Social Change Theories

SW 611-001
Fall 2004
Thursday 9 a.m. – Noon
Family Assessment Clinic
Enter off S. University at S. Forest

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Course Description
This course will review theories and research on organizational, community and societal change, and the roles of individual and group change within larger systems. Theories from many disciplines will be covered, including social conflict, interest groups, and social movements, and such processes as consciousness-raising. Dynamics of the diffusion of innovations in society will also be addressed. Examples will be drawn from a variety of areas of practice in which social workers are involved.

Course Content
The main goal of this course is to address the questions of why and how change occurs in different types of macro systems. Students will compare and contrast different theoretical approaches to the understanding of organizational, community and societal change. Students will learn about how theories have explained stability and change, and approaches to planned change. Comparative dimensions will include the theory’s scope, historical origins, and cultural contexts; the societal arenas and problem areas from which the theory was developed and in which it has been applied; and the assumptions of a theory about humankind, society and how change occurs.

Although the primarily emphasis will be on societal level change, this course will also consider theories of change at the individual, group, community, and organizational levels, and in particular how changes at different system levels affect each other. Students will consider the extent to which different theories are, or are not, compatible with each other and the implications of these relationships for the usefulness of particular theories for particular purposes. Change theories will be included from multiple disciplines and traditions, and students will consider how scholars and activists from different disciplinary perspectives and fields have used and critiqued each other’s work. Emphasis will be given to the types of evidence and knowledge available about each theoretical approach and the types of inquiry used to develop and critique different theories.

Different bodies of thought about change will be critiqued for their relevance to the issues facing privileged, marginalized and oppressed groups within U.S. society and for their usefulness cross-culturally and cross-identity group boundaries. Students will consider how different theories have been applied or could be applied for different purposes, and critique existing types of practice from particular theoretical perspectives. In particular, students will explore the theories that have been important within human service goal and problem areas of interest to them.
**Course Objectives**
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe, compare, and contrast several types of theories about organizational, community, and societal change, and the roles that individual and group change play within these changes.

2. Identify theories relevant to particular goal and problem areas, and critique their strengths and limitations.

3. Critique different theories as to their assumptions, origins, implications for different social problems, and relevance for social justice, diversity, oppression, privilege, marginalized and oppressed groups.

4. Apply particular theories to different areas of practice.

5. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to theories or organizational, community and societal change.

**Intensive Focus Note**
This course is one of those designated by the Governing Faculty to Intensively Focus on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice. Attention to these four dimensions is to occur across the three courses within each Practice Area Concentration and the Program Evaluation course. Note that these IF dimensions are related to the themes that are mandated to be included through all courses, but they are to be foregrounded even more in the Practice Area Concentration courses. As an HBSE course, our emphasis in 611 will be on knowledge and theory, and the application of that knowledge and theory to various areas of practice within the arenas of CSS. Although this is not a practice methods course, we can develop and practice skills in the critique and application of knowledge and theory in ways relevant to practice (e.g., assessment, analysis, planning, design and evaluation of interventions and change strategies and tactics).

We will be emphasizing the social justice dimension—as a desired goal of all planned change. This includes articulating what social justice is, forces for and against social justice goals, and factors that must be incorporated in applying theories of change if social justice is always to be a goal. Factors necessary to examine in social change for social justice include 1) forces that create and perpetuate unearned privilege and oppression and discrimination related to group membership; 2) dimensions of diversity and how they interact/intersect with each other; and 3) power, various ways of understanding power, and how power is relevant in all of the above.

What precedes this is the course description approved by the faculty several years ago, revised somewhat from the one approved by the faculty to include more attention to organization level theory and approaches. **This course description has not yet been revised to include language and goals that emphasize the Intensive Focus (IF) goals.** We are working on changing the courses simultaneously with rewriting the course descriptions, so will be working on the language in this course description during the Spring/Summer and fall. The revised course descriptions will be submitted to the governing faculty for their approval in the future.

The School is also conducting an evaluation of the IF change process in order to provide us information to inform our on-going planning. Eventually, we will be identifying and evaluating desired outcomes—for
student learning overall and within particular courses, for each course, for each set of courses, for the
curriculum as a whole, and the School as an organization. It is likely that we will be asked to participate
in evaluation-related activities over the course of the term, but we don’t know yet exactly what these
might be. We are very interested in your advice about relevant language and goals for this course in
relation to the IF initiative.

**Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes & to Social Work Values & Ethics**

*Multiculturalism and diversity* will be addressed in this course by identifying theories espoused
by and compatible with different cultural traditions, by critiquing theories from different cultural
perspectives, and through course examples about the usefulness of theories in different interest
groups and cultural communities, and with regard to the intersections among these group
boundaries.

