Human Differences, Social Relationships, Well-Being and Change through the Life Course

Fall 2011

Course Number: SW 500-005
Meeting Dates/Time: Wednesdays 5:00-8:00pm
Meeting Room: 2752 SSWB
Meeting Dates: 9/7/11-12/7/11

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1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will employ multicultural and critical perspectives to understand individuals, families, and their interpersonal and group relationships, life span development, and theories of well-being, stress, coping, and adaptation. This course will emphasize knowledge about individuals and small social systems and the implications of this knowledge for all domains of social work practice. Students will be introduced to the concepts of risk and protective factors, with relevant examples at the individual and small system levels. Students will also consider the implications of this knowledge for intervening in social problems and supporting rehabilitation once problems have developed. Major components of the course will be concerned with the processes of oppression, privilege, and discrimination and factors that help people and small social systems to change. The knowledge presented will include the interrelationships between smaller and larger social systems, and in particular, how biological factors and the larger social and physical environments shape and influence individual and family well-being.

2. COURSE CONTENT

Content will include selected theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and individual and small system change. Students will consider the processes through which relevant concepts have been developed, the types of knowledge and data that inform different theories, and the current gaps and controversies in biological, behavioral, and social science knowledge and theory. Emphasis will be placed on similarities and differences related to human diversity and dynamics of oppression and privilege, including 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. In addition, this course will focus on how individual-level and small system-level factors and processes can facilitate attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, family characteristics, and group processes that either promote multicultural human well-being and social justice or help to recreate inequities and problems.
3. COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

a. Demonstrate knowledge about and be able to critically analyze relevant theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and individual and small system change through the life course emphasizing similarities and differences and the effects of oppression and privilege.

b. Articulate the concepts of risk and protective factors and give examples at the individual, group, and family levels.

c. Describe the impact of diverse 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 risk and protective factors, human development, human interactions, and the structures of small social systems.

d. Identify the interrelations among smaller and larger social systems and describe how biological factors and larger social and physical environments interact to influence individual and family well-being.

e. Describe how relevant concepts have been socially constructed, what knowledge and empirical evidence support selected theories, some current gaps in knowledge, and key controversies about these theories and related knowledge.

f. Conceptualize how individual and small system factors and processes can either promote multicultural human well-being or recreate inequities and problems.

g. Examine theories of individual, family, and group change and their relevance for all types of social work practice towards a multicultural and socially just world.

h. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to human differences, social relationships, well-being, and change through the life course.

4. COURSE DESIGN

The instructor for this course will select required and recommended readings. In addition, the instructor will include a range of pedagogical methods, such as participatory discussions, films, written assignments, and experiential exercises related to course materials. Guest speakers may be invited to address special topics.

5. RELATIONSHIP OF THE COURSE TO CURRICULAR THEMES

Theme Relation to Multiculturalism & Diversity:
Students will examine the ways in which the diverse dimensions affect individuals and small social systems. Emphasis will also be placed on the processes of oppression, privilege, and discrimination, as well as the factors that help people and small social systems to change.

Theme Relation to Social Justice:
Students will analyze selected theories in terms of the factors and processes that either promote social justice and change or help to perpetuate inequities and problems.

Theme Relation to Promotion, Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation:
Students will learn about social problems, as well as the spectrum of interventions and supportive rehabilitation currently used to alleviate these problems.
**Theme Relation to Behavioral and Social Science Research:**
Students will critically analyze relevant theories of human behavior, human development, families and small groups, and individual and small system change through the life course. The research supporting these theories will provide a foundation for the content in this course.

6. **RELATIONSHIP OF THE COURSE TO SOCIAL WORK ETHICS AND VALUES**

As human development throughout the life course is so profoundly impacted by environmental and social conditions, this course will emphasize the critique and evaluation of various developmental theories from a multicultural perspective and a social justice perspective. This course will also consider potential ethical dilemmas that may arise for social workers working with individuals, families, and small groups. The impact of social conditions and social policy and the need for macro and micro intervention to improve the lives of clients will also be addressed.

