COURSE NUMBER: SOWO 900

COURSE TITLE: Conceptualizing Social Problems to Inform Interventions

SEMESTER: Fall 2009 (Tuesday, 9-11:50 a.m., Room 439)

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OFFICE HOURS: Monday (1:00 – 3:00 p.m.)/By Appointment
UNC-CH Safe Zone

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
An application and critical analysis of behavioral and social science theories and theory-driven research for understanding the etiology of social problems for purposes of social intervention.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
By course end, students will:

1. Understand the application of the scientific process to social work research and practice, including the role of research and theory in evidence-based social work practice.
2. Understand the reciprocal and dynamic links among theory, research, and practice.
3. Understand distinctions among theories at different levels of abstractness and scope, as well as the distinction between explanatory theories and practice theories.
4. Review specific examples of the use of conceptual frameworks for informing the development of explanatory substantive models for understanding social problems, and how these substantive models inform the development of social interventions.
5. Identify a specific social problem, describe its incidence/prevalence and significance for social work intervention, and identify and critique relevant conceptual frameworks and substantive models that have been used to frame and inform understanding of the problem (explanatory theories).
6. Understand the development and application of theories in the context of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and culture and history.
EXPANDED DESCRIPTION:

This course instructs students in the critical analysis and application of behavioral and social science theories for understanding variation in the incidence and prevalence of social problems. It is designed to be highly pragmatic; it is not designed to provide a forum to debate the merits of different approaches to science or epistemologies. Positivist, postpositivist, and postmodern views are embraced. The aim is to gain experience in identifying critical explanatory factors associated with the occurrence of social problems—factors that function as leverage points in the design of social interventions.

Primary attention is directed to two levels of theory: conceptual frameworks and substantive models (causal models, middle-range theories, formal propositional theories, analytical typologies). In the context of HBSE preparation in the MSW curriculum, limited focus is directed to grand or universal theories of development, such as Freud’s theory of psychosexual development or Piaget’s stage-developmental theory of cognitive theory. In addition, the course addresses explanatory theory rather than practice theory (solution-focused therapy, narrative theory, motivational interviewing). Practice theories provide perspectives on the implementation of strategies to promote change and development.

A conceptual framework is defined as a set of concepts, most often with interrelated assumptions (declarative propositions), that provide “perspectives” or “orientations” to understanding behavioral and social phenomena, including human development (e.g., systems theory, exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, life course theory). As compared to substantive models, conceptual frameworks are more abstract and broader in scope. Substantive models are conceptually similar to what Jeanne Marsh (2004) calls “theories of the problem” (p. 27), although, where possible, we reframe social problems from a strengths perspective (e.g., school success versus school failure). According to Marsh, “Problem theories are concerned with typography or characteristics of problems, the factors and conditions that shape and constrain them, and the ways that they change in response to those factors and conditions” (p. 29). Marsh distinguishes “theories of the problem” from “theories of the treatment or service” and “theories of problem-service matching,” which are not the focus of this class. In most cases, substantive models are logically deduced from larger conceptual frameworks (or grand theories of development), which may be more or less explicit in the specification of the substantive model. At times, we may be tempted to overstate this linkage for purposes of our learning.

The conceptualization of social problems is a necessary first step in developing logic or program models that inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of social interventions. As stated by Marsh (2004), “Problem theory is relevant to designing interventions in that it puts a problem in context and identifies specific aspects or

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1 See Newman, B. M., & Newman, P.R. (2007). *Theories of human development*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates for an excellent book on theories of development. The authors divide theories into three groups: (a) theories that emphasize biological factors, (b) theories that emphasize environmental factors, and (c) theories that emphasize the interaction of person and environment.

dimensions of the problem that might be amendable to change or intervention” (p. 27-28). This course addresses this first step—conceptualizing social problems. The specification of explicit practice models from our conceptualization of social problems is the ultimate outcome from this activity and functions as a beacon in our work, including the specification of inputs, throughputs, and outputs. However, the design of social interventions is secondary rather than primary in SOWO 900. SOWO 940, Development of Social Intervention Models, will build on the foundation of SOWO 900.

At the beginning of the course, students will be introduced to concepts related to the process of theorizing, including a discussion of evidence-based practice in social work. They will also review exemplary examples of theory-driven research and perform a content analysis of selected social work journals and journals from areas related to social work to identify recent examples of theory-informed research. Students will subsequently review examples in the use of conceptual frameworks and substantive models for understanding social problems, which reflect “storylines of research,” from a broad range of interdisciplinary research (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). It is important to underscore that these topics were selected as examples; many other topics lend themselves to the same type of review and discussion. In addition, it is usually possible to identify multiple “storylines of research” in any one topical area. Our focus is on the process of conceptualizing rather than on the content per se. Yet, it is hoped that students will gain valuable insights from a review of this research—insights that can be applied to thinking about their own specialized area of study. And, who knows, one of these topics may fuel the fires of future scientific inquiry for a class member.