*Social justice and social change* will be addressed within the goals and assumptions of each
theoretical approach. Most of the course will focus how theories can illuminate and help to
promote social justice goals, and disrupt the forces that perpetuate unearned privilege and
oppression, by conceptualizing and operationalizing organizational, community, and societal
change.

*Promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation* will be addressed by examining theories
about social change for their relevance and applicability in each of these areas. Students will
compare and contrast theories that focus on a positive vision of the future with theories focusing
on preventing, reducing, or eliminating existing problems.

*Behavioral and social science research* as well as knowledge from other disciplines will be
included by examining the evidence and approaches used to build theory and apply theory
through its applications in practice.

*Social work ethics and values*—Students will examine theories and explore the extent to which
they aid social workers with their ethical responsibilities to the general welfare of society. In
particular, theories and practice examples will be critiqued with respect to the following ethical
principles: preventing and eliminating discrimination, ensuring access to resources and services,
expanding choices for all persons, promoting conditions that encourage respect for diversity,
advocating for changes in policy to improve social conditions and promote social justice, and
encourage informed participation by citizens in shaping policies and institutions.
Course Readings
A large coursepack will be available at Excel at 1117 S. University (upstairs) [734-996-1500]. Some required course readings are posted on the CourseTools website; these readings are indicated by a computer (💻) on the course schedule and will NOT be in the coursepack at Excel. All readings, however, are available on reserve in the SW Library.

Fostering Epistemological Curiosity in Our Classroom

My hope this term is that we create a climate that fosters “epistemological curiosity”, as Freire describes it. We will teach and learn from one another, drawing on our different perspectives and experiences. We will experiment with new knowledge and skills. We will explore the implications of our multiple identities and our backgrounds as we approach social change. We will consult with each other on our projects and assignments. We will plan for ongoing learning and development.

Theorizing can be scary and difficult, exciting and challenging. We are likely to differ in how we believe change should or does happen. We need to be able to challenge and assist each other if the learning experience is to be an optimal one. I need each of you to be “up front” about what is clear, uncomfortable, or problematic. I will develop varied approaches to the use of class time, and am open to your ideas about how best to use our time.

Guidelines for Participation
Together we will develop guidelines for participation and spend time getting to know each other’s backgrounds and interests. We will revisit and revise our guidelines as needed. Please approach me about revisiting them if you feel that the classroom environment is no longer supportive of epistemological curiosity.

Course Tools Website
This course will utilize CourseTools technology to support in class learning. CourseTools Next Generation is here, and I am excited to expand our use of it this term. Many of the assignments will be completed in conjunction with CourseTools and with the intention of promoting discussion of the course themes, content and activities outside of class. Please offer suggestions or ideas as to how we can use this technology to maximize our learning experience.

Special Circumstances
If there are any circumstances that require me and/or the class adapt to your special needs, please consult with me about them.

Religious Observances
Please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance or due dates for assignments so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Electronic Devices
Due to their disruptive nature, I request that we turn off cell phones and pagers while in class, as they are disruptive to the learning environment. If you must be on call for an emergency, please let your home or office know that you are only available for emergencies that no one else can handle. Please set devices to vibrate only.
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you need or desire an accommodation for a disability, I encourage you to contact me at your earliest convenience. Many aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way that I teach can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress throughout the semester. The earlier you make me aware of your needs, the more effectively we will be able to use the resources available to us through Office of Services for Students with Disabilities and the Adaptive Technology Computing Site. If you do decide to disclose your disability, I will (to the extent permitted by law) treat that information as private and confidential.

Writing Resources
Appropriate referencing is required on all written assignments. If you do not know correct citation format, please seek assistance before you submit your assignments. One source for this information is the guide to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. This can be found on the School’s website at http://www.lib.umich.edu/socwork/apastyle.html. See also the information in the Student Guide to the Master’s in Social Work Degree Program and other appropriate University publications for policies and penalties related to academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism.

Please note that ranges given for papers are based on work that is typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced, and with one-inch margins. Electronic submissions of assignments will not be accepted except in emergency situations and with the approval of the instructor.

The University has a College Writing Workshop with graduate fellows and faculty of the English Composition Board. The Writing Center assists students in completing specific assignments or projects to help them improve academic writing skills. Students are encouraged to use these resources. For further information and an appointment, contact:

Sweetland Writing Center
1139 Angell Hall, 1003
(734) 764-0429

Course Assignments & Grading
The course readings, class activities, online CourseTools discussions, and assignments are intended to support students’ interests, knowledge, and experience with social change. Building on this, students will engage theorizing – analysis and critique of theories and application of theories to a planned change effort related to students’ interests and experience. An additional theme of the course is to explore how our privileged and oppressed social identities shape our interests, experiences and epistemologies related to social justice and social change. Students’ final grades will be based on the following grading scale based on the assignments described below.

