Course Description

Theoretical bases of Human Behavior in the Social Environment is a two semester course and is designed to provide the foundation generalist social work knowledge, from an ecological perspective, concerning the application of bio-psycho-social theories to contemporary social work practice situations at multiple levels (micro, meso, macro). According to the Curriculum Policy Statement (CPS) on HBSE for Master’s Degree Programs in Social Work Education...

“The professional foundation (SW 235A/B) must provide content about theories and knowledge on human bio-psycho-social development, including theories and knowledge about the range of social systems in which individuals live (families, groups, organizations, institutions, and communities). The HBSE curriculum must provide an understanding of the interactions between and among human biological, social, psychological, and cultural systems must be presented. Content must be provided about the ways in which systems promote or deter people in the maintenance or attainment of optimal health and well-being…”

The purpose of this course sequence is to enable students to understand the multi-level, multi-dimensional processes of development (CPS M5.4.1.). This is a prerequisite course for advanced practice courses and for field internships to assist students in developing a knowledge base to draw from in preparation for social work micro, meso and macro practice (CPS M5.4.1, 7.8). Additional content on globalization and its impact on other systems will be provided and discussed.

The course is based on a diversity perspective emphasizing close attention to culture, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (CPS M5.4.2.7.2). The approach utilizes ecosystems, multidimensional views, and is eclectic. How humans establish knowledge from various starting points (i.e. postmodern/constructivist, empirical and evidence based) will be explored. The course has integrated theories and content about diversity (class, race, ethnic, age, gender, gay and lesbian) into a multi-dimensional framework to insure that it is comprehensively covered (CPS M5.4.2, 7.2). The course sequence is built upon and extends the Liberal Arts Perspective by incorporating ideas for such areas and ethics, cultural anthropology, economics, political science, history, biology, psychology, social psychology, sociology, philosophy, etc. Students may expect to gain an understanding of the nature of theory, theoretical application, and a critical analysis of theoretical constructs.
During the fall semester course (SW 235A) emphasis will be placed on human growth and lifespan development from conception through late adulthood in the context of family, community, society and global influences. Theories are explored to gain an understanding of how individuals develop within various systems (groups, families, organizations, communities, society and globally). The mutual impact of systems on individuals and of individuals on systems will be of special interest. Careful attention is paid throughout the course to the impact of different theories upon the social worker’s craft, the nature of practice applied as service, and the social work profession itself. The course perspective is strongly centered in client strengths, empowerment and recovery perspectives.

The spring semester course (SW 235B) continues the study of human behavior, drawing again from a multi-dimensional framework. While SW235A addressed human development within the context of expectable environments, the second semester course (SW 235B) will be organized around human behavior in contexts of challenges, vulnerable life conditions: poverty and its impact, homelessness, social injustice and institutional discrimination; strengths and risks, attachment and separation, dynamics of trauma, interpersonal and institutional violence, family dysfunction and transition, mental and behavioral disturbances, physical illness, disability and death and loss: oppression and challenges to group, organizational, community, societal and global functioning.

**Statement of Course Sequence Goal**

The goal of this course sequence is to enable students to understand and critically analyze theories and develop a knowledge base about human behavior and lifespan development using multi-dimensional frameworks (M5.710). This knowledge base then empowers the social worker to create effective and empowering relationships with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in the profession of social work and to work toward social change in an effort to obtain social justice for vulnerable populations.

**Core Objectives**

It is expected that students will be able to demonstrate the objectives listed below by the completion of the course sequence. Assignments are specifically designed to measure these objectives and to provide feedback to students. Evaluation of attainment of these objectives will be through in-class assignments, group discussions, take-home exams, class presentations, exercises and discussions.

1. To understand the dynamic interactions among biological, social, psychological, and cultural factors as they affect and are affected by human growth and development, strength, risk, vulnerability, protective mechanisms and resilience in interactions with environmental systems.
2. To critically review, analyze, and extend major theoretical approaches to the multi-faced processes in the development of individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and society.

3. To understand how environmental factors, especially racism, poverty, sexism, abuse and violence, homophobia, social stigma and other forms of oppression affect development.

4. To understand that life challenges, adversities and transitions are created by forces that are complex, multi-causal, and multileveled as are the responses to challenges.

5. To be able to demonstrate how systems promote and deter people in maintaining or achieving optimal health and well-being as individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and society.

6. To be able to critically analyze and evaluate multi-level theories and to integrate theories into frameworks for professional social work practice.

7. To integrate values and ethics compatible with the profession of social work.

8. To reframe deficit-based models of cultural expression to reflect client and community strengths; to see and value cultural diversity as an expression of cultural vitality and cultural wealth created by natural support systems and communities of the economically disenfranchised, women, people of color, sexual and religious minorities, children and the aged.

**Required Books for SW 235A:**


New York: Ballentine Books.


Allyn and Bacon.

**Suggested Books for Additional Content:**


This class will be conducted on a lecture-discussion basis. Student preparation and participation are integral parts of this learning process. Video, guest speakers, and group exercises may also be used to accomplish the learning objectives.

