SW 624: Interpersonal Practice with Groups

Sp / Su ‘10
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds on the content presented in SW521 and the other foundation courses and focuses on the processes of intervention 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 intra-group 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. The course will also consider how gender, ethnicity, race, social class, sexual orientation, and different abilities will impact on various aspects of group functioning such as purpose, composition, leadership, selection of intervention strategies, and group development.

COURSE CONTENT

The 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/social change, self-help, internet, etc.) found in contemporary social work practice. The 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 intervention process from recruitment and composition to assessment, goal formulation, evaluation, intervention and termination will be presented. Special consideration will be given to how these phases may be modified to account for the various diversity identities racial, class, gender, ethnic, sexual orientations, and abilities of clients. Evaluation procedures, designed to determine the effectiveness of various interventions, that can be incorporated into small groups will be presented. 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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this 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. Critically apply in a practice setting a minimum of two empirically supported group work approaches.

4. Implement specific evaluation measures that can be integrated into monitoring and evaluation of group work.

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

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

7. 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.

8. Describe the impact of the key diversity dimensions such as ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation on the dynamics of group structure and process in small groups.

9. Identify ways to match group intervention methods effectively and ethically with client problems, across diverse populations, cultural backgrounds, and sociopolitical contexts.

10. Operationalize ethical codes (i.e. the NASW Code of Ethics and other ethical codes such as the ASGW) as they apply to value dilemmas that arise in social group work practice.
11. Conduct an assessment of coping resources and strengths; biophysical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive functioning; intra-personal and environmental systems.

12. Identify the factors that influence group members’ motivation to pursue change.

13. Demonstrate their ability to form worker-group member alliances and collaborations, communicate empathically, and help enhance the motivation for change, cultivate hope, and address ambivalence and internal and external barriers to change.

14. Identify one’s own social and cultural identities and group memberships, and how these relate to working with diverse group members, colleagues, and other professionals.

COURSE DESIGN
The format is lecture, with questions and discussion, as well as organized class discussion, with the latter frequently focusing on the analysis of actual cases.

RELATIONSHIP OF COURSE TO FOUR CURRICULAR THEMES
• Multiculturalism and Diversity: The key diversity dimensions 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 concerning 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. We will examine contemporary conceptions of social justice practice in groups and the diverse ways this may be addressed.

• 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 empirical research on the effectiveness of various group interventions and models. A goal of competency emphasizes evidence-based group work practice.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE 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.

ACCOMMODATIONS
If you need or desire an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Many aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities and the way that the course is taught can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress throughout the semester. The earlier that you make me aware of your needs the more
effectively we will be able to use the resources available to us, such as the services for Students with Disabilities, the Adaptive Technology Computing Site, and the like. If you do decide to disclose your disability, I will (to the extent permitted by law) treat that information as private and confidential. Also, please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance or due dates for assignments so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

COURSE TEXTS
This summer we will be drawing on literature listed on c-tools for each designated week. I have included the specific articles with citations in the syllabus outline. If you cannot retrieve the article, please e-mail or see me immediately.

ADDITIONAL TEXTS (ON RESERVE):


Optional articles: As new or previously undiscovered material emerges during the semester I may add it for additional reading because of its relevance to current discussions. I will make every effort to give at least a one-week notice.

RELEVANT JOURNALS
The following journals are oriented primarily toward group research, practice and education:

*Group, The Journal of the Eastern Group Psychotherapy Society*

*International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*

*Journal for Specialists in Group Work*

*Small Group Research* (A combination of two journals: *Small Group Behavior* and *International Journal of Small Group Research*)

*Social Work with Groups*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
In this section of SW624, there are 4 required assignments that add up to 75 points (i.e., full credit will be given once all tasks are met). If your assignment is incomplete or insufficient it will be returned with a written request for specific revisions. Attendance and participation (A&P) will also be required and will account for an additional 10 points. Receiving 85 points is assessed as demonstrating MASTERY of the material and will be recorded as a “B” grade for A&P and assignments according to the University and SSW grading policies. If your goal is to demonstrate above mastery level achievement, you can do so by first, completing required assignments, and then completing optional assignments outlined below. Optional assignment points are only counted in addition to course requirements. In this section, an “A” = 96-100 pts.; “A-” = 91-95 pts.; “B+” = 86-90 pts.; “B” = 81-85 pts.; “B-” = 76-80 pts.; “C+” = 71-75 pts.; & “C” = 70 pts. or below.
The policy for late assignments is as follows: Assignments that exceed the due date must not overlap with the next assignment due date. In order to receive full credit, you will have up to the due date for the next assignment to turn in a previously required assignment, including revisions. The final date to turn in Assignment #4 and Optional Assignments is July 26. Partial credit may be assigned to incomplete Optional Assignments turned in on the last day since no opportunity can be provided for revisions.

