UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

S.W. 697: Social Work Practice with Community and Social Systems

Amos O. Aduroja, Ph. D
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Office: (734)763-8045
Evening: (734)485-0069
3740 School of Social Work Building
Email: AdurojaA@umich.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11AM-2 PM, 3740 School of Social Work Building

Course Description
This course prepares students to engage in integrated practice focused on utilizing community and social systems to support individual, family, organizational and community functioning. It builds on practice methods presented in the foundation and the platform methods courses and elaborates on how social workers can work in partnership with community and social systems. Special emphasis will be placed on conducting this work in a multicultural context and on enhancing the well-being of vulnerable and oppressed populations and communities.

Course Objectives
On completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of how community and social systems can play a role in improving the well-being of individuals, families, organizations and communities;
2. Identify the critical primary and secondary structures in communities that can be mobilized for engaging in practice;
3. Describe how the gender, racial, religious, economic or other characteristics of a community affect the needs and assists to be mobilized in practice;
4. Demonstrate skills for engaging community systems and encouraging the participation of community members;
5. Identify how social work ethics and values can guide practice with community and social systems.
Relationship to Four Curricular Themes

1. **Multiculturalism and Diversity:** This course will focus on ways in which the characteristics of individuals, families and communities will drive the approach to practice. Therefore, the themes of diversity and multiculturalism will be addressed throughout the course. This will include attention to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, economic status, and sexual orientation.

2. **Social Change and Social Justice:** This course will focus on methods for increasing community participation and empowerment. Therefore, the themes of social change on multiple levels toward the goal of social justice are central to this course. Special attention will be paid for developing methods that are democratic, participatory and focused on equity and equality.

3. **Promotion/Prevention/Treatment/Rehabilitation:** This course will consider how community and social systems can be mobilized toward promotion, prevention, treatment or rehabilitation efforts. For example, community and social system involvement can be an integral element of the promotion of mental health, the prevention of mental illness, the treatment of mental distress or the rehabilitation of the mentally disabled. This course will shed light on how these methods can be involved at these different types of practice focus.

4. **Social Science and Social Research:** Community and social systems practice is supported by research that suggests that well being is enhanced by the involvement of social supports and social networks. This course will be based in social research that guides this practice. In addition, social science methods will be introduced as a means for developing and evaluating specific practice methods.

**Course Responsibilities**

**Course Content**

This course will cover practice methods for working with multiple social systems to promote well being through the involvement of community and social systems. The primary focus will be on ways to work in partnership with the primary and secondary mediating structures in communities such as schools; neighborhood associations, self-help organizations, community centers and faith based organizations. Emphasis will be placed on ways in which different levels of practice ---including interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy practice – can be involved in this kind of work.

Specific practice methods to be covered will include techniques for crisis intervention, advocacy and service coordination; conducting community outreach and education; convening and working with community committees, coalitions and planning boards; organizing and facilitating mutual aid and self help groups; and collaborating with communities to develop local programs and services. Underguarding all of these methods will be a focus on methods for encouraging community participation and empowerment.
Assignments:

The course assignments have a variety of teaching/learning objectives. They are designed to help you develop skills in integrating experience and scholarship and in applying theory to practice. They are designed to clarify the benefits and limitations of both independent and interdependent practices.

INDEPENDENT ESSAYS (3): (15 points each; no more than 10 pages maximum each; 45 points total)

These essays should demonstrate your integration of knowledge gained in class, reading, field and other experiences. They should go beyond description. This means not only telling about your reaction to some text, model, experience, etc. but also reflecting on that experience. Reflecting, in this context, means telling how the “text” chosen relates to conceptual knowledge, and analyzing and critiquing that knowledge in light of your reflecting on it.

Essay I: Understanding how culture and community relate to multiculturalism.

Attend a minimum of two cultural events that are unfamiliar to you, the Martin Luther King Day programs scheduled in the middle of January are a good source. Your essay should focus on how the experience of attending these events influences, or fails to influence, your understanding of multiculturalism.

Due January 30, 2001

Essay II: My most critical social issue

In a memo form addressed to classmates and the instructor, present the social issue that you are most concerned about at the present time and what you currently know about effective strategies of community and social systems intervention for this arena. Include a plan you have developed to increase your knowledge of this area.

Due March 6, 2001

Essay III: A modest proposal

In a memo form for classmates and instructor, present a proposal for action, based on your current thinking about the issue you presented in essay two. This proposal should include a statement of why this is an important area for action, an actual potential source of funding for this action, and supportive evidence for your action that would be likely to appeal to the funder.

Due April 10, 2001
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND GROUP PRESENTATION (35 points, 15 points for reflection paper, 20 points for class presentation)

Early in the semester we will form groups for a collaborative learning project. Each group will develop a framework for community assessment that can be operationalized and tested in the field. They will then conduct a community study using this framework that considers both strengths and needs; they will identify the community and social systems that influence social work practice; how each person’s field site functions in this context will also be addressed.