In this class, we will work inductively; we will first define the social problem, including a discussion of its incidence and prevalence and its significance. We will subsequently identify a substantive model from the literature that provides a “perspective” or “lens” to view this problem. In most cases, this is one of several substantive models that could be reviewed and discussed. Next, we will review the results from theory-driven research that has examined hypotheses or expectations from this model. Finally, we will consider the conceptual frameworks from which this substantive model was derived. For example, students will review how ecological theory (conceptual framework a la Bronfenbrenner), and general systems theory (conceptual framework a la von Bertalanffy) frame the study of school success (social problem) via a risk and resilience perspective on educational persistence (substantive model). In this context, students will review theory-driven research that examines research questions from the substantive model. From each social problem review, students will identify research questions to advance knowledge of the issue, problem, or phenomenon and to inform the design of social interventions. Special attention will be given to the deductive and inductive cycle of theory building and empirical research, as well as to quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation strategies. The aim is to engage students in the same process that prepares them for successful completion of the written portion of the qualifying exam, the scientific

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3 The topic of evidence-based practice is discussed more extensively in SOWO 910, Research Methods in Social Intervention. The material is an important foundation for SOWO 900.

4 It is important to note that, in some cases, we do not have an adequate empirical base for conceptualizing social problems; we simply lack an understanding of the problem. Still, we may be able to discuss the problem from the perspective of different conceptual frameworks and even substantive models, especially substantive models that are more abstract and broader in scope.
process, through the repetition of these reviews across a range of social problem areas highly relevant to social work practice today.

After gaining an appreciation for the use of theory to conceptualize social problems, students will have the opportunity to identify a particular social problem for advanced study, including a review of its incidence and prevalence, its significance, and its relevance/implications for social welfare and social intervention. To develop a broad understanding of this problem, students will be introduced to the method of meta-narrative review, and they will review literature from multiple disciplines to identify a relevant research question. From their identification and application of one or more theories or conceptual perspectives (grand theory, conceptual framework, or substantive model) that frame and inform the research question and the research strategies for addressing it, they will develop a conceptual/empirical model that explains variation in the social problem. They will also examine how available data fit with this model (empirical support). Students will conclude their review by offering additions and/or refinements to the conceptual/empirical model, suggesting how these additions and/or refinements fit with existing theories or conceptual perspectives in the area of study. Students will also identify research questions that need to be addressed to advance knowledge of the social problem for purposes of informing the science of intervention practice.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Main Text


Supplement Texts (Required)


SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS (REFERENCE ONLY):


Description from Sage Web Site
(http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book226285)

Sponsored by the National Council on Family Relations, the Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research is the reference work on theory and methods for family scholars and students around the
world. This volume provides a diverse, eclectic, and paradoxically mature approach to theorizing and demonstrates how the development of theory is crucial to the future of family research. An accompanying website, http://www.ncfr.org/sourcebook, offers additional participation and interaction in the process of doing theory and making science.


RECOMMENDED READINGS:


TEACHING METHODS:

This course has been designed to maximize student involvement, and it will be facilitated using a transformative learning model. From this model, students work with the instructor as full partners in assuming responsibility for the success of the course.

CLASS MEEINGS:

August 25 (no class), September 1, September 8, September 15, September 22, September 29, October 6, October 13, October 20, October 27, November 3, November 10 (no class), November 17, November 24, December 1, December 8

BAD WEATHER POLICY:

Please check your email by 7:00 a.m. on the day of class in case of snow, ice or other threatening and/or unsafe conditions. Use your best judgment about travel safety if you are driving to Chapel Hill from surrounding areas with inclement weather or threatening and/or unsafe conditions. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT:

Class Attendance
Students are expected to attend all class sessions, and classes will begin and end on time. If there is some reason that you cannot attend a class, please contact the instructor or leave a message for the instructor at the School of Social Work (919-962-6542). Students who miss two class sessions will be penalized by one letter grade (special exceptions may apply). Students who miss three or more class sessions will receive an "F" as their final grade for the class.

Email Accounts
All students are required to have a valid UNC email account. A valid UNC email address has the following extension: @email.unc.edu or @ unc.edu.
Required Reading
To facilitate class involvement and discussion, students are expected to read all required materials prior to class.

Class Participation
Students are expected to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. At the beginning of each class session, time will be allocated to address questions about readings and assignments.

APA Format
All written assignments should conform to the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.). If you do not have a copy of this manual, I would suggest that you buy one.5

Softcover: $28.95

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 1: Article Review (Due: September 15)

Each student has been assigned an article that represents an exemplary example of theory-driven research. All articles include data and analysis that tests an underlying “theory of the problem.” Our main focus is on the intentional and intelligent use of theory to frame and inform the social problem. Please prepare a 12-to-15 slide PowerPoint presentation, including the following:

(a) Statement and significance of the problem, including a statement of the central research question (2 slides),
(b) Theoretical perspective(s), including major assumptions and concepts (2-3 slides),
(c) Substantive/theoretical model derived for testing in the form of a figure (1 slide),
(d) Definitions of key variables in the substantive/theoretical model (2 slides),
(e) Summary results or discussion (2 slides),
(f) Discussion of results in the context of theoretical perspectives(s) (1 slide), and
(g) Implications for informing social interventions (1 slide).

The required number of slides may vary depending on the particular article. Each student will have 30 minutes for presentation and for leading a discussion about the implications of the article for advancing knowledge of the issue, problem, or phenomenon and informing the design of social intervention. Please review all articles before coming to class. Send the PowerPoint to the professor as an email attachment in advance of class. Please bring the presentation to class on a USB flash drive or memory stick or other portable drive. A computer/LCD will be available for all presentations.