**Required - Attend and participate (A&P) in each session. (Maximum 10 points).**
In this interpersonal practice course, in-class discussions and participation in exercises are considered an essential part of your learning experience. In addition, some of the material considered essential to achieving the objectives of the course will only be presented in class. If unanticipated circumstances arise that prevent you from attending or cause you to arrive late or leave early, you must notify me as soon as possible. Each clock hour of class missed (whether excused or unexcused) results in the loss of .5 A&P points. Missing more than two class periods requires a meeting with the instructor. You may complete ONE optional assignment to make up for A & P points that are deducted for up to (and NOT more than) two classes AND you must clearly designate which optional assignments you want to use to make up for missed class hours.

**Required Assignment #1 (Due May 24): “What’s social justice got to do with social work with groups!?” (The entire paper should not exceed 8 pages typed, double-spaced and proofread. (Maximum 20 points)** Assume you are engaged in a discussion about our course with a colleague. The colleague argues that group work practice automatically neutralizes dimensions of power and privilege because everyone is treated the same. The person states, “I’ve run a lot of groups and it didn’t make any difference how different the members were; in fact, if you make a big deal out of social injustices, the members feel uncomfortable. As long as everyone gets along, and they all work together, then you have the recipe for a successful group.” You, of course, respond by arguing that without raising the group’s consciousness of social justice issues, you potentially privilege some members while maintaining oppressive group dynamics for others. You also believe it’s our ethical responsibility to tune into matters of social (in)justice in group work practice, especially when they present themselves in the group. Keeping in mind that your colleague will not be interested in listening to our lectures in which we discuss the relevant content, write a concise response that clearly delineates your main points.

**Required Assignment #2 (Due June 14): (Video) Group Dynamics Analysis Worksheet – Discussed in Class (Maximum 10 points)**

**Required Assignment #3 (Due June 28): Assessment in Group Work Practice – Paper should be 6-8 pages in length (including charts, diagrams and graphs), typed, double-spaced and proofread. (Maximum 30 points)**
For this assignment, you are asked to observe and assess one formal group session of your choice. The group could be a committee meeting, a staff meeting, a treatment group (e.g., that you either observe or facilitate). You are expected to maintain anonymity of participants (i.e., do not use actual client names or initials) and in observing the group, it must be of the kind that will allow you to complete each one of the following required tasks:
(Task 1) Describe the group's context (e.g., sponsor, full description of physical setting (Hint: a room diagram helps!), purpose, composition, size, frequency of meetings (i.e., how often scheduled to meet), length, duration (how many sessions planned), open vs. closed, session context (what’s the session you observed about?).

(Task 2) Refer to Toseland and Rivas Chapter 8 reference on c-tools: (a) chart and record each member’s frequency of interactions (i.e., measure communication and interaction); (b) measure the group members’ social preferences (i.e., the group’s sociometry); (c) comment on your observation of the group’s social controls and group culture (Note: If the group you are observing is not conducive to continuous recording, identify a sampling procedure that best fits this task and briefly explain your rationale for the procedure you selected.); (d) comment on the charting and recording used both in terms of strengths and limitations; (e) on the basis of your observations, speculate on relevant aspects of the group’s dynamics at the time you made your observations (e.g., were you able to identify distinct subgroups or patterns of interaction based on seating? Did your observations help you identify task and socio-emotional leaders within the group? Were there other roles that could be associated with particular members?)

(Task 3) In your observation, you should have identified aspects of the group that appear as strengths (that contribute to the group’s success) and/or that appear problematic. (a) describe the strengths and/or concerns relevant to the group’s functioning. If you’ve raised a specific problem or concern, use Toseland and Rivas Figure 8-6 (p.247) and select an appropriate intervention to address the level of problem or concern. (b) suggest a plan for intervention (focused on the group as a whole, subset of members, an individual or the group in interaction with its environment.

**Required Assignment #4 (Due no later than Friday, August 6): Group Role Play Workbook To be discussed in class. (15 points)**

Optional Assignments:
The following assignments are worth 5 points each. Optional assignments are designed to reinforce learning objectives. They can be turned in any time during the semester with an opportunity for revisions if necessary. No revisions will be expected if turned in during the last week of class. Instead they will receive points commensurate with how much they conform to the assignment tasks (i.e., partial points may be assigned if the assignment is incomplete). All Optional assignments must be turned in no later than Friday, August 6.
**Optional Assignment #1: Cultural Competence and Social Work Practice with Groups.** *Paper should be a maximum of 5 pages typed, double-spaced and proofread. (5 points)*

For this assignment you are asked to summarize an experience you had this term either as an observer or member of a community-based group, and had implications for social work practice with diverse group participants. Attending a group-focused cultural event would be an excellent way to complete this assignment! From that summary, identify at least 5 practice principles that will help you to achieve and maintain *cultural competence and humility* in group work practice.

