

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

<b>Course Number:</b>	SW381T	<b>Instructor's name:</b>	Alba Sereno
<b>Unique Number:</b>	93880	<b>Office Number:</b>	3.104A
<b>Semester:</b>	Summer 2014	<b>Office Phone:</b>	214.799.3767
<b>Meeting</b>	M/W, 5:30-8:30 pm	<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:ALBA.SERENO@GMAIL.COM">ALBA.SERENO@GMAIL.COM</a>
<b>Time/Place:</b>	Room 2.112		
<b>Office Hours:</b>	M/W, 4:30-5:30 pm by appointment		

**DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

**I. Course Description**

This course familiarizes students with the macro context of social work practice. It examines the reciprocal relationship between human behavior and social environments. It emphasizes the interlocking and complex nature of culture and personal identity with content on populations-at-risk, examining the factors that contribute to and constitute being at risk. It introduces the student to the obligation that social services meet the needs of groups served and are culturally relevant. This includes equipping students with skills to recognize diversity within and between groups that may influence assessment, planning, intervention, and research. Students learn how to define, design, and implement strategies for effective practice with persons from diverse backgrounds.

This course examines the impact of social structure and other societal factors on one's personal life chances in relation to equity, fairness, opportunity, and other issues of social and economic justice. Drawing on a systems-ecological perspective, this course helps students develop skills at using systems thinking approaches to understanding organizations and communities with special emphasis on their application to a variety of oppressed and disadvantaged populations and multiple levels of intervention. Special emphasis is given to the development of assessment skills and intervention methods that are relevant to empowerment, capacity building and social change within organizations and communities. Understanding the role of age, race, gender, social class, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, and physical and mental ability is an integral part of this course.

**II. Course Objectives**

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

1. Discuss communities and organizations as a context for professional practice to meet individual needs, build community capacity, and promote social and economic justice;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the value dilemmas and ethical issues confronting social work professionals and their implications for social work practice with organizations and communities;
3. Assess the influence of community norms, priorities, and competitive community factions on the social structure of communities and the delivery of human services;
4. Assess various evidence-based intervention approaches for working with organizations and communities;
5. Analyze the impacts of organizational and community dynamics on populations at risk and relate those impacts to the participation of such populations in organizational and community governance, human service provision, and policy formulation;

6. Evaluate alternative strategies for initiating change in organizations and communities, including planning models, coalition building, community development, direct action, and legislative advocacy;
7. Understand the relevance of age, race, gender, social class, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, and physical and mental ability in social work practice that is grounded in social and economic justice.

### III. Teaching Methods

Course content is covered through reading, listening, thinking, and discussing social work practice in organizations and communities. Class sessions will be devoted to focused discussions that flow from assigned readings and supplemental materials presented in class. Students are expected to ask questions, share experiences, and actively participate in class discussions. In addition, the class may include small group experiential learning, videotapes to generate discussion, and guest speakers who work in agency and community-based settings.

### IV. Required and Recommended Texts, and Materials

Hardcastle, D. A., Powers, P. A. & Wenocur, S. (2011). Community Practice: Theories and Skills for Social Workers, 3rd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Assigned readings that are not from the text are available on-line in the course documents section of the class Canvas page. Additional readings may be assigned as we go through the semester. These readings will, in most cases, also be available on-line. If additional readings are assigned, I will notify the class the week before so that students will have adequate time to read it before class.

The assigned readings for this course represent the minimum required reading for this course. There is a vast body of literature available on organizations and communities. An extensive bibliography is provided on the course Canvas website. You might peruse the bibliography to see if there are titles that you find interesting and would like to investigate.

### V. Course Requirements

Course requirements, due dates, and their contribution to the final grade are summarized below.

Assignment	% of Course	
	Grade	Due Date
<b>Current Events Assignment</b>	<b>10%</b>	TBD
<b>Exam 1</b>	<b>20%</b>	6/30
<b>Exam 2</b>	<b>20%</b>	7/30
<b>Task group project</b>	<b>50%</b>	
Skills Inventory & Work Plan	10%	6/16
Professional Presentation	15%	7/28
Project Outcome	15%	7/28
Individual Evaluation	10%	7/28

Grades for this course will be assigned using the following +/- scale.

