THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

COURSE NUMBER: SOWO 900

COURSE TITLE: Conceptualizing Social Problems to Inform Interventions

SEMESTER: Fall 2016 (Tuesday, 9-11:50 AM, Room 439)

PROFESSOR: Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D., ACSW
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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 (central malleable mediators) 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.1 In addition, the course addresses explanatory theory rather than practice theory (solution-focused therapy, narrative therapy, motivational interviewing). Practice theories provide perspectives on the implementation of strategies to promote change and development.2

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),3 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 topography 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 deducted 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

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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.


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 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 (its epidemiology). 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

4 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.
6 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.
and inductive cycle of theory building and empirical research, as well as to quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation strategies.

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 identify and apply theories or conceptual perspectives (grand theories, conceptual frameworks, or substantive models) to the study of the social problem. Students will conclude their review by noting limitations in the application of theory in the content area and offering suggestions for better use of theory.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

**Main Texts**


**Supplemental Text (Not Required to Purchase)**


**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](http://www.ncfr.org/sourcebook), offers additional participation and interaction in the process of doing theory and making science.

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7 Professor Bowen has copies of this book for reference.


**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**


**TEACHING METHODS:**

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

**CLASS MEETINGS:**

August 23, August 30, September 6 (no class), September 13, September 20, September 27, October 4, October 11 (University Day, Diane Wyant), October 18, October 25, November 1 (no class, CSWE/NCFR), November 8, November 15, November 22, November 29, December 6

**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 (glbowen@email.unc.edu; 919-448-4058) 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 (special exceptions may apply).

**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 or @live.unc.edu.

**Required Readings and Assignments**
To facilitate class involvement and discussion, students are expected to read all required materials and complete any required assignments 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.


**ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Assignment 1: Chapter Review (Due: September 20)**

In consultation with the Professor, each student will select a chapter from a volume edited by Mark A. Fine and Frank D. Fincham, *Handbook of Family Theories: A Content-Based Approach* (2013). Each chapter demonstrates the use of theory in a family-related area. Students are asked to prepare a class presentation (20 minutes) about the success of the assigned chapter in responding to three core objectives:

(a) To identify and describe theories that have been used to study the content area
(b) To highlight limitations of how theory has been used in the content area
(c) To make suggestions for better use of theory in the content area

Please provide a PowerPoint presentation that identifies and describes the theories that have been used to study the context area (see core objectives above), including key assumptions and concepts from each theory (8-10 PowerPoint slides, although the exact number of slides will vary by the particular chapter). In some cases, chapters include a number of theories—please limit your focus/presentation to three or four theories. Students should begin with an introduction to the topic addressed by the chapter. What is the social problem or issue that is being addressed, and how does this topic relate to social work practice/social justice?

No additional references or resources are needed to complete this assignment.

Send the PowerPoint to the professor as an email attachment in advance of class. Also, please bring a hard copy of the PowerPoint to class for the Professor and for class participants (six slides per page). As a backup, 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.

Please review the chapters selected for presentation before coming to class.

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8 See Appendix A for an assignment that students completed in prior classes.
9 Provide student with a prior chapter review as a model.
Assignment 2: Article Review (Due: September 27)\(^{10}\)

In consultation with this Professor, each student will select an article that represents an exemplary example of theory-driven research (see articles provided on the syllabus). 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 20 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for leading a discussion about the implications of the article for advancing knowledge of the issue, problem, or phenomenon and for informing the design of social intervention (30 minute total).

Send the PowerPoint to the professor as an email attachment in advance of class. Also, please bring a hard copy of the PowerPoint to class for the Professor and for class participants (six slides per page). As a backup, 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.

Please review the articles selected for presentation before coming to class.

Assignment 3: Journal Review\(^{11}\) (Due: October 4)\(^{12}\)

Social Work Journals

In a past 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, in part, from his list, students will be assigned a journal for review. Four social work journals have been selected for purposes of this exercise:

\(^{10}\) Provide students with prior article review as a model.


