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 work place, 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 at Shaman Drum Bookstore on State Street and are on reserve in the School library.

- Johnson, Allan (1997), *Privilege, power, and difference.*

In addition, there is a coursepack of articles and book chapters, which is available in three places:

1) For purchase at Accu-Copy, 518 E. William St. (Please note: Accu-Copy does not accept credit cards).
2) On reserve in the School library.
3) On Electronic Reserves [Mirlyn website→ “go to find other library catalogs”→Course Reserves (under “University of Michigan”)→type in “sw 502” (listed under Rall)]

All readings listed on the syllabus are required. It is important to read all the materials before class, as they will be a central focus of our large- and small-group discussions. I would also like you to bring a copy of the readings with you to class each week.

On occasion, I may assign additional readings (with advance notice). I am also very open to your suggestions concerning additional readings or class activities pertaining to the course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS, REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

There will be two basic assignments for the course, each of which will be discussed in greater detail in class:

**First Assignment: Response papers.** A response paper is a short paper (no more than 2 pages) telling me about some of your thoughts on the readings. I would like to receive them via email before 12 noon on the day before class. The three weeks these are due are:

- Week 2 (Sept. 15—paper due Sept. 14 at noon)
- Week 3 (Sept. 22—paper due Sept. 21 at noon)
- Week 5 (Oct. 6—paper due Oct. 5 at noon)

**Second Assignment: A case study of a human service agency.** We will be working together to create groups of approximately 3-4 students, each of which will apply the ideas being discussed in the course to a particular human service agency. This project will be written up in three parts and presented to the rest of the class at the end of the semester. The three parts are:

Part I (due Oct. 13, in class):

a) Choose a social issue that is central to the work of the agency, and analyze it from the perspective of two of the paradigms discussed in the Mullaly text (see readings for Week 4).

b) Write about the theoretical approach(es) taken by the agency to this issue, using the readings from Week 5 or other readings of your choice.
Part II (due Nov. 17, in class):
   a) Discuss the history of the organization you are studying: When was it founded? What were the prevailing social conditions and political concerns of that time? What approaches were developed in response to those concerns? How have those concerns and approaches shifted over time?
   b) What is the organizational structure of the agency? How would you compare it to the types of agencies discussed in Week 9? What can you say about the ways in which power operates within the agency?

Part III (due Dec. 14, in class):
   a) Can you envision alternative approaches to those taken by the agency? How might you change the ways in which the problems dealt with by the agency are defined? What connections do you see between these problems and global political dynamics?
   b) How could the changes you’ve suggested be worked on by: 1) the agency administration; 2) the clients; 3) social workers working “within” the system; 4) people outside the agency (specify); 5) social workers and other agents (specify) working “outside” the system; 6) possibilities for transnational/global alliances.

Grading and evaluation. The basic structure of the grading/point system is as follows:
   Attendance  10 pts.
   Response papers (due weeks 2, 3, 5)—5 pts. each  15 pts.
   Project, part I (due Oct. 13)  25 pts.
   Project, part II (due Nov. 17)  25 pts.
   Project, part III (due Dec. 14)  25 pts.

Although I will assign the number of points and final grades, I will also ask you to assess your own performance in the class, the effort you have expended, and how much you have learned. You will also evaluate each other in your class presentations. These evaluations will be incorporated with mine.

Basic evaluation criteria (to be refined during class discussion): a) degree to which you demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to use macro knowledge and theory; b) systematic and logical presentation of arguments; c) appropriate use of evidence with citations; d) use of relevant literature and concepts; e) clarity of presentation; f) attention to social justice issues.

Course Syllabus

Week 1 (Sept. 8): Introduction to the course and to each other
Week 2 (Sept. 15): What’s theory got to do with social work?
(Response paper #1 due, Tues. 9/14 at noon)

Readings:

Week 3 (Sept. 22): A short history of capitalism and social work
(Response paper #2 due, Tues. 9/21 at noon)

Readings:

Week 4 (Sept. 29): Modernist paradigms

Readings:

Week 5 (Oct. 6): Modernist Social Work Theories
(Response paper #3 due, Tues. 10/5 at noon)

Readings:

**Week 6 (Oct. 13): Recent paradigm and theoretical shifts: Feminism, postmodernism and critical theory**

(Part I of agency case study due)

**Readings:**

**Week 7 (Oct. 20): The neo-liberal, neo-conservative 90’s: Globalization, privatization and the dismantling of welfare.**

**Readings:**

**Week 8 (Oct. 27): Social work in the 21st century: Privilege, oppression and “social justice work”**

**Readings:**
Johnson, Allan (2001). *Privilege, power, and difference*. Chapter 3 (pp 15-41), Chapter 4, (pp. 42-56), Chapter 8 (pp. 96-116), and Chapter 10 (pp. 137-171).

**Week 9 (Nov. 3): Social work in human service organizations**

**Readings:**
Week 10 (Nov. 10): Communities, processes and change

Readings:
Harp, Rick (1994). “Native by nature.” In Godway, Eleanor and Finn, Geraldine, (Eds.), *Who is this ‘we’? Absence of community*. (pp. 45-55).

Week 11 (Nov. 17): Contextualizing community

(Part II of agency case study due)

Guest lecture from Lynn Nybell, a professor of Social Work at Eastern Michigan University, on historical shifts in ideas about community and children in the 20th century.

Week 12 (Nov. 24): Independent research/Small group meetings

Readings:

Week 13 (Dec. 1): Student presentations: Case studies of human services organizations

Week 14 (Dec. 8): More student presentations, evaluations and wrap-up

(Part III of agency case study due)