THEORIES OF SOCIAL WORK: FROM CONCEPTUALIZATION TO APPLICATION

I. STANDARDIZED COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers the conceptualization, development, and application of social work theories. Philosophical, theoretical, and empirical underpinnings of different social work practice theories will be studied with an emphasis on understanding and critically analyzing the philosophical assumptions and scientific basis of various theories. Students will become familiar with the historical context of different theories covered and research on their effectiveness within social work. Since social work has relied on other social science disciplines for much of its theoretical base, major theories will be covered from diverse disciplines. A selection of theories from different perspectives have been chosen based on the experience of the professor and their importance to social work practice. Students will also be provided opportunities to learn about theories unique to their interest areas. Students will study select theories in-depth and in the process of their study will gain knowledge in the broader philosophical, epistemological, and empirical methods that support theories within social work.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

1. Critically analyze social work practice theories based on developed knowledge of the major philosophical and research paradigms.
2. Understand the basics of theory construction including how the context, person, and process of theory development contribute to theories.
3. Critically analyze the scientific merit and the professional utility of different theories including a thorough analysis of studies on their efficacy and effectiveness.
4. Critically analyze key constructs, concepts, guiding principles, and research basis for social work practice theories.
5. Understand and appreciate the heuristic value of different theories and how practice-based knowledge contributes to a science for social work practice.
6. Explore the basic philosophical, moral, and ethical premises inherent in different theories and relate those to the issues of social justice and the values of the social work profession.

III. TEACHING METHODS

This is a doctoral seminar. Accordingly, students are expected to attend class on a regular basis and be prepared to engage in dialogue with the professor and student colleagues. Each class requires students to be prepared to individually present information about their prospective practice theory(s). This means that students must complete readings and background research on their topic so that they will be prepared to discuss practice theories. Respect and professional behavior toward other students and the professor is expected.

IV. REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND COURSE MATERIALS

**Required Texts**


**Recommended (Check out from Library as needed)**


**Other Optional Texts (Check out from Library as needed)**


### Examples of Social Work Journals that may be Helpful

- Children and Youth Services Review
- Child Welfare
- Families in Society
- Health and Social Work
- Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work
- Journal of Social Service Research
- Journal of Social Work Education
- Journal of Teaching and Social Work
- Research on Social Work Practice
- Social Service Review
- Social Work
- Social Work Research

### Additional Readings

Additional supplemental readings are available on the BlackBoard site for this class.

### V. COURSE POLICIES

Students are expected to attend class sessions regularly and to participate in an *interactive* framework between collegiate students and professor. Students are expected to *complete the readings prior to class*, and should be well prepared to participate in discussions. Failure to regularly attend the class and demonstrate through discussions that one has comprehended the readings will be considered in assigning the final grade. Students are to notify the professor if they are going to be absent. Students are also responsible for any material missed due to absences.

Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with the permission of the professor, *late assignments will not be accepted without penalty*. Students are expected to turn in all
required assignments on the agreed upon due date at the beginning of class. Assignments turned in after class starts will be considered late. If accepted, late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5 points each day it is late. If the due date is a problem, then the student should see the professor and negotiate another due date well in advance.

Student feedback is welcome. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback during office hours, by phone, by e-mail, and by appointment if they desire.

If students are concerned about their class performance, the professor is more than willing to work with students to help them improve their course grades prior to the end of the semester. Final grades assigned in the course are not negotiable.

**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 sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. However, the professor does require that students engage one another with respect and professionalism.

**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/).

**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
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:

1. 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.
2. If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
3. In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor’s instructions.
4. 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.

VI. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are three assignments. All written assignments should follow the APA 6th edition manual and be carefully edited for appropriate grammar and writing technique.

1. Synopsis of one of the theories covered in the class (40%)
   Create a summary table and a table of outcome studies along with a 10-12 page synopsis of one of the theories in the class including an analysis of the evidence base of interventions used in social work that are guided by the theory. The professor will provide the format for the overview and the outcome studies table. Be sure and include a well-researched bibliography that supports your work. This assignment is to be completed along with the Teaching Presentation Theory assignment. Theories to be covered are: Social Constructionism and Strengths-based, Cognitive-Behavioral, Task Centered, Systems and Humanistic/Positive Psychology. Choose one. Synopsis due one week after your teaching presentation. Check syllabus for dates.

