The University of Kansas  
School of Social Welfare

SW 867 Social Work Practice with Families

Master Syllabus

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Rationale

Social Work Practice with Families emphasizes the application of advanced theory and practice principles to work with families in diverse practice settings. This course provides students an opportunity to critically consider how the themes of the school the strengths perspective, diversity and social justice with oppressed groups apply to their work with families. The impact of the larger social system on family functioning will be emphasized. Models of family practice that emphasize methods of engaging, assessing and developing and evaluating interventions that promote optimal functioning of a variety of family systems will be stressed. The class will provide opportunities for all students to engage in critical thinking and practice that will prepare them for competent practice as they enter the workforce.

B. Linkage to other courses

Social Work Practice with Families builds on foundation practice, human behavior in the social environment, policy, diversity and the integrative courses that have prepared students to examine client functioning within a larger social context. Students will build on foundation practice skills and a strengths perspective for engaging and assessing family systems, and developing and evaluating interventions that identify specific barriers that may interfere with optimal functioning. Emphasis on how issues of diversity and family life stage impact functioning within the family will be addressed. The impact of current social policy on the ability to parent children and care for family members of all ages will be addressed with particular emphases on oppressed groups i.e. poor families, immigrant families, female headed households, gay and lesbian parents, and families with a member who have a cognitive, emotional or physical disability.

C. Preparation for advanced level practice

This course will prepare students to view client strengths and problems within the context of the family system at different stages in the family life cycle. Students will be provided with the theoretical knowledge and clinical skills appropriate for understanding and helping a diverse group of families to better meet their physical, social and emotional needs. Specific intervention models that can be generalized to work with families in diverse settings will be introduced with emphasis on theoretical knowledge as well as implications within each student’s field of practice.
D. Content

This course examines approaches to theory and practice with couples and families in widespread use today and addresses special issues in couple and family practice. The historical perspective of the social work profession with children and families will be discussed as well as historical roots of each family therapy model. Theoretical constructs and intervention strategies will be examined for several family therapy models including communications/humanistic, intergenerational, eco-behavioral, structural and strategic. Research on effectiveness in addressing client needs, and use in actual case situations will be reviewed as well as the fit of each model with the ethics and values of social work practice. Students will learn to adapt various practice approaches to social work with families and to assess the impact of clients’ socioeconomic, ethnic/minority status and gender on implementation of the various family practice models. Non-traditional family structures will be considered to evaluate how the various practice approaches can be adapted to fit different client family needs.

II. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

By the end of this semester, students will be able to:

1. Describe and analyze the use and purpose of theoretical and practice models in advanced family practice.

2. Analyze major components of and the constraints involved in applying a particular theoretical/practice model based on one or more evaluative frameworks.

3. Critically analyze the effects of applying a particular family therapy model to their practice.

4. Analyze the values and relevance of using a diagnostic framework to understand the client and to develop an appropriate treatment plan with the client’s full participation.

5. Critically analyze the use of the DSM IV in social work practice with families and apply these concepts of assessment when appropriate.

6. Develop intervention plans based on their assessment of specific case materials and analyze the relationship of subsequent practice activities to those plans.

7. Identify gaps in resources when performing their ongoing clinical responsibilities and influence institutional and professional systems in order to improve resource availability to clients.

8. Describe important characteristics of relationships with other professionals and their differential impact on collaborative clinical practice on behalf of families.
9. Analyze and apply a framework for understanding the impact on the clinical process of client, worker and system characteristics including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion and culture.

10. Apply methods for evaluating the worker’s use of self on the clinical process with families and use the resulting feedback to modify, when necessary, their practice activities with families, colleagues and/or collaterals.

11. Critically analyze the ethical and value implications of practice models for clients, professionals, and social service organizations.

12. Integrate the sum of their academic and experiential learning processes through a concerted focus on the course of their MSW studies, achieved through a semi-structured agenda, achieved through a semi-structured capstone agenda designed for all clinical students during their final weeks of their academic stay. I AM SORRY BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN????

III. CURRICULUM THEMES

B. The overarching themes of the school are encompassed in a practice centered curriculum that promotes a critical perspective, focuses on people’s strengths, celebrates human diversity and promotes social justice.

- Consistent with a critical perspective, students in the Social Work Practice with Families course will be expected to raise questions, reflect upon and systematically evaluate and apply the divergent theories and knowledge upon which social work practice with families is based.

