

HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT I
SOWK 603
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Department of Social Work

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The social work profession draws from many interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives to develop knowledge and skills for responding to the challenges faced by client systems across the lifespan. SOWK 603 Human Behavior in the Social Environment I (HBSE I) begins by introducing general systems theories, strengths perspectives, empowerment theory, identity development and other theories commonly used in direct practice as models for understanding human behavior and the interactions of systems of different sizes. The focus of the course then shifts to understanding individual and family development across the lifespan in the context of these models, examining how larger systems influence the processes of human growth and change. Of particular importance are human diversity, including age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation, and the role of oppression in the development of populations-at-risk. HBSE I provides an overview of human development from birth to old age in the context of family and community. Students will learn and critically analyze theories of human development and behavior with consideration of the: 1) social, cultural and economic forces affecting human development, with an emphasis on populations-at-risk, 2) factors that contribute to the enhancement of “well-being” and empowerment of individuals and families, and 3) social and economic injustices experienced by individuals and families that impact human behavior.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Understand the theoretical concepts of individual and family development across the lifespan from birth to death (MSW 2.2).
- 2) Critically analyze the impact of diversity, including age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation, on individual and family development across the lifespan (MSW 1.1, 1.4).
- 3) Assess the impact of social, cultural and economic forces on individuals and families, with an emphasis on populations-at-risk (MSW 1.1).
- 4) Understand general systems theories, strengths perspective, empowerment theory, and other practice theories and models in relationship to individuals and families (MSW 2.2).

5) Understand the consequences of multiple forms of oppression on human development (MSW 2.2, 3.1).

6) Examine the value base of the social work profession in relation to the theories of human development and behavior that guide advanced generalist social work practice (MSW 2.3).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance, Preparation, and Participation

Students are responsible for reading assigned material *prior to* each class, attending the class sessions when they meet, and participating in online discussions when classes do not meet in-person. Students are expected to be prepared for and to participate in all class discussions and exercises. Students will not meet the learning objectives for the course if they fail to read the assigned chapters and articles. Sets of reading and reflection questions or brief study activity will be posted to help students prepare for the following week. *If a student misses three or more of the class sessions (in-person or online) she/he will receive a grade lower grade.*

Online Assignments

During the course of the semester, there will be three to four class sessions when students will be meeting course requirements by carrying out reading and reflections on their own. These assignments will require students to post essays, short answers to questions, or other information or responses to the course website. They will then be required to read some of the postings and respond to their classmates. These discussions will be asynchronous, meaning that students will be able to do this work at a time that best fits their schedule during the week the class is not meeting in person. These discussions will be monitored by the instructor and feedback provided to students about their postings.

Exams

There will be a midterm and final exam that will evaluate mastery of reading assignments, discussions, and lectures. These exams will ask a set of short answer essay questions about specific case studies to which students will respond. They will focus largely on your understanding of human develop theories and concepts and their application to social work case studies.

Perspectives on Development Presentation

This assignment will provide students the opportunity to engage in individual and pair study and in comprehensive discussion with their peers of chosen theories of human behavior and/or development. Students will select a theory to study through reviewing the scholarly literature and will work with a partner to compare, contrast, and critique the selected theories. They will reflect upon how individual and/or family development may be different for people depending on age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Students will demonstrate the ability to critique the selected theories with regard to the aforementioned aspects of human diversity, including at least one specific population-at-risk. Students will be responsible for presenting

their theories and leading a class discussion. Outlines and bibliographies of their presentations will also be made available to the other students in the class. (See details after schedule.)

HBSE Theory Application Paper (Designated Learning Assignment L.O. 2.2)

The final theoretical application paper will require students to critically analyze and apply theories of human development and behavior. They will apply the theories to their own development in their family of origin system and to a person/family in an additional memoir they will select. The paper will be an introspective analysis of student's family history and relationships and compares this to what they learn about another family of a diverse background different from their own. This paper requires the development of a multi-systems level eco-map of their family and that reflected in the book. Using the concepts and theories discussed in class about individual behavior and development, as well as family development, the impact of the aspects of diversity that apply to their family system, the impact of social, cultural and economic forces, and the impact of oppression, students will present an application of these theories to demonstrate their understanding. (See details after schedule.)

SOWK 603 COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Topic: Introduction & Background: Importance of understanding human development, behavior, and systems transactions

Week 2

Topic: Conceptual Issues: Frameworks and Theories of Human Behavior and Development; Neurobiological Underpinnings

Week 3

Topic: Theories of Individual Development

Week 4

Topic: Sociocultural Contexts: Identity and Spiritual Development

Week 5

Topic: Sociocultural Contexts: Family and Community; Family Systems; Family Life-Cycle Model

Week 6

Topic: Review and Discussion of Theories/Theoretical Frameworks Presentations by Students

Week 7

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Infancy to Early Childhood

Week 8

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Middle Childhood Online Discussion

Week 9

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Adolescence Lecture and Discussion

Week 10

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Early & Middle Adulthood

Week 11

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Later Adulthood

Week 12

Topic: Complications in Development: Trauma

Week 13

Topic: Complications in Development: Illness and Disability

Week 14

Topic: Wrap-Up the Semester; Evaluation of Teaching & Learning

Week 15

Topic: Human Life Cycle: Later Adulthood

Week 16 – Finals