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**Class Participation – 20% of final grade**
I believe in the power of peer learning; everyone’s participation is critical for everyone’s learning. Participation includes participation in and providing leadership in classroom discussion, class attendance & punctuality, participation during class activities, consultation with colleagues on Social Change Projects, and presentation & discussion of key aspects of your Social Change Project with the class. These will be assessed in various ways throughout the term.

**Online Commentaries & Responses – 20% of final grade**
We will be utilizing the CourseTools website in order to process the course themes as well as the weekly readings. Each student in the course will take responsibility for posting 3 commentaries to the CourseTools website over the course of the semester. In the first commentary, students will share their interests in social change in a essay (400-600 words, or 2-3 pages). For the second commentary, students will submit an analysis of the week’s readings by the Saturday prior to the session (again, 400-600 words, or 2-3 pages).

**Commentary 1 – Social Change Interests & Experience – due for all students 9/16.**
What arena for social change & social justice most interests you? What are you passionate about as far as social change and social justice are concerned? What experience have you had with social change/social work/social justice? What goals do you think are important in this change arena? What theories do you think underlie the change work being done in this arena? What questions about social change do you hope to answer this semester?

**Commentary 2 – Exploring the Course Readings – due the Saturday before the class session the readings are assigned – we will sign up for these class**
What do you take as the main points of the readings? How does it describe social change? What are its limitations? How do you apply it to the change arena you discussed in Commentary 1? What questions do you have about this theory (in general, as it relates to your change arena)? How does it relate to the IF criteria of privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice? What connections can you make between this reading and the other readings for this week? From past weeks? To other theories with which you are familiar? To social work as a field? How is your reaction to the readings impacted by your positionality? How do they inform your critical consciousness?

**Commentary Responses**
In addition to the commentaries, students are also expected to make 2-3 replies to the commentaries that have been posted each week (not to each commentary, but to all of those posted in a given week). That is why the due date for the commentaries is midnight the Saturday before the class session – giving everyone from then until class on Thursday to post to discussions. The purpose of doing the assignments this way is to facilitate discussion, analysis and application of the theories outside of class.

**Social Justice Analysis Paper – 25% of final grade**
This assignment is an opportunity to consider your understanding of a social change arena that interests you through the lens of social change theory, to analyze how the Intensive Focus criteria of social justice, diversity, privilege and oppressions are involved in it, and to begin to discuss potential directions for your Planned Change Project. **This assignment should be 8-10 pages (double-spaced) and is due at the beginning of class on 10/28.**
1. Describe a change arena of interest to you.
   - What are some of the change goals you are familiar with in this change arena?
   - What people, settings, organizations, and contexts have been historically important in relation to this goal? What have they done in this arena?
   - How would you describe changes that have occurred or are occurring in this arena? Why? What strategies/tactics/methods have been used to make change?
   - What are some of the outcomes of the changes made in this arena – intended or unintended?

2. Theorize about the social justice implications of this change arena.
   - How is social justice defined, either explicitly or implicitly, in the change arena? What are the implications of this for people of privileged or oppressed social identities?
   - How do you understand and define power in this arena?
   - How can you use Hill Collins’ domains of power to understand how power is circulated within the change arena?

3. Theorize about a change goal you would like to see happen in this change arena.
   - Why has change in the directions you desire not occurred?
   - What theories/conceptual approaches have been used, either implicitly or explicitly, to understand or make change in this arena?
   - Based on your experience and exposure to theories, what theories might be helpful in pursuing change?
   - How can you use the theories in the course and your experience/knowledge of the change arena to critique one another?

4. Construct a force field analysis based on your theorizing around your change goal.

5. Discuss your positionality (the role of your social identities and resulting experiences of privilege or oppression) in relation to this change arena.
   - How do they impact your practice and passion for social change?
   - How do they affect how you understand power?
   - How do they aid/hinder/bias you as a change agent in this arena?