5 I ordered my copy on August 18, 2009. At this point, APA has a backlog of orders.
Assignment 2: Social Work Journal Review (Due: September 22)

In a recent issue of *Research on Social Work Practice* (Vol. 15, July 2005, pp. 310-311), Bruce Thyer identified more than 70 journals, which he labeled as “disciplinary social work journals published primarily in English.” He excluded “interdisciplinary” and “field of practice” journals that may have affiliations other than social work, such as *Family Relations*, *Child Welfare* and *Journal of Community Practice*. Working from his list, each student will be assigned one journal for review. Journal assignment will be done randomly, although students may switch assigned journals (see below). Four journals have been selected:

- **Children and Schools** (Sarah) (review three years: 2006, 2007, 2008)
- **Social Service Review** (Kate) (review two years: 2007, 2008)

Please note that the number of volumes to cover varies by journal assigned. Two of the journals include more articles per issue than the other two.

First, count the number of empirical articles in the journal for the reference years—an empirical article manipulates data (quantitative or qualitative) in its analysis. Do not include book reviews, theoretical essays, or articles that pertain to a review of a particular method (e.g., randomized experiments) or analysis procedure (structural equation modeling). What proportion of these articles use quantitative methodologies exclusively, what proportion use qualitative methodologies exclusively, and what proportion use a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies?

Second, of the empirical articles identified, count the number of articles that identify an explicit underlying theoretical base (middle-range theory, formal propositional theory, analytical typology, or conceptual framework) and makes intelligent use of the theory or theories to frame the research question, to inform the data collection and analysis decisions made, and to interpret the results. Please list the reported theoretical frameworks in a summary table, including the number of articles that reference each theory. In the table, identify the number of empirical articles that made no mention of an explicit theory.

Third, what patterns, if any, do you see between the use of explicit theories and the type of methodology primarily employed: quantitative, qualitative, and both quantitative and qualitative.

Last, using Burrell & Morgan’s logical classification of major sociological paradigms or world views, what quadrants of the matrix are most represented by the theories identified in your review?

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Please prepare a report of no more than 3-5 pages that summarizes your findings. Include the following subheadings: Introduction (purpose), methods (your procedures for conducting the review), results (include summary table), discussion (what do you make of the results, including your conclusions), limitations, and implications for further review. (See Taylor & Bagd, 2005, for a model.) Please send me an electronic copy of your report and I will post it on the web site. Be prepared to present your report to the class on September 22 (approximately 15 minutes).

Identify what you consider to be an “exemplary theory-based empirical research article” from your journal review and be prepared to discuss this example in class. Please make a copy of the article/manuscript for all students in class. We are particularly interested in empirical investigations examining hypotheses from two or more competing theoretical perspectives.

Assignment 3: Family Studies Journal Review\(^7\) (Due: September 22)

For purposes of comparison to leading social work journals, each student will be assigned one journal for review from the field of family studies—(all articles appearing in 2008 only). Journal assignment will be done randomly, although students may switch assigned journals (see below). Four journals have been selected:

- Journal of Marriage and Family (Sarah)
- Family Relations (Melissa)
- Journal of Family Issues (Ahmed)
- Journal of Family Psychology (Kate)

First, count the number of empirical articles in the journal for 2008—an empirical article manipulates data (quantitative or qualitative) in its analysis. Do not include book reviews, theoretical essays, or articles that pertain to a review of a particular method (e.g., randomized experiments) or analysis procedure (structural equation modeling). What proportion of these articles use quantitative methodologies exclusively, what proportion use qualitative methodologies exclusively, and what proportion use a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies?

Second, of the empirical articles identified, count the number of articles that identify an explicit underlying theoretical base (middle-range theory, formal propositional theory, analytical typology, or conceptual framework) and makes intelligent use of the theory or theories to frame the research question, to inform the data collection and analysis decisions made, and to interpret the results. Please list the reported theoretical frameworks in a summary table, including the number of articles which referenced each theory. In the table, identify the number of empirical articles that made no mention of an explicit theory.

Be prepared to present your summary table to the class on September 22 (approximately 15 minutes). Please note that no summary report is required.

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Identify what you consider to be an “exemplary theory-based empirical research article” from your journal review and be prepared to discuss this example in class. Please make a copy of the article/manuscript for all students in class. We are particularly interested in empirical investigations examining hypotheses from two or more competing theoretical perspectives.

Assignment 4: Conceptual Framework Presentation (October 6)

Students will be paired together to provide an overview of a conceptual framework. Please work together to discuss the history and development of the conceptual framework, including its principal founders/developers, basic assumptions, and core concepts. In what areas of scholarship has this conceptual framework most often been applied? Using Burrell & Morgan’s logical classification of major sociological paradigms or world views, what quadrant of the matrix does this conceptual framework best fit? Please apply the conceptual framework as a “lens” to understanding and examining teenage pregnancy. In relationship to teenage pregnancy, what becomes the central focus of your attention from the perspective of the conceptual framework? Please develop a 15-20 PowerPoint slide presentation for class on October 6. Please develop questions to stimulate class discussion and integration. You have 45 minutes for presentation.

