I. PURPOSE

SW 980, History and Philosophy of Social Work is designed to provide students with opportunities to examine the underlying conceptual frameworks of social work practice—their history and present manifestations. This course rests on the definition of social work practice that includes the interaction of knowledge, value, and skill around professional purpose and in the context of professional sanction. This conceptual context will be used as the basis to analyze current practice models and the individual models developed and used by students in the course. Further, this course is designed to focus attention on contributions made within the social work literature, and will make use of primary source materials as an essential component of the learning experience.

This course has four interrelated facets. First, is a brief examination of some basic epistemological issues that suggest how we explain our world, and examine some basic notions in science including the use of concepts, conceptual frameworks, models, and theories and their relationship to science, the researcher, and the practitioner. Second, conceptual frameworks produced by social workers will be examined. Third, these frameworks will be examined from a historical perspective with an emphasis on how these frameworks have evolved and influence present day social work practice and education. Finally, each of these facets will be integral to an analysis by each student of their practice framework.

This course should be viewed as an intellectual history of the professional of social work. The major emphasis will be on how social work approaches were developed by successive waves of scholars and practitioners. Emphasis will be on understanding their intellectual contributions within the context of cultural, social, and economic forces that these thinkers faced as they endeavored to conceptualize practice. Also examined will be the ideas that these social workers utilized, which often were simultaneously emerging in psychology, sociology, economics, and philosophy, or which emerged from social movements such as the labor movement, Marxist groups, feminist activists, etc. How social work scholars innovated to develop ideas for the profession within these intellectual and social currents will be a guiding theme of the course. Understanding the innovative thinking of social work’s historical intellectual leaders will help students to think about opportunities for innovation within their own areas of interest.

II. OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester students will be able to:
1. Describe basic epistemological issues and how these issues are manifested in conceptual models, frameworks and theories used within social work practice.
2. Describe the historical foundation of a variety of practice models found in contemporary practice.
3. Describe and analyze contemporary practice models utilizing the basic components of social work practice, including values, knowledge and skills.
4. Analyze a specific practice framework from both a historical and epistemological perspective and begin to analyze areas where possible innovation, extension, or critique might be possible.
5. Describe and discuss the multiple frameworks used by members of the class to understand people and their environments, within an atmosphere of collaboration and respect.
III. TOPICS

A. Foundational Concepts for Understanding Conceptual Social Work
   Intellectualism in Social Work: The Importance of Rigor and Clarity in Writing and Thinking
   Theory, Models, Concepts and Frameworks For Practice

B. Social Work’s Intellectual History: The Profession’s Thinkers and Their Socio-political Contexts
   The Settlement House Workers and the Era of Reform
   Scientific Charity and The COS Movement
   From the rise of psychoanalysis to the search for coherence
   An Alternative Voice: Bertha Reynolds and the Rank and File Movement
   Behaviorism and the rise of positivism in social work
   Ecological and Systems Theory
   Post-Modernism, Social Constructivism, and Social Work Practice
   Contemporary Innovations in Micro-Practice Theory
   Contemporary Innovations in Macro-Practice Theory
   Major Issues of Professional Mission and Values