**Class Requirements:**

1. **Attendance.** It is a basic requirement to attend class. It is not possible to pass this course if there is only sporadic attendance. You will not be considered in attendance in this class if you are talking to someone else on your cell phone or using i-pods, computers or other electronic devices during class. No calls please during class, turn off the phone, beeper, etc or you will lose class credit. Please inform the professor when you will not be in class. If you miss three classes, you must make an appointment to discuss whether continuing is feasible.

2. **Assigned Readings.** Students will be expected to complete assigned readings prior to class attendance.

3. **Classroom Preparation and Participation.** Students are expected to be prepared to participate in discussions and in written and oral exercises.

4. **Assignments.** Students are expected to complete assignments and turn them in on time. There will be a grade penalty (of –5pts/day) added each day a paper is late. Papers must be handed in at the beginning of class on the due date. Be sure to make a copy of your papers for yourself. All papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, and free of spelling and grammatical errors. Apply basic APA (American Psychological Association) style for all written assignments both in the main text and in citing references.

5. **Plagiarism.** Any form of cheating or plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. Written work must reflect your own thinking. It is considered plagiarism if you copy from your textbook or claim ideas that belong to others without citing the source of those ideas. **University policy on plagiarism is an automatic failure.**

6. **Ethical Practice.** As developing social work professionals, it is expected that students will become familiar with and adhere to the **NASW Code of Ethics.** This code for professional behavior should guide your actions in class and in the field agency setting. Disrespect for student colleagues will not be tolerated as classroom dynamics must be safe, appropriate, on topic, open and respectful of diverse opinions and experiences.

7. The course outline is to be shared with the field instructor as soon as possible after the student’s entry into the field in order to provide guidance for both the field instructor and classroom instructor in supporting the fullest possible integration of field and classroom learning.

**Class Assignments:**

1. **In-Class Exercises and Discussions**

2. **Analysis and Application of Theoretical Frameworks to Case Examples done in groups in class (Credit may not be made up as this is done in-class with classmates).**
3. Participate in a get out the vote campaign.

4. **Two Reaction Papers:**
Students will be expected to come to class having read the assignments for the week and prepared to discuss the readings in a critical way. To facilitate this, students will be given sets of questions, which relate to the readings throughout the semester and will, from those questions, write short (5-8 page) reaction papers. The purpose of the papers is to encourage students to develop their own critical thinking skills regarding material that they will be encountering during the course. (Each paper will be worth 50 points).

5. **Final Paper:**
While recognizing that learning and decision making are on going in professional development of anyone becoming a social worker, students will write a final paper (5-10 pages) for the course. Identify and outline the theoretical perspective(s) the student feels will be most influential in guiding one’s own practice. Students will share these papers and perspectives during the last two sessions of the course and orally give and receive feedback from others. Students will be asked to be knowledgeable about the theoretical perspective(s) they have selected and demonstrate the usefulness of the perspective(s) from their perspective while linking the theoretical perspective(s) to such criteria as personal career objectives, client population the student is likely to work with, client and career context, etc. Provide examples for how and why this perspective or these perspectives are useful, effective, ethical, etc. (This final paper will be worth 150 points and is graded on its rigor, thoroughness, accuracy, organization and application to clients.)

**Grading Criteria:**

1. Complete all course requirements outlined above (there will be a grade penalty for turning in late papers—**5 points will be deducted daily for every day the paper is late**).

2. Class participation: There will be a grade reduction for missed attendance and/or lack of preparation.

3. Life is a balance Activity (to be explained in class and part of the final papers)

4. Analisis of Cases—50 total, **In class group application** of theory to case (usually a video)--periodically during course.

5. Two Reaction Papers—50 points each—total of 100 points
   1st paper Due: Sept. 25 (week 4)  
   2nd paper Due: Oct 30 (week 9)

6. Integration Final Paper—150 points, Due Dec. 4 and presented orally to the class during the weeks of Nov. 27 and Dec. 4.
**Tentative Course Schedule for SW 235A:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction to Human Behavior in the Social Environment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course requirements, readings, expectations, evaluation—feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Systems Theory, Ecological Perspectives (micro, meso, macro)</td>
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<td>Discussion of living a balanced life.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Essential:</td>
<td>Hand-out—Lyddon, “Root Metaphor Theory”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Also read</td>
<td>Schriver, Chs 1, 2, &amp; 3 (Paradigms for Social Work)</td>
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<td>And (Suggested)</td>
<td>Payne, Ch 1 &amp; 2 (Social Construction of Theories and Using Theory in SW)</td>
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<th>Week 2</th>
<th>The Nature of Theories, epistemology and knowledge generation</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unexamined Assumptions or Meta Theory and Epistemology</td>
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<td>Same as above--Required Readings for this Class Session:</td>
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<th>Week 3</th>
<th>“Traditional Theories” and the “Biological” Context of Human Behavior</th>
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<td><em><strong>First Reaction Paper, Due Sept. 25</strong></em></td>
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<td><strong>Required:</strong></td>
<td>Schriver, Ch 4 (Dominant Theories)</td>
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<td><strong>Suggested</strong></td>
<td>Readings: Payne, Ch 3 ( Psychodynamic Theories)</td>
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<td>Payne, Ch 5 (Cognitive-behavioral Theories)</td>
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Begin Reading: Kindlon & Thompson Chs. 1-4 and Pipher, Ch 1-3