Assignment 5: “Storylines of Research” (Due: October 20)

Working from the context of your specialized area of study, please identify and discuss at least two “meta-narratives” from the literature and explain how researchers from each “tradition” have, in the words of Greenhalgh et al. (2005), “conceptualized, explained and investigated [your specialized area of study] differently and used different criteria for judging the quality of empirical work” (p. 417). In this section of the report, try to capture what Greenhalgh et al. describe as “the prevailing language and imagery used by scientists to ‘to tell the story’ of their work” (p. 420). Choose one of these “traditions” and describe the “storyline of research” in the specialized area and key elements of the research paradigm (conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and instrumental). Identify at least one example of pioneering and seminal theoretical and empirical work, including the names and affiliations of scholars associated with this work, that significantly advanced the work of scholars in that particular tradition and that may have had significant implications for the work of researchers in other traditions or for the field at large. In addition, please identify at least one “breakaway” researcher whose work significantly advanced or challenged the prevailing paradigm within this tradition.
Introduction (1/2 page)
Research Question (1/4 page)
Purpose of Assignment (1/4 page)
Method (1/2 page)
Results
  - Meta-Narratives: Two Research Traditions (1 page)
    - Prevailing language and imagery
  - A Storyline of Research (3 page)
    - The storyline
    - Key elements of the research paradigm:
      - Conceptual
      - Theoretical
      - Methodological
      - Instrumental
    - Example of pioneering and seminal work
    - Example of a “breakaway” researcher
Conclusions (3/4 page)
Lessons Learned (1/4 page)

Prepare a PowerPoint summary of your paper (8-10 slides) to present in class (30 minutes for presentation).

Assignment 6: Class Presentation (Due: October 27 to November 24)

From October 27 to November 24, we will cover four social problems: school success, marital happiness, crime and delinquency, and mundane extreme environment stress. Each student will be assigned one of the four social problems for presentation. Topics for each social problem include: statement and significance of the social problem (15 minutes), substantive model (30 minutes), empirical support for the substantive model (30 minutes), and conceptual framework(s) that inform the substantive model (45 minutes). Students will be responsible for summarizing the assigned reading(s) and facilitating discussion around topics. The amount of time allocated to topics will vary from week to week depending on the number of readings/reference materials and their relative importance to the discussion.

All students are requested to review all assigned readings/reference materials for each class session. Such preparation will facilitate the work of the presenter. In preparing for these classes, student participants are encouraged to consider the following questions:

a. What is the level of congruence and coherence among the statement and significance of the problem, the substantive model, the empirical support for the substantive model, and the conceptual framework(s) for informing the substantive model?
b. What are your suggestions for refining the substantive model so that it better explains the phenomenon or problem and/or fits with the data, including the integration of alternative substantive models and/or conceptual frameworks?
c. What research questions need to be addressed to advance knowledge of the issue, problem or phenomenon?
d. What research methods could be used to address those research questions?
e. What are the implications of the empirical research for interventions at the policy, program, or direct practice level?

Presenters will have approximate 120 minutes to work with. Please use the following outline to frame and inform your presentation:

*Statement and significance of the problem:* What is nature of the social problem, including a review of its incidence and/or prevalence? What are the implications of the social problem and the short- and long-term consequences of not attending to it for individuals, families, communities and society? What research questions appear most pressing at the current time? Please identify and discuss at least one Web-based resource for further information about the statement and significance of the social problem.

*Substantive model:* What basic assumptions and concepts anchor the substantive model? What, if any, conceptual frameworks are identified as informing the substantive model? How does the substantive model explain variation in the social problem? If possible, please represent this explanation in the form of a diagram (middle range theory, analytical typology) or a conceptual/empirical model (causal model). What research questions are most pressing from the perspective of the substantive model?

*Empirical support for the substantive model:* How effectively do the authors use the substantive model to build a context for the research? What is the degree of fit between the research design and data collection/analysis strategies and the substantive model? To what extent were hypotheses derived from the substantive model supported by the findings? In other words, please evaluate the model’s precision of prediction/the accuracy of explanation. What possible refinements to the substantive model are indicated by the results?

*Conceptual framework for informing the substantive model:* Please discuss the history and development of the conceptual framework, including its principal founders/developers, basic assumptions, and core concepts. In what areas of scholarship has this theory most often been applied? Using Burrell & Morgan’s logical classification of major sociological paradigms or world views, what quadrant of the matrix does this conceptual framework best fit? What is the link between each conceptual model and the substantive model? In other words, what assumptions and concepts from the conceptual framework do you see reflected in the substantive model? If possible, please show these linkages via a conceptual diagram.

A PowerPoint presentation summary (20–25 slides) is required for distribution to all class participants, including any diagrams, tables, figures or graphs that may facilitate review and understanding of the reading. Please develop questions to stimulate class discussion and integration. Please include any references not included on the syllabus.

**Evaluation Criteria for Class Presentations:**

- Demonstrates understanding of assumptions/concepts/findings from the assigned readings/reference materials
- Effectively communicates ideas/findings—free of ambiguity
• Integrates readings/reference materials in the context of other topics (e.g., discusses support for the substantive model in the context of an understanding of the substantive model)

• Stimulates class discussion and integration

• PowerPoint presentation (20-25 slides) that effectively summarizes the reading/reference materials.

