Spring/Summer 2009  
S.W. 624: Interpersonal Practice with Groups  
Mondays 1-5  
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Office hours: to be determined with class  

1. Course Description  

This course builds on the content presented in SW521 and the other foundation courses and focuses on the processes of intervention and individual change groups. Particular attention will be given to the recruitment and composition of group members, leadership structure of small groups, phases of group development, and such group processes as decision-making, tension reduction, conflict resolution, goal setting, contracting, and evaluation. Students will learn how to assess and address group problems such as scapegoating, member resistance, low morale, over-active deviance, etc. They will learn to employ a variety of intra-group strategies and techniques such as programs, structured activities, exercises, etc. Theories and methods consistent with the achievement of social justice through group work practice will be emphasized. The course will also consider how gender, ethnicity, race, social class, sexual orientation, and different abilities will impact on various aspects of group functioning such as purpose, composition, leadership, selection of intervention strategies, and group development.

2. Course Content  

The course briefly reviews the history of social group work practice in the United States, and discusses the various kinds of task and individual change groups (e.g. teams, committees, consciousness raising, support, treatment, developmental, social action/social change, self-help, internet, etc.) found in contemporary social work practice. The course will also discuss how groups can be used to promote well-being, to prevent social problems, to treat existing problems, and to rehabilitate clients with severe conditions that are not amenable to more time limited interventions. The various factors associated with group effectiveness in both task and individual change groups will be presented, as well as those factors that have been designed to reduce the potentially negative and deleterious consequences of group interventions.

Various models of stages of group development in both task and individual change groups and in both open- ended and closed-ended groups will be presented. The implications for leadership styles, the kinds of group dynamics, and the kinds of group interventions in each stage will be discussed. Various structural properties of groups such as sociometry, communication, norms,
roles, status, power, and geography will be presented as they relate to the stages of group development. Group processes such as decision making, task achievement, conflict resolution, tension reduction, and contracting will also be related to stages of group development.

All phases of the intervention process from recruitment and composition to assessment, goal formulation, evaluation, intervention and termination will be presented. Special consideration will be given to how these phases may be modified to account for the various diversity identities—racial, class, gender, ethnic, sexual orientations, and abilities of clients. Evaluation procedures, designed to determine the effectiveness of various interventions, that can be incorporated into small groups will be presented. Course content will include ethical issues that relate to the practice of social work with groups, and those elements of the NASW code of ethics that especially impact on group practice.

3. Course Objectives

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

1. Describe the differences between task, individual change, promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation groups and how these groups are employed in contemporary social work practice.

2. Assess the effectiveness of various kinds of groups and the various interventions that group leaders and facilitators utilize.

3. Critically apply in a practice setting a minimum of two empirically supported group work approaches.

4. Implement specific evaluation measures that can be integrated into monitoring and evaluation of group work.

5. Operationalize various models of group development in both open and closed groups and recognize how these various stages impact on group dynamics.

6. Identify common problems that emerge in group practice and intervene to resolve these problems.

7. Plan and carry out various structured activities and group interventions that take into account the phases of group development and the special needs of group members.

8. Describe the impact of the key diversity dimensions such as ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation on the dynamics of group structure and process in small groups.
9. Identify ways to match group intervention methods effectively and ethically with client problems, across diverse populations, cultural backgrounds, and sociopolitical contexts.

10. Operationalize ethical codes (i.e. the NASW Code of Ethics and other ethical codes such as the ASGW) as they apply to value dilemmas that arise in social group work practice.

11. Conduct an assessment of coping resources and strengths; biophysical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive functioning; intra-personal and environmental systems.

12. Identify the factors that influence group members’ motivation to pursue change.

13. Demonstrate their ability to form worker-group member alliances and collaborations, communicate empathically, and help enhance the motivation for change, cultivate hope, and address ambivalence and internal and external barriers to change.

14. Identify one’s own social and cultural identities and group memberships, and how these relate to working with diverse group members, colleagues, and other professionals.

Relationship of Course to Four Curricular Themes

- Multiculturalism and Diversity: The key diversity dimensions have an impact on membership and composition, which in turn, influence various aspects of group dynamics. Leadership, status, sociometry, norms, conflict resolution, and communication in groups are dramatically affected by issues of diversity and must be accounted for by social workers in planning and facilitating various kinds of groups.

- Social Justice and Social Change: The history of social group work emerges from that part of social work’s history concerned various reform movements in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Though therapy groups have emerged as the primary venue in the last two decades, there are efforts to redirect group work to its more traditional roots. We will examine contemporary conceptions of social justice practice in groups and the diverse ways this may be addressed.

- Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation: Though methods courses tend to emphasize treatment models, this course will examine at least one promotion and prevention model of groups and at least one rehabilitation model of groups. This course will also describe the similarities and differences between these kinds of groups.

- Behavioral and Social Science Research: This course will rely on group dynamic theory and onempirical research on the effectiveness of various group interventions and models. A goal of competency is evidence-based group work practice is emphasized.
**Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values**

Social workers must understand when groups are contraindicated for particular clients and must be able to assertively intervene in group processes when group experiences are harming group members. Ethical issues such as client confidentiality, forced participation, and involuntary treatment are considered as they impact social work with groups.

**Recommended Course Texts:**


**SESSION OUTLINE**

**Session 1 - May 11**

**Introduction**

**Group Work History**


**Dynamics**


**Development**


**Session 2 - May 18**

**Group Leadership**


Session 3-June 1
Planning/ Composition


Session 4–June 8
Ethics


Session 5-June 15
Early Stages – The first session


Session 6-June 22
Group Work Models


Session 7-June 29
Later stages of groups/Problem Behavior in Groups

Corey & Corey, Ch. 7 Working Stage


Session 8-July 6
Groups for Children and Adolescents


**Session 9—July 13**  
**Foregrounding social justice**


**Session 10—July 20**  
**Ending the Group**

Corey & Corey, Ch. 8


**Session 11—July 27**  
**Completing previous material; Reflections; Student Presentations-final rituals, wrap-ups**


Hallas, V. (2006). You don’t always have to pick up your mess right away: How being messy can be really neat! *Social Work with Groups,* 29 (2/3), 175-194.

**Assignments**
I. **Weekly Journals (20%)**

You will submit, via c-tools 8 weekly journals-1-2 pages in length. Seven of these must be submitted by 5 PM Sunday night before class, and should include reflections on the reading for the class the next day. You can turn one additional log in at any time before the last class session. No other late logs will be accepted.

Journals entries should reflect questions you have, things you are learning, developing competencies, applications to field experience, and other things of note. You can include reflections on class process, teaching/learning styles as well. The journals are intended to have a reflective and a feedback function. Individual entries will be ungraded, but I will give you feedback on your journals. I may ask you to redo an entry if I believe it is too superficial or doesn’t reflect sincere effort to engage the material.

Consider the following components for each log entry:
- a. Reflection on previous class—classroom interactions, further insights or applications of the earlier readings
- b. Reflection on the reading for the current class
- c. Reflection on other issues/applications insights that have arisen for you

(20% of grade. Each journal is worth 2.5 %. All logs will due by the final class time).

II. **Choose from the following menu of papers and projects. Due July 6 (30%).**

For some of the following assignments you can use a group you have been a member of, one you have worked with as a leader, a group you have gotten permission to observe, or possibly a recorded group or transcript. In cases of groups that use real life members, you must apply appropriate ethical standards in terms of permission to use the group for your assignment and in appropriately disguising any identifying information. This is especially important since assignments will be shared with other class members in addition to the instructor. As part of the papers, describe the permissions you have received and the safeguards you have taken to complete the assignment.

A. **Effectiveness variables:** Briefly describe how many members attended and what generally transpired in the session. Observe how the group functions. What variables of a successful group do you observe operating in this group? What factors limit the effectiveness of the group.

B. **Group composition:** Many problems that emerge in groups can be traced to imbalances in membership composition. Describe how a group you were involved in planning was composed. Describe how decisions were made about whom to include or exclude from the group. Were there screening procedures or interviews? What variables such as age, race,
gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and different abilities were considered? Describe any problems that may have emerged because of membership imbalances. You may also consider composition issues in any existing group that you did not compose. Describe the purpose and membership of the group and then analyze any problems that seem to be related to membership imbalances.

C. Group development: Apply what you know about group development to a group in which you have participated as a member or leader or one you have observed over time. Describe the purpose and membership of the group, and how long they met (have been meeting). Using the models of group development, describe how the group moved through successive stages. What problems emerged at various stages? What impact did leadership have on the success or failure of the group to move through the stages. How did gender and or ethnicity impact on development?

D. Teams: The two most common task groups for social workers are “teams” and “case conferences”. Unfortunately, these common group experiences are sometimes the most negative experiences for practitioners. If you are placed in an agency setting that utilizes interdisciplinary teams or frequently holds case conferences about clients, then you will have an opportunity to apply your knowledge of group dynamics to analyze the effectiveness of these kinds of professional groupings. In this assignment, analyze those aspects of group structure (leadership, norms, status, etc.) and group process (cohesion, decision-making, conflict resolution, etc.) that clarify some of the struggles that this group experiences when it tries to function, or shed light on why it functions effectively. Address issues of ethnicity and gender. Suggest how you might go about improving the groups functioning.

