

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL WORK

Course number:	SW 393T20	Faculty:	Suzanne Potts, LMSW, MPH
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Human services are under increasing pressure to document the services they provide in light of the diminished resources. As a result of these demands, agencies compile data consisting of the number of services provided, the outcomes, and the demographics of clients receiving those services. Human service practitioners and managers are frequently using technological products (i.e., word processing applications, email, text messaging, case management applications) to not only document services provided to clients, but also to facilitate communication, report outcomes to funding agencies, and monitor trends in service delivery. Because human service managers are not working in a technological environment, they must become familiar with the technologies that agencies are typically using to document services, the ways to use technology to improve the overall quality of services provided to clients, and the barriers and opportunities afforded by the increased integration of technology into human services.

This course emphasizes the use of information technology in human service delivery and management (1) to improve overall quality of services provided by agency staff as well as (2) to leverage the implicit knowledge of workers so that agency's foster ongoing innovations in service provision. To that end, students in this course will be exposed to traditional management practices, intra-agency communication strategies using various technologies, factors facilitating and impeding information flow in organizations, and the technological opportunities and limitations facing human services as these organizations integrate technology into their daily operations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course student will be able to:

1. understand the role of information and technology in both the management and delivery of human services; **(CAL/APB 7)**
2. understand how organizational, interpersonal, ethical, and cultural factors facilitate and impede the flow and exchange of knowledge (i.e., formal/informal structure, hierarchy, organizational roles, the democratic ideal, and similar factors) within organizations; **(CAL/APB 7)**
3. identify traditional methods of disseminating and exchanging knowledge in organizations and their strengths and weaknesses (i.e., policy manuals, memo systems, staff meetings, training, MIS, organizational development, and other methods); **(CAL/APB 6 & 9)**
4. apply automated methods of information collection, dissemination and analysis (i.e., database management, report generation, spread sheet analysis, electronic mail systems, and other methods);

(CAL/APB 6)

5. assess organizations to determine the ways in which they make use of technology to facilitate communication between staff members and compile client information regarding services and outcomes achieved; **(CAL/APB 9)**

6. apply general-purpose computer software to such human service information problems as client information and tracking systems, information and referral problems, budget preparation and analysis, and related problems; and, **(CAL/APB 10b, c, & d)**

7. analyze the differential impact of technology on diverse client and user groups. **(CAL/APB 10c)**

The School of Social Work has been continuously accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1952. In order to maintain our accreditation status, we engage in ongoing curriculum assessment to demonstrate compliance with CSWE's Education Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). Several required courses in our curriculum are part of this ongoing assessment, including this course. Below is a list of the specific Educational Policies (EP) and Practice Behaviors (PB) that are assessed in this course. The complete EPAS can be optioned from your Student Handbook.

EP2.1.6 Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

CAL/APB6 Use empirical evidence to create strategies for system change

Objectives 3, 4

Assignments: Logic Model development and Agency Information System assessment project

EP2.1.7 Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.

CAL/APB7 Synthesize and select human behavior and the social environment theories to develop effective macro interventions

Objectives 1, 2

Assignments: Logic Model and Podcast project, reading and classroom discussions

EP2.1.9 Respond to contexts that shape practice.

CAL/APB9 Engage in continuous environmental scanning and forecasting and adapt macro practice based on the acquired knowledge

Objectives 3, 5, 6

Assignments: Logic Model and Podcast project, reading and classroom discussions

EP2.1.10b Assessment

CAL/APB10b Design and conduct community, organizational, and technological assessments

Objectives 6

Assignments: Agency Information System Assessment project and presentation

EP2.1.10c Intervention

CAL/APB10c Critically apply systematic interventions that prevent problems, expand opportunities, and enhance quality of life

Objectives 6, 7

Assignments: Agency Information System Assessment project and presentation

EP2.1.10d Evaluation

CAL/APB10d Develop and recommend program and/or policy changes based on evaluation