94.0 and Above	A
90.0 to 93.999	A-
87.0 to 89.999	B+
84.0 to 86.999	B
80.0 to 83.999	B-
77.0 to 79.999	C+
74.0 to 76.999	C
70.0 to 73.999	C-
67.0 to 69.999	D+
64.0 to 66.999	D
60.0 to 63.999	D-
Below 60.0	F

Each of the course requirements is described in detail below. However, sometimes students still have questions about the assignments. If this is the case, please feel free to ask for clarification at any time during the course. Students may ask for clarification on an individual basis or they can ask questions at the beginning of each class session.

**Exams.** There will be two exams. The first exam will include material covered in the first half of the class. The second exam will focus on material from the second half of the class. The exams will draw heavily from the readings and class discussions. Format for exams may include multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. Only in the case of illness or other unforeseen emergencies will make-up exams be given. The format of make-up exams is at the discretion of the instructor.

**Task Group Project.** Much of our professional work is done through task groups. Task groups are working groups that are designed to achieve some specific goal or objective. Examples of task groups include staff meetings to clarify agency policies, team meetings to coordinate treatment plans, interagency councils to work out service agreements, Board of Directors to provide community oversight, committees to plan fund-raising events, conference planning committees for professional associations, and community meetings to help residents voice concerns and solve problems.

Task groups are an essential tool for community practice and the ability to work effectively with task groups is a critical professional skill. Like other professional skills, working with task groups involves a deliberate process focused on achieving specific goals. It requires preparation before the meeting and follow-up after. It means being able to develop professional relationships with others that are grounded in trust and respect, even when we disagree with one another.

This project requires students to work in a task group consisting of 3-4 students. Each task group will be paired with a community partner to work on an issue of concern to the community partner. Students will exercise skills in the day to day practice of the partner in ameliorating the critical social problem. The goal is to expose students to real practice examples of skills presented and learned about in the course.

To achieve the goals of this project, task group members will need to develop a work plan to guide their activities and determine how to best organize the work of the group. This may mean breaking into smaller sub-groups to conduct specific tasks related to the project.

The task groups will be provided some meeting time during class. However, it is expected that additional time will be required outside of class for sub-group meetings and tasks related to the completion of project.

Project outcome. Each group will produce a specific product for the community partner. The format and content of that product will be negotiated between the group and the community partner. This means that the product may be somewhat different for each group. Project descriptions will be provided on the

first day of class for individuals to sign up for. Groups will then have the opportunity to meet with a project liaison from the community to ask questions and negotiate the outputs that will inform their work plan. Some community partners may want a formal written report. Others may prefer some training materials, a PowerPoint presentation, survey instrument and methodology for a community survey, or a set of policy recommendations based on the group's research or a combination of these outcomes. What is common across the products is that they should be well organized, neatly presented, and in a form useful to your community partner. In other words, the final product should be professionally done and take into consideration the needs of the community partner.

Professional Presentations. In addition to the project outcome, each group should be prepared to make two presentations of their project. One presentation will be a presentation during class time. The other presentation will be at the discretion of the community partner with the time and place of that presentation being negotiated with the community partner (may or may not be requested). Community Presentations should be developed in consultation with the community partner, regarding the audience, format, length, and content.

Task Group Documents: Skills inventory and Work Plan.

Individual Evaluation. The individual portion of the grade will be determined from three sources of information. First, I will meet with the task groups on special workdays throughout the semester to observe work activity, member participation, etc. Second, each member of the group will prepare a brief written statement outlining their contributions to the project (it may be helpful for each member of the group to maintain a log to document their effort throughout the semester). Third, at the end of the semester each member of the group will complete an evaluation of themselves and of each of the other members of the group.

This is a **“group project”** and I hold the group responsible for its successful completion. That means that the group should address issues regarding quality standards for the project, timely task completion, workload, etc. If and when problems arise in the group, the group should work as a unit to try to develop appropriate solutions. Of course, as professor, I will be available to consult with the groups as needed. I will also intervene if the community partner has expressed concerns about the project.

