The University of Michigan
School of Social Work

SW500 - Human Differences, Social Relationships, Well-Being, and Change Through the Life

Fall, 2003
Section 004, Thursdays, 9:00 a.m.-12 noon
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Course Description

This course takes a multicultural and critical perspective on understanding individuals, families, and their interpersonal and group relationships; life span development; and theories of well-being, stress, coping, and adaptation. This course will emphasize knowledge about individuals and small social systems and the implications of this knowledge for all domains of social work practice. Students will be introduced to the concepts of risk and protective factors, with relevant examples at the individual and small system levels. Students will also consider the implications of this knowledge for intervening in social problems and supporting rehabilitation once problems have developed. Major components of the course will be concerned with the processes of oppression, privilege, and discrimination and factors that help people and small social systems to change. The knowledge presented will include the inter-relationships between smaller and larger social systems, and in particular, how biological factors and the larger social and physical environments shape and influence individual and family well-being.

Course Content

Content will include selected theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and individual and small system change. Students will consider how relevant concepts have been developed, the types of knowledge and data that inform different theories, and current gaps and controversies in biological, behavioral, and social science knowledge and theory. Emphasis will be placed on similarities and differences related to human diversity and dynamics of oppression and privilege. In addition, this course will focus on how individual and small system factors and processes can facilitate attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, family characteristics and group processes and either promote multicultural human well-being and social justice or help to recreate inequities and problems.
Course Objectives

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

1. Demonstrate knowledge about and be able to critically analyze relevant theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and individual and small system change through the life course emphasizing similarities and differences and the effects of oppression and privilege.

2. Articulate the concepts of risk and protective factors and give examples at the individual, group, and family levels.

3. Describe the impact of such characteristics as economic class, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, and age on risk and protective factors, human development, human interactions, and the structures of small social systems.

4. Identify the inter-relationships between smaller and larger social systems, and describe how biological factors and larger social and physical environments interact to influence individual and family well-being.

5. Describe how relevant concepts have been socially constructed; what knowledge and empirical evidence support selected theories, some current gaps in knowledge, and key controversies about these theories and knowledge.

6. Conceptualize how individual and small system factors and processes can either promote multicultural human well-being or recreate inequities and problems.

7. Examine theories of individual, family and group change and their relevance for all types of social work practice towards a multicultural and socially just world.

8. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to human differences, social relationships, well-being, and change through the life course.

Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes

Multiculturalism and Diversity: Students will examine ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, and other forms of social stratification and disenfranchisement affect individuals and small social systems. Emphasis will also be placed on the processes of oppression, privilege, and discrimination, as well as the factors that help people and small social systems to change.

Social Justice and Social Change: Students will analyze selected theories in terms of the factors and processes that either promotes social justice and change or help to recreate inequities and problems.

Promotion, Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation: Students will learn about social problems as well as the spectrum of interventions and supportive rehabilitation currently used to alleviate these problems.

Behavioral and Social Science Research: Students will critically analyze relevant theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and small system change through the life course. The research supporting these theories will provide a foundation or the content in this course.
Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values

This course will address ethical and value issues related to working with individuals, families, communities, and small social systems. The NASW Code of Ethics will be used to inform practice in this area. For example, students will learn about client issues such as confidentiality, privacy, rights and prerogatives of clients, the client's best interest, proper and improper relationships with clients, interruption of services, and termination. In addition, this course will focus on 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 changes in social policies, and encouraging informed participation by the public.

Course Design

The belief that underlies the presentation of this course is that, in practice, social workers operate from a theoretical framework or perspective, which may be conscious or unconscious. The course will be offered in such a way that students will have an opportunity (1) to become familiar with theories of human behavior and human development, in all its diversity, (2) to identify theoretical perspectives that are at work as individual behavior or small group behavior are observed, and (3) to make theoretically-informed choices regarding one's own professional social work behavior. Content to be covered includes biological, human development, political, psychological, psychosocial, and sociological theories.

