The University of Texas at Austin

Steve Hicks School of Social Work

Course number: SW 393T20   **Instructor:** Suzanne Potts, LMSW, MPH
Unique number: 61220   **Email:** spotts@utexas.edu
Meeting time: Thur 11:30AM-2:30PM   **Office number:** Online
Meeting place: MEZ 1.102   **Office phone:** (619) 994-1871
                                        Office Hours: As needed

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL WORK

I.   COURSE DESCRIPTION

Human services are under increasing pressure to document the services they provide in light of 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.

II.   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;

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;

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);

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);

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;

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,

7. analyze the differential impact of technology on diverse client and user groups.

III. 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 marketing and communication needs to key stakeholders. The instructor will assign students into work teams for the 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.

IV.   REQUIRED TEXTS

All readings are included and linked in the course syllabus. Additional readings may be handed out in class or linked in syllabus.

V.   COURSE ASSIGNMENTS/REQUIREMENTS

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 an attempt to include trauma-informed teaching methods into this course, several of the assignments will include choice, ongoing feedback and clear rubrics for success.

In class participation (15%)

This course will include discussion on in class activities, readings, topics and 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. Students are expected to read all assigned readings and participate in an active dialogue, using in class discussion. Students may have divergent thinking on topics however discussions are expected to be professional and courteous.

Information Systems Project (**15%)**
Individuals or small groups will research and share examples of information systems that work to support social service or nonprofit organizations and present back to class. This opportunity will require students to practice research, public speaking and collaboration skills. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Infographic (15%)

Students will be expected to develop a topic, outline, content, and references for an Infographic or marketing project from an organization of choice. Students will work individually to develop these tools. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Social Media Plan (15%)

Students will plan a social media campaign related to an organization and/or program of their choice. They will clearly articulate their plan as well as the rationale and intended outcomes of the plan. Project specifics will be handed out in class.

Agency Information System Assessment and Presentation (40%)

Work teams of your choice 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.

Extra Credit (5%)
Students will have the opportunity to identify and share minimum of one Social Work, Information System, Health or relevant Technology Podcast, Article or Video and write a one-page minimum paper about how it relates to our course. Additional opportunities for Extra Credit will be discussed and handed out in class.

VI.   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**.**

VII.   UNIVERSITY POLICIES
Grading Scale

[No A+]		87.0 to 89.999	B+	77.0 to 79.999	C+	67.0 to 69.999	D+
94.0 and Above	A	84.0 to 86.999	B	74.0 to 76.999	C*	64.0 to 66.999	D
90.0 to 93.999	A-	80.0 to 83.999	B-	70.0 to 73.999	C-	60.0 to 63.999	D-
				minimum to pass course		Below 60.0	F

Attendance and Academic Behavior. At the University of Texas at Austin, regular attendance at all class meetings is expected. Instructors are responsible for implementing an attendance policy and must notify students of any special attendance requirements. See more information at https://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/attendance/. Furthermore, students are expected to abide by the Standards for Social Work Education (available at https://socialwork.utexas.edu/student-resources/bsw/policies-and-procedures/). The student shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, and keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements.

Religious Holy Days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable period after the absence. A reasonable accommodation does not include substantial modification to academic standards, or adjustments of requirements essential to any program of instruction. Students and instructors who have questions or concerns about academic accommodations for religious observance or religious beliefs may contact the Center for Access and Restorative Engagement at https://community.utexas.edu/care/. The University does not maintain a list of religious holy days.

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.

Policy on Academic Integrity. Students who violate University rules on academic 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 academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct.

Use of Course Materials. The materials used in this course, including, but not limited to exams, quizzes, and homework assignments, are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized duplication of the course materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of course materials without the specific, express approval of the professor 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 sharing includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of distributing those materials to other current or future students.

