

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

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 **(PB11 and 27)**;
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 **(PB 27)**;
3. Assess the influence of community norms, priorities, and competitive community factions on the social structure of communities and the delivery of human services **(PB 11)**;
4. Assess various evidence-based intervention approaches for working with organizations and communities **(PB 11)**;

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 **(PB 12 and 27)**;
6. Evaluate alternative strategies for initiating change in organizations and communities, including planning models, coalition building, community development, direct action, and legislative advocacy **(PB 11, 12, 27 and 28)**;
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 **(PB 11)**.

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.

EP2.1.3 Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.

PB11 Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom

Objectives 1, 3, 4, 6, 7

Assignment: Class exercises and activities, exams and class project

PB12 Analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation

Objectives 5 and 6

Assignment: Class exercises and activities, exams and class project

PB13 Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues

Objectives (not specified)

Assignment: Class exercises and activities, exams and class project

EP2.1.9 Respond to contexts that shape practice.

PB27 Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services

Objectives 1, 2, 5, 6

Assignment: Class exercises and activities, exams and class project

PB28 Provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services

Objective 6

Assignment: Class exercises and activities, exams and class project

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

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

Required: Assigned readings that are not from the text are available on-line in the course documents section of the class Blackboard 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 at the end of the syllabus. 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 consist of a small group assignment and two exams. A description of the assignment is provided below. I try to return all exams and assignments within 1 week. I do not take class time to go over exams in detail, so if students have questions about their grade, they should see me individually.

Course requirements, due dates, and their contribution to the final grade are summarized below. Assignment	% of Course Grade	Due Date
Exam 1	25%	October 11
Exam 2	25%	November 22
Task group project	15%	
Written report	15%	
Presentation	10%	
Group documents	10%	
Individual grade		

Grades for this course will be assigned using the following +/- scale.	76 – 74 = C
	73 – 70 = C-
	69 – 67 = D+
100 – 94 = A	66 – 64 = D
93 – 90 = A-	63 – 60 = D-
89 – 87 = B+	59 and below = F
86 – 84 = B	
83 – 80 = B-	
79 – 77 = C+	

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 be on October 11 and will include material covered in the first half of the class. The second exam will be on November 15. This exam will focus on material from the second half of the class. Each exam is worth 25% of your final grade. 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 4-6 students. Each task group will be paired with a community partner to work on an issue of concern to the community partner. Students will conduct research to assess this critical social problem and identify innovative approaches that might help address the problem. This might include reviewing the existing literature to see how other communities have approached similar issues in an innovative manner, or developing a plan for how existing innovations in the community may be successfully replicated in other communities.

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. The assignment is worth 50% of your final grade. Of this 40% will depend upon the products produced by the group and 10% will be based on individual participation. The group grade will be divided into 3 parts, 15% for the class presentation, 15% for the written report, and 10% for the task group documents (see below).

Written report. Each task group will produce a written report for the community partner. The specific format and content of the report will be negotiated between the group and the community partner. This means that the written report of each group may be somewhat different. What is common across the reports is that they should be well organized, concisely written, neatly presented, and in a form useful to your community partner. In other words, the final report should be a professional document that takes into consideration the needs of the community partner.

Professional Presentations. In addition to the written report, each group will make two presentations of their project. One presentation will be a PowerPoint presentation to the class during the last class session on November 29. The other presentation will be for the community partner with the time and place of that presentation being negotiated with the community partner. The presentations should be about 15-20 minutes in length, including 5-10 minutes for questions. In preparing the presentation, the task group will, in consultation with the community partner, define who the audience is and prepare the presentation for that audience.

Task Group Documents: agendas, minutes, work plan. Task groups need to produce documents that represent a record of the group's activities. These include meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and a work plan. The work plan is a planning document that will help your group organize the project and identify important tasks that need to be accomplished. Meeting agendas should provide a roadmap for the meeting to give the members a sense of purpose and direction for the meeting. Minutes should indicate the meeting date and start and stop time, who is in attendance at each meeting, how tasks were determined and assigned, which groups or individuals took responsibility for specific tasks, and the expected timeline for completion of each task. When individuals or sub-groups complete assignments outside of the task force meeting, it is expected that these are reported to the entire group and documented as appropriate. A group page will be created in BlackBoard for each group and these documents should be posted on the group page so that all members of the groups will have access to these documents.