Objectives 6

Assignments: Agency Information System Assessment project and presentation

TEACHING METHODS

This course is an intensive class-based learning that introduces them to the concepts, processes, and practice of human service information technology. At the end of this course students will be fluent in the terms used for information systems and communication, and will have a theoretical framework to assess information system needs within an organization. Students will develop a logic model for a hypothetical program or project, as well as identify budget preparation needs and communication of budgets to key stakeholders. The instructor will assign students into work teams for the Podcast and Agency Information System Assessment. These teams will be asked to conduct an assessment of the information systems and communication of an agency and/or the program. The assessment seeks to identify the current technology, information systems and communication process in the agency/program, the agency's technological or communication efforts towards improving the quality of services, and the mechanisms for exchanging knowledge among staff or programs within the agency/program. Student teams will meet with the instructor to discuss the process and outcome of the assessment for the assigned program and then host a presentation on their findings.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. All readings are included in the reading packet available at Speedway and/or available as PDF on Blackboard. Speedway is located at 715 West 23rd street, Suite N (by University Towers); (512) 478-3334.

ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

The assignments for this class include an in-class assessment based on the readings, presentation of projects, an information system and communication assessment, and an agency presentation. Each section includes the weighted percentage for that grade.

In class participation (10%)

This course will include discussion on in class activities, readings, topics and small group work. Your participation in classroom discussion is expected and encouraged. This will be graded by in class activities, attendance to the class and observation by the instructor.

Reading discussion and participation (10%)

Students are expected to read all assigned readings and participate in an active dialogue, using Blackboard and in class discussion. For each assigned reading, students are required to prepare and post a question, quote or key concept using Blackboard for the class to discuss. Students will post their question, quote or key concept by Thursday 9:00AM CST before class. Students are required to post once

per week on each reading starting the second week of class. Keep in mind that you may comment on other student's posts as well so you may have more than one post per week. This assignment is to engage students in weekly readings and encourage personal thought and reflection, as well as facilitate a healthy dialogue on the subject. Students may have divergent thinking on topics however posts are expected to be professional and courteous.

Logic Model Project (15%)

In this project, students will develop a Logic Model on program, project or agency of your choice. It must include a Program Description, Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Short and Long Term Outcomes and overall Impact expected. A sample Logic Model will be developed in class and discussed from readings. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Podcast Project (15%)

Students will be expected to develop a topic, social significance, outline, content, references and propose a speaker for a Macro podcast. Students will work in groups of no more than three (3) to create these concepts with support from the instructor and Jonathan Singer, from Social Work Podcast. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Agency Budget Project (10%)

Students will demonstrate appropriate skill level and knowledge of budget management and communication by developing a short, in class presentation based on a budget for a nonprofit organization or agency. This assignment will be done in class and will cover the basics of budget preparation and communication of specific budget areas to key stakeholders. Students will identify key budget areas for review and communication, and then develop a plan to engage stakeholders in the budget process. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Agency Information System Assessment and Presentation (40 %)

Work teams will identify an area agency to assess their agency information system or technology needs. Towards the end of the assessment, each student group is required to submit a presentation (PowerPoint or other presentation tool) assessing a particular project or program with clear recommendations for the agency. Student's will demonstrate that they integrated the readings, analyzed the group process used to coordinate the project, reflected on the student meetings including what was discussed (in terms of tasks), tasks that were completed, and challenges in completing the project. *The presentation will be given in class and is expected to include well-developed, carefully thought-out reflections of the team's perspective or ideas and is targeted to the board of the agency that you are assessing.*

The guidelines for this assessment will be drawn from the readings, and the needs of the organization. Each assessment must include a detailed description of the methodology used to gather information about the agency's technology (i.e., interviews with staff or clients; document reviews), the methods to analyze the data, the conclusions, and recommendations for agency.

The team will present the results of their information system assessment to the class. This presentation will be an informal showcasing of process the group engaged in to determine the information system, communication or technological needs of the organization as well as the results of the assessment. Typically, student groups' schedule the presentation and it lasts approximately 30 minutes with 10 minutes for questions and answers. Students' must submit copies of the presentation evaluation to the professor with a brief description of their perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation.