**NOTE:** As the professor, I do reserve the right to award differentially weighted grades on the group project. This will normally occur when a member of the group fails to actively participate in the group, consistently misses deadline for assigned tasks, or produces work that is below the quality standards expected for the project. In other words, if a student's individual performance is consistently below par so that it jeopardizes the grades of the other members of the group, I will down grade that student.

## **VI. Class Policies**

**Class Attendance and Participation.** Attendance and participation are important for effective learning. This means that students should not only attend class but should be prepared to actively participate in class discussions. At the same time, there may be occasions when students will not be able to attend class because of illness or other unforeseen problems. In such cases, it would be appropriate for the student to notify the professor before class that they will not be in class. In the case of excessive absences, the professor reserves the right to deduct points from a student's final course grade.

**Publication style manual.** The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association is the style manual adopted by the School of Social Work. All papers prepared for this class should conform to the APA style. A summary handout of this manual is available in Student Services. The complete manual is available in the Learning Resource Center. You can also find on-line assistance with electronic reference guidelines at: [APAStyle.org](http://APAStyle.org).

**Scholastic Dishonesty.** The University of Texas at Austin is proud of its students' commitment to academic integrity and their pledge to abide by its policy on scholastic dishonesty. The tradition of

academic integrity is maintained by the cooperation of students and faculty members. Official University policies regarding academic integrity may be accessed from the [Student Judicial Services](#) web site. This site provides detailed information about the university's policies regarding academic integrity and standards of conduct. Students are encouraged to review this page and to become familiar with these policies.

If a student has any questions concerning the application of the rules prohibiting scholastic dishonesty in regard to a particular assignment, it is the responsibility of that student to seek clarification from the instructor of the course. Violations of the University's policy on scholastic dishonesty will result in a grade of F for the course and may result in reporting to the Dean of the School of Social Work and the Dean of the Graduate School.

**Conditional admission.** Students who were admitted into the MSSW program on a conditional basis are not able to take an incomplete for this course if the conditions for admission are still in place.

**Safety.** As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should also notify instructors regarding any safety concerns.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities.** The University of Texas at Austin provides, upon request, appropriate academic accommodation for any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive). For information about academic accommodations, students should contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or (512) 410-6644 (videophone). Information is also available online at: <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>. Students are asked to notify the professor of any accommodations they may need prior to the end of the second week of class.

**Behavioral Concerns Advice Line (BCAL).** If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy.** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor's instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

**Professional Conduct in Class.** I expect students to act like professionals in class. This means arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another's opinions. We will not, nor should we, always agree with one another. In this environment we should be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometime we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. However, I do require that you engage one another with respect and professionalism.

**USE OF CLASS MATERIALS.** The materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, exams, quizzes,

and homework assignments are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized copying of the class materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary actions being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of class materials without the specific, express approval of the instructor may be a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of sharing those materials with other current or future students.

## VII. Course Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Topics (Assigned readings are on Canvas by date)</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
6/9	Introductions and course overview  Working with task groups  <b>Project Work Day</b>	Signup for project and project workgroup  Signup for current events assignment due date
6/11	Introduction to Community Practice, Values and Principles  <b>Project Work Day: Meeting with Project Liaison</b>	Gather necessary project information from project Liaison
6/16	Understanding the Social Environment  Conceptualizing community/social problems  Community and Community Practice  Understanding neighborhoods	<b>Skills Inventory &amp; Project Work Plan Due</b>  <b>Current events assignment for students:</b> <hr/>
6/18	Community Analysis  Community Maps  Mapping Community Resources	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b> <hr/>
6/25	Professional use of self in community practice  Understanding the agency  <b>Project work day</b>	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b> <hr/>
6/30	<b>Exam one</b>	
7/14	The community as a social network  Using social media  <b>Project work day</b>	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b> <hr/>

7/21	Community intervention: Models and approaches Social action and advocacy Organizing for community change	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b>
7/23	Guest Speaker(s)  <b>Optional Early Project Presentation Day</b> <b>Project work day</b>	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b>
7/28	<b>Project Presentation Day</b>	<b>Current events assignment for students:</b>  <b>Professional Presentations Due</b> <b>Project Output Due</b> <b>Teammate evaluations Due</b>
7/30	Course Evaluations <b>Exam two</b>	