Social Change Theories

SW 611-001
# 63653; Summer 2005
Monday 8 a.m. – Noon
1804 SSWB

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Course Description
This course will review theories and research on organizational, community and societal change, and the roles of individual and group change within larger systems. Theories from many disciplines will be covered, including social conflict, interest groups, and social movements, and such processes as consciousness-raising. Dynamics of the diffusion of innovations in society will also be addressed. Examples will be drawn from a variety of areas of practice in which social workers are involved.

Course Content
The main goal of this course is to address the questions of why and how change occurs in different types of macro systems. Students will compare and contrast different theoretical approaches to the understanding of organizational, community and societal change. Students will learn about how theories have explained stability and change, and approaches to planned change. Comparative dimensions will include the theory’s scope, historical origins, and cultural contexts; the societal arenas and problem areas from which the theory was developed and in which it has been applied; and the assumptions of a theory about humankind, society and how change occurs.

Although the primarily emphasis will be on societal level change, this course will also consider theories of change at the individual, group, community, and organizational levels, and in particular how changes at different system levels affect each other. Students will consider the extent to which different theories are, or are not, compatible with each other and the implications of these relationships for the usefulness of particular theories for particular purposes. Change theories will be included from multiple disciplines and traditions, and students will consider how scholars and activists from different disciplinary perspectives and fields have used and critiqued each other’s work. Emphasis will be given to the types of evidence and knowledge available about each theoretical approach and the types of inquiry used to develop and critique different theories.

Different bodies of thought about change will be critiqued for their relevance to the issues facing privileged, marginalized and oppressed groups within U.S. society and for their usefulness cross-culturally and cross-identity group boundaries. Students will consider how different theories have been applied or could be applied for different purposes, and critique existing types of practice from particular theoretical perspectives. In particular, students will explore the theories that have been important within human service goal and problem areas of interest to them.
**Course Objectives**

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

1. Describe, compare, and contrast several types of theories about organizational, community, and societal change, and the roles that individual and group change play within these changes.

2. Identify theories relevant to particular goal and problem areas, and critique their strengths and limitations.

3. Critique different theories as to their assumptions, origins, implications for different social problems, and relevance for social justice, diversity, oppression, privilege, marginalized and oppressed groups.

4. Apply particular theories to different areas of practice.

5. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to theories or organizational, community and societal change.

**Intensive Focus Note**

This course is one of those designated by the Governing Faculty to Intensively Focus on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice. Attention to these four dimensions is to occur across the three courses within each Practice Area Concentration and the Program Evaluation course. Note that these IF dimensions are related to the themes that are mandated to be included through all courses, but they are to be foregrounded even more in the Practice Area Concentration courses. As an HBSE course, our emphasis in 611 will be on knowledge and theory, and the application of that knowledge and theory to various areas of practice within the arenas of CSS. Although this is not a practice methods course, we can develop and practice skills in the critique and application of knowledge and theory in ways relevant to practice (e.g., assessment, analysis, planning, design and evaluation of interventions and change strategies and tactics).

We will be emphasizing the social justice dimension—as a desired goal of all planned change. This includes articulating what social justice is, forces for and against social justice goals, and factors that must be incorporated in applying theories of change if social justice is always to be a goal. Factors necessary to examine in social change for social justice include 1) forces that create and perpetuate unearned privilege and oppression and discrimination related to group membership; 2) dimensions of diversity and how they interact/intersect with each other; and 3) power, various ways of understanding power, and how power is relevant in all of the above.

What precedes this is the course description approved by the faculty several years ago, revised somewhat from the one approved by the faculty to include more attention to organization level theory and approaches. **This course description has not yet been revised to include language and goals that emphasize the Intensive Focus (IF) goals.** We are working on changing the courses simultaneously with rewriting the course descriptions, so will be working on the language in this course description during the Spring/Summer and fall. The revised course descriptions will be submitted to the governing faculty for their approval in the future.
The School is also conducting an evaluation of the IF change process in order to provide us information to inform our on-going planning. Eventually, we will be identifying and evaluating desired outcomes—for student learning overall and within particular courses, for each course, for each set of courses, for the curriculum as a whole, and the School as an organization. It is likely that we will be asked to participate in evaluation-related activities over the course of the term, but we don’t know yet exactly what these might be. We are very interested in your advice about relevant language and goals for this course in relation to the IF initiative.

**Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes & to Social Work Values & Ethics**

*Multiculturalism and diversity* will be addressed in this course by identifying theories espoused by and compatible with different cultural traditions, by critiquing theories from different cultural perspectives, and through course examples about the usefulness of theories in different interest groups and cultural communities, and with regard to the intersections among these group boundaries.

*Social justice and social change* will be addressed within the goals and assumptions of each theoretical approach. Most of the course will focus how theories can illuminate and help to promote social justice goals, and disrupt the forces that perpetuate unearned privilege and oppression, by conceptualizing and operationalizing organizational, community, and societal change.

*Promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation* will be addressed by examining theories about social change for their relevance and applicability in each of these areas. Students will compare and contrast theories that focus on a positive vision of the future with theories focusing on preventing, reducing, or eliminating existing problems.

*Behavioral and social science research* as well as knowledge from other disciplines will be included by examining the evidence and approaches used to build theory and apply theory through its applications in practice.

*Social work ethics and values*—Students will examine theories and explore the extent to which they aid social workers with their ethical responsibilities to the general welfare of society. In particular, theories and practice examples will be critiqued with respect to the following ethical principles: preventing and eliminating discrimination, ensuring access to resources and services, expanding choices for all persons, promoting conditions that encourage respect for diversity, advocating for changes in policy to improve social conditions and promote social justice, and encourage informed participation by citizens in shaping policies and institutions.

**Course Readings**

This course requires a lot of reading. To ease this as much as possible, I have scanned the readings and placed them in the resources folder of our CTools webpage. I will also make the readings available as a coursepack at Excel at 1117 S. University (upstairs, phone: 734-996-1500) and on reserve in the SSW Library.
Fostering Epistemological Curiosity in Our Classroom

My hope this term is that we create a climate that fosters “epistemological curiosity”, as Freire describes it. We will teach and learn from one another, drawing on our different perspectives and experiences. We will experiment with new knowledge and skills. We will explore the implications of own multiple identities and our backgrounds as we approach social change. We will consult with each other on our projects and assignments. We will plan for ongoing learning and development.

Theorizing can be scary and difficult, exciting and challenging. We are likely to differ in how we believe change should or does happen. We need to be able to challenge and assist each other if the learning experience is to be an optimal one. I need each of you to be “up front” about what is clear, uncomfortable, or problematic. I will develop varied approaches to the use of class time, and am open to your ideas about how best to use our time.

Guidelines for Participation
Together we will develop guidelines for participation and spend time getting to know each other’s backgrounds and interests. We will revisit and revise our guidelines as needed. Please approach me about revisiting them if you feel that the classroom environment is no longer supportive of epistemological curiosity.

Course Tools Website
This course will utilize CourseTools technology to support in class learning. CourseTools Next Generation is here, and I am excited to expand our use of it this term. Many of the assignments will be completed in conjunction with CourseTools and with the intention of promoting discussion of the course themes, content and activities outside of class. Please offer suggestions or ideas as to how we can use this technology to maximize our learning experience.

Special Circumstances
If there are any circumstances that require me and/or the class adapt to your special needs, please consult with me about them.

Religious Observances
Please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance or due dates for assignments so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Electronic Devices
Due to their disruptive nature, I request that we turn off cell phones and pagers while in class, as they are disruptive to the learning environment. If you must be on call for an emergency, please let your home or office know that you are only available for emergencies that no one else can handle. Please set devices to vibrate only.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you need or desire an accommodation for a disability, I encourage you to contact me at your earliest convenience. Many aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way that I teach can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress throughout the semester. The earlier you make me aware of your needs, the more effectively we will be able to use the resources available to us through Office of Services for Students with Disabilities and the
Adaptive Technology Computing Site. If you do decide to disclose your disability, I will (to the extent permitted by law) treat that information as private and confidential.

**Writing Resources**

Appropriate referencing is required on all written assignments. If you do not know correct citation format, please seek assistance before you submit your assignments. One source for this information is the guide to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. This can be found on the School’s website at http://www.lib.umich.edu/socwork/apastyle.html. See also the information in the Student Guide to the Master’s in Social Work Degree Program and other appropriate University publications for policies and penalties related to academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism.

Please note that ranges given for papers are based on work that is typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced, and with one-inch margins. Electronic submissions of assignments will not be accepted except in emergency situations and with the approval of the instructor.

