The University of Kansas  
School of Social Welfare  
Prerequisites: SW 220, SW 530  
SW 532 Community and Organizational Dynamics and Human Behavior  

Master Syllabus  

I. COURSE RATIONALE  

SW 532 is essentially a study of human ecology through larger social systems such as communities, organizations, and groups. This course builds on the foundation course, SW 220 - Social Work, Social Welfare and U.S. Society and on the first HBSE sequence course, SW 530 - Human Behavior in the Social Environment which focuses on individuals and families. SW 532 links horizontally with research, diversity, and practice courses, as elements from these courses are incorporated into the content of SW 532. Since social policy is developed within the context of organizations and communities, this course provides the basis for relevant concepts for students to understand the influence of communities and organizations on policy formulation. SW 532 also makes clear to the students that research skills are required in understanding the balance between needs and resources in organizational, inter-organizational, and community decision-making. The study of communities and organizations includes confronting racism, sexism, and classism in American society. Through systems analysis students learn to become aware of institutional maintenance of these social ills. In addition, students are exposed to theoretical approaches to social change in order to work toward social justice. As with all courses in the curriculum, SW 532 provides a foundation for the Practicum, as it provides students with the theoretical concepts to understand and assess the organization where the student will be working and the influence of the community upon the practitioners, client systems, and other systems involved in the planned change effort. (Prerequisites: SW 220 and SW 530)  

The ecosystems perspective will be used as a framework to integrate theories related to human behavior and the social environment that focus on system’s strengths, celebrate diversity, promote social justice and integrate a critical perspective. Specifically, the social systems approach, derived from general systems theory, will be used to understand and analyze the meso and macro systems studied in this course. A systems perspective forces students to pay simultaneous, dual attention to both systems and their environment and the interaction between the two, thus promoting a generalist approach. Students learn to think in non-linear, holistic terms and to acknowledge the interplay among various factors that contribute to single events.  

SW 532 covers content on small groups, developmental stages of small groups and interaction between small groups and the larger environment. Content on formal organizations includes theories of organizational development, rational bureaucracies, and the interaction between organizations and the broader political/economic context. Content on communities includes theories of social change, community development and
institutional racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. The social systems approach applied to these systems elucidates the internal structures and energy exchanges, including power and privilege structures, as well the exchanges of energy with systems in the larger environment.

II. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The course objectives are clustered according to the three competencies: knowledge, skills, and values.

Knowledge

By the end of the semester, BSW students will demonstrate:

1. Knowledge of social systems theory and its application to small groups, formal organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objective 7).

2. Knowledge of selected theories on small group development, organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objective 7).

3. Knowledge of selected professional literature related to groups, organizations, and communities that reflect a critical perspective and a strengths-based approach. (Reflects BSW Objective 1, 7, and 9).

Skills

By the end of the semester, BSW students will demonstrate an ability to:

4. Apply the social systems framework to groups, organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objectives 1, 9 &10).

5. Think critically in culturally competent, holistic terms. (Reflects BSW Objective 1 and 3).

6. Analyze a small group using social systems concepts. (Reflects BSW Objectives 1 and 7).

7. Analyze a formal organization, specifically a social service organization, using the social systems model, including the ways in which the organization promotes social justice with particular attention to populations at risk and how social and economic forces impact on the delivery of services. (Reflects BSW Objective 1, 4, 7, and 12).

8. Analyze a local community by applying the social systems model, including the ways in which the community promotes optimal health and well-being for its citizens. (Reflects BSW Objective 2, 3, 7, and 12).
9. Critically examine selected professional literature related to groups, organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objective 9).

Values

By the end of the semester, BSW students will have developed:

10. An understanding and sensitivity towards diversity based on age, class, culture, disabilities, ethnicity, family status, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation are either promoted or hindered in small groups, formal organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objective 3).

11. An awareness of inherent value dilemmas in delivering human services and ethical ways of responding to human behavior in groups, organizations, and communities. (Reflects BSW Objective 2)

III. CURRICULUM THEMES

The following themes interweave through the curriculum and are addressed in SW 532.

1. **Strengths Perspective.** By learning to think in critically and holistically, students shift out of the “blaming the victim” paradigm into a fresh and more realistic perspective that encompasses multiple, simultaneous causation. The balance between clients’ or systems’ needs and strengths becomes apparent and through guidance from the instructor, systems’ strengths becomes the focus.