**Optional Assignment #2: Reading Summaries**

Provide a 2-3 page summary of a required or optional reading from the ones listed on the syllabus, *for 5 different sessions* (i.e. a total of five reading summaries from different weeks). ALSO, provide a one-paragraph synthesis of the readings in terms of lessons learned or “take-away” points *(5 points)*

**Optional Assignment #3: Media / Book Review – Worksheet** *(See C-tools site for further explanation) (5 points)*

**Optional Assignment #4: Annotated Bibliography of 5 articles relevant to your specific interests.** *(See C-tools site for further explanation) (5 points)*

**Optional Assignment #5: Group Work Practice in the Community** *(See C-tools site for further explanation) (5 points)*

**Optional Assignment #6: Special Topic.** You may identify a target population, target problem or group related matter that will enhance your learning about or practice with groups. Examples of special topics include an annotated bibliography focusing on disaster relief using the group modality, crisis intervention using groups, a reference list of targeted activities for special populations, group work practice in rural areas, group work with delinquent youth, and so on. You must consult with me for approval prior to engaging in and submitting your special topic assignment for credit. *(5 points)*
SESSION SUMMARY

I. KNOWLEDGE BASE OF GROUPS AND GROUP WORK

WEEK 1 (May 10): Introduction to Social Work with Groups

WEEK 2 (May 17): Group Dynamics / Values, Ethics and Professional Guidelines / Group Work Practice, Diversity and Social Justice

WEEK 3 (May 24): Group Dynamics in Action; “12 Angry Men” / Group Work Practice, Diversity and Social Justice (cont.)
(Note: Required Assignment #1 Due)

WEEK 4 (May 31): *** MEMORIAL DAY – NO CLASSES ***

II. ACHIEVING CHANGE THROUGH SMALL GROUPS & GROUP PRACTICE CONTEXTS

WEEK 5 (June 7): Group Structure, Formation, Process and Development / Assessment and Evaluation

WEEK 6 (June 14): Leadership: Roles, Functions and Guidelines / Group Typologies & Task Groups: Foundation and Specialized Methods
(Note: Required Assignment #2 Due)

WEEK 7 (June 21): Group Work for Treatment, Support and Mutual Aid / Launching the Group / Pre-Group Formation

III. PHASES OF GROUP WORK PRACTICE

WEEK 8 (June 28): Beginning the Group
(Note: Required Assignment #3 Due)

WEEK 9 (July 5): *** INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASSES ***

WEEK 10 (July 12): -Beginning the Group (cont.) / Groups in Transition

WEEK 11 (July 19): Groups in Transition (cont.)

WEEK 12 (July 26): Ending in Groups

WEEK 13 (August 2): Ending in Groups (cont.) / Summary / Wrap-Up
(Required Assignment #4 & Optional Assignments Due August 6)
COURSE OUTLINE
In the following outline, I have indicated required reading as a double asterisk (**) and recommended readings by a single asterisk (*). Articles designated (e) can be retrieved electronically.

I. KNOWLEDGE BASE OF GROUPS AND GROUP WORK

WEEK 1 (May 10): Social Work with Groups: The Dynamics of Practice
Discussion Questions:
(1) What is a group?
(2) Are groups “real”?
(3) What are “group dynamics”?

Forsyth (TEXT): Chapter 1: The Science of Group Dynamics (pp. 2-23) and Chapter 2: Studying Groups

Discussion Questions:
(1) What ethical issues are unique to groups?
(2) What makes social justice and diversity important topics to consider in group work practice?
(3) Discuss the ways in which “evidence-based practice” is relevant to groups?


**Week 3 (May 24): Group Dynamics in Action: “12 Angry Men” and continued discussion of social justice and diversity in groups**

(Note: Required Assignment #1 Due)

(Note: For today’s session we will continue to discuss readings not covered last week. For the activity, we will be following a worksheet located on c-tools outlining essential concepts and issues relevant to group dynamics and social work practice in groups. Please bring a hard copy of the worksheet to today’s class and be prepared to discuss readings)

**WEEK 4 (May 31): *** Memorial Day – No Classes ***