1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good, 4 = Very Good, and 5 = Clearly Exceptional

Assignment 7: Qualifying Paper (Due: Exam Date)

The major deliverable for the course is the preparation of an abbreviated version of the qualifying paper (approximately 20 double-spaced pages, excluding references, diagrams, and appendices). Although students may evolve from their original intent during their doctoral studies (this is not unusual), the requirements and format of the qualifying paper will remain the same. Consequently, this assignment provides a “dress rehearsal” for completion of the qualifying paper, which has been modified in outline to fit the design of the course. (Attachment A includes the description of the qualifying paper from the doctoral program manual.)

Students will work on this paper during the course of the semester. Your work on the “stories of research” paper will provide a foundation for your work on this assignment. Beginning in November, time will be set aside at the end of classes to discuss progress on this assignment. Please use the following headings in preparation of the paper. Page number guidelines are offered. For a good example of this qualifying paper assignment, see Hoffman, K. L., & Edwards, J. N. (2004). An integrated theoretical model of sibling violence and abuse. *Journal of Family Violence, 19*, 185-200 (see assignments for Week 3, September 8).

a. **Introduction.** Provide an opening that introduces the topic, identifies the focus of your review, including the population of interest, and provides the reader with a roadmap for your review. (1.5 pages)

b. **Statement of the social problem.** Describe/illustrate the phenomenon or problem. Present what is known about the scope or the problem (e.g., the incidence and prevalence of the problem). (1.5 pages)

c. **Significance of the problem.** What relevance/implication does the social problem have for social welfare and social intervention. (1 page)

d. **Background review.** What is currently known and understood about the phenomenon, problem or issue? Identify unresolved research issues (gaps in knowledge, unresolved puzzles, measurement problems, research design/methodological issues, analysis limitations) (3 pages)

e. **Research question.** Specify a research question for framing and informing your review. Discuss this research question in the context of the background review, and provide definitions of key concepts. (1.5 page)

f. **Theoretical perspective.** A presentation and critical analysis of a theory or conceptual perspective that frames and informs the research question and the research strategies.
for addressing it. This analysis may involve the use of a grand theory (e.g., Piaget’s theory of cognitive development), a conceptual framework (e.g., social exchange theory), and/or a substantive model (e.g., social development model). Please note that you may use more than one theory or conceptual perspective, if you so choose. Discuss the conceptualization of the research question from the perspective of this theory or conceptual perspective. In other words, rather than review the theory per se, apply the theory to your topic at hand, although it is important to specify key assumptions and concepts from the theory that frame and inform your analysis. (3 pages)

g. **Theoretical model.** Include the development of a heuristic in the form of a conceptual/empirical model that explains variation in the social problem. Identify the major components and variables of this model in a table and provide a diagram that specifies the proposed linkages among the components. Discuss each component of this model, as well as proposed linkages among the components. (3 pages)

h. **Empirical support.** How does the theoretical model fit with the available data? Evaluate the empirical support for the theoretical model. (3 pages)

i. **Conclusion:** Provide suggestions for refining the theoretical model so that it better addresses the research question and fits with the data, including the integration of alternative theories or conceptual perspectives for examining the social problem. (2 pages)

j. **References.** Format all references using APA guidelines.

Prepare a PowerPoint summary of your paper (10-12 slides) to present in class (30 minutes for presentation). (Due: December 1 or December 8)

**Assignment 8: Discussant Comments (Due: December 1 or December 8)**

Two students will be asked to play the role of lead discussants on each student’s PowerPoint summary of the qualifying paper (10 minutes). Consequently, each student will serve as a discussant on two PowerPoint summaries. These assignments will be made in advance based on students’ areas of expertise. Discussants will need a copy of the PowerPoint Presentation at least 24 hours in advance of class. Discussants are asked to submit a one page, single-spaced summary of their main points—discussants may use a bulleted format. We will allocate an additional 10 minutes for general discussion.

**GRADING SYSTEM:**

The core assignments and their relative weights in the grading system are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Article Review (9/15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Social Work Journal Review (9/22)</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Family Studies Journal Review (9/22)</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Conceptual Framework Presentation (10/6)</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Storylines of Research (10/20)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Class Presentations (10/27 to 11/24)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Qualifying Paper (12/1 or 12/8)</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Discussant Comments (12/1 or 12/8)</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Class Participation</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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Each assignment/requirement will be graded using the following numeric system:

- **H** = 94-100
- **P** = 80-93
- **L** = 70-79
- **F** = 69 and below

To qualify for a grade of Clear Excellence (H), students will need to complete all assignments with a grade of 70% or better, with an average grade of 94% or better.

**POLICY ON INCOMPLETES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS:**

Unless negotiated in advance with the professor, assignments are due on the date specified in the syllabus. All assignments must be completed to receive a Passing Grade for the course (H/P/L). Students will receive 0 credit for assignments submitted past the due date unless approved for late delivery in advance of the due date.

**POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

All academic work submitted by students will be conducted within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code, which is described in *The SSW Manual* and the *Graduate School Record*. Please refer to the *APA Style Guide*, *The SSW Manual*, and the *SSW Writing Guide* for information on attribution of quotes, plagiarism and appropriate use of assistance in preparing assignments. All written assignments should contain a signed pledge ((//signed//) from you stating that, “I have not given or received unauthorized aid in preparing this written work.” In keeping with the UNC Honor Code, if reason exists to believe that academic dishonesty has occurred, a referral will be made to the Office of the Student Attorney General for investigation and further action as required.