The University has a College Writing Workshop with graduate fellows and faculty of the English Composition Board. The Writing Center assists students in completing specific assignments or projects to help them improve academic writing skills. Students are encouraged to use these resources. For further information and an appointment, contact:

Sweetland Writing Center  
1139 Angell Hall, 1003  
(734) 764-0429

**Course Assignments & Grading**

The course readings, class activities, online CourseTools discussions, and assignments are intended to support students’ interests, knowledge, and experience with social change. Building on this, students will engage theorizing – analysis and critique of theories and application of theories to a planned change effort related to students’ interests and experience. An additional theme of the course is to explore how our privileged and oppressed social identities shape our interests, experiences and epistemologies related to social justice and social change. Students’ final grades will be based on the following grading scale based on the assignments described below.

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<th>Range</th>
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<td>98-100</td>
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<td>59 and below</td>
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**Class Participation—25% of final grade**

I believe in the power of peer learning; everyone’s participation is critical for everyone’s learning. Participation includes class attendance & punctuality, actively engaging in classroom activities and discussion of the readings, conferences with instructor regular posting on CTools discussions, consultation with colleagues on Social Change Projects, and presentation & discussion of key aspects of your Social Change Project with the class.
Punctuality & Attendance—In order to maximize your learning and the learning of others in the class, it will be important for you to prioritize attendance. Attendance for each class session will be worth 5 points—one for each hour of class and one for arriving on time.

Classroom Engagement—Four hours makes for a long class session, and I will structure class session to maximize our learning through varied class activities and discussion. The course will follow a seminar-type structure, and coming to class prepared to engage in discussion of the readings will be important. This will be both instructor- and peer-assessed.

CTools Discussion—Each week we will have two discussion topics: one to follow-up on the activities & discussions in class that week and another to discuss the readings in preparation for the following week. Participation will be assessed based upon the number, quality and consistency of posts to the discussions.

Conferences with Instructor—Twice during the term conferences will be scheduled between students and the instructor concerning the assignments for the course. The intention is to provide an opportunity for students receive specific feedback on their projects and to further support learning and application of the material. Students should come prepared with questions concerning the course content and plans for their projects in the form of drafts and notes.

Theorist Trading Card—25% of final grade
This assignment is an opportunity to create your own theorist trading card, describing a theorist not represented in the set published by theory.org.uk. Students will make cards to pass out to the class (and perhaps to submit for inclusion in future sets of cards) and make a small presentation on their theorist mid-term.

Social Change Project—40% of final grade
This assignment is an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of social change theories and to apply that understanding to a specific area in which you would like to make change. The project must include analysis of the arena for change concerning the Intensive Focus criteria of social justice, diversity, privilege and oppression. The project should also demonstrate an application of the theories presented in the course through a strategy for planned change in the selected change arena. The project will include research on your topic area outside of course readings; the intent is to look at what is known or what has been done in your change arena and to explore that through the lenses provided by the theories covered in class as well as other relevant theories.

This has traditionally been accomplished by a paper or a series of papers, and will indeed necessitate an amount of written theorizing drawing from the readings. Options include 1) planning and/or discussion of social change work that you believe should happen on a particular topic in a particular action context, 2) a case study of actual social change work done in the past (through literature review, perhaps some interviews with participants, document analyses) or 3) a case study of social change work that is on-going (through participation and observation, in addition to what is listed for #2). Creative ideas for completing this assignment are encouraged.
Both the student(s) and the instructor will assess the social change project using a rubric that will be distributed in class.

**Critical Reflection Essay – 10% of final grade**
This essay provides an opportunity to reflect on the semester—including areas of major learning, goals for future learning, and integration of learning with awareness of positionality. Specifically, your essay should address the following:

1. (Change in) Understanding of positionality and social identities & impact on learning
2. (Change in) Understanding of social justice
3. Understanding of privilege and oppression related to aspects of diversity
4. Major learning this semester as it relates to social change theories.
5. Questions you still have about the themes and content of the course and goals for future learning.
Course Schedule

Session 1/Monday 9 May

Introductions, Course Overview & Education as Social Change

Welcome to Social Change Theories! We will spend some time getting to know one another and familiarizing ourselves with the goals of the course.


The following readings will be distributed during class; each member will select a reading of interest, read it during an extended break, then return to discuss the reading with those who read the same reading. Each group will present the key concepts of their reading to the rest of the class, with attention to the role of education in social change and to the implications of these readings to the classroom environment that we are creating for ourselves. This will inform our process of norm-setting in the form of guidelines for participation.