Based on this analysis, the group will do a class presentation in which they will describe the community they wished to assess, present a rationale for their assessment model, highlight key measures of outcome and discuss any hypotheses about how individual organizations within the community relate to each other in functional or dysfunctional ways.

The class presentation should engage students in activities, which will present the issues and methods for this specific strategy. Students are encouraged to be creative in their use of lecture, role-plays, small group exercises, videos, or other media. These presentations will be peer evaluated. Peer evaluation score will account for 50% of the score on class presentation.

Reflection paper: Each student will turn in a 6-8 page paper in which they reflect on what they learned from their collaborative learning project. This paper should identify what you learned about the community and what you learned from the process of working with others. Specific attention should be paid to how the group negotiated their working process, how they dealt with conflict, and what you learned about future group endeavors.

Due April 17, 2001

CLASS PARTICIPATION (20 points)
Each week we will engage in group activities and discussion, therefore attendance is very important. Students are expected to attend every class session and participate in discussions and group exercises.

Grading

A 100 point system is used. At the end of the term, the numerical grades earned for each written assignment will be averaged and translated into letter grades using the following formula:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>94-96</td>
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Grades in the B range reflect satisfactory completion of course requirements (competent performance). C grades reflect less than satisfactory work. A D indicates deficient performance and is not acceptable at the graduate level. Grades are given for exceptional individual performance. Assignment turned in on time can be revised if students desire.

Readings

Readings for this course have been selected very carefully to reflect community and social system practice. Students should come to class having read the materials and prepared to discuss and work with what has been covered. Some classroom exercises have been developed to synthesize and apply the readings to practice.

Books

The following books, designed to provide background-reading materials for the course, are available at Ulrichs on the corner of S.University and E. University. All books will be placed on reserve at the Social Work Library.

Kemp, S., Whittaker, J. & Tracy, E. Person-Environment Practice. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter

Supplemental Text:
COURSE SCHEDULE

Session 1: January 9, Introduction and Overview

Activities
Group and Individual Introductions
Overview of course and requirements
Introduction to community and social systems practice

Session 2: January 16, MLK Events

A number of lectures, exhibits, videos, performances and other presentations will be held on campus from January 8 to January 31 in recognition of Martin Luther King Day. A complete listing of these events is on the Web at http://www.umich.edu/~oami/mlk2k/. Select at least two of these events to attend and be prepared to discuss them next week in class.

Community and Social System Dynamics: An Overview

Readings
Section 1: The Individual and the Village
Greywolf: Scott Walker (Placed on reserve at the Social Work Library)

Session 3: January 23, Principles of Community and Social Systems Practice

Methods

Readings
Kemp, et al., Chapters 1-3
Gutierrez, Chapter 1
Delgado, Chapters 1 and 4

Session 4: January 30, Roles in Community and Social Systems, Conflict and Collaboration

Readings
Kemp, et al., Chapter 1
Section 4: The Ecological Model of Community (Scott Walker)
Class handouts
ESSAY I DUE

Session 5: February 6, Conflict Resolution in Community and Social systems practice

Readings
Delgado, Chapters 2 & 3
Kemp, Chapter 6
Practice Methods with Community and Social Systems

Session 6: February 13: Methods for entering and engaging with community and social systems

Readings
Delgado, Chapters 5 & 10
Greywolf, Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop

Session 7: February 20: Scanning and mapping methods for community and social systems

Readings
Delgado, chapters 7 & 8
Gutierrez, Chapter 11 (research methods)

Session 8: March 6: Assessing conditions in community and social systems

Readings
Delgado, Chapter 9
Kemp, Chapter 4

Essay II due

Session 9: March 13, Work with clients in their own behalf

Readings
Gutierrez, Chapter 2 (Women), Chapter 7 (homeless people), Kemp, Chapter 5

Session 10: March 20: Work with clients on behalf of themselves and others like them

Readings
Gutierrez, Chapter 3 (communities of color)
Gutierrez, Chapter 8 (Youth)

Session 11: March 27, Work with others on behalf of a category of clients

Readings
Gutierrez, Chapter 10 (Administration), chapter 4 (Lesbians and Gays), chapter 5 (Disabilities)
Session 12: April 3, Work with others on behalf of clients

**Readings**
Delgado, chapter 11
Gutierrez, Chapter 6 (Mental Health), Gutierrez, Chapter 9 (families)

Session 13: April 10, Evaluating community and social systems practice

**Readings**
Delgado, Chapter 12
Gutierrez, Chapter 12 (Evaluation methods)

Essay III due

Session 14: April 17, Assessing and evaluating our mutual learning activities
Dialogue and Discussion/Class Brunch Potluck

**Readings**
Delgado, Chapter 13
Gutierrez, 13
Kemp, Chapter 7

Reflection paper due