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<th>Week 4-6</th>
<th>Focus on Socio - Psychological aspects of Childhood Development</th>
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<td>Presentation—Attachment Theory, Developmental Theories</td>
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<td>(Psychological, Cognitive, Moral) and a Critique of Developmental Theories</td>
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<td>Case Study Response: Video</td>
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<td>R. Readings: Payne, Ch 6 (Systems and Ecological Perspectives)</td>
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<td>Payne, Ch 9 (Social and Community Development)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suggested: Robbins, Ch 8 (Cognitive &amp; Moral Development), pgs. 231-251</td>
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<td>Robbins, Ch 7 (pg. 219-230) (Library Reserve/handouts)</td>
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Week 7  **Alternative and Micro-Sociological Theory of Human Behavior**  
Suggested Readings: Payne, Ch 7 (Social Psychological and Communication)  
Robbins, Ch 9 (Symbolic Interactionism)  
Continue: Kindlon & Thompson, Chs 7-12  
Pipher, Chs 8-11 & 12-14-and Part IV  

Week 8  **Experiencing Oppression and Diverse Human Experiences and Responses**  
Presentation: Conflict Theory, Empowerment and Strengths Perspectives, Feminist Theory  
Readings: Shriver, Ch 5 (Alternative Possible Perspectives on Individuals)  
Suggested: Payne, Ch, 10 (Radical and Marxist Perspectives) and Payne, Ch 11 (Anti-discrimatory and Anti-oppressive Perspectives)  
Payne, Ch 12 (Empowerment)  

**2nd Reaction Paper Due Next week: Oct 30 (week 9)***  

Week 9-10  **The Social Context of Development**  
Family Systems Theory and Theories of Group Work  
*****Discuss Pipher’s and Kindlon’s Books  
Video: Case example  
Required: Schriver, Ch 6 (Familiness) and Ch 7 (Groups)  
Suggested Readings: Payne, Ch 4 (Crises Intervention  
Payne, Ch 13 (Assessing Social Work Theories  

Week 10-11  **Socio-Psychological Systems and their Impacts on Adulthood as well as Organizational Systems and their Impacts**  
Presentation—Humanistic and Existential Perspectives  
Transpersonal Theories  
Adult Lifespan Theories, Adult Cognitive and Spiritual Developmental Theories  
Social Context: Organizational Theories and Community
Video: “Living Proof” Case example

Required: Schriver, Ch 9 (Perspectives on Communities)

Readings: Payne, Ch 7 (Social Psychological and Communication Theories)

Payne, Ch 8 (Humanist and Existential Perspectives)

**Week 12** Human Behavior in Organizations and its implications for Social Work

Readings: Schriver, Ch 8 (Perspectives on Organizations)

**Week 13** Bio-Psycho-Social Systems and Impacts of Older Adulthood
Presentation—Theories of Aging (We may do this next semester instead)

Readings: Class Hand outs

**Week 14-15** Student Presentation of Personal Frameworks

*Final Papers Due Dec. 4 and Presentations Due Nov. 27 & Dec. 4

**SW 235A---Reaction Paper #1---**

Questions to Provoke Thoughts

1. Which of the root metaphors (as laid out in Lyddon’s article) best describes your own assumptive world? How does this fit with the main tenants of a theoretical perspective that you are familiar with or have used in the past? How does it “fit” with some of the issues raised about epistemology? If you are unsure of which theoretical point of view is yours, pick one for the purposes of this reaction to demonstrate how assumptive world views influence a given theory or developmental perspective. Is the theory most useful for understanding micro (or individual) issues, meso (or person-environment transactions in a community setting) and macro (or overarching societal/structural) issues? How consistent is the theory with social work values and ethics? What are the political implications of this focus? Does the theory address issues of human oppression (racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, heterosexism, sexism)? Does the theory’s philosophical underpinnings or values provide insight on the role of multiple identities or interlocking oppressions and privileges in the lives of individuals, groups, families, communities, organizations, institutional structures and global relations?

2. One way to organize one’s view of human behavior in social environments is in terms of “life course development.” How might this be a productive way to view such development? What sort of bias may be included in such a view? (Stated differently, what is the critique of the developmental or life-span approach to understanding
human behavior? Are there alternative ways to view human behavior and what are the strengths or weakness of each?

3. Schriver discusses what he calls “traditional” and “alternative” theories and presents a powerful critique of the bias that is part of traditional theories. Discuss his arguments and critique. What is his argument regarding theory and its uses in social work? What are contrasting perspectives on knowledge and how it is to be “built”?