Individual Evaluation. The individual portion of the grade (10%) will be determined from three sources of information. First, the instructor 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 summary statement outlining their contributions to the project, as documented by keeping a running log in a bound "composition book" to capture (via "process evaluation") each student's efforts throughout the semester. The composition book will be reviewed throughout the semester on in-class workdays, and will be submitted with the summary and final project at the end of the semester. Third, on the last day of class, each member of the group will complete a confidential evaluation of themselves and of each of the other members of their group.

This is a "**group project**" and the instructor will hold the entire 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, such as someone not doing their share of the work, the group should work as a unit to try to develop and implement appropriate solutions. Of course, the instructor will be available to consult with the groups as needed, and will intervene if the community partner expresses concerns about the project.

NOTE: The professor reserves the right to award differentially weighted grades on the group project. For example, if a member of the group fails to actively participate in the group by skipping outside sub-group meetings, consistently misses deadlines for assigned tasks, and/or produces work that is below the quality standards expected for the project, i.e., an individual student's performance is consistently below par so that it jeopardizes the grades of the other members of the group, the professor will down grade that student.

VI. Class Policies

Class Attendance and Participation. Attendance and participation are important for effective learning and clearly expected by the professor. This is especially true in 3 hour classes that meet once per week. This means that students should attend all classes and be prepared to actively participate in class discussions. If a student is not be able to attend a class because of illness or other unforeseen problems, the student should call or text message the professor via her cell phone before class starts at (512) 799-9358, and out of courtesy, also communicate with other students on her/his assigned task group before class. In extreme situations, such as being at a hospital ER, this requirement is waived and the student should contact the professor and student peers after the emergency is addressed. In the case of excessive absences (3 or more), 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 latest 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.

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 the instructor about any safety concerns as soon as possible.

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 the Dean of Students, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Information is also available online at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/>. Students are asked to notify the professor of any accommodations they may need prior to the end of the second week of class.

Professional Conduct in Class. Students are clearly expected to act like professionals in this class. This means arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion by reading all materials before class starts, and show respect for one another's opinions, even when there are disagreements of view. Professional debating that offers dignity and respect to all involved is rewarding, promotes growth and insight, and is expected. In this academic environment all of us must feel safe and feel free to express ourselves and be willing and open to considering diverse ideas and opinions so that we may learn from one another. As necessary, we can at least "agree to disagree." However, the professor will not tolerate disrespectful verbage and/or disrespectful behaviors being expressed among student peers or to the professor. The professor reserves the right to dismiss from class any student who is being disrespectful, and instead, clearly requires that we all engage one another with respect, dignity and professionalism on a consistent basis with no exceptions.

<u>VII. Course Schedule Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Text / Readings</u>
Aug. 30		Introduction and course overview Review Project Descriptions Begin Forming project groups
Sept. 6	Using Work Groups: Committees, Teams, and Boards Introduction to Community Practice Skills Inventory and work plan; Finalize Project Groups	Text: Chapter 1 and 9 Hightower: Rebellion is What Built America Loeb: We Don't Have To Be Saints
Sept. 13	Understanding the Social Environment Conceptualizing community/social problems Meeting with community liaison	Text: Chapters 2 and 3

Sept. 20	Community and Community Practice Project work day	Text: Chapters 4 Webb: Community Overview
Sept. 27	Community Analysis Community Maps Mapping Community Resources	Text: Chapters 5, 6 Kretzman & McKnight: Asset-based Community Development
Oct. 4	Mapping Community Resources (cont.) Professional use of self in community practice Project work day	Text: Chapter 7
Oct. 11	EXAM 1 & Understanding the agency	Text: Chapters 8
Oct. 18	The community as a social network Project work day	Text: Chapter 10
Oct. 25	Social action and advocacy Community intervention: Models and approaches	Text: Chapter 12 Rothman: Multi-methods of intervention at the macro level
Nov. 1	Social marketing Project work day	Text: Chapter 11
Nov. 8	Organizing for community change	Text: Chapter 13 and 14
Nov. 15	EXAM 2	
Nov. 22	Thanksgiving	
Nov. 29	Class Projects	

Final project and materials due

VIII. Bibliography

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