7. **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**A. Academic Conduct and Integrity**
Please see the Student Code of Academic and Professional Conduct in the current *Student Guide to the Master's in Social Work Degree Program* for a discussion of student responsibilities for academic conduct and integrity. Students who are found responsible for academic misconduct are subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the School of Social Work, revocation of degree, or any other sanction deemed appropriate to address the violation.

**B. Attendance and Participation (25% of your course grade)**
Attendance at all classes is required. Attendance is required for participation. More than two absences may result in a lower grade. You are responsible for obtaining all lecture notes and handouts from your classmates if a class is missed. You are expected to read assigned readings prior to class each week and to actively participate in all discussions and class activities. In consideration of your classmates, please arrive on time and turn off all cell phones and other potentially distracting devices. If you are on call, please let your pager to vibrate. Likewise, use of laptop computers and similar devices should be kept to a minimum so we can all focus on what’s happening in the classroom and wireless internet settings should be turned off. Please do not text-message, read your e-mail, surf the Internet, etc. during class.

The goal is to create an active learning environment that builds in content from one week to the next. Keeping up-to-date on readings will help facilitate a more active and engaging discussion.

- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
  If you need accommodation for a disability or other special need, please let me know at the beginning of the semester so that we can work out the necessary arrangements. This information will be kept strictly confidential. For more information and resources, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities at G664 Haven Hall (734-763-3000).

- **Religious Observances**
  Please notify me at the beginning of the semester if religious observances conflict with class or due dates for assignments so that we can make appropriate arrangements.
C. Required Assignments

1. **Quiz (November 2 In-Class Assignment)** – 25% of Grade
   The purpose of this quiz is to demonstrate that you had read and understand the materials, as well as have the ability to apply them to social situations. For the quiz, you will be asked to elaborate on 10 terms, theories, and ideas presented in this course in the form of “identification statements”. You will be asked to explain these identification statements by bridging together relevant theories and examples from empirical knowledge (from the articles and relevant discussion) on these identification statements. You will be presented with some choices of identification statements to pursue for the quiz (you will not have to answer all the options given). The strategy to do well on this quiz is to demonstrate that you have read and can use the required readings from the first 7 class sessions. This quiz is closed book and closed-note, but you will be provided with a blank copy of the syllabus to refer to during the quiz for your reference.

2. **Research Paper or Multidimensional Assessment.** – 50% of Grade
   For this class you will be asked to write a 10-12 page paper (the page requirement does not include the references). The paper should focus on a concept or issue relevant to the course that you would like to investigate in greater depth. Alternatively, you can write a paper in which you apply a multidimensional framework to evaluate the social functioning of a composite client (details will be provided). A brief proposal for your research paper or multidimensional assessment will be due on **September 28** (5% of grade). The proposal will allow me to determine the relevance of your topic to the course content and to review the appropriateness of your preliminary bibliography. You will also be asked to make a brief presentation of your proposal to the class (5% of course grade). The final paper will be due on **November 30** (40% of course grade). The paper must be typewritten and double-spaced using a 12-point font and one inch margins. APA style should be used (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* Sixth Edition (2010). Washington, D.C.: Author). Detailed instructions for the proposal, brief presentation, and final paper will be provided in separate handouts and posted on CTools.

3. **Brief (1-page) reflection, bring to class to use in discussion**
   (part of Participation Grade)
   What is your service population/group of interest? How does using a “Multidimensional Approach to Assessment in Social Work” & considering that population in the context of their Life Span help you better serve or understand that population?