\(^{12}\) Provide students with prior submission as a model.
Research on Social Work Practice (published bi-monthly, randomly select 4 issues: 2015)
Children and Schools (review two years: 2014, 2015)

Please note that the number of volumes to cover varies by the journal assigned. Two of the journals, Research on Social Work Practice and Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, includes more articles (and more complex articles) per issue than the other two.

First, count the number of empirical articles in the journal for the reference year(s)—an empirical article manipulates data (quantitative or qualitative) in its analysis. Do not include book reviews, theoretical essays, systematic reviews, 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.

Please prepare a report of no more than 5-7 pages that summarizes your findings. Include the following subheadings: Introduction (purpose), description of the Journal (sponsorship and overall focus), 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. Also, please bring a hard copy of the report to class for the Professor and a copy of the summary table for class participants. Be prepared to present your report to the class on October 4 (approximately 20 minutes). Please plan to submit your final report to Diane Wyant, Academic Editor and Education Specialist, School of Social Work, for editorial review (details will be provided).

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 email a copy of the article to class participants. We are particularly interested in empirical
investigations examining hypotheses from two or more competing theoretical perspectives.

**Comparison Journals**

For purposes of comparison to leading social work journals, students will be assigned a journal for review from the fields of family studies and community psychology—(articles appearing in 2015 only). Two journals have been selected:

*Family Relations (randomly select three issues: 2015)*  
*American Journal of Community Psychology randomly select two issues: 2015*

First, count the number of empirical articles in the journal for 2015—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.

Please prepare a report of no more than 5-7 pages that summarizes your findings. Include the following subheadings: Introduction (purpose), description of the Journal (sponsorship and overall focus), 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. Also, please bring a hard copy of the report to class for the Professor and a copy of the table for class participants. Be prepared to present your report to the class on October 4 (approximately 20 minutes). Please plan to submit your final report to Diane Wyant, Academic Editor and Education Specialist, School of Social Work, for editorial review (details will be provided).

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 email a copy of the article to class participants. We are particularly interested in empirical
investigations examining hypotheses from two or more competing theoretical perspectives.

**Assignment 4: Family Theory Presentation** (October 25, November 8)

Working individually, students will provide an overview of six family theories (conceptual frameworks) from the main text by Smith and Hamon. Please discuss the history and development of the conceptual framework, including its principal founders/developers, basic assumptions, core concepts, and subtheories. What is the interface between the assigned family theory and family stress theory (Chapter 4)? In what areas of scholarship has this conceptual framework most often been applied? Please apply the conceptual framework as a “lens” to understanding and examining teenage pregnancy/parenthood. In relationship to teenage pregnancy/parenthood, what becomes the central focus of your attention from the perspective of the conceptual framework?

Please develop a 12-15 PowerPoint slide presentation for class. Please develop questions to stimulate class discussion and integration. Send the PowerPoint to the professor as an email attachment in advance of class. Also, please bring a hard copy of the PowerPoint to class for the Professor and for class participants (six slides per page). 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. You have approximately 40 minutes for presentation.

All students will need to carefully review the assigned readings before class.

**Assignment 5: Social Problem Paper** (Due: Exam Date)

The major deliverable for the course is the preparation of a theory-based paper that addresses a social problem related to the student’s primary content area (approximately 20 double-spaced pages, excluding references, diagrams, and appendices). Students will work on this paper during the course of the semester. Beginning in mid-October, 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.

