WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

SW 9230   Theories for Practice and Research   3 credits
                   with Communities and Organizations

Master Syllabus

I.   Course Domain and Boundaries

        This course focuses on social work theory at the macro level of change. Two perspectives will serve as the focus of the course: first, we will consider how "macro" serves as the context of social work practice at policy, community, and organizational levels; and second we will consider practice with macro systems with an emphasis on how the social work scholar approaches this form of practice through various roles and activities. The scope of the course also incorporates the principal functions of the social work scholar including teaching and research and so we will also consider how the social work scholar imparts content about policy, community, and organizational change as well as undertakes research at this level of practice.

        The course prepares students to actuate a macro perspective as a scholar and teacher and helps prepare students for incorporating into their dissertation work variables or models that emanate from macro practice, whether this is undertaken through communities, policies, and organizations. Thus, a product of this course is the students' refinement of their research foci as well as their research questions. We will also consider factors of diversity and how these influence practice in policy systems, communities, and organizations.

II.   Knowledge and Skill Objectives

        Students should acquire knowledge and skills in the following areas:

        1.   Conceptualizing macro social work practice, particularly how it is presented in the principal texts of the profession.

        2.   Identifying various frames of reference relevant to macro practice including ecological systems theory, conflict theory, cultural theory, developmental theory, and interactional theory.

        3.   Frame practice as a form of action that emerges from and informs theory and that is a product of research and evaluation.

4.   Designing intervention at macro levels through systematic designs that lend themselves to evaluation.

5.   Engaging in the evaluation of practice to identify intentional and unintentional products and outcomes of policy, community, or organizational change processes.

6.   Building macro theory within social work practice.

7.   Appreciating policy, community, and organizational levels of analysis as context of social work practice.

8.   Appreciating policy, community, and organizational factors as drivers and products of social change.

9.   Identifying relevant research perspectives and questions.

III.   Performance Criteria

Students will be expected to demonstrate their progress in the comprehension and integration of content through:

1.   Critical analysis of the macro perspective in principal social work practice texts.

2.   Development of a practice model that is evaluable within their area of interest whether this is at the policy, community, or organizational level.

3.   Integration of a research perspective into their knowledge base that is relevant to an emerging dissertation area and idea.

4.   Critical review of the literature in the student's domain of research interest and the identification and interaction of macro level practice variables.

IV.   Textbooks:

1.   Course pack on organizational practice in social work.
2.   Course pack on community practice in social work.
3.   Course pack on policy practice in social work.
4.   Moxley, D. (forthcoming). The culture of human service organizations and the challenge of change.
5.   Van Horn, C. E., Baumer, D. C., & Gormley, W. T. (2001). Politics and public policy, (3rd ed). CQ Press.

6. Hardcastle, D. et al. Community practice: Theories and skills for social workers. New York: Oxford University Press.

V. Organization of the Course

The course will operate as a seminar with considerable expectations placed on students for managing the learning experience and maintaining the discussion and discourse of each session. Each student will be the convener of a particular session and, therefore, responsible for the content, the design of the learning experience, and the leadership of the session. Other students will serve as discussants and responsible for contributing perspectives, knowledge, and content to the session. Periodically, students will be asked to present their work and papers and so it is incumbent upon them to come prepared to present their ideas. The course will follow the knowledge and skill areas and while we may focus on each area (policy, community, and organization) at a particular time in the seminar we also will talk across areas examining implications of our emerging knowledge and insights for macro practice, macro practice in social work, and research and teaching.

VI. Role of Student and Instructor

The instructor will serve as a facilitator during the semester helping students reflect on their emerging knowledge and understanding and working with individual students to prepare their materials for presentation. In addition, the instructor will assist students to identify the implications of their work for their emerging area of research and to identify appropriate research questions with potential relevance to their dissertations.

Students are responsible for coming to seminar prepared to discuss the materials, but not merely to review them. We are searching for breakthrough insights that can contribute to the identification of new avenues of research and theory building as well as the formation of conceptual frameworks. Thus, students are searching for new insight and for mapping the knowledge base in social work macro practice mindful of the dissertation. Thus, the identification of research questions serves as an on-going backdrop of the course.

VII. Brief Course Outline

Session #1: Orientation to the seminar. Development of learning strategies and differentiation between the role of instructor and the role of student. Assessment of the fund of knowledge among seminar participants and the scope of experience with policy, community, and organizational change. Overview of grading and assignments.

Session #2: The macro perspective in social work. Examination of the historic and contemporary themes of macro practice in social work. Identification of the drivers of this form of practice and its differentiation into policy, community, and organizational forms/levels.

Session #3: Drivers of change within macro practice. Examination of the driving forces of societal change and how these manifest themselves in policy, community, and organizational change.

Session #4: Theories of macro practice in social work. Identification of specific theories of macro practice and a critique of the change process each theory suggests. Examination of the research exemplars within each major theoretical orientation.

Session #5: Synthesis of macro practice within social work and the identification of relevant research possibilities, questions, and issues. Translation of questions into design possibilities supporting research.

Session #6: Focus on policy change and policy practice. Examination of how social work views policy practice and the various conceptual frameworks that populate this form of practice.

Session #7: Critical examination of exemplars of social work practice research in policy systems and policy practice.

Session #8: Focus on community change and community practice. Examination of how social work views community change and community practice and the various conceptual frameworks that populate this form of practice.

Session #9: Critical examination of exemplars of social work practice research in community and in community practice.

Session #10: Focus on organizational change and organizational practice. Examination of how social work views organizational change and organizational practice and the various conceptual frameworks that populate this form of practice.

Session #11: Overview of meta-frameworks emerging out of macro practice including ecological systems theory, conflict theory, cultural theory, and interactional theory. Implications for macro practice in social work and for research into social work practice.

Session #12: Theory development in policy, community, organizational practice in social work. What constitutes a "good" theory? Examination of the

relationship between theory of policy, community, and organization and the students' research agendas.

Session #13: Theory utilization in social work macro practice research with a focus on the development of research direction. Teaching macro content at the BSW and MSW levels.

Session #14: Synthesis of course. Teaching macro content at the BSW and MSW levels.

VIII. Assignments:

1. Paper on the macro perspective in principal social work practice texts and a critique of their strengths and limitations. (20% of final grade).

2. Paper on an innovative practice model that is evaluable within the student's area of interest whether this is at the policy, community, or organizational level. (20% of final grade).

3. Paper on the student's research perspective and their knowledge base that is relevant to an emerging dissertation area and idea. (30% of final grade).

4. Critical review of the literature in the student's domain of research interest and the identification and interaction of macro level practice variables and implications for dissertation direction. (30% of final grade).

IX. Supplemental Bibliography

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