**Planned Change Project – 25% of final grade**

This assignment will build on the Social Justice Analysis of your change arena to create a strategy for planned change in that your change arena. This might include 1) planning and/or discussion of social change work that you believe should happen on a particular topic in a particular action context, 2) a case study of actual social change work done in the past (through literature review, perhaps some interviews with participants, document analyses) or 3) a case study of social change work that is on-going (through participation and observation, in addition to what is listed for #2). The project will include research on your topic area outside of course readings; the intent is to look at what is known or what has been done in your change arena and to explore that through the lenses provided by the theories covered in class as well as other relevant theories. **Your Planned Change Project should be 8-10 pages (double-spaced) and is due on 12/9.**

1. Review your force field analysis.
   - Which forces are strongest? Which are most consistent? Which are most amenable to change?
   - What specific change goal(s) will you pursue to modify these forces? Why do you choose these forces?
What desired outcomes would you like to see happen as a result of achieving this goal?
- How do these address social justice issues you raised?

2. Select & describe contexts in which you can pursue your change goal(s).
- What are some domains in which change can occur within the issue area you have chosen? What people, settings, organizations, and contexts are important in relation to this goal?
- What has been done in the past that is specifically relevant to the change goals you have defined?
- What theories about change have been applied in work towards this goal in the past (can be explicit or implicit)? How have they been successful? How have they failed?

3. Use theories to analyze the change goal and contexts in which you could make change.
- How do the theories and concepts from this class help you understand the change arena you are exploring? What directions do they take in considering change?
- How do the theories and concepts from this class help you think about stimulating change, identifying and addressing barriers to change, and applying particular change strategies or tactics in this arena?
- How do you compare, contrast, and critique the theoretical approaches, with regard to their assumptions and implied strategies, their likely effectiveness, and/or their concern with and impact on privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice?
- depicting different types and levels of forces and incorporating social justice.

4. Based on your theorizing, construct another Force Field Analysis
- What are the driving and restraining forces for the goal you have identified?
- What theories relate to each force? How do those theories help you think about making change (or modifying the forces)?
- What obstacles can you foresee?
- What strategies and tactics do you propose to realize your change goal?

5. Form a conclusion that addressed:
- How does your plan address social justice issues you identified?
- Identify and discuss relevant ethical and value questions.
- Describe how you will assess and evaluate change efforts informed by relevant theories.

Critical Reflection Essay – 10% of final grade
This is an essay to provide you the opportunity to reflect on the semester – including areas of major learning, goals for future learning, and integration of learning with awareness of positionality. Specifically, your essay should address the following:
1. (Change in) Understanding of positionality and social identities & impact on learning
2. (Change in) Understanding of social justice
3. Understanding of privilege and oppression related to aspects of diversity
4. Major learning this semester as it relates to social change theories.
5. Questions you still have about the themes and content of the course and goals for future learning.
Course Schedule

Thursday 9 September

**Introductions, Course Overview & Education as Social Change**


Thursday 16 September

**Theory & Consciousness: Social Identities, Privilege & Oppression**

We will meet in the SW Library Computer classroom for the first 1/2 of this class. Please be on time, as we will need to be out for another group to start at 10:30 a.m.


Thursday 23 September

**Theories in Social Work & Sociology**

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 18 September by:

Thursday 30 September

Theories & Conceptions of Social Justice

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 25 September by:


Thursday 7 October

Planned Change

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 2 October by:


Thursday 14 October

Theories & Conceptions of Power

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 9 October by:

- Coser, Lewis, ed. (1963). Power and authority, from Sociology through literature, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 150-174. This chapter contains brief excerpts on the subject of power and authority from the following writings:
  - Norman Mailer (1948). The naked and the dead
  - Arturo Barea (1946). The forging of a rebel
  - George Bernard Shaw (1923). Preface to Saint Joan
  - Charles Dickens (1848). Dombey and son
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson (1850). “Napoleon; or the man of the world”
- Lev Tolstoi (1869). War and peace


Thursday 21 October

Postmodernism

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 16 October by:


- Spargo, T. 1999. Sex Matters; Who is Foucault?; What is Queer Theory?; A Queer Genealogy; Sex, Truth and Discourse; Scientia Sexualis; The Construction of Homosexuality; Power and Resistance; Reactions to Foucault. Foucault and queer theory, 3-27. NY, NY: Totem Books.


Thursday 28 October

Social Movement Theory

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 23 October by:

Social Justice Analysis due at the beginning of class


Thursday 4 November

**Policy Change Models**

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 30 October by:


Thursday 11 November

**Organizational Change**

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 6 November by:

Thursday 18 November

Applications of Postmodernism

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 13 November by:


Thursday 25 November

Thanksgiving Day – Enjoy Your Holiday!

Thursday 2 December

Nonlinear Systems & Chaos Theories

Commentaries submitted by Saturday 27 November by:


Thursday 9 December

Your Theories Here – Presentations of Social Change Projects & Theories

Planned Change Project due at the beginning of class
Thursday 16 December

**Privilege, Oppression, Diversity & Social Justice**