**POLICY ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

Students with disabilities that affect their participation in the course and who wish to have special accommodations should contact the University’s Disabilities Services and provide documentation of their disability. Disabilities Services will notify the instructor that the student has a documented disability and may require accommodations. Students should discuss the specific accommodations they require (e.g., changes in instructional format, examination format) directly with the instructor.

**POLICY ON THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM**

Computers and other electronic devices may be used in the classroom only for purposes of presentation and note taking. The use of electronic devices for non-class related activities (e.g., checking email, playing games) is prohibited.
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Week 1: August 25
No Class

Week 2: September 1

Introductions and Syllabus Review

Class Discussion

Please describe your perspective toward conceptualizing social problems to inform interventions. What particular theories, models, or empirical findings have most influenced your perspective? The same for people—what theorists, researchers, or practitioners have had a particular impact on your perspective? How do you present yourself and your scholarly work from a theoretical point of view? What assumptions and concepts anchor your perspective and provide coherence to your presentation of self and ideas in professional exchanges?

Week 3: September 8

Introduction to Theory

Preparation Assignment

Please access SAMHSA’s (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (http://nrepp.samhsa.gov). From the [Find Interventions] link, please identify an evidence-based program/practice for review in class (10 minutes). Note that you may click on [View All]. Why did you choose this particular program? How intuitive is the suggested approach to intervention in the context of your own natural inclinations?

From an earlier website (CSAP’S Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies), the following statement was made:

"Published literature on the program should provide a description of its theoretical underpinnings; if not, an inquiry to the program developer may yield this information. This may or may not include a logic model that describes in linear fashion how the program works. The theory and logic model are not in themselves core components of a program, but they can help identify what the core components are and how to measure them. This step also identifies core values or assumptions about the program that can be used to help persuade community stakeholders of the program's fit and importance for their environment."

In the context of the program/practice that you selected above, how explicit is this underlying theory or logic model?

Preparation Assignment

8 * = Priority reading.
In 1979, Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan published a highly influential text entitled *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. In this text, they presented four paradigms for organizing approaches to understanding organizations. How did Burrell and Morgan define a “paradigm,” and what were the two dimensions that formed their logical typology? Please do a web-based search to see what you can learn about Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan’s work. Also, see Martin & O’Connor (1989) below.

**Required Readings**


**Feature Articles**


**Supplemental Readings**
Thyer, D., & Morris, T. (1997). Is it possible to know when theories are obsolete? In M. Bloom & W. C. Klein (Eds.), Controversial issues in human behavior in social environment (pp. 64-80). Boston: Allyn and Bacon. (On Reserve)

Assignment 1 (see class assignments): Article Review (Due: September 15)

**Week 4: September 15**

**Theory-driven Research: Exemplary Examples**

**Required Readings**


**Optional Readings**


Assignment 2: Social Work Journal Review (Due: September 22)

Assignment 3: Family Journal Review (Due: September 22)
Week 5: September 22

Theory-based Research in Social Work

Preparation assignment: What do you consider to be criteria for exemplary social work research?

Required Reading


The Search for Theory in Social Work Research: A Social Identity Perspective

Visit by members 2007 SOWO 900 Cohort: Carrie Pettus Davis, Tiffany Washington, Ijeoma Nwabuzor (9:45-10:30 AM)

Theory and Publications in Social Work and Family-Related Journals

Assignment 2 Review: Social Work Journal Review

Assignment 3 Review: Family Journal Review

Supplemental Readings


Week 6: September 29

Conceptualizing Social Problems: Former SOWO 900 Students’ Journey

Visit by members of 2008 SOWO 900 Cohort(9:15-10:00 AM)

Conceptualizing Social Problems to Inform Interventions: An Example

Video

Growing up fast (30 minutes)

Required Reading

**Supplemental Reading**


**Participation Assignment:**

Theory Supporting the *Taking Charge* Curriculum. Each student has been assigned a theory from the *Taking Charge* manual for presentation and discussion (15 minutes):

- Developmental Framework (Ahmed)
- Solution-Focused, Brief Therapy Framework (Kate)
- Social Learning and Cognitive-Behavioral Theories (Sarah)
  - Social Learning Theory
  - Self-efficacy Theory
- Transactional Coping Theory (Melissa)
- Social Problem-Solving Model (Kate)

**Assignment 4:** Conceptual Framework Presentation (Due: October 6)

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**Week 7: October 6**

**Continued Discussion from September 29**

**Required Reading**


**Conceptual Frameworks**

Chapter 4: Theories of Empowerment (Kate & Ahmed)
Week 8: October 13

Storylines of Research

Required Readings


Storyline of Research: An Example

Dr. Bowen Presents
Military Family Resiliency and Community Capacity Building in the Shadows of War

Required Readings


Assignment 5: “Storylines of Research” (Due: October 20)

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9 These readings will provide a broader perspective on Dr. Bowen’s presentation. They do not require a comprehensive or detailed review.
Week 9: October 20

“Storylines of Research” (Continued Discussion from October 13)

Preparation Assignment

Identify what you consider to be an exemplary theory-based empirical research example in your area of study and be prepared to discuss this example in class. Please bring the article/manuscript to class. We are particularly interested in empirical investigations examining hypotheses from two or more competing theoretical perspectives.