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

b. **Statement of the social problem.** Describe/illustrate the social problem (its epidemiology). Present what is known about the scope of the problem (e.g., the incidence and prevalence of the problem), its distribution in the population, its determinants, and its short- and long-term effects or consequences. (3.0 pages)

c. **Significance of the problem.** What relevance/implications does the social problem and/or the targeted population have for social justice. (1 page)

d. **Theoretical perspectives.** A presentation and critical analysis of three theories or conceptual perspectives that have been applied to the study of the social problem. 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). 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. (12 pages)
e. Conclusion. Discuss limitations in the application of theory in this content area and offer suggestions for the better use of theory, including your plans for theoretical refinement and application. (3 page)
f. References. Format all references using APA guidelines.

Chapters in the volume edited by Fine and Fincham (2013) are a model for this paper.

Prepare a PowerPoint summary of your paper (12-15 slides) to present in class (30 minutes for presentation). (Due: November 29 or December 6)

GRADING SYSTEM:

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

1. Chapter Review 10.0%
2. Article Review 10.0%
3. Journal Review 15.0%
4. Conceptual Framework Presentation 20.0%
6. Social Problem Paper 25.0%
7. Preparation Assignments/Class Participation 20.0%

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 80% 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 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.

ACCESSIBILITY AND RESOURCES SERVICES:

The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. In the first instance please visit their website http://accessibility.unc.edu, Tel:- 919-962-8300 or Email:- accessibility@unc.edu. A student is welcome to initiate the registration process at any time, however, the process can take time. ARS is particularly busy in the run-up to Finals and during Finals. Students submitting Self-ID forms at that time are unlikely to have accommodations set until the following semester. Please contact ARS as early in the semester as possible.

WRITING SUPPORT:

Clear, cogent writing is an essential skill for social work professionals. Writing support is available to all students through the School’s Writing Support Team; they can help you strengthen your writing skills by sharing strategies for organizing information, presenting a cohesive argument, ensuring clear communication, and mastering APA style. Writing Support offers a learning opportunity for students but does not merely copy edit student papers. Writing support is available in-person, by e-mail, or by phone. E-mail a requested appointment day and time to SOSWwritingsupport@gmail.com. In addition, see the Writing Resources and References page on the School’s website (under the Current Students tab: https://ssw.unc.edu/students/writing).
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Week 1: August 23

Introductions and Syllabus Review

Class Discussion:

Please describe your perspective toward conceptualizing social problems to inform interventions. What particular theories, models, empirical findings, and personal experiences have most influenced your perspective? The same for people—what theorists, researchers, practitioners, or significant others have had a particular impact on your perspective? What assumptions and concepts anchor your perspective and provide coherence to your presentation of self and ideas in professional exchanges? In what ways do issues related to social justice inform your perspective?

Required Reading

http://aasww.org/grand-challenges-initiative/  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKbj3y-LUbw


Recommended Readings


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13 * = Priority reading.
14 Please send me a copy of your CV.

### 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 an Intervention] link, please identify an evidence-based program/practice for review in class (3-5 minutes). Note that you may click on [View All Interventions]. 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, theory of change, or logic model? If not provided, please review a few of the original sources for this particular intervention to see if you can discover the underlying theory or logic model.

**Required Readings**


Feature Article


Suggested Reading


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)

### Week 3: September 6 (No Class)

### Week 4: September 13

**Theories: A Content-based Approach in Family Science**

**Required Readings**


Chapter 23 the Resilience of Military Families: Theoretical Perspectives – Gary L. Bowen, James A. Martin, & Jay A. Mancini

**Supplemental Readings**


**Assignment 1** (see class assignments): Chapter Review (Due: September 20)

### Week 5: September 20

**Theories: A Content-based Approach in Family Science**

**Required Readings**

Students will identify a chapter for review and analysis from the *Handbook of Family Theories: A Content-Based Approach* (Fine & Fincham). Please consult with the Professor in making this selection. This is assignment 1.

