Fall 2012
SW 500: Human Differences, Social Relationships, Well-Being, and Change through the Life Course
Tuesday 2-5pm, 2816 SSWB
Section 004

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00am-12:00pm (or by appointment)

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.

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.

Course Objectives:
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:
1. 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.

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

3. 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. 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. 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. Conceptualize how individual and small system factors and processes can either promote multicultural human well-being or recreate inequities and problems. 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. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to human differences, social relationships, well-being, and change through the life course.

**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.

**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, 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.
Relationship to SW Ethics and Values:
As human development throughout the lifecourse 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 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.

Core competencies: As a school we are focused on the CSWE-articulated 10 core
competencies—SW 500 addresses 5 of these directly. These are (as numbered by CSWE): (1)
Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly, (3) Apply critical
thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments, (6) Engage in research-informed
practice and practice-informed research, (7) Apply knowledge of human behavior
and the social environment, and (9) Respond to contexts that shape practice using empirical
research to inform thinking and practice, understanding perspectives other than our own,
understanding how our prior knowledge creates a biased lens for perceiving others and
situations, the effects of social structures at the individual and group level.

General perspective: This is a foundation course, which means that information (‘stuff you
read’) is to be translated to knowledge (‘getting it’) and later into wisdom (‘using it’) for
more advanced coursework later in your MSW career. Two of these foundational skills are
how to read empirical papers and how to use theories of change from a psychological
perspective to make sense of your social work practice and career. My goal is that you will
learn things that stick with you in your professional life after this semester is over. We will
focus on the interface between how the mind works and the PODS constructs as applied to
core topics of well-being and happiness; inclusion, belonging, and identity; social structures;
& cognition, memory, and mental processes. Biological bases will be discussed as relevant,
particularly to highlight the interface between each of these basic social constructs and
impact on the body.

Accommodations: Please see me or email me if you require special accommodations due
to learning disabilities, religious practices, physical requirements, medical needs, or any
other reason.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Grade: Participation 25%, Brief Paper 25%, Quiz 25%, Group Resource Guide 25%

Participation
DUE: Weekly. I expect students to attend and participate in class every week. Attendance is
necessary for participation to occur, but attendance alone is not enough to receive full
credit for participation—you have to actively engage, asking and answering questions and
making comments. Each week you can earn participation points, and without participation
you lose 25% of your grade. You will get credit for participating (not just showing up)
because active participation facilitates both learning and memory. You should consider yourself not only learning but also earning credit for learning each week.

This requires that students attend class each week having read the assigned material and ready to discuss their reactions. Typically each week we'll have some combination of lecture, small group discussion, and full-class discussion. Each week there will be required readings and, for those students with particular interest in the area, further suggested readings. Each our discussions each week, you will be asked about the core concepts from the readings and relevant implications of these concepts. The goal of the discussions is to create an active learning context in which each week’s content is actively linked to prior content and relevant applications. This will create a linked memory structure, facilitating later recall and use of the material in class and in the field.

Brief Paper
DUE: Oct 9 -- Submit your paper online through Ctools (Brief Paper will appear under Assignments) before class. Papers submitted after 2pm (when class starts) are late.

In the first five weeks you will have read, heard, and thought about social context effects on self, identity, health and well-being. In this assignment, you will write a 4-page paper in which you first describe a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had and then (re)interpret it in light of the readings until this point on social context effects.

A successful paper contains three elements: a brief sketch of the experience, a summary of the relevant points from the readings you chose, and your interpretation of the experience in light of these readings. A successful paper is structured with APA format for references and includes references from each week (to show that you can integrate across weeks).

Any meaningful social experience (e.g., school, family, neighborhood friendships or close relationships) is fine. I am asking for you to choose something with which you have personal experience so that you can get a sense of the difference between your initial interpretation when you had the experience and your reinterpretation in light of the readings. I am not asking you to share something you find too personal to share but rather something that you experienced and can think about.

This paper applies to the all of the core competencies by showing me that you read and understood and can apply social science theories we are learning and can (re)interpret your own experiences in light of these perspectives.

The brief paper gives you a chance to use the readings (not simply to summarize them) to make sense of real world experiences. The paper is meant to be brief. The 4-page limit means you may need to edit your writing so that you cover both the personal experience and the core points in the readings that provide a lens to make sense of why the experience was meaningful. Your goal is to show me that you have read and can integrate, so choose an experience that can be interpreted with readings across more than one week. It can happen that your initial attempt is not yet ‘A-quality’ work. You can rewrite this paper, but only if you hand it in on time. The goal is that you and I both see your "A-quality" work.
Quiz
DUE: Nov 6 This is an in-class assignment, you will not have a chance to redo.