**D. Grading**
Letter grades from "A" through "E" are given for class performance. "A" grades are given for exceptional individual performance and mastery of the material. The use of "A+", "A", and "A-" distinguish the degree of superiority. "B" grades are given to students who demonstrate mastery of the material. "B+" is used for students who perform just above the mastery level but not in an exceptional manner. "B-" is used for students just below the mastery level. "C" grades are given when mastery of the material is minimal. A "C-" is the lowest grade which carries credit. "D" grades indicate deficiency and carry no credit. "E" grades indicate failure and carry no credit.
Grade Breakdown:
Participation: 25% (including reflection assignment at end of term)
Quiz: 25%
Research Paper: 50% (including proposal 5%, informal presentation 5%, and final paper 40%)

8. REQUIRED READING


Required articles are available through the University Library's Electronic Journals (http://www.lib.umich.edu/ejournals/) and on our course website in CTools.

9. COURSE CALENDAR AND READING ASSIGNMENTS
   This schedule is preliminary; any changes will be announced in class and on CTools in advance of the session.

   September 7: Introduction and Overview (Week 1)

   Content:
   Introduction to the “Multidimensional Approach to Assessment in Social Work”
   Differing perspectives of well-being within and between societies
   Discussion of mobility in well-being: Movement over the life course and across generations

   Readings:
   Chapter 1 of the text
   handouts on GDP, IMR, Longevity, Subjective Scales, Inequality

   September 14: Biophysical Development and Functioning (Week 2)

   Content: Biological development, physical, and genetic perspectives

   Readings:
   Chapter 2 of the text


   Baird P. A. (1994). “The role of genetics in population health.” In RG Evans, ML Barer, and TR
**September 21: The Psychological Dimension (Week 3)**

*Content:* We will integrate theories of psychological dimensions of development from the text with the biophysical processes thus far covered within the context of a social environment.

*Readings:*
Chapter 3 of the text


**September 28: Social Systems and Human Development (Week 4)**

*Brief Research Proposal Due Prior to Class*

*Content:* We will integrate theories of social dimensions of development from the text with the biophysical and psychological processes of development.

*Readings:*
Chapter 4 of the text


**October 5: Pregnancy, Birth, and the Newborn (Week 5)**

*Content:* We will extend the social contextual framework to discuss pregnancy and birth experiences and outcomes – how do these vary according to one’s social position? How do psychological, biological factors, and social factors intersect? How are these circumstances indicative of parental experiences, and how might they shape children’s life chances later in life?
Readings: Chapter 5 of the text


October 12: Infancy – Early Childhood (Week 6)

Content: Risk and protective factors in infancy and early childhood will be discussed.

Readings: Chapter 6-7 of the text


October 19: Middle Childhood (Week 7)

Content: The influence of the peer and school environments (beyond the parental home) will be discussed.

Readings: Chapter 8 of the text


October 26: Adolescence (Week 8)

Presentations 1/5

Content: We will discuss adolescence as a period in the life course where identity formation becomes more externalized and the culmination of risk and protective factors become more apparent.

Readings: Chapter 9 of the text


November 2: Young Adulthood (Week 9)

*Quiz (November 2 In-Class)

Content: We will discuss different what shapes different paths in young adulthood, and how safety nets are in place for some more than others.

Readings: Chapter 10 of the text


November 9: Middle Adulthood (Week 10)

Presentations (2/5)

Content: We will discuss stressors specific to middle adulthood, but conditions of middle adulthood are influenced by early life conditions (and strongly influence later life).

Readings:
Chapter 11 of the text


November 16: Late Adulthood (Week 11)

Presentations (3/5)

Content: We will discuss issues emerging in late adulthood, including cumulative inequality later in the life span.

Readings:
Chapter 12 of the text


November 23: No class – Thanksgiving Recess (Week 12)
November 30: Death & Dying (Week 13)

*Final Paper Due

Presentations (4/5)

Content: Death and dying offer dramatically different experiences for those experiencing it and for their loved ones. How can such experiences differ according to the social/environmental context and one’s life span?

Readings:


December 7: Wrap-up – (Week 14)

*Brief Reflection Due (please bring to class and turn in at the end of class)

Presentations (5/5)

Content: What is your service population/group of interest? How does using a “Multidimensional Approach to Assessment in Social Work” & considering that population in the context of their Life Span help you better serve or understand that population?

Readings: None