University Electronic Mail Student Notification. Electronic mail (email), like postal mail, is a mechanism for official University communication to students. The University will exercise the right to send email communications to all students, and the University will expect that email communications will be received and read in a timely manner. Students can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at https://it.utexas.edu/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy.

Steve Hicks School of Social Work Policies

Professional Conduct and Civility in the Classroom. 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. A course brings

together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as race, 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. This atmosphere includes working intentionally to recognize and dismantle racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism in the classroom. Social Work also 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. In this environment, we will be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. Nevertheless, the professor requires that students engage one another with civility, respect, and professionalism.

Classroom Confidentiality. Information shared in class about agencies, clients, and personal matters is considered confidential per the NASW Code of Ethics on educational supervision and is protected by regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well. As such, sharing this information with individuals outside of the educational context is not permitted. Violations of confidentiality could result in actions taken according to the policies and procedure for review of academic performance located in sections 3.0, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Standards for Social Work Education.

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 professor. The professor 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 may contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center at 512-471-3515 or online at https://cmhc.utexas.edu/.

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 (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other forms of electronic communication (e.g. blogs) 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.

Resources, Prevention of Discrimination, and Safety

Disability Accommodation Statement. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability and Access (D&A). You may refer to D&A's website for contact and more information: https://community.utexas.edu/disability/. If you are already registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and how they apply in my class.

Behavior Concerns and Covid-19 Advice Line (BCCAL). If students have concerns about their behavioral health, or if they are concerned about the behavioral health of someone else, students may use the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns. This service is provided through a partnership between 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 https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line. The Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line has been expanded to support The University of Texas at Austin community during the COVID-19 pandemic. By calling 512-232-5050 - Option 2 for COVID-19, students, faculty and staff can be assisted in English and Spanish with COVID-19 support.

Covid-19 Related Information. The University's policies and practices related to the pandemic may be accessed at: https://protect.utexas.edu/

Title IX Reporting. In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the University of Texas at Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct on the basis of sex https://titleix.utexas.edu/. Faculty, field instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking, dating violence, or any other forms of sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University's Title IX Coordinator. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at https://titleix.utexas.edu/.

Title IX Accommodations for Those Pregnant, Nursing and Parenting. Pregnant, nursing and parenting students, faculty, and staff are eligible for accommodations through the Title IX Office that support equal access to education and work and prevent discrimination. Students may

reach out to the Title IX Office for help with accommodations to make up missed classes, complete missed coursework, keep them safe in the classroom, apply for leaves of absence, receive priority registration and other related support. Faculty and staff, including undergraduate students who work on campus and graduate student employees, may reach out for assistance with job or schedule restructuring and obtaining modified or additional work equipment. Visit the Title IX pregnancy and parenting resource page for more information or contact the Title IX Support and Resources team connect with a Case Manager.

Campus Carry Policy. The University's policy on campus carry may be found here: https://campuscarry.utexas.edu.

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.

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 in the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering 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.

VIII.   COURSE SCHEDULE

Class	Date	Class content/Activity	Readings for the Week	Assignments
1	Aug 29	Course Overview	**Syllabus review and course agreements** **Reading:** https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/technology-articles/why-social-workers-need-data-science/	Syllabus review
2	Sept 5	Social Work and Information Systems	**Reading: NASW Technology Standards** Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice (socialworkers.org)	Agency Information Systems project Review-**DUE DEC 5**