This course will be delivered in a way that integrates theory and application. In carrying out its objectives, therefore, the course will make use of lecture and discussion, videotapes, empirical and practice-relevant articles which demonstrate the application of human behavior theories, individual and small group activities. Guest speakers may be invited to address special topics.

Students are encouraged to bring their own thoughts, insights and understanding from relevant issues they encounter in their field placements. Attendance, preparation for class, and participation are expected. Frequent absences are not acceptable and will result in a lowering of a course grade. If you know in advance that you are going to miss a class, prior notification to the instructor is expected.

Required Readings


Both books are available at Shaman Drum Bookstore on State Street and on reserve at The Social Work Library.
ASSIGNMENTS

Classroom Activity

Each student is expected to do one during the semester. The presentation should be about 10 minutes in length to allow for discussion. Suggested activities:

Report on a publication about an aspect of life span development from a newspaper article, magazine, or TV show for the general public. Remember, it should NOT be one prepared for professionals. Comment about the publication or presentation in terms of what we are discussing about life span development, developmental theories, and disruptions in well-being.

Report on issues in other cultures or in this culture in poverty stricken families or families at risk as they pertain to what we are studying.

Present notes or consultation notes demonstrating the need to know about developmental theories. Remember, this is not a clinical course and what you said to the client is unnecessary, only the material presented by the client and why knowledge of developmental theory is important.

Present material related to ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, and their forms of social stratification and disenfranchisement affect individuals and small social systems.

This is not an exhaustive list. If you have other ideas, talk to me.

Written Assignments

Formal writing assignments for this course will be evaluated for content, ideas presented, and for the clarity and accuracy of the presentation. Appropriate referencing is required on all written assignments. Sources of assistance include Writing Term Papers, by Professor Kossoudji, in your Student Guide to the Master's in Social Work Degree Program. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association is the style manual to be used by all students. Another source of assistance is Strunk & White's Elements of Style.

All papers are to be typewritten or word-processed with a 12-point font and double-spaced. All papers will need to include bibliographic references and follow parenthetical format for references. Papers that do not adhere to these instructions will be returned and regarded as “late”.

Paper #1

Select one of the theories of development discussed in class and/or from your readings. Briefly summarize the main points of the theory and the theorists associated with it. Apply the theory to a personal situation or a situation with client(s). If you do not have an applicable situation, then apply the theory to a movie, or chapters from a novel, or a novel. It is suggested that this paper be 4-5 pages in length.

This assignment is due October 23.
Final Paper Assignment

This paper is a concept paper. Chose a concept discussed in class or from the readings that you would like to learn about in more depth. Examples of such topics are listed below. It will be important to narrow the topic in order to achieve a focus that goes deeply enough into the topic you have chosen.

The paper will have two parts. The first part will present an overview/definition of the concept you have chosen drawing from readings on research and/or more theoretical aspects of the topic. The second part will illustrate the concept by using examples from your own experience, i.e., your clinical work, family, or neighborhood. If you do not have clients, you may choose your example from a novel or movie.

Read at least five references regarding the concept. If using examples from your field placement, please disguise all material by using pseudonyms and otherwise avoiding other specific information that could identify your clients. It is suggested that this paper be 8 pages in length.

Suggested topics:
  attachment
  impact of culture and ethnicity
  race or gender or poverty as a context for development
and its impact on families and/or societies
  impact of racism on development
  role of fathers in development through the life span
  impact of oppression or privilege on development
  trauma and its impact on development at a particular phase
  aging and its impact on social well-being

This assignment is due December 11.
Optional Exit Cards:

At any time during the class period, you may turn in a card with your responses to the day’s discussions, questions, reflection on the material, discussion of issues you want to address but did not want to discuss during class time, comments on how you think the course is going. Make any suggestions about the course content or any particular class period. It is not necessary to turn in a card with your name on it. This is a direct link to me to address your questions, concerns, needs, etc., so take advantage of it. Please feel free to use email for this purpose (or any other purpose), but the exit cards allow for more confidentiality of such a response, should you prefer it.