**Assignment 2** (see class assignments): Article Review (Due: September 27)
Required Readings


Assignment 3: Journal Review (Due: October 4)

**Week 7: October 4**

**Theory-based Research in Social Work: A Comparative Perspective**

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

**Required Reading**


Theory and Publications in Social Work and Related Journals

Assignment 3 (see class assignments): Journal Review (Due: October 4)

Supplemental Readings (Optional)


Assignment 4 (see class assignments): Conceptual Framework Presentation (Due: October 25, November 8)

Week 8: October 11 (University Day)

Writing Workshop and Editorial Feedback on Papers

Diane Wyant, Academic Editor and Education Specialist

Week 9: October 18

**Conceptualizing Social Problems: Former SOWO 900 Students’ Journey**

(9:15 – 10:15 AM)


Laurie Graham, Doctoral Student (3rd year). Intimate partner violence among same-sex couples in college.


**Conceptualizing Social Problems to Inform Interventions:**

An Example (Teenage Parenthood)

**Required Reading**


**Video (View in Class)**

*Growing up fast* (30 minutes)

**Optional Reading**


**Application of Conceptual Frameworks**

Chapter 4: Family Stress Theory
Chapter 5: Systems Theory
Chapter 6: Human Ecological Theory

**Supplemental Readings**


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**Week 10: October 25**

**Continued Discussion from October 18**

**Applications of Family Theories**

Chapter 1: Symbolic Interactionism Theory (Student Presentation)
Chapter 3: Family Development Theory (Student Presentation)
Chapter 7: Conflict Theory (Student Presentation)

**Supplemental Readings**


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15 Note for Professor. Potentially apply SSP to the lives of the young women.
16 Desired competency: Take any of these three theories and apply to the understanding of some aspect of teenage parenthood.


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**Week 11: November 1 (No Class, CSWE)**

**Week 12: November 8**

Continued Discussion from October 25

Applications of Family Theories

Chapter 6: Social Exchange Theory (Student Presentation)
Chapter 9: Feminist Family Theory (Student Presentation)
Chapter 10: Biosocial Theory (Student Presentation)

**Supplemental Readings**


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**Week 13: November 15**

Storylines of Research

Preparation Assignment: Students will be asked to review and present a verbal summary of one of the six empirical articles referenced in the School Success storyline example. 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?
Required Readings


Application

**Storyline Example: School Success**

Statement and Significance of the Social Problem

*Civic Enterprises & Everyone Graduates Center (2016). Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates.*


Conceptual Frameworks that inform Substantive Model


Substantive Model


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17 This storyline example captures the essence of the course, which focused on conceptualizing social problems (in this case, school success) to inform interventions).

18 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

**Assessment Tool**


**Empirical Support for Substantive Model**


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19 Discussion leaders will be assigned for these articles.

**Social Intervention**


### Week 14: November 22

**“Storylines of Research” (Continued Discussion from November 15)**

**Preparation Assignment**

Working from the context of your specialized area of study, please identify 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). 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. Please prepare a one-page summary handout for class members (outline form only). Each student will be given approximately 20 minutes for this discussion.

**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. Each student will be given approximately 10 minutes for this discussion.

**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.

Assignment 5 (see class assignments): Social Problem PowerPoint Summary (Due: November 29 or December 6)

Class 15: November 29

Student Social Problem Paper Presentations (4 Presentations)

Class 16: December 6

Student Social Problem Paper Presentations (2 Presentations)

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.

Next Steps: Taking Charge of your Program of Study

Final Exam

Social Problem Paper Due
Appendix A

Former Assignment: Class Presentation

We will focus our attention on three social problems: school success, crime and delinquency, and mundane extreme environment stress. These social problems are used as examples. In the course of this assignment, other social problems have been the focus of this assignment.

Students will be assigned one of the three social problems for presentation. Topics for each social problem include: statement and significance of the social problem (10 minutes), conceptual framework(s) that frame and inform the social problem (20 minutes), substantive model (20 minutes), empirical support for the substantive model (20 minutes), and general discussion (5 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 approximately 65 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.

