Organizational, Community, and Societal Structures and Processes

Course Description

This course examines theory and research knowledge about political, economic, and societal structures and processes related to communities, groups, and organizations within contemporary society. Consideration is given to ways in which these social systems have significant social, political, economic, and psychological impacts on the functioning of individuals, families, and social groups. The course provides a framework for understanding the influences of medium to large social systems on individuals, families, and groups with whom social workers practice. Communities, organizations, and other social groups are examined in terms of risk and protective factors that promote or detract from optimal individual and group well-being.

The course gives special attention to the critical evaluation of theory and research knowledge about social change and social processes within an organizational, community, societal, and international context. There is a focus on oppression, discrimination, prejudice, and privilege and their relationship to social and economic justice for populations served by social workers. This knowledge is considered within a context of social work values and ethics that support the general welfare of all citizens, especially the disadvantaged and oppressed.

Course Objectives

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

1. Identify, describe, and discuss selected theoretical perspectives on organizational, community, and societal structures, processes, and change and social and behavioral science knowledge.

2. Describe and discuss the impact of communities, organizations, and other societal groups on the social environmental interactions between individuals, families, and small groups.

3. Describe and discuss the meaning of multiculturalism and diversity and their consequences in American society for community, organizational, and societal functioning.
4. Identify, describe, and discuss the role of risk and protective social factors in relation to social problems, social work interventions and social/economic justice.

5. Identify, describe, and discuss major processes and contemporary manifestations of oppression, discrimination, prejudice, power, and privilege as they impact on the social environment, especially in relation to women, people of color, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons.

6. Identify, describe, and discuss barriers to organizational and community competence, especially those derived from race, ethnicity, culture, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, or national origin.

7. Critically evaluate organizational, community, and societal structures and processes that seek to promote social and economic justice by applying professional values and ethics.

8. Critically evaluate and apply social and behavioral science knowledge about macro systems to generalist social work practice.

**Relationship of the Course to the MSW Curriculum**

This course is part of the HBSE (Human Behavior and Social Environment) component of the foundation, generalist component of the curriculum. As such, it focuses on the “macro” knowledge base for social work practice in all methods and fields, emphasizing mid to larger size systems. It draws from some areas of psychology, but more from sociology, political science, and anthropology, with some economics and history. The course will emphasize what evidence is available to support particular perspectives and theories and will analyze the strengths and limitations of each. A major goal is to develop the capacity to think, plan, problem-solve, and create change at larger systems levels, and to understand how larger systems affect individuals, families, and groups.

**Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes**

- **Multiculturalism and Social Diversity** is addressed through the presentation of theory and research on their role in community, organizational, and societal functioning and well-being.

- **Social Justice and Social Change** is addressed through the discussion of the role of risk factors and preventive social factors in relation to social problems and social work interventions.

- **Behavioral and Social Sciences Research** is addressed through its inclusion in the description of the social environment and its impact on individuals, families, and groups.
• **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation** is addressed through the discussion of programs and systemic interventions to prevent stress and alleviate oppression for individuals, families, and groups and to enhance their quality of life and well-being.

**Required Readings**
The following books are required texts for the course. They are available for purchase in Shaman Drum bookstore on State Street and are on reserve in the School library.

- A coursepack of articles and book chapters available for purchase from Excel (on S. University, between E. University and Church).

**Course Assignments, Requirements, and Grading**
10% of your grade will be based on class participation – showing up for class is very important as is participation in a number of in-class/out-of-class group and individual activities.

Everyone will be assigned a specific date on which she/he will co-lead a half-hour discussion of the readings for that particular class date. The group will be responsible for jointly developing 3-5 discussion questions (which should be made available to the class) and for facilitating the actual discussion. This activity will not be formally graded, but will be considered as part of your class participation grade. If it is possible to find a fictional or non-fictional video/movie clip (of no longer than 7 minutes) which illustrates and/or illuminates some of the material in the readings, please feel free to include this video in your presentation.

For class 5 and 6, I would like the presenters to focus on Barbara Ehrenreich’s book. For Class 5, looking at the “barriers to community competence” she encounters; and for Class 6, looking specifically at the ways in which the author and her co-workers were disempowered and/or empowered.