The point of the quiz is to demonstrate that you have read and can apply the readings to social situations. In each question on the quiz, you will be presented with a scenario. You will (1) make a prediction based on the relevant readings and (2) explain your reasoning, using the relevant core readings. You will have some choice as to which scenarios to write about and your goal is to show that you have read and can use the core readings from the class up to this date. The quiz applies all of the core competencies and requires that you think and respond in real time with a prediction and course of action, as a professional social worker is often asked to do.

Resource Guide
DUE: Dec 13 hard copy to my office and loaded onto Ctools

Your final project is to create a resource guide for a population of your choice. The resource guide will translate core ideas from class into pointers to improve health and well-being by creating contexts that reduce the chances that people will fail to work on their goals, procrastinate, or make choices that harm rather than promote well-being. The core competencies reflected in this project are using social science theories critically as a basis for evidence-based practice, considering the continuum from prevention to rehabilitation, and taking on a professional identity as a social worker to communicate clearly. In the past, student groups have focused their handbooks on needs of students, needs of social workers, or needs of particular client populations (applying PODS). This is a group assignment (groups of 4 or 5).

Your goal is to show me that you understand and can apply the readings to novel situations that may arise in your professional career. Since this is a class assignment, concentrate on readings from the second half of the semester after the quiz. Since this will be a product you can use in your professional portfolio, include any readings from the first half of the semester that you find useful. Use readings from each week. The format of the Resource Guide can be in the form of pointers, frequently asked questions, an outline for planning, or whatever appeals to you. Your Resource Guide should be visually appealing, but keep in mind that the sophisticated inclusion of course content is the primary goal of this assignment.

A successful Resource Guides contains three elements: (1) vivid and brief sketches of questions, concerns or situations relevant (likely to come up, or important to consider) for your target group, (2) a summary of the relevant points from the readings you chose, and (3) application of the readings -interpretation of implications in light of these readings for your target audience. References inside the Guide can be positioned as foot or end notes so that they are easy to access. While references other than those from our class can be used, remember that your goal is to show me you have read and can apply class readings. Use APA format for your bibliography.
WEEKLY CLASS OUTLINE

Week 1 (Sept 4): Getting Started

In the first session we will get to know each other, go over the syllabus, and discuss course expectations and assignments. We will also discuss the smiles and longevity piece which suggests that being happy, well-being and longevity are all connected. This will also serve as an introduction to or refresher on reading original source journal articles, something we will be doing throughout the course.

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

Week 2 (Sept 11): Well-Being, Happiness, & Health

The next four weeks of class will focus on the effects contexts (including interpersonal relationships) on well-being, identity, motivation, and meaning making more generally. This week, we focus on well-being and happiness. We will consider what well-being means and discuss what factors (such as structural and relationship contexts) contribute to well-being and how they connect to health.

Required readings:
Suggested readings:
John, O.P. The "Big Five" factor taxonomy: Dimensions of personality in the natural language and in questionnaires.

Week 3 (Sept 18): Thinking about Yourself

This week we focus in on the self, asking what self-concept is and what it does, especially how thinking about the self over time influences motivation and action. You should start with Synder overview, and then go to the long chapter on self-concept (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith), followed by the two brief readings on self-esteem and reasoning about the future (topics which are not covered in the chapter).

Required readings:

Suggested Readings:

Week 4 (Sept 25): Thinking about Others: Stereotypes & Stereotype Malleability

We are a country that is becoming increasingly diverse yet we are still grappling with how to get along and how we make sense of others. This week we consider social psychological
theorizing on intergroup processes and show that people are surprisingly attuned to context and shift easily in expression of stereotypes (Sinclair & Lun), which may result in stereotypical behavior or not (Pager & Quillian).

**Required Readings:**

*The Attitude-Behavior Gap: Why we say one thing but do the opposite.* From Psychblog.

**Suggested Readings:**
Ackerman, J.M., Shapiro, J.R., Neuberg, S.L., Kenrick, D.T., Becker, D.V., Griskevicius, V., Maner, J.K., & Schaller, M. (). They all look the same to me (unless they're angry). From out-group homogeneity to out-group heterogeneity. *Psychological Science, 17*, 836-840.