   Include this information in the tables and synopsis:
   a. What disciplines and dominant discourses have created the theory?
   b. What epistemologies guide the theory?
   c. What ethics and values does the theory purport?
   d. How is the theory being used in social work?
   e. What is the evidence base of the theory? (Attach a table of outcome studies or meta-analysis showing the evidence for interventions guided by the theory).
   f. Add your personal analysis and critique of the importance of the theory at the end of the synopsis and thoughts for how it can be improved for use in social work.

2. Teaching presentation of one of the theories covered in the class (20%).
   Plan for one half of the class for presentation. Your presentation should follow closely the same information that is covered in your synopsis of the theory. Create a power point
for the presentation to be used during teaching. The power point must be turned into the professor prior to the class. The presentation and power point will both be considered in your presentation grade. Provide a copy of your tables (e.g. overview of theory and outcome studies from your synopsis paper) as a handout for other student colleagues. Be prepared to answer questions and dialogue about your theory.

3. Project on Analysis of Theories that Conceptually Support a Problem area (40%). Each student will show how specific theories are used in research to frame a problem area by presenting their ideas to the class. In preparation for the presentation, you will develop a 12-15 page personal narrative, with a bibliography, describing some of the major theories that have been used in a specific problem area of interest. In addition, you will explain how that those theories could be conceptual frameworks for the questions that you are interested in. This project is designed to be carried out over the entire semester. Students are encouraged to schedule periodic meetings with the professor as needed to discuss their questions and progress.

Follow this process in developing your narrative.
I. Select a problem area.

II. Create a research question that you are interested in answering.

III. Starting with the problem area and your question as a focus for a literature review and explore relevant theories that are being used in that problem area to conduct research and inquiry. This requires reading and reviewing the research literature related to the topic and thinking about how authors have used specific theories in their studies.

IV. Identify and interview one or more experts on research in this area for the purposes of discovering what theories that they use to explain the problems and to conduct research in this area.

Questions to ask the Experts:
1.) What are the main theories that you use in your research?
2.) How have these theories help you conceptualize this problem?
3.) How have the theories help you discover solutions to the problem?
4.) How has your research added to the understanding of the theories being used?

IV. Describe from your exploration of the literature and expert interviews what you have learned about the specific theories that are being used and how these theories are being applied in your problem area.

V. Explain how one or more of these theories might apply if you were to use them as a framework to answer your question. Be specific in your applications and this means include one or more examples, diagram of ideas, etc. Due on the last day of class.

VII. COURSE GRADES
The final course grade will be calculated as follows:

Synopsis of Theory Paper (40%)
Teaching Presentation (20%)
Analysis of Theories for Research Question (40%)

Grading scale:
100 - 94 = A
93 - 90 = A-
89 - 87 = B+
86 - 84 = B
83 - 80 = B-
79 - 77 = C+
76 - 74 = C
73 - 70 = C-
69 - 67 = D+
66 - 64 = D
63 - 60 = D-
59 and below = F

VIII. COURSE SCHEDULE

August 28: Getting Started: What will I learn in this class? How to Approach and Get Started with Assignments

Readings: None.

September 4: Major Conceptual Frameworks and Transdisciplinary Theories Guiding Social Work

Texts: Payne Chapter 1-2, Jaccard & Jacoby, Chapters 1-3; Rallis & Rossman, Chapters 1
Readings on Blackboard:


September 11: Many Ways of Knowing in Social Work

Readings on Blackboard:


Read a Debate about Best Ways to Know and the Use of Theory in Social Work


September 18: Social Construction and Strengths-based Approaches

Texts: Payne chapters 8 & 14 Jaccard & Jacoby, Chapters 4-6 & 10

Readings on Blackboard:


September 25: Guest Lecture

October 2: Guest Lecture

October 9: Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

Texts: Payne Chapter 6 Jaccard & Jacoby, Chapters 7 & 8

Readings on Blackboard:


October 16: Task-Centered Social Work Practice

Texts: Payne Chapter 5

Readings on Blackboard:


**October 23: Ecological and Systems Theories**

**Texts:** Payne Chapters 7, 10, & 11

**Readings on Blackboard:**

October 30: Humanistic Theories and Positive Psychology

Texts: Payne Chapters 9 &12

Readings on Blackboard:


November 6: Library Day

Readings: Jaccard & Jacoby, Chapters 12 & 13, Rallis & Rossman, Chapters 6-8.