Preparation Assignment (Optional)

Interview with a Scholar in the Specialized Area: Develop a short interview guide and interview a research scholar who is conducting research in your specialized area and who has published the results of her/his research in a peer-review journal. Ask her/him about the use of theory to conceptualize the social problem and to inform the research design.

Preparation Assignment (Optional)

Interview with a Practitioner in the Specialized Area: Develop a short interview guide and interview a social worker who is practicing in your specialized area. Ask her/him about the use of theory to conceptualize the social problem and to inform practice strategies, including the use of evidence-based practice strategies.

Storylines of Research

Assignment Presentations (30-minute PowerPoint Presentations)
(Ahmed, Melissa, Kate, Sarah)

Class 10: October 27

School Success (Kate)

Statement and Significance of the Social Problem


Substantive Model


Empirical Support for Substantive Model


Conceptual Frameworks that inform Substantive Model


Chapter 2: Systems Theory
Chapter 7 Theories of Life Span Development (pp. 198-208 only)

Class 11: November 3

Marital Happiness (Melissa)

Statement and Significance of the Social Problem


Substantive Model


Empirical Support for Substantive Model


Conceptual Frameworks that inform Substantive Model

Chapter 11: Behaviorism, Social Learning, and Exchange Theory


Class 12: November 10

No Class (National Council on Family Relations Conference)
Crime and Delinquency (Ahmed)

Statement and Significance of the Social Problem


Substantive Model


Empirical Support for Substantive Model


Conceptual Frameworks that inform Substantive Model*


¹⁰ See Canillon et al. (2003) and Sampson & Groves (1989) for a review of social disorganization theory. Shaw and McKay (1942) is out-of-print.
Mundane Extreme Environment Stress: The Case for African American Family Functioning (Kate)

Statement and Significance of the Social Problem*


Substantive Framework or Perspective


Supplemental Readings and Resources


**Video:** McCubbin, H. I. (2001). *Family Stress, Ethnicity & Resiliency: Dangers and Opportunities in the Advancement of Theory, Research & Practice*. [Marie Peters Award Address]

Empirical Support for Substantive Model*


Conceptual Frameworks that inform Substantive Model*

Chapter 5: Theories of Assimilation, Acculturation, and Bicultural Socialization and Ethnic Minority Identity
Chapter 10: Phenomenology, Social Constructionism, and Hermeneutics (For class review only)
Class 15: December 1

Student Qualifying Paper Presentations
(Ahmed, Sarah, Melissa)

Class 16: December 8

Student Qualifying Paper Presentations
(Kate)

Toward an Integrative Perspective

Preparation Assignment
Please describe your understanding of and perspective toward conceptualizing social problems to inform interventions at the beginning of the semester. How, if at all, has your perspective been influenced by your readings and experiences this semester? Of all the theory and research that we have reviewed, what particular concepts, assumptions, and findings have most influenced your perspective? The same for people—what theorists and researchers have had a particular impact on your perspective? What readings do you consider as pivotal for your experience this semester? Please be prepared to discuss with another student, as well as share with the class.

Required Reading


Next Steps: Taking Charge of your Program of Study

Final Exam

Qualifying Paper Due
Attachment A

Process for the Qualifying Examinations

http://ssw.unc.edu/doctural/curriculum/qualrate.html

Content of the written examination

The doctoral qualifying paper will consist of a single paper that demonstrates the capacity of the student to integrate information from research, relevant literature, and course materials in order to frame the statement of the problem, literature review and theoretical frameworks sections of the dissertation. The paper will formulate an issue or problem of importance for social work and identify a specific issue for research. The qualifying paper will include a critical examination of problem to be investigated and follow a sequence of steps that provide a careful review and analysis of the research that has been conducted on that problem, the theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explain the problem, relevant interventions that have addressed the problem, and research strategies that have been used to examine the problem. The qualifying paper is to include at least the following sections:

a) Statement of the research problem and its significance

b) Critical review of previous research addressing the problem or issue

c) Critical analysis of theoretical frameworks or perspectives for examining this problem, selecting 2-4 major theoretical perspectives

d) Critical review of intervention programs, strategies, or approaches in the problem area

e) Critical review of research methodologies or approaches for examining this problem or of the important methodological issues in doing research in this area of interest (roughly three approaches or issues, if appropriate)

f) Conclusions and implications.

The qualifying paper should be a disciplined and focused analysis of the relevant scholarship involved in your qualifying area. The paper should be reasonably comprehensive, but must also be disciplined -- the final product should provide a foundation for the dissertation research, but may contain material that is not necessarily to be included in the dissertation proposal. The anticipated length of the qualifying paper is to approximately 50-60 pages, including references. This means that a careful synthesis is necessary rather than an extensive narrative description.

This proposed outline is to be applied flexibly to fit the particular research problem and approach of each dissertation.
Criteria for evaluating the written exam

a) It should demonstrate critical thinking.

b) It should include content addressing oppressed populations.

c) The review of literature should show evidence of the use of empirical data.

d) It should be carefully and clearly written, with style and citations consistent with the APA style manual.

The student and their qualifying examination committee should review the Written Qualifying Examination Rating Form for specific guidance on the criteria that will be used to evaluate the quality of the qualifying paper. This Rating Form offers criteria that can be used for each section of the qualifying paper and provides the committee members with a simple tool for assessing their ratings of the paper and providing recommendations to students as they prepare their paper for the examination.