Session 2/Monday 16 May

Theories of Consciousness & PODS

The following readings concern consciousness in terms of social problems, social work practice, education and social identities. We will use these to build on the previous week’s discussion of education as social change, and begin to relate this explicitly to the role of consciousness development particularly in relation to the curricular focus on privilege, oppression, diversity & social justice.

Session 3/Monday 23 May

Theories & Conceptions of Power & Social Justice

This week’s readings present varying conceptions of power and social justice, two concepts central to the intensive focus on PODS. We will review these for their utility in analyzing arenas for social change and setting goals for planned change.

- Coser, Lewis, ed. (1963). Power and authority, from Sociology Through Literature, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 150-174. This chapter contains brief excerpts on the subject of power and authority from the following writings:
  - Norman Mailer (1948). The naked and the dead
  - Arturo Barea (1946). The forging of a rebel
  - George Bernard Shaw (1923). Preface to Saint Joan
  - Charles Dickens (1848). Dombey and son
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson (1850). “Napoleon; or the man of the world”
  - Lev Tolstoi (1869). War and peace

Monday 30 May

Memorial Day Holiday—No class, so enjoy the long weekend!

Session 4/Monday 6 June

Theories in Social Work & Planned Change

The first five readings provide a survey of theories at varying levels of social work practice and in social work research. Some of these were used in SW 502 last fall and may be review for you. The second set of five readings introduces frameworks and models for planned change, which can help conceptualize applying theory in pursuit of planned change goals.


Session 5/Monday 13 June

Sociological Theories: Critical Social Theory & Postmodernism

This week we will cover classic sociological theories and current thought in social theory, including critical and postmodern theories. We will relate this to the theoretical underpinnings in social work discussed the previous week and discuss the implications of these for planned change initiatives.

Session 6/Monday 20 June

**Feminist Thought & Queer Theory**

Building from last week's introduction to critical and postmodern thought, the readings this week will present some concepts from and applications of feminist thought and queer theory.


Session 7/Monday 27 June

**Nonlinear Systems, Complexity & Chaos Theories**

The following readers extend our knowledge of a cornerstone of theory in social work practice. Systems theory and the ecological perspective came to us through the natural sciences, and the understanding of systems has continued to grow to account for complexity and chaos. The implications of these theories will help us to analyze and strategize for planned social change.

Monday 4 July

**Independence Day—No class; enjoy yet another holiday weekend!**

Session 8/Monday 11 July

**Social Movement Theory**

The following readings present concepts central to understanding collective behavior and social movements, challenges to the different conceptualizations of this theory over its evolution, and case studies of social movements in practice. The concepts discussed in social movement theory are helpful in planning for change, whether at the broadest levels of society, or in smaller arenas like organizations, where cross-fertilization of ideas has occurred in understanding organizational change. This week is overloaded with readings; please know that we will be divvying up some of the readings and learning cooperatively from one another in class.

- **McAdam, Doug, McCarthy, John D. & Zald, Mayer N.** (Eds). 1996. Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes--toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements, In (Eds) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 1-20. Cambridge University Press.

Session 9/Monday 18 July
Organizational Theories, Policy Models & Law as Social Change
The readings for this week specifically relate to the policy and management concentrations in the social work program, presenting various ways of understanding and steering change in these arenas for planned change. The first six readings listed here relate to policy and litigation as manners of effecting desired change; the remaining readings present conceptions for managing change in organizations. Again, we will be dividing these readings, largely based on interest area and which seem most relevant to the planned change projects goals.
• Streiffer, Jeff. (1997.) If you can’t get there from here, then that’s not where you need to go: Epistemological priority, cultural action, and lawyering for social change. Hamline Journal of Public Law and Policy, 19(1), pages 397-448. St. Paul, MN: Hamline University School of Law.


Session 10/Monday 25 July

**Spirituality, Liberation Theology & Conscious Evolution**

*Social Change Projects due in class*

These readings present a variety of readings on spiritual, esoteric and mystical approaches to change, and serve to challenge us in terms of ‘measurable’ aspects of social change and consider the role of religion in motivating change and as a locus for change.


Privilege, Oppression, Diversity & Social Justice

These final readings revisit the intensive focus criteria for the course, centering again on issues of privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice, and should serve to center your thinking on these themes for purposes of the final critical reflection essay.

**Critical Reflection Essay due at the beginning of class**