SSS 932
Critique of Contemporary Theories Influencing Social Work Scholarship and Research
(3 credits)
Spring 2013
Instructor: Christine A. Sabatino, MSW, Ph D, LICSW

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I. COURSE PURPOSE
This course examines selected contemporary psychological, learning, systems, and sociological theories as well as post-modern theories and conceptual frameworks influencing social work scholarship and research. The purpose of the course is to analyze them for their suitability for knowledge development and scholarly research and to apply them to a selected problem and population of interest to professional social work.

Grounded in scholarly literature, class presentations, and class discussions, this course challenges student to examine each theory or conceptual framework in terms of its historical background, philosophical paradigm for knowledge development, assertions about human nature and the nature of social order, and congruence with professional social work.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Demonstrate increased knowledge of selected contemporary theories and conceptual frameworks influencing social work scholarship and research
2. Identify the underlying philosophical paradigm of a theory
3. Analyze and evaluate a theory/framework using specific criteria for critical analysis
4. Demonstrate conceptual and critical thinking skills
5. Identify personal values and biases in selecting theories for scholarship and research
6. Apply a selected theory/framework to a social work problem for a specific population
III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Texts


Additional required readings will be assigned in class.

B. Recommended Readings

See Appendix A, Selected Reference List

C. Other Recommended Resources and Media


D. Course Assignments

The assignments for this course consist of a scholarly comparing two theories, a scholarly application of a theory to a problem/issue/challenge/need, formal class presentations, and active class participation. See the attached outlines for the scholarly papers, class presentation, and weekly assignments.

| Assignment 1 | Scholarly comparison of two theories | Due Date: March 15, 2013 | 40% |
| Assignment 2 | Scholarly application of a theory to a problem/issue/need/challenge and a unit of attention | Due Date: April 26, 2013 | 40% |
| Assignment 3 | Class presentation Topic identified in conjunction with the professor and date selected in Class 2 | Due Date: As assigned | 10% |
| Assignment 3 | Class attendance and active participation | Due Date: Weekly | 10% |
E. **Grading Policy**

Grades for the course are based on the University grading system. Grades for the scholarly papers are based on the strength of the literature review, understanding of the theories, evidence of critical thinking, strength and organization of scholarly writing using APA format, and skillful application of the theory to the selected problem for assignment two. Class presentations are to demonstrate mastery of the assigned readings as well as independent research and presented in a clear, cogent, and robust manner covering all the elements on the Class Assignment outline.

Students are required to attend classes and are expected to participate meaningfully in class discussion/exercises. Participation is defined as reading and reflecting upon the required readings prior to class in order to understand the context of the discussion and to speak informatively on the educational topic. It is understood that some students will have an easier time than others with spontaneous class participation, while others will have an easier time with pre-planned questions and comments. Both types of contributions are valued.

F. **Course and Instructor Evaluation**

The NCSSS doctoral program requires evaluation of this course and the instructor. At the end of the semester, an evaluation form will be distributed in class. Results will not be given to the instructor until grades are submitted. Additional informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests.

IV. **CLASS EXPECTATIONS**

A. **Scholastic Expectations**

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements or appropriate Program Handbook (available on the NCSSS web page) for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, adhere to APA format, and should be carefully proof read by the student before submission to the instructor for grading.

**Additional Behavioral Requirements:**
Students are expected to maintain accepted standards of professional conduct and personal integrity in the classroom. Students should:

- Attend all classes and contribute constructively to the classroom culture
- Recognize and avoid behavior that jeopardizes the learning/teaching environment of other students or the instructor
- Demonstrate competence in planning academic activities and in following through on those plans
• Reasonably respond to and respect others’ reactions to one’s comments or actions in the classroom
• Use an appropriate level of class time and instructor’s time and attention in and out of class
• Behave in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of the social work profession.

B. Academic Honesty

Joining the community of scholars at CUA entails accepting the standards, living by those standards, and upholding them. Please refer to University Policy and appropriate Program Handbooks.

C. Accommodations

Students with physical, learning, psychological or other disabilities wishing to request accommodations must identify with the Disability Support Services (DSS) and submit documentation of a disability. If you have documented such a disability to DSS that requires accommodations or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.

*There is nothing so practical as a good theory.* Kurt Lewin
*There is no theory that is not beset with problems.* Karl Popper

Class Schedule

Unit One
Many ways of knowing: Theory for Scholarship and Research

Class 1
Introduction and Framework for the course
Review of the course syllabus and assignments.
Template for class presentations and course assignments distributed.

What are the critical elements of a theory from a social work perspective?
What is the difference between theory, perspective, model, and paradigm?
How do we link theory and research to build knowledge?