Conceptual framework(s) for framing and informing the social problem: Please apply the conceptual framework as a “lens” to understanding and examining 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? What is the link
between the conceptual framework(s) reviewed above and the substantive model? In other words, what assumptions and concepts from the conceptual framework(s) do you see reflected in the substantive model? 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?

A PowerPoint presentation summary (12-15 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 (12-15 slides) that effectively summarizes the reading/reference materials.

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

Process for the Qualifying Examinations
[FORMER REQUIREMENT]

http://ssw.unc.edu/doctoral/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 C

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)

Proceedings of the Conference on Improving the Teaching of Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work, Sponsored by the University of Texas School of Social Work, Austin, Texas, October 16-18, 2006. (Special Issue of Research on Social Work Practice, 17, September 2007)

Classic Theory Texts from my Library


Burr, W. R. (1973). Theory construction and the sociology of the family. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Note. This is an example of deductive theory around specific substantive topic, such as marital satisfaction and ease of role transition.


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20 The video will be placed on reserve for viewing.

**Theories Covered:** Choice, Exchange, and the Family; Symbolic Interaction and the Family; The General Systems Approach to the Family; Conflict Theory and the Study of Marriage and the Family; Toward a Phenomenological Sociology of Family: A Programmatic Essay.


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


**Theories Covered:** Developmental Theories, Structure-Functional Theory, Conflict Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory.

**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**

*Acculturation Theory*


*Contact Theory*


*Ecological Theory*


Democratic Responsiveness Theory


Situated Cognition


Examples of Theoretically-informed Published Empirical Articles in Other Journals

Developmental Theory


Ecological Theory


**Feminist Theory**


**Human Capital Theory**


**Social Capital Theory**


**Institutional Perspective**


**Possible Selves 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


Career Start


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*


*Reuben Hill Award Winners: National Council on Family Relations*

*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
http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template.cfm?page=default

“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-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.)

Example Descriptions of Post-Doctoral Experiences that align with SOWO 900

Social Science in Practice
As part of a new initiative that will affect how social science is taught and practiced at UCLA, the Dean of the Division of Social Sciences has created a postdoctoral fellowship program. The ideal postdoctoral candidates will be scholars who have demonstrated through their research that they can draw on social science theory and methods to examine the origins and effects of societal problems and to search for their solutions. Postdoctoral fellows will work closely with faculty and students who bridge fields and transform disciplinary boundaries to address an important societal problem (e.g., poverty,
discrimination, racism, gender inequity, corruption, lack of access to education and health care, and environmental injustice. The Dean will offer up to six, two-year postdoctoral fellowships. Candidates must have completed all requirements for their doctoral degree before the program begins, July 1, 2010, and must have received their doctoral degree no earlier than November 1, 2007.

Successful candidates will be selected on the basis of their academic achievements and demonstrated involvement in problem-driven research grounded in one or more of the social sciences, broadly defined. See complete list of the departments and programs <http://ssip-postdoc.sscnet.ucla.edu/departments-and-programs.aspx> in the division of the social sciences at UCLA.

To apply, candidates must submit (a) a two to three page research proposal, (b) the names of two UCLA faculty sponsors/mentors at least one of whom is in the division of social sciences, (c) a CV, (d) a writing sample such as an article or thesis chapter and (e) three letters of recommendation by February 19, 2010.

In addition to pursuing their own research, Fellows will be required to teach two courses per year: one from among the existing courses in one of the departments in the division of social sciences and one of their own design. During the fellowship period, Fellows are expected to be in residence during the academic year of the fellowship and will be expected to participate actively in the running of a new Workshop on Social Science in Practice and collectively plan a conference in collaboration with a senior member of the faculty.

The SSIP Fellowship provides a stipend of up to $55,000, standard fringe benefits, a modest research budget, office space, and library privileges. The application is available at:

http://ssip-postdoc.sscnet.ucla.edu/

UCLA is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. Women and Minorities are especially encouraged to apply.