E. Roots of group work: Visit a settlement house (e.g. in Detroit, the Franklin Wright Center; in Chicago, Hull House; in New York, Henry Street Settlement, in Chicago) or a community center (e.g. Ann Arbor Community Center, YMCA, YWCA, JCC, Brightmoor Community Center, Detroit; Friendly Center; Toledo). Try to get an appointment with the program director and interview them to discover the kinds of services being provided in the 1990’s. Find out about the group oriented services in operation. Learn what you can about how an agency that played a role in the development of social group work incorporates groups into their current programming. In your paper, describe what you have learned and relate this to historical material in the readings.

F. The “future” of group work? Participate in or observe a telephone or electronic group and reflect on how the process in that group compares to what you would experience in a live group. Do similar developmental stages occur? What group structures develop (leadership, norms, etc.)? What problems or advantages result from the lack of face to face contact in the group? For example, do composition issues change in the electronic or telephone context? Is communication hampered by the lack of visual feedback? What unique aspects of groups emerge in this technological settings?

G. Multicultural competence in social work group intervention:
1. Individual Project. Do a self-evaluation of your multicultural competence as a group worker. Pick an area to work on, develop that plan, carry it out, and evaluate your success.

2. Group Project. Do a group project that will enhance the multicultural competence of the groups members. The group must prepare a written paper to be shared with the class or an in-class presentation for the class.

H. Program activities: Plan a structured activity for a group you are working with. Describe how the activity fit the needs of the group. How did you decide on this activity? How did you operationalize it in the group. What happened when you implemented the activity. How effective was its implementation?

I. Evaluation: Develop a plan for evaluating a group you are involved in. What measures of success could you use? How could you implement these procedures.

J. Group proposal. Develop a proposal for a group that could be used in a social work setting. Describe the rationale for the proposed group. What problem or situation requires attention? How will the group conduct its work? What will the worker do to assist the group in achieving its purpose. What is the evidence-base for the group model/techniques/processes you propose? Who would sponsor the group? What resources does the agency have available for the group? Who will be the members of the group? What methods will be used to recruit? What criteria will be used to include or exclude members? What composition issues will be addressed? Will the group be open or closed. Structured or unstructured? How many sessions will the group meet, for how long, and at what interval? Give a description of the types of activities planned for the group.

K. STUDENT LED SEMINAR—Propose a topic that you will teach the class about. This can include coverage of material on the syllabus or related to class learning objectives. The presentation time proposed can be for ½ to 1 ½ hours of class, depending on demand and fit. If multiple students work together, time may be expanded. Some seminars may take place outside of scheduled class hours, depending on class willingness and demand. Several seminars may occur concurrently with students choosing what to attend. Guidelines for this assignment will be discussed more fully in class. THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL NOT BE DUE JULY 6 IF APPROVED SEMINAR IS TO BE HELD LATER IN THE SEMESTER.

L. Devise your own assignment. You can propose any learning activity that you will find helpful for your development as a group worker. Submit in writing a one-paragraph description of the assignment you propose. Allow for one week for approval. (So you will want to propose the assignment at least two weeks before a paper is due).

II. Simulated Group Leadership and Assessment. Due July 20 (30%).
Choose one of the following options.

A. Simulated group of your own devising

You will lead and video record 20 minutes of a simulated group session in which you act as leader.

1) Create a group of 4-5 members.
2) Develop simulated group situations for members to play out and distribute the information to your group prior to recording.
   i) Each leader is responsible for helping group members know what roles to play.
   ii) You can pick a scenario that is at any stage of group development.
3) Members should be somewhat cooperative but present leader with material that will allow her/him to demonstrate leadership skills.
4) The recorded segment should be 20 minutes long.
5) You can team up with another student to be co-leader. In that case, recorded segment should be 30 minutes to give each of you ample time to demonstrate leadership. You can focus your analysis on your own work, but of course, your co-leader's behavior will be relevant and important to discuss.
6) View recording and write evaluation of your leadership of the group
7) Evaluation criteria:
   i) Describe the group you were leading
      (1) What stage was the group at?
      (2) What issues were before the group?
      (3) What issues of group composition were relevant in this group session?
      (4) What did you want to accomplish as leader in the segment that is taped?
   ii) What techniques of group leadership did you use during the session and describe why you chose them?
      (1) Analyze in detail your interventions in the groups.
      (2) Explain or comment on what you did or said at each point of intervention.
         It will be very helpful to create and turn in a transcript in order to guide your paper and to facilitate my evaluation of your paper.
   iii) What were the strengths you exhibited during the session?
   iv) What areas do you need to work on?