2. **Critical Perspective.** Critical, holistic thinking brings into balance different perspectives that assist students to critically examine selected theories about human behavior and the social environment and beliefs and assumptions that support and maintain unjust and oppressive social structures and practices.

3. **Social Justice.** By analyzing organizations and communities, students become aware of ways that larger systems can contribute to expanded opportunities for oppressed, stigmatized, and marginalized populations to access needed services and resources. They can identify opportunities for intervention to enhance social and economic justice.

4. **Diversity.** A focus on culturally competent practice and holistic thinking sensitzes students toward diversity and facilitates acceptance, respect and appreciation of diverse populations and diverse lifestyles. Populations include those differentiated by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexual orientation, age, gender, and disability.
IV. LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

Students are required to have a background in the liberal arts, including sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, political science, and economics. Course work across these disciplines is necessary for students to understand the interrelationships between people and the environmental context in which they function. In addition, students must draw on courses in English and Communication in order to express themselves effectively in written and oral form.

V. PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE AND VALUES

The pressures for conformity to group, organizational, and community norms and values have the potential for conflicting with professional purposes and values when client welfare requires social advocacy and change. This course provides students with a context for examining professional and ethical dilemmas inherent in social work. The course brings about an awareness of the student’s own depth, nature of ethical commitment and professional motivation.

VI. PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

The two primary suggested assignments in SW 532, analysis of a social service organization and analysis of a local community, require students to pay attention to issues of diversity. Analysis of the formal organization involves a description of the clients served: the number of clients, their special needs, identification as populations at risk, and whether there exists an overrepresentation of a particular population among the client group. The community analysis requires students to examine neighborhoods, resources, the general distribution of wealth, and the distribution of formal power in the community. In this way, inequities can be discovered and students can begin to solidify their commitment to work toward social justice for under-represented and oppressed groups.

VII. TOPICS

Topics That Must Be Covered:

Social systems theory (or approach) based on general systems theory must be covered. Social systems concepts must be mastered by the students in order for the educational outcomes to be met. Initially difficult, the students will be challenged to shift from linear thinking to non-linear thinking. Terminology will be new, but as they apply the social systems model to groups, organizations, and communities, students will master the concepts by the end of the semester.

Stages of group development will help students to understand internal dynamics of small groups. Types of groups and dimensions of groups will help to prepare BSW students to co-lead some types of groups.
Theories of organizations and description of bureaucracies will assist students in the analysis of an organization. Since social work is an agency-based profession, information on this topic will prepare students not only to work in a formal organization but also to make changes in one, changes that will expand opportunities for both employees and under-represented client populations.

Theories of social change, community development and institutional discrimination are topics that students must become familiar with in their preparation for practice. Creating a link to the roots of the profession reminds students that the larger environment is just as important in the promotion of social justice as working at the micro level. Students must understand that certain aspects of the community may limit or enhance resources and services to populations at risk and that working at the community level may be the key to resolving many problematic situations.

Recommended Topics

Resilience, especially as it applies to groups and communities, will broaden the strengths perspective.

Religion/spirituality and how it comprises an aspect of some groups, of private, faith-based social service organizations, and some communities.

Traditional and alternative paradigms, how they differ, how the alternative paradigm expands the concepts of the social systems approach and includes voices not previously heard.

VIII. RECOMMENDED READINGS

Suggested Required Texts:


Suggested readings for the instructor:


**Recommended readings for students:**


Note: Another alternative to the Anderson, Carter & Lowe book is the following text with slightly different (more cybernetic) terminology:


**Relevant chapters** from one of the following may serve as an adjunct text to the Anderson, Carter, Lowe book:


Other illustrative readings:


**IX. RECOMMENDED ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Exam on social systems model, concepts and terminology. (The purpose of this exam is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcome 1.)

2. Exam on groups, developmental stages, types, dimensions, and the application of social systems model to a group which was read about, for example, the burglary ring in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. (The purpose of this exam is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.)

   **OR**

3. In lieu of an exam on content material on groups, an assignment to analyze a small group that students belong to or can have access to, e.g., a committee, a social group, a support group, etc., may be assigned. (The purpose of this assignment is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcomes 4, 5, and 6.)

4. Analysis of a formal organization, specifically a social service organization. This assignment will entail interview(s) with a staff member(s), for example a social worker and perhaps an administrator (supervisor, program director, or executive director). This assignment may be done in small groups of no more than three students or it may be done individually. (The purpose of this assignment is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcomes 4, 5, and 7.)