There will be three (3) written papers for the course. Each paper is worth 30% of your course grade. The requirements for each paper will be explained in detail at least 3 weeks prior to the due date. If you have a creative idea for one of the papers, please come up with a 1-2 paragraph proposal which explains your idea AND explains how your idea will address/embrace the basic premises of the assignment. This kind of creativity is welcome! Papers will be marked down 5% for every day late. The papers will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
Systematic and logical presentation of arguments;
• Appropriate use of evidence;
• Familiarity with and appropriate use of relevant literature and concepts;
• Clarity and coherence of presentation;
• Originality and creativity;
• Conformity with the requirements of the assignment

I am not interested or impressed by lengthy papers that exceed the page limit or meet the page limit exactly. In many instances, the conciseness of a paper indicates that it has been well organized and well contemplated.

Assignment 1 – Examination of self in relation to the macro world. – Due Oct. 2

This assignment asks you to examine yourself and your background in relation to the macro world and the material in this course. Details will be provided in class.

Assignment 2 – Multicultural Conceptions of Community – Due November 13

This assignment utilizes literary and social science sources to examine different perspectives on the nature of community. Each student will select a novel (or anthology of short stories) that explores the role of community in the lives of individuals, families, and groups. The assignment will require students to compare and contrast the conception of community presented in the novel with their own perspective(s) on community in the context of a theoretical perspective on community drawn from the course readings. A list of potential readings will be distributed in class. Students may also suggest additional titles. **Note: Students must select a book that describes a racial, ethnic, or cultural group different from themselves.** Further details will be provided in class.

Assignment 3 – Community/Organizational Theory and Change – Due December 11
(Turning in papers on Dec. 4, if possible)

This assignment requires students to explore the utility of a theoretical perspective on community or organizational change in the context of their field placement agencies. Details will be provided in class.

All assignments should be **5-8 double-spaced, typewritten pages (using a 12-point font)**. Sources used must be cited using the appropriate citation format. Note that two important criteria for the evaluation of each assignment are that its emphasis must be on analysis, and not merely description; and that the paper apply concepts and theories covered in class and required readings.
Class Schedule and Readings (CP = Reading in Coursepack)

The chapters and articles are to be read by the date under which they are listed in the Schedule. Example: On September 11, you need to come to class having read the first 6 chapters of Mullaly.

Class 1       September 4       Introduction to the Course
               Basic Goals and Concepts

Class 2       September 11      Theories of Society and Social Welfare

Reading:
• Mullaly, chapters 1-6.
• Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 1, pp. 1-25

Paper 1 assigned

Class 3       September 18      Theories of Society and Social Welfare II

Class 4       September 25      Defining and understanding communities

Readings:
• (CP) Fellin, Chapter 3, “Defining Communities,” 49-69.
• Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 2, pp. 26-43

Paper 2 Assigned

Class 5       October 2         Barriers to Community Competence. Theories Underlying Community Change

Readings
• Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 3, pp. 44-68

Paper 1 Due
Class 6  
October 9  
Community Political Systems and Power

Reading:

Class 7  
October 16  
Ideology, multiculturalism, and Community

Readings:
- (CP) D. deAnda (1997). “Are There Theories That Are Sufficiently ‘Culture-Free’ to be Appropriate and Useful for Practice with Multicultural Clients?” in Controversial Issues in Multiculturalism, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 142-152.
- Ehrenreich, “Cleaning in Maine.”

Oct. 23  
All School Event – “Intensive Focus”

Class 8  
October 30  
Community Conflict: Decision-making/Problem-Solving

Reading:
- (CP) Johnson, Chapters 3, “The Trouble We’re In: Privilege, Power and Difference,” pp. 15-41

Class 9  
November 6  
Community Organizing on the Neighborhood Level

Reading:
- Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 4, pp. 69-83.

Assign Paper 3
Class 10  November 13  Theories of Organizations and Organizational Practice I

Reading:
- Ehrenreich, “Selling in Minnesota” and “Evaluation”
- Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 5, pp. 84-100

Assignment 2 is due

Class 11  November 20  Theories of Organizations and Organizational Practice II

Reading:
- Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 6, 101-126.

Class 12  November 27  Theories of Community and Organizational Development and Change I

Readings:
- Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 8, 9 153-201.

Class 13  December 4  Interorganizational Relations

Readings:
- Kirst-Ashman, Chapter 7,8 127-152.
Class 14    December 11    Theories of Community and Organizational Development & Change II

Readings:
- Mullaly, Chapter 9, “Working Within (And Against) the System,” 163-186.

Assignment 3 due