I will not be grading your performance on the recording. My evaluation will be based on the quality of your self-assessment. These papers generally are about 8-10 pages.

B. Leadership of a simulated class group-to be discussed in class. Details will posted later in revised syllabus and on c-tools.

IV. Final Reflection Paper. Due August 3 (20%).
Everyone should include the following in their reflection paper-to form the basis for evaluation of your engagement and participation in class.

(1) Sessions attended
(2) Participation in class sessions (see guidelines for active participation on syllabus)
(3) Participation between classes (e.g. logs and papers posted and responded to, any additional relevant work).

This assignment is designed to give you the space (and a bit of motivation) to reflect on your experience in the group work class this semester. Here are some of the questions that you might consider reflecting on:

1. What were your learning goals for the semester. What progress did you make in fulfilling those goals?
2. What did you learn about yourself in terms of how you work with small groups? Did you find areas of greater comfort/discomfort? What were they?
3. What important aspects of group leadership did you explore?
4. What past experiences with groups did you reexamine during the semester? What new insights did you get from those experiences?
5. Did you make any connections to material from other classes or other learning experiences? How did your exploration of group work inform other areas or how did you bring those experiences into your exploration of group work?
6. What have you learned about creating social change through small groups? Are there any experiences or accounts that illustrate what you have learned.
7. What have your learned about yourself in terms of your ability to work with diverse clients/colleagues? Are there any experiences or accounts that illustrate what you have learned?
8. What readings/materials/exercises were most compelling to you? Why? What important lessons did you take from those?
9. Which assignments did you find best enhanced your learning? What made the assignment a good fit for you?
10. What could have improved your learning for the semester? Feel free to reflect on the readings, class exercises, lectures or any other element of the class that was not a good fit or didn’t meet your expectation. Also feel free to examine anything that impeded your ability to meet your learning goals this semester.
11. How did you integrate what you learned in class with what you learned in field or in any other practice or non-classroom settings? Are there any specific examples or stories that stand out as examples of what you learned?
12. What areas have you identified for future growth as a group worker? What will you need to do/plan to do to further improve your skills as a social worker?
13. Aha! Tell the story of how you came to an important insight about group work this semester.
You needn’t answer all of these questions or only these questions. The challenge is to use the assignment in a meaningful way for you and to communicate that in a meaningful manner. Creativity is encouraged. One useful way to generate material for this assignment may be to work with someone else in the class or a small group in class and discuss this together. That may generate further reflection and new areas to examine for you. Your colleagues may have insights that they can share back with you about what you have learned and how you will apply it. Re-reading your logs and your other assignments may also help you reflect back on the semester.

Guidelines for length- 6-8 pages. Take more space if you like. Cite specific readings as relevant, but this is not meant to be a summary of readings or to repeat the logs.

V. Active Engagement. (To be evaluated in your final reflection paper—engagement grade will be integrated with that assignment). Class attendance is required. If you are unable to come to class on a specific day, please contact me (via email or c-tool message to create a written record) with the reason for the absence. If you miss more than two class sessions, we will need to meet to discuss a plan for making up missed class material to adequately complete the course. Active participation in class is expected. Active participation can be demonstrated in several ways, some examples are: participation in discussion, volunteering for in-class exercises, bringing experiences or problems from real life groups to class discussion, sharing group activities or techniques with class members, thoughtfully processing classroom experiences, taking risks in sustaining dialogue on difficult issues that arise in class, giving feedback online to your colleagues on their postings and reflections, and posting suggestions for additional readings, learning activities for classmates. You will reflect on your attendance and participation in your final reflection paper and that will provide a basis for evaluating and crediting your class participation.

Notes on Grading
All assignments earn points, which total to 100. The final grading scale is:

A+ = 98-100, A = 94-97, A- = 90-93, B+ = 87-89, B = 82-86, B- = 78-81, C+ = 75-77, C = 70-74, not passing = <70

I strive to give substantive feedback on each assignment, and to use my comments as a way to continue to have a dialogue about what you are learning in the class. I may not give specific feedback about why an assignment didn’t get a perfect scores, say a 28 (~an A) instead of 30 (an A+). A paper needn’t have any major flaws to earn an A-. But if you ever have any questions or concerns about the grading, please contact me to talk more about it.