Required reading


**Additional Readings**


**Unit Two**

**Major Theoretical Frameworks:**

**Contemporary Psychological, Learning, Systems, and Sociological Theories**

For classes 2-6, doctoral faculty will take the lead on class presentations. Each professor will present one theory from each of the major approaches: psychological theories, learning theories, systems theories, sociological theories, and post-modernism. Students are expected to complete the required reading only for the theory addressed by the lecturer. For example, for the contemporary psychological theories, students will read only on attachment theory.

For classes 7-13, doctoral students will select a theory or framework for their class presentation that is listed on the syllabus. Required and recommended readings have already been identified and are found in Appendices A – E. Students may select a theory or conceptual framework not listed on the syllabus with permission of the instructor, requiring the student presenter to provide required and recommended readings for the class.

**Class 2**

**Contemporary Psychological Theories**

Ego Psychology, Psychosocial Theory, Object Relations Theory, Self Psychology, Attachment Theory, Relational Theory, and Transpersonal Theory

**Theory: Attachment Theory**

**Presenter: Dr. Susanne Bennett**
Required reading for today’s class


**Additional Reading**


**Class 3**

**Contemporary Learning Theories**

Theory: Cognitive Theory  
Presenter: Dr. Melissa Grady

Required Reading for today’s class


Recommended Readings


Class 4  
Systems Theory

General Systems Theory (Linear Theory), Chaos Theory (Non-linear Theory), Family Systems Theory (Bowen, Minuchin, Haley), and Group Theory
Theory: General Systems (Linear) Theory
Presenter: Dr. Chris Sabatino

Required Reading for today’s class


Recommended Reading


Class 5  
**Contemporary Sociological Theories**
Structural Functional Theory, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory, and Role Theory

**Theory: Symbolic Interaction Theory**
Presenter: Dr. Joe Shields

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**

**Unit Three**
Post-Modern Theories and Conceptual Frameworks
Social Constructionism/Constructivism, Narrative Theory, and Feminist

Class 6  
**Theory: Narrative Theory**
Presenter: Dr. Ellen Thusby

**Required Readings**
To be announced

**Recommended Readings**
To be announced.

**Classes 7-13**
Class Presentations
Students lead the class discussion on one of the theories/frameworks not presented by faculty, or they may choose to present a contemporary conceptual framework of interest selected in consultation with the professor.
Course review and synthesis

What is a theory?
Why is it important for social work scholarship and research?
How is it applied to contemporary issues of social work interest?

Class Presentation: Dr. Sabatino
Class Presentation Outline

Introduction
The class presentation establishes a framework for the examination of a theory or conceptual framework that is used to inform scholarship and research. The objective of the presentation is to provide a framework for lively discussion that promotes deeper knowledge about each theory or conceptual framework and how it relates to topics of interest to professional social work.

Directions
Develop a power point presentation for class distribution that takes no longer than one hour to present. Be prepared to lead a class discussion on the subject matter.

Presentation Outline

Introduction
Why did you select this theory or conceptual framework to present?

Background
Provide an overview of the theory or conceptual framework, including the
- historical and contemporary scholars
- origins and social context of the theory
- basic assumptions about human behavior or worldview of society

Philosophical Base
Using Guba's paradigms of inquiry, discuss the theory’s philosophical knowledge base, including
- ontology
- epistemology

The Theory
Address the following questions
- What is the origin or nature of problems/challenges/issues/needs?
- How does the theory explain normal growth or change?
- What is the goal of intervention or planned change?
- What are the key concepts that guide intervention or planned change
- How strong is the empirical evidence to support the theory

Congruence with Professional Social Work
Discuss the strengths and limitation of the theory or conceptual framework in relation to the
- mission, values, and ethics of professional social work
- person-in-environment perspective and strengths perspective
- race and gender
- power and oppression
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Scholarly Paper Assignments  
Students are required to submit two scholarly papers to fulfill requirements for this class.  

The first paper analyzes the similarities and differences between two theories (from separate categories) or one theory and one conceptual framework. The objective is to gain a depth of knowledge about these theories/conceptual frameworks using the analytical template for knowledge development used in this course. This paper is to include a robust review of the contemporary literature in social work and related disciplines that develops or tests these theories.  

In the second paper, the student selects one of these two theories/conceptual frameworks and applies it to a contemporary issue of interest to professional social work. The objective is to present a synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and empirical literature related to the student’s area of interests. This paper is to include a discussion of how this theory incorporates the mission, values, and ethics of professional social work.  

The Doctoral Program Handbook defines a scholarly paper as one that is a minimum of 15 pages with a reference list that is equal to or greater in number than the number of pages in the paper. If a paper is 25 pages, it must have a minimum of 25 references.  

The maximum page limit for the first scholarly paper is 25 pages, excluding the reference list. The maximum page limit for the second scholarly paper is 15 pages, excluding references.
Comparison of Two Theories/Conceptual Frameworks for Social Work Scholarship and Research  
Paper # 1

Introduction
This paper examines in detail two theories (from separate categories) or one theory and one conceptual framework for social work scholarship and research. The objective is to deepen understanding of them by comparing and contrasting the two approaches. The paper is to go beyond the class presentations and readings by including a robust review of the contemporary literature in social work and related disciplines and by incorporating scholarship that discusses the development or testing of each.

