15  8 and 9.  EAPs in Organizations—structure and function

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) began as alcoholism programs but have expanded to addressing a broad range of personal problems that can interfere with work. Social workers are key professionals in EAP programs. In these two sessions, we introduce the background of programs in the workplace, looking at the origin of EAPs as a key example of such a program. We consider the organizational context and underlying values associated with the development and implementation of such programs.
We will examine the relationship between EAPs and the provision of services, with specific attention to how programs are established, their roles both within the workplace and in relationship to external suppliers of services, including how they fit in with “managed care” and other cost-control mechanisms.

Readings:


Goplerud, Eric and Marlene Cimons, "Workplace Solutions: Treating Alcohol Problems through Employment-Based Health Insurance" (Research Report, from "Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems, George Washington University Medical Center, 2002)

Eriksson, Mimmi; Börje Olsson; and Johanna Osberg, "Alcohol prevention in the Swedish workplace-who cares?" *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Summer 2004.

**March 22 10. Work-family issues and dependent care**

With changes in the structure of families and increasing numbers of parents in the workforce, many employers are instituting personnel policies and programs to accommodate the need to balance responsibilities of home and work. In this session, we examine these efforts, with a focus on dependent care programs.

Readings:

Cunningham, Gloria, *Effective Employee Assistance Programs*, Ch. ****


[add additional readings]

**March 29 11. Discrimination in the workplace**

In this session, we shall examine issues of discrimination faced by specific groups within the workplace. These include issues associated with hiring, advancement on the job, and termination. This session will also address programmatic approaches to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Readings:

ABA, *Guide to Workplace Law*, ch. 2

Outten, Wayne N., Robert J. Rabin, and Lisa R. Lipman, *The Rights of Employees and Union Member* (American Civil Liberties Union), Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994, Ch. 8: “Discrimination: An Overview” and
Ch. 14: “Disability”


April 5 12 Bargaining, mediation, conflict resolution
This session examines bargaining and conflict resolution in the workplace. Arbitration, mediation, are addressed …

Readings:

[add readings]

April 12 13. Sexual harassment in the workplace
In this session we will discuss the issues of sexual harassment and program interventions to address such problems.

Readings:


April 19 14. Student presentations of program prospectuses
Final papers due (one-page summaries to be provided to each class member)