**Week 5 (Oct 2): Thinking about Yourself with Others: Fitting in and Belonging**

Last week we focused on how people judge and perceive others and other groups. This week’s readings focus on the interface between identity development and motivation to fit in and feel connected. We will discuss the role of intergroup contexts in shaping behavior and consider interventions to improve outcomes in the domains of both school success and health behaviors.

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 6 (Oct 9): Cultural Context**

4 PAGE PAPER DUE—load onto CTOOLS before class

What is “culture”? In today’s class we focus on culture-relevant content, procedures, and motivations at the individual-level. This narrows our working definition of culture to culturally-characteristic content (what is relevant, moral, central, of consequence), culturally-characteristic procedures (ways of thinking and making sense of oneself, others and the world), and culturally-characteristic motivations (e.g., to self-enhance or self-improve, to assert confidence and leadership or not to offend). These elements together constitute that which “goes without saying”, that which feels transparent, right, and logical in context.

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**

**Oct 15-16 Fall Study Break (No Class)**

**Week 7 (Oct 23): Poverty - Effects on Health & Well-Being (Part 1)**

Poverty is associated with stressful life conditions including exposure to violence. Minority status is associated with additional stress of exposure to discrimination. Stress, unfair treatment and discrimination all occur over the lifespan, beginning in early years of life. There is evidence that taken together, these events increase allostatic load (the extent that the body is chronically in a state of preparedness) and that this chronic state can have negative effects on health and well-being, including capacity to focus and concentrate.

**Required Readings:**
Unnatural Causes (Introduction to series, 5 minute video):

**Suggested readings:**
Week 8 (Oct 30): Poverty - Effects on Health & Well-Being (Part 2)

This week we continue to look at the ways that contexts, including social networks, family and neighborhood poverty can produce adverse effects on health, mental health and well-being. Rather than blame and victimization, our focus is on larger structural conditions, collective problem solving and policy change. Other useful questions might include: who benefits from particular actions and decisions, who bears the cost, and who has the power to make decisions about how resources are allocated?

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


Week 9 (Nov 6): Money, Health, and Happiness

**IN CLASS QUIZ 1 (covers core concepts from sessions 1-8)**

We all know the saying “money cannot buy happiness,” but is that really true? What about the reverse, for example, is there a relationship between lower incomes and happiness? Are people with health problems or disabilities as happy as people without them? What may this mean for social work practice? Good decision making often requires accurate predictions about how potential outcomes will make one feel. This session focuses on explicitly on happiness: what it is, how we measure it, what it is and is not related to.

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 10 (Nov 13): Optimism and Positive Thinking**

The power of positive thinking has gained attention in the self help world. Should we be focusing ourselves and our clients on the positive? Is there any empirical evidence that optimism helps? What about the reverse, is there evidence that pessimism hurts? This week we focus on optimism and the impact of the positive.

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


**Week 11 (Nov 20): Rumination vs. Reflection**

In the next three sessions, we focus on thinking and memory. As a social worker, can you help yourself and your clients to improve well-being, physical and mental health by how you think about your experiences? When bad things happen, some people keep it to themselves, some ruminate, some share.

In this session we will discuss why some approaches are more helpful than others.

**Required Readings:**

**Suggested Readings:**

**Week 12 (Nov 27): Framing and Decision Making**

This session focuses on how the way we think about a choice influences the choice we make. Last week we focused on positive thinking. Of course, positive thinking is only helpful to the extent that it also produces action in pursuit of self-relevant and self-enhancing life goals. This week we will focus on the sometimes surprising behavioral effects of relatively subtle differences in the way choices are structured.


**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 13 (Dec 4): Tools to Promote Well-Being from Social Cognition**

Work with clients can be difficult. A topic of interest for social workers is burn out and how to deal with negative feelings about the meaning of one’s life and work in the face of stress and difficulty. Today’s session focuses on what the field has learned about thinking as it relates to promoting a sense of meaning and well-being. A goal is to apply these healthy lessons both in one’s own life and in one’s interactions with clients and other professionals.

**Required readings:**


**Week 14 (Dec 11): Decision Making and Feelings of Ease and Difficulty**

Decades of psychological research documented that human judgment often falls short of normative ideals. It may seem that if people had accurate information then their decision making would surely improve. This assumption is central to public information campaigns
designed to dispel erroneous beliefs and to replace them with more accurate information. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by Norbert Schwarz and his colleagues, these attempts to improve decision making often fail to achieve their goals, even under conditions assumed to foster rational judgment.

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