Directions
Compare and contrast the two approaches on the following dimension.

Introduction
Why did you select this theory or conceptual framework to present?

Background
Provide an overview of the theory or conceptual framework, including the
- historical and contemporary scholars
- origins and social context of the theory
- basic assumptions about human behavior or worldview of society

Philosophical Base
Using Guba’s paradigms of inquiry, discuss the theory’s philosophical knowledge base, including
- ontology
- epistemology

The Theory
Address the following questions
- What is the origin or nature of problems/challenges/issues/needs?
- How does the theory explain normal growth or change?
- What is the goal of intervention or planned change?
- What are the key concepts that guide intervention or planned change?
- How strong is the empirical evidence to support the theory

Congruence with Professional Social Work
Discuss the strengths and limitation of the theory or conceptual framework in relation to the
- mission, values, and ethics of professional social work
- person-in-environment perspective and strengths perspective
- race and gender
- power and oppression
Application of a Theory or Conceptual Framework
To a Topic of Contemporary Interest to Professional Social Work
Paper #2

Introduction
This paper takes one of the two theories or the conceptual framework from the first paper and applies it to a specific problem or issue of contemporary interest to professional social work. The objective of this paper is to integrate theory with practice. The paper requires a robust review of the contemporary literature on the problem or issue, critique of scholarship and research applying the theory or conceptual framework to the problem or issues, and a discussion of the existing gaps in knowledge development.

Directions
Analyze your problem using a theory or conceptual framework along the following dimensions. Identify and discuss the unit of attention or population affected by this issue.

Identify the problem or issue of interest to contemporary social work
- Discuss the nature, scope, and historical roots of the problem/issue/challenge/need.
- Discuss the contemporary scholarship and research from social work and related fields on the condition.

Identify and discuss the unit of attention or population affected by the problem or issue.
- Provide data on the prevalence of this problem or issue on the selected unit of attention
- Discuss the impact of this problem or issue on the unit of attention or population

Analyze the capacity of the theory/conceptual framework to 1) explain the nature of the problem or issue, and 2) guide planned change.
- How does the theory explain this problem/issue for this population?
- How does the theory explain 1) normative change, and 2) guided intervention?
- What are the weaknesses for explaining and resolving the problem or issue?

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the theory/conceptual framework
- Does the theory/framework include internal and external factors to explain the problem?
- Is change directed toward the person, the environment, or a combination of these?

Discuss the theory/framework in the context of professional social work, including
- the mission, values, and ethics of the profession
- the person-in-environment perspective
- race and gender
- power and oppression

Discuss areas of future knowledge development
- Discuss the originality and contribution of this theory/framework to social work scholarship and research forth this problem/issue with this unit of attention/population.
Appendix A

Contemporary Psychological Theories: Required and Recommended Readings
Ego Psychology, Psychosocial Theory, Object Relations Theory, Self Psychology, Attachment Theory, Relational Theory, and Transpersonal Theory

**Ego Psychology**

**Required Reading**

Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.


**Additional Reading**


**Psychosocial Theory**

**Required Reading**


**Additional Reading**
Texts and articles by Erik Erikson

**Object Relations Theory**
Required Reading


Additional Reading


Self-Psychology Theory

Required Reading


Additional Reading

Books and article by or about Heinz Kohut


Relational Theory/Interpersonal Theory

Required Reading


Additional Readings
Books and articles by or about Harry Stack Sullivan


Transpersonal Theory

Required Reading


Additional Reading


**Appendix B**

**Contemporary Learning Theories: Required and Recommended Readings**


**Behavior Theory**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


### Social Cognitive Theory

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Appendix D**

**Systems Theory: Required and Recommended Readings**

General Systems Theory (Linear Theory), Chaos Theory (Non-linear Theory), Family Systems Theory (Bowen, Minuchin, Haley), and Group Theory

**Chaos Theory (Non-linear Theory)**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Family Systems Theory**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**

See books by Jay Haley, Chloe Mandes, Salvador Minuchin, and Murry Bowen.


**Group Theory**
Required Reading


Recommended Reading


Appendix E

Contemporary Sociological Theories: Required and Recommended Readings
Structural Functional Theory, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory, and Role Theory

Structural Functional Theory

Required Readings for today’s class


Recommended Read


**Conflict Theory**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Role Theory**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Appendix F**

Social Constructionism/Constructivism, Narrative Theory, and Feminist Theory: Required and Recommended Readings.

**Social Constructionism/Constructivism**
Required Reading

Recommended Reading


**Narrative Theory**

**Required Readings**

**Recommended Reading**


**Recommended Readings**

**Feminist Theories**

**Required Reading**


Recommended Reading


Selected References