Grading Criteria

- Class Attendance, Participation, and Activity 30 points
- Paper Assignment #1 30 points
- Final Concept Paper 40 points

Do not hesitate to contact me at any time with any questions about the course.
Course Outline and Reading Schedule

September 4
Introductions, overview of the course, discussion of assignments, brief lecture and discussion on Assimilation, Acculturation and Bicultural Socialization.

September 11
Lecture and discussion: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives of Development

Readings: Chapters 1 & 2, Modern Social Work Theory

Viewing of When The Bough Breaks, a videotape of three toddlers having difficulties with attachment

September 18
Lecture and discussion: The Psychosocial Approach to Development, The Psychosexual Theory of Development & The Biopsychosocial Model of Development

Readings: Chapters 3 & 4, Modern Social Work Theory

September 25
Lecture and discussion: Cognitive & Learning Theories of Development.

Readings: Chapter 5, Modern Social Work Theory

October 2
Lecture and discussion: Cultural Theory and Systems Theory of Development

Readings: Chapter 6, Modern Social Work Theory

Viewing of The Last Hit, videotape on Detroit area school-aged children's perceptions and experiences of violence.

October 9
Lecture and discussion: Evolutionary Theory

Readings: Chapter 9, Modern Social Work Theory
Optional: View the 30-minute documentary at the web site, becominghuman.org

October 16
Readings: Chapter 12, Modern Social Work Theory
First Paper Assignment Due

October 23
The Preschool Child: Emerging Emotions, Interacting With Others, Gender Roles and Gender Identity

Readings: Chapters 1 & 2, Turning Stones
First paper assignment due.

October 30
The School-age Child: Aptitudes For School, Special Children & Special Needs, Learning In School, Family Relationships, And Expanding Social Horizons

Readings: Chapters 3 & 4, Turning Stones

November 6
Adolescence: Farewell to Childhood, Puberty & Physical Growth, Search for Identity, Ethnic Identity, Myth of Storm and Stress, Part-time Work, Career Development, Dating, Awakening of Sexual Interests, Problems of Adolescent Development

Readings: Chapters 5 & 6, Turning Stones

November 13
Young & Middle Adulthood: Role Transitions Marking Adulthood; Going to College; Psychological Views; Growth, Strength, and Physical Functioning; Health Status; Life-Style Factors; Social, Gender, and Ethnic Issues in Health; Thinking in Adulthood; Self-Concept

Readings, Chapters 7 & 8, Turning Stones
November 20
Middle Age: Physical Changes and Health (changes in appearance, dealing with physical aging, reproductive changes, having babies after menopause, stress and health); Lifelong Learning; Stability of Personality; Does Everyone Have a Midlife Crisis?; Letting Go (Middle Age Adults and Their Children); Middle-Aged Adults and Their Aging Parents; Grandparenthood

November 27: Thanksgiving Break

December 4

Later Life: The Demographics of Aging, Biological Theories of Aging, Psychosocial Changes, Health Issues, Cognitive Processes, Depression, Anxiety Disorders, Dementia

December 11
Final paper assignment due.
General Source Materials

Books


Journals

Adolescence
American Journal of Community Psychology
American Journal of Health Promotion
American Journal of Orthopsychiatry
American Journal of Public Health
American Psychologist
Child Abuse and Neglect
Child and Adolescent Social Work
Child Development
Child Welfare
Contemporary Drug Problems
Death Studies
Development and Psychopathology
Developmental Psychology
Families in Society
Family Relations
Health and Social Work
Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology
Journal of Child Psychotherapy
Journal of Community Health
Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment
Journal of Marriage and the Family
Journal of Multicultural Social Work
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare
Journal of Traumatic Stress
Psychoanalytic Study of the Child
Psychological Review
Psychological Bulletin
Public Health Reports
Social Work
Social Work with Groups
Young Children