5. Analysis of a local community that the student is familiar with, for example, a student’s hometown. This may require an interview with a city official or a high ranking city employee in addition to other research (e.g., Chamber of Commerce brochures, interviews with long-time citizens and/or citizens’ groups). This assignment may be done by a small group or by an individual student. (The
purpose of this assignment is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcomes 4, 5, and 8.)

6. A final, comprehensive exam that pulls all the course content together. (The purpose of this exam is to assess the student’s progress on Educational Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, and 11.)

X. GRADING

BSW GRADING SCALE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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A. **Incomplete grades.** A temporary grade of Incomplete may be assigned to a student who, for a reason beyond the student’s control, has been unable to complete the required work in a course on time. It is the student’s responsibility to request an Incomplete from the instructor. A request signed by the student and the faculty member must be on file when grades are submitted. A student may not enroll in a course sequential to one in which he or she has an I or F letter grade. An incomplete not removed by the end of the next semester will be changed to an F.

The Master syllabi should specify:

B. Attendance policies for BSW courses. For example: Class attendance is very important. More than two absences could result in the loss of all your attendance points. More than four absences will result in failure in this class. If you have missed two classes, please arrange an appointment with me to discuss the reasons for the absence and to arrange for make-up work that will count toward your class participation points. Points are deducted for missing class and coming to class late (3 pts. for each absence/lateness).

Individual instructors’ syllabi should specify the following:

C. The weighting of each assignment in the course and the dates by which they are done.

D. For every assignment, explain the standards used for grading.

E. If class participation is part of the grade, indicate what this means. For example, if 10 points are awarded for class participation, one point will be deducted for every class missed.
F. Indicate the policy on late assignments, e.g., they are not accepted and treated as an “F” grade or the grade is reduced by ____ for each day, week, etc.

G. Indicate how final grades will be determined.

XI. ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Students are expected to attend class on a regular basis and actively participate in discussions and class activities/exercises. Students are also expected to complete reading assignments prior to each class meeting. Further, they must take the two [or one] in-class exams and the comprehensive final exam.

Students are expected to submit required papers when due. For each day that a paper is late, the grade will be reduced by five (5) [or whatever the instructor sees fit] points. The only time that this reduction in points does not apply is in a bona fide emergency as assessed by the instructor or when classes are canceled due to bad weather.

It is the responsibility of the student to contact the instructor as soon as possible if clarification of assignments is needed.

XII. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Students who have special educational needs of any kind, including those related to learning disabilities, other disabilities, English as a second language should discuss necessary accommodations with the instructor within the first two sessions of the course. The university and School of Social Welfare are committed to provide supportive programs and accommodations to assist students who have special learning needs to successfully meet course expectations. In particular, students who feel that they have a disability that may require accommodation should advise the instructor of such disability and desired accommodation as soon as one obtains written documentation of the disability. The instructor will work with the student and the office of Services for Students with Disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations.

Please notify the instructor if your religious observances conflict with class or due dates for class assignments so we can make appropriate arrangements.

XIII. RECORDING AND SHARING RECORDINGS OF LECTURES

Course materials prepared by the instructor, together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. On request, the instructor will usually grant permission for students to audio tape lectures, on the condition that these audio tapes are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not
be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

**XIV. HIPAA REGULATIONS**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires that any personal information that may identify a person must be removed to protect confidentiality. Confidentiality applies to both classroom discussions and to written work. Please follow these simple, yet essential guidelines:

- Always disguise the name and other personal identifying information when you speak and write about a person, following the guidelines established by HIPAA.
- If writing in great detail about a client, ask permission from the client.
- Share nothing about specific clients, agencies or other students outside of the classroom.

Any information shared with the class/instructor will be confidential, within the limits defined by the Code of Ethics and state guidelines.

**Individual instructors’ syllabi should be exactly the same as in the master syllabus.**

**XV. INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY**

Provide students with information on how to see and/or reach you.

**XVI. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY**

In the event of inclement weather students should call:

- Lawrence: the University (785) 864-SNOW, or if hearing impaired and have TTY/TDD equipment, (800) 766-3777
- Edwards Campus: (913) 897-8499
- KCKCC Campus: (913) 334-1100

to determine if classes have been cancelled. Class will be held if classes have not been cancelled, and students should contact the instructor if weather or driving conditions make it impossible for them to get to class.