Grade Ranges Corresponding to Letter Grades:

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

CLASS POLICIES

Assignment Submissions

Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with the permission of the professor, late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. Late assignments will be assessed point penalties at the rate of ten (10) percent of the value of the assignment for each day late. If a student has a significant and unavoidable conflict with an assignment's due date, then they should contact the instructor well in advance to discuss an alternate submission date.

Student Feedback and Performance Questions

Student feedback is welcome. Students are encouraged to provide feedback during office hours, by phone, by e-mail, and otherwise by appointment. If students have questions on a specific assignment or general course topic, the professor is willing to work with them outside of class or office hours.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE. The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT IN CLASS. The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should 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, the professor does require that students engage one another with respect and professionalism.

CLASSROOM CIVILITY. A course brings together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as ethnicity, gender, sex, physical abilities, religious and political beliefs, national origins, and sexual orientations, among others. We expect to learn from each other in an atmosphere of positive engagement and mutual respect. Social Work deals with complex and controversial issues. These issues may be challenging and uncomfortable, and it would be impossible to offer a substantive classroom experience that did not include potentially difficult conversations relating to challenging issues.

UNANTICIPATED DISTRESS. Students may experience unexpected and/or distressing reactions to course readings, videos, conversations, and assignments. If so, students are encouraged to inform the instructor. The instructor can be responsive and supportive regarding students' participation in course assignments and activities, but students are responsible for communicating clearly what kind of support is desired. If counseling is needed, students can contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling Center at [512-471-3515](tel:512-471-3515) or online at www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/.

POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION. Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and other forms of electronic communication (i.e. blogs, etc.) must be mindful of how their communication may be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image. Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students' social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including **any** information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in **any** way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.

Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

POLICY ON SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>).

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.

DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471- 6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS. By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS. Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to their e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time- sensitive. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

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 notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

BEHAVIOR 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](tel: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.

SCHEDULE

Class #	Date	Class content/Activity	Readings for the Week	Assignments
1	Aug 28	Course Overview	Syllabus review	Pre-survey (emailed before class)
2	Sept 4	Information Seeking/Agency Assessment Overview	Kling ; Parker-Oliver and Demiris; NASW Policy statement	Agency Technology project (DUE Nov 27)
3	Sept 11	Logic Models	Kellogg Foundation, Chapter 1 and 2; http://nonprofitwebinars.com/past_webinars/10122011-a-guide-to-logic-models-grant-writing/	Homework-Logic Model (DUE October 16) ; Review SW Podcast
4	Sept 18	Information Systems	Megivern, McMillen, Proctor, Striley, Cabasa, and Munson; http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/111610p6.shtml ; Singer (The Role and Regulations for Technology in Social Work Practice and E-Therapy); http://socialworkpodcast.blogspot.com/	Homework: Podcast (DUE Nov 7)
5	Sept 25	Dealing with Data	Budget activity-in class	
6	Oct 2	Communicating Data	Kanter and Fine, Chapters 3 and 4	
7	Oct 9	2-1-1 and Community Information Systems	Guest Speaker-United Way of Greater Austin (UWGA) 2012 UWGA Community Needs and Trends Report ; 50 Ways 2-1-1 Works	
8	Oct 16	Social work and social media	Emailed prior to class	
9	Oct 23	The Safety Net	Guest Speaker-Aunt Bertha	
10	Oct 30	Evaluation to inform and improve programs	Guest Speaker-LIVESTRONG Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, Chapter 1	
11	Nov 6	Ethical Challenges in Technology & Social Work/GIS mapping	Guest Speaker-OneStar Foundation Dunlop and Fawcett; Hillier, "Why Social Work Needs Mapping"	
12	Nov 13	Project Presentations	No readings	
13	Nov 20	Project Presentations	No readings	Post-survey (emailed after class)
14	Nov 27	No Class	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	
15	Dec 4	Project Presentations/ Last Class	Survey results discussion	Agency Information System assessments and evaluations due

Readings in BOLD are included in the course packet.