- The strengths perspective is a humanistic, empowerment approach to social work practice with families that operates on the assumption that all persons have untapped mental, physical, and emotional resources. Students are encouraged to extend their understanding of assessment, goal setting, design and selection of interventions, and evaluation procedures in practice settings that serve families and to view themselves as collaborators in working with families, schools and colleagues from other agencies to achieve the mutually decided on goals.

- The commitment to principles of appreciating diversity while securing social justice entails helping students develop an appreciation for difference in families and an awareness of how oppression limits human and community development. Focus will include fostering economic and social justice that enables all families to access resources to pursue their chosen goals.

IV. LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

This course builds on the liberal arts perspective by engaging students in critical thinking as they examine the literature related to best practices that enhance the functioning of families within the larger social context. Students will use a historical perspective to understand how family problems have been viewed over time and to determine how that view has influenced development of intervention
strategies. Students will perform assessments that utilize knowledge from the biological and social sciences as they develop understanding of the resources and barriers to optimal functioning of families within their larger social environments. Intervention strategies will include a commitment to principles of appreciating diversity while securing social justice. Students will develop an appreciation for diversity in family structure, rules and communication patterns and an awareness of how oppression and discrimination can limit the optimal functioning of families within their household and communities.

V. PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES AND VALUES

This course emphasizes the person-in-environment perspective and concerns itself with empowerment of families within the larger social system. Emphasis will be on appreciation of the strengths that diverse persons bring to the parenting experience and use of collaborative practice to work toward mutually decided upon goals. The impact of oppression and discrimination on diverse families will be explored as well as social work’s mandate to promote social justice for our clients. Students will be challenged to think critically about the interface of social work values and ethics as they collaborate with clients and stakeholders from various systems and levels of intervention. This focus within the course seeks to help social work students identify and develop strategies for situations where personal and professional values conflict with those of the client and other service providers within the system. The specific social work values and ethics that are addressed include accountability, client involvement, self-determination, advocacy, confidentiality and informed consent.

VI. PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

This course considers variations in family structure and functioning that may be influenced by racial/cultural factors, socioeconomic status, role of gender in family role and patterns, sexual orientation of parents and children and ability/disability. The course focuses on both positive and negative influences of these factors as the family is considered within his/her environmental context. The community is identified as an environment that may either support or discriminate against diverse families. Policy that supports patterns of discrimination and oppression will be identified as well as methods to address the barriers that prevent families from developing to their fullest potential. Particular emphasis will be on teaching students how to help families develop skills that will enable them to advocate for themselves in situations where they are experiencing oppression or discrimination.

VII. TOPICS

1. Historical and conceptual overview-
2. Social work values and family treatment
3. Diversity in families and family interventions
4. The family life cycle

5. Grief and loss and its impact on the family - death of child, divorce, birth of child with disability

6. Communication and humanistic approaches to family treatment (Satir and Whitaker)

7. Intergenerational approach to family treatment (Bowen)

8. Structural family treatment (Minuchin)

9. Strategic approaches to family treatment (Haley and Madones)

10. Eco-behavioral approaches to family treatment (Mattaini and Aponte)

11. Narrative approaches to family treatment (White)

11. Work with couples

12. Evaluation in family treatment

**VIII. RECOMMENDED READINGS**


A course reader that contains additional readings will be available for purchase.

Suggested Readings: there will be additional readings as soon as I find my list.


Chan, P. (1996). The application of the Satir model of family therapy to the families in Hong Kong: A personal reflection. Contemporary Family Therapy, 18, 4, 489-505.


**IX. RECOMMENDED ASSIGNMENTS**

Think, pair and share

Cultural, ethnic, religious and spiritual family assessment

Role play of family intervention

Genogram and interpretation of family patterns

Family assessment and intervention paper using specific family treatment model

Process and analysis of family therapy sessions
IX. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

If any member of the class has a disability, please advise the instructor of such disability and desired accommodation as soon as you have written documentation. The instructor will work with you and the Services for Students with Disabilities Office to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to perform in the class.

Students who observe religious holidays that occur during scheduled classes should notify the instructor of the reason for absence.

XI. INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY

I am available and welcome dialogue with students about class and fieldwork interests and concerns. You may call me and leave a message at the Lawrence campus, e-mail me or call me at home (See page 1 for telephone numbers). I do not always check my voice mail or e-mail at the Lawrence campus daily, so if your concern is pressing, call me at home. Please do not call my home after 9PM.

XI. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather, students should call the University (864-SNOW) to determine if classes are cancelled. If the University is operating, I am expected to hold class, however, accommodation will be made for difficulty in travel. If you believe the weather or some other emergency may result in class being canceled, call my home prior to heading out. Contact me if the weather or driving conditions make it impossible for you to get to class.