Organizational, Community, and Societal Structures and Processes

Course Description

This course will examine theory and research knowledge about political, economic, and societal structures and processes related to communities, groups, and organizations within contemporary society. Consideration will be given to ways in which these social systems have significant social, political, economic, and psychological impact on the functioning of individuals, families, and social groups. This course will provide a framework for understanding the influences of these significant social systems on individuals, families, and groups with whom social workers practice. Communities, organizations, and other large social units will be 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 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.

**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. 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 Social Work Ethics and Values**

This course will address ethical and value issues relate to working with organization, communities and societal structures and processes. The NASW code of Ethics will be used to inform practice in this area. Examples of ethical and value related issues will include the social worker’s responsibility to promote the general welfare of society by preventing and eliminating discrimination, ensuring equal access to resources, expanding choices and opportunities for all persons, encouraging respect for diversity, advocating for change in social policies, and
encouraging informed participation by the public. In addition, issues related to organizations will be covered such as preventing discrimination in the workplace, improving agency policies and procedures, and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations.

Required Readings

The following books are required texts for the course. They are available for purchase in Ulrich’s bookstore on East University Avenue and are on reserve in the School library.

- A set of articles on reserve in the Social Work library or easily accessible via the Internet.

All readings listed on the syllabus are required. Students must read all assigned material BEFORE the class for which they are assigned. Students will be expected to participate actively in class discussion and small group activities. I will call on students during class to offer their comments on the readings and on the general topic being discussed and I encourage you to draw on your personal and professional experiences. However, you should relate these experiences directly to the readings or to the topic being covered and this is very difficult to do if you haven’t actually done the readings.

I would like to add that I consider learning to be a lifelong and never-ending endeavor. As such I am excited to have the opportunity to deepen my own understanding of social welfare theory over the course of the semester. I also want to be responsive to the particular interests of students. Therefore, if during the term I encounter readings that would be relevant to the topic at hand, but that are not currently listed on the syllabus, I reserve the right to assign such readings on an ad hoc basis and will give students at least a week’s notice of any additional reading assignments. No more than one such reading will be assigned for any given week.

As this course is part of the HBSE (Human Behavior and Social environment) component of the foundation, generalist component of the curriculum it focuses on the ‘macro’ knowledge based for social work practice in all methods and fields emphasizing mid to larger systems. Your learning will be correlated with the effort you expend in taking responsibility for your own goals and agendas. We will discuss many of the readings, but I may not discuss some unless you tell me you have a question or aren’t sure you see the relevance. In addition, there are numerous articles and books that have been written on the topics we'll cover in this course and there is simply not enough time to read all of them. My selection of these particular readings represents in part my own training and background and in no way suggests that the particular theories, problems, populations, covered represent all of the important issues. I am very happy to listen to your suggestions regarding the inclusion of other readings or activities that are relevant to this course.

Course Assignments and Requirements
Assignment #1: News Article Review - 20 Points.

Each week, beginning on week #4 (Sept. 27), one to three students will make brief oral presentations based on a news article/story that they choose. You will provide the following in a 7-12 minute oral presentation: a brief summary of the content of the article; discussion of how it is related to the prior week's readings; discussion of how the issue is related to social work values and social justice; and, discussion of what you think social work's role should be regarding the issue. You should make direct references to the prior week's readings and to the NASW code of ethics where applicable. You should bring enough copies of the story for all classmates but no additional handouts are necessary nor are visual aids however, you are welcome to provide such presentation materials (you must tell me at least one week ahead of time if you'll need any equipment such as an overhead or computer). The news article/story need not be from a 'mainstream' source (e.g. one that targets a mass audience) nor only from a print media source. I encourage you to use material from sources that are geared toward a narrower audience or represent 'alternative' viewpoints (e.g. Amsterdam News-www.amsterdamnews.org; Disability World-www.disabilityworld.org; Echo Magazine-www.echomag.com; Oxygen Network-www.oxygen.com; etc.). This assignment is an opportunity for you to contribute your particular interests and in so-doing help all of us take advantage of the diversity represented by all of you. It is also a way of helping us understand how the media contributes to our understanding of social problems and solutions. At the beginning of class on the day of your presentation you should hand in to me a 750-1000 word (3-4 pages) paper that addresses these same issues in a formal written manner (excluding the article summary). The oral presentation should not simply be a recitation of your paper. The goal here is to demonstrate your ability to apply course concepts to current events while also demonstrating your ability to effectively communicate basic information as well as your own thoughts on a topic. Finally, I ask that you provide me with a copy of the article, or tell me where I can locate it (e.g. website address) by no later than the Monday before the class in which you will present. If I believe that the article is not sufficiently related to the prior week's discussion or to the class content in general I may ask you to identify and use a different article.

Assignment #2: Weekly Commentary Papers on the Readings - 40 Points (10 points each).

During weeks 4 through 14 (Sept. 27 to Dec. 6, excluding week #12 which is Thanksgiving) you are expected to hand in 4 short commentary papers between 600-900 words (about 2-3 pages) in length which should consist of your reaction to, and critical comment on, the readings (or a particular reading) for the upcoming week. In these papers you can write about things in the readings that you agree or disagree with and explain the basis of your agreement/disagreement or you may discuss how the readings prompted you to think about an issue differently as a person and as a social worker. You may discuss the readings in relation to current events, your field placement or social work in general. The intention of these papers is to get you to think critically about the readings and to understand their usefulness to social work(ers). Therefore, simply summarizing the readings will not receive a very high grade. You will sign up for your four weeks during class on September 20 (week #3). The papers should be placed in my mailbox or e-mailed to me as an attachment no later than 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the day before class. So for example, if one of your four choices is week #4-Friday, September 27, you must submit your paper to me by Thursday, September 26 by 12:00 noon. I will e-mail you to confirm that I
received your paper. If you don’t get an e-mail from me then it is your responsibility to contact me to ensure that I actually receive your paper. My intent is to integrate these papers into class discussion and therefore I may quote from your paper or ask you to clarify or debate a point during class. Please be aware of these possibilities as you compose your thoughts.