November 13:

Class presentation and individual feedback for your Analysis for How Theories Are Used in a Problem Area. Come to class with an outline that can be handed out and be prepared to make a 10-15 minute presentation on what theories you have discovered and how you believe that they apply to your question. Class and professor will provide feedback on your explanation of theories being used. Different students will be asked to present that day. Lack of preparation for
your presentation or failure to incorporate constructive feedback may result in points being deducted from your final narrative project.

**November 20:**

Feedback for your Analysis for How Theories Are Used in a Problem Area. Come to class with an outline that can be handed out and be prepared to make a 10-15 minute presentation on what theories you have discovered and how you believe that they apply to your question. Class and professor will provide feedback on your conceptualization of theories. Different students will be asked to present on this day. Lack of preparation for your presentation or failure to take constructive feedback may result in points being deducted from your final narrative project.

**November 27: Thanksgiving Holiday**

**December 4: Class Evaluation and Wrap-up.**

Final project due: Analysis of how theory is used in a problem area.
Email to professor before Class
Practice Guidelines Available Online

www.psychguides.com

http://www.guideline.gov


The American Psychological Association publishes Practice Guidelines and Guidelines for interpreting the Plethora of Guidelines that exist: www.apa.org

Evidence-Based Practice Resources

Netting the Evidence [www.shef.ac.uk/~scharrr/ir/netting/]

The goal of this website is to provide a complete list of evidence-based practice resources that are available on the Internet with a focus on healthcare.

Campbell Collaboration (C2): The Campbell Collaboration Library and Database [http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/]

This is a key international source for social work and social welfare efficacy and effectiveness information. All research presented on the website has met rigorous methodological standards and are designed to provide researchers, policy makers, and practitioners with critical reviews of current research.

Evidence-based Behavioral Practice Project (EBBP) [http://www.ebbp.org/]

This web site, located in the Department of Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University, provides a wide range of resources for training evidence-based behavioral practitioners including social workers. While focused on behavioral health (nonmedical, psychosocial health interventions) the EBP resources are generalizable to EBSWP. Included on the website are publications, a bibliography, training video modules and a discussion forum.

Evidence-Based Practice for the Helping Professions [http://www.evidence.brookscole.com/]

This is a well-established web site designed by a prominent social work educator containing a rich array of resources for supporting teaching and learning of EBP. This web site supports the text by the same name and it is designed to help practitioners to pose specific questions regarding practice, to help them plan an electronic search for the current best evidence regarding their question, and to search electronically for an answer.
Evidence-Network
[http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/interdisciplinary/evidence]
This website is an EBP information resource for social and public policy providing news, access to information resources, a gateway to EBP literature, and networking.

Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)
[http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx]
The EPPI-Centre was established in 1993 to address the need for a systematic approach to the organization and review of evidence-based work on social interventions. The work and publications of the Centre engage health and education policy makers, practitioners and service users in discussions about how researchers can make their work more relevant and how to use research findings.

National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP)
[http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/]
A service of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) this is a searchable database of interventions for the prevention and treatment of mental and substance use disorders.

Ovid EBM
[www.ovid.com]
Ovid provides access to a variety of EBP relevant resources including bibliographic databases (such as MEDLINE, EMBASE and CINAHL); more than 300 full text journals; and other clinical information products such as Evidence Based Medicine Reviews (EBMR) and some textbooks. EBMR contains material from Best Evidence and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. It combines Best Evidence and the Cochrane Database into a single, fully searchable database with links to both MEDLINE and Ovid full-text journals. This is a fee-based provider. Many universities and organizations have institutional subscriptions. Consult with your reference librarian for help using this valuable service.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)
[http://www.scie.org.uk/index.asp]
This website provides a free online library with an extensive collection of social care knowledge including practice information, skills tutorials, research, and several thousand abstracts related to EBP.