				Working groups determined
3	Sept 12	Social Work and Social Media	**Guest Speaker Brooke McMillan** **Reading: Social Media Best Practices** https://mediacause.org/social-media-best-practices-for-nonprofits/	Macro Social Media assignment review**-DUE OCT 3**
4	Sept 19	Understanding Technology in Social Work	**Reading: "Late Adapters? How Social Workers Acquire Knowledge and Skills about Technology Tools"** (Goldkind, Wolf & Jones, 2016)-**Uploaded to Canvas**	In class activity: What are Information Systems? Information Systems project review-**DUE OCT 10**
5	Sept 26	Social Work and AI	**Reading: Artificial Intelligence in Social Work: Emerging Ethical Issues (**Reamer, 2023)**-Uploaded to Canvas**	
6	Oct 3	Mapping Data	**Reading: "Why Social Work Needs Mapping"** (Hillier et al)-**Uploaded to Canvas**	Social Media Assignment **DUE**
7	Oct 10	Data Safety Net	**Guest Speaker:** Erine Grey, FindHelp **Data Privacy for Non-Profits Article:** https://www.squirepattonboggs.com/~/media/files/insights/events/2018/03/data-privacy-for-non-profits/data-privacy-for-nonprofitspptx.pdf	
8	Oct 17	Sharing Stories to Increase your Impact	**Guest Speakers:** Jennifer Long and Mat Hames **Preparation:** www.storycorps.org	Review StoryCorps and find one story that you wish to

				discuss with the class
9	Oct 24	Using Data to Tell your Story	**Reading: Infographics for Nonprofits** https://www.dipjar.com/blog/infographics-for-nonprofits-how-to-create-one-and-why-its-effective	Infographics assignment review-**DUE NOV 14**
10	Oct 31	Generating Revenue in Social Work	**Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Pena,** Austin Community Foundation **Reading: "The Overhead Myth" (Spencer, 2022)** https://blog.candid.org/post/the-overhead-myth-crash-course-to-fundraising-transparency/ **Video: https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong**	
11	Nov 7	Presentation Prep	In class work session to review and prepare for presentations	
12	Nov 14	Bringing Equity to Evaluation	**Guest Speaker:** TBD **Reading:** TBD	Infographics Assignment **DUE**
13	Nov 21	Project Presentations	No readings	
14	Nov 28	NO CLASS	Thanksgiving Week	
15	Dec 5	Last Class	Last class/ discussion	Agency Information System assessments and evaluations **DUE**

IX. Bibliography

Gardiner, I. (2017, November 6) Social Media Best Practices for Nonprofits-A Comprehensive Guide. Mediacause blog. Retrieved from https://mediacause.org/social-media-best-practices-for-nonprofits/

Goldkind, L., Wolf, L., & Jones, J. (2016). Late adapters? How social workers acquire knowledge and skills about technology tools. *Journal of Computers in Human Services.* DOI:10.1080/15228835.2016.1250027

Griffin, Gina (2020) Why Social Workers need Data Science. The New Social Worker https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/technology-articles/why-social-workers-need-data-science/

Hillier, A.E. (2007) Why Social Work Needs Mapping. University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons, School of Social Policy and Practice. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/86

McDaniel, P. (2018) Data Privacy for Nonprofits: A Toolkit for Sound Stewardship. Presented at the State Bar of Georgia, Nonprofit Law Seminar. Retrieved from https://www.squirepattonboggs.com/~/media/files/insights/events/2018/03/data-privacy-for-non-profits/data-privacy-for-nonprofitspptx.pdf

National Association of Social Workers Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice. (2017). Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=lcTcdsHUcng%3d&portalid=0

Palotta, D. (March 2013) The Way We think about Charity is Dead Wrong. TED Conferences. [VIDEO] https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong

Reamer, F. (2023). Artificial Intelligence in Social Work: Emerging Ethical Issues. International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, 20(2), 52-71. https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020 205

Spencer, J. (July 2022) The overhead myth: crash course to fundraising transparency. Candid blog. Retrieved from: The overhead myth: crash course to fundraising transparency | Candid Blog

Toporof, R. (2018) Infographics for Nonprofits: How to Create One and Why They're Effective. Dipjar blog.
Retrieved from https://www.dipjar.com/blog/infographics-for-nonprofits-how-to-create-one-and-why-its-effective

Hitchcock, Baez et al. (20210 [Full article: Social Work Educators' Opportunities During COVID-19: A Roadmap for Trauma-Informed Teaching During Crisis (tandfonline.com)](#)