Assignment #3: Final Paper - 30 Points. Due December 13 by 5:00 p.m.

A paper between 2000-3000 words (8-12 pages) that: (choose one of the following)-

1. critically compares and analyzes two theoretical perspectives as to their utility in explaining the relationship between socio-political-economic forces and structures and the experiences of a particular community, neighborhood, organization or group that you identify.

2. explores the utility of a theoretical perspective on community or organizational change in the context of your field placement agency.

Be sure to address issues of oppression, discrimination, prejudice, power and privilege as they relate to the particular theory(ies) you are discussing and the population/organization that you are writing about. We'll discuss the specifics of this final paper during the term after you've had a chance to be exposed to some of the course material.

A Note about Assignments:

All assignments should be typewritten and double-spaced with numbered pages using a 12-point font and 1 inch margins. Titles, dates, your name, etc should appear on a separate cover page with all pages stapled (please no plastic covers, etc.) Sources used and referred to must be cited. Note that an important criteria for all written and oral assignments is the emphasis on analysis, (not mere description) and that you apply concepts and theories covered in class and required readings. In addition, lateness will result in reduction of your grade (5 points per day) for that assignment and consequently for the course. Only emergencies will be considered as an acceptable excuse for lateness.

Class Participation and Attendance -10 Points.

Overall your grade will be based on your attendance, the quality (and quantity) of your contributions to discussions and in-class activities, your attention and response to other's contributions, and your courtesy and respect to others.

Grading System and Criteria

Active Participation in class (I’ll call on students to help with this).
Degree to which you demonstrate understanding and ability to use macro knowledge and theory.
Systematic and logical presentation of arguments.
Appropriate use of evidence and reference to readings.
Clarity of presentation.
Originality and creativity.
Attention to multicultural and social justice issues across different populations and macro levels.

A 100-point system will be used. At the end of the term, the numerical grades earned for each written/oral assignment will be translated into letter grades according to the following formula:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>94-97</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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Incompletes are not granted unless it can be determined that it would be unfair to hold the student to the normal expectations of the course. The student must formally request an incomplete prior to the final week of classes. Students with specialized learning needs are requested to make an appointment with me to discuss necessary arrangements. Finally, it is an expectation of this course that you will check your e-mail account at least a few times each week and reply when necessary.

Class Schedule and Readings

INTRODUCTION

Week #1. September 6   Introduction to the Course: Basic Goals and Concepts
- Discuss the syllabus and structure of the course.
- Introduction Information Sheet
- The importance of Macro issues.
- Questions, comments, concerns.

THE BIG PICTURE: SOCIETY AT LARGE

Week #2. September 13  Macro Social Environment & Social Work
- Kirst-Ashman Ch. 1: Introduction to Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment.

Week #3. September 20 Theories of Society and Social Welfare
• Fellin Ch. 2 American Society as a Welfare State.
• Mullaly Ch. 1: Capitalism, Crises, and Paradigms. Ch. 3: The Neo-Conservative Paradigm. Ch. 4: The Liberal Paradigm. Ch. 5: The Social Democratic Paradigm. Ch. 6: The Marxist Paradigm. Ch. 7 Structural Social Work Theory.
• Sign up for reading review assignment.

Week #4. September 27 Economics and the Macro Environment

Week #5. October 4 Politics and the Macro Environment
• Party Platforms

NARROWING OUR FOCUS: COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBORHOODS

Week #6. October 11 Defining and Understanding Community
• Kirst-Ashman Ch. 2: Communities in the Social Environment: Theories and Concepts.
• Fellin Ch 3: Defining Communities & Ch. 4: Community Competence and Systems Perspective.
Gilens, M. Race and poverty in America: Public misperceptions and the American news media.

Week #7. October 18 Communities: Diverse Needs, Diverse Strengths
- Kirst-Ashman Ch. 12: Diversity, Populations-at-Risk, and Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment.
- Fellin Ch. 5: Demographic Development of Communities; Ch. 6: Stratification by Social Class; Ch. 7: Neighborhood Communities; Ch. 8: Social Class and Ethnic/Cultural Neighborhoods.

Week #8. October 25 Communities: Economics & Politics
- Kirst-Ashman Ch. 4: Neighborhood Empowerment
- Fellin Ch. 11: Community Economic System & Ch. 12 Community Political System
- *Roger & Me*

Week #9. November 1 Communities: Power, Policy & Practice
- Fellin Ch. 13: Community Conflict & Ch. 14 Social Integration in Communities

ZOOMING IN: SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS & GROUPS

Week #10. November 8 Theories of Organizations and Organizational Practice Change
- Kirst-Ashman Ch. 5: Knowledge and Theories About Organizations; Ch. 10: Types of Groups in the Macro Social Environment; Ch. 11: Human Behavior in Groups: Theories and Dynamics.
Fellin Ch. 9 Community Social Welfare and Health Care Systems

Week #11. November 15 Organizations: Diverse Interests - Many Functions
Smith, B. 1998. Nonprofit Organizations in International Development: Agents of Empowerment or Preservers of Stability?

Week #12. November 22 THANKSGIVING BREAK-NO CLASS

Mullaly, Chapter 9: Working within the System & Chapter 10: Working Outside the System

Week #14. December 6 Organizations: Challenges & Benefits of Working Together