The qualifying examination paper does not have to be publishable at the time of the examination. At some time before completion of the dissertation, the student is strongly encouraged to revise the examination paper into a review article for publication and to submit it to a refereed journal. Additionally, students are encouraged but not required to make a public presentation on their qualifying paper; this may be at the school or at a professional meeting.
Attachment B
Resource/Reference Materials

Science and Social Work Scholarship

PBS Home Video (2000). *The first measured century: The other way of looking at American history.* (Running Time: 3 hours)\(^1\)


Classic Theory Texts from my Library


Theories Covered: Symbolic Interactionism; Structural-Functionism; Family Development Theory; Systems Theory; Social Conflict Theories of the Family; Exchange and Resource Theories; Human Ecology Theory; The Life Course Perspective; Family Therapy Theory; Social-Cognitive-Behavioral Psychology; Communication Theory; Feminist Theories; Theories for Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Families; Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Family Discourse; Biosocial Perspectives on the Family.


Note. This is an example of deductive theory around specific substantive topic, such as marital satisfaction and ease of role transition.


Note. This is an example of deductive theory around specific substantive topic, such as social processes and power in families.

\(^1\) The video will be placed on reserve for viewing.


Note: Good supplemental reading for main theory text: Robbins et al.


**Theory Reviews**

*Family Development Theory*

Life Course Theory


Social Work Theory Texts from my Library


Theories Covered: Part/Whole Analysis, Psychodynamic Theory, Ecological Theory, Cognitive Theory, Radical/Critical Theory

Substantive Models: Classics


Qualifying Paper Examples from the Published Literature


Examples of Theoretically-informed Literature Reviews


**Role of Theory in Social Work Research: Debates**


**Examples of Theoretically-informed Published Empirical Articles in Social Work Journals**

*Ecological Theory*


**Examples of Theoretically-informed Published Empirical Articles in Other Journals**

*Developmental Theory*


*Ecological Theory*


**Feminist Theory**


**Human Capital Theory**


**Social Exchange Theory**


**Life Course Theory**


**Social and Cultural Capital Theories**


**Structural Effects (Radical Structuralist Paradigm)**


**Symbolic Interactionism**


**Examples of Theoretically-informed Social Intervention Models**

**Communities that Care**


**Making Choices**


*MAP: A Corporate Support Program for Couples*


*Taking Charge*


*Suicide Prevention*


*Special Issues of Journals: Methodology*


*Special Issues in Journals: Contextual Effects*


*Websites: Award Winning Empirical Articles*

Research on Social Work Practice Research Awards

The Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award for Excellence in Work-Family Research
http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff/pages/kanter/index.html
“The Kanter award is given to the authors of the best piece of work-family research published during a calendar year (note that "family" is defined broadly). No external nominations are accepted for the award. Instead, every article published in a large number of scientific journals is scrutinized by a large committee of esteemed scholars who generate a list of candidates for the award.” (Description from website)

Evidence-Based Practice

Critical Thinking


Science and Social Work Practice


Evidence-Based Practice Readings


*Action-Oriented Research*


**Evidence-Based Research Web Sites**

Evidence Based Practice Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide
See [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/EBP%20Resource%20Guide%205_28_04.doc](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/EBP%20Resource%20Guide%205_28_04.doc) from which the descriptions below of the Campbell Collaboration were copied.

*Campbell Collaboration (C2): The Campbell Collaboration Library and Database*  
Philadelphia, USA  

“The C2 website posts a searchable database of randomized controlled clinical trials and systematic reviews of social, psychological, education, and criminological research. All research presented on the website has met rigorous methodological standards and are designed to provide researchers, policy makers, and practitioners with critical reviews of current research. Currently twenty one full reviews are available to download from the website and several more are currently in progress.”

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP): Model Programs and National Registry of Effective Programs.*  
Maryland, USA  

“The website provides information about substance abuse and mental health programs tested in communities, schools, social service organizations, and workplaces in the United States. Nominated programs are reviewed by research teams who rate the programs primarily on methodological quality, but also consider other factors such as theoretical development and community involvement. Programs are rated in increasing order of quality as either: promising, effective, or model. Information briefs are provided regarding each of the programs including an overview description, estimated costs, background, target areas, references, and creator or developer contact information. The website also includes information about funding, helpful topic-specific links, and technical assistance information. Also available for download from this site is the “Comparison Matrix for Science Based Prevention Programs,” an outline of research-

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based programs and their comparative ratings by five different U.S. federal agencies as well as their rating standards.”

_The Cochrane Collaboration_
http://www.cochrane.org/

“The Cochrane Collaboration is an international non-profit and independent organisation, dedicated to making up-to-date, accurate information about the effects of healthcare readily available worldwide. It produces and disseminates systematic reviews of healthcare interventions and promotes the search for evidence in the form of clinical trials and other studies of interventions. The Cochrane Collaboration was founded in 1993 and named for the British epidemiologist, Archie Cochrane.” (This description was copied from the web site.)

**Resource Websites**

_Sloan Work and Family Research Network (Boston College)_
http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/

“The Sloan Work and Family Research Network maintains an online database which contains the citations and annotations of work-family research publications.” (This description was copied from the web site.)