SWK 6141
Family Systems
Fall 2020

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the student to a beginning conceptual framework of a systems approach to social work practice with families. It provides an overview of family life taking into consideration the developmental life cycle of families. It also highlights the profound impact that societal and cultural influences have on a family’s identity, structure, communication patterns and style of functioning. The course explores how common issues such as mental and physical illness, alcoholism and domestic violence may impact family life. The course provides an overview of assessment and interventions with families from a systems perspective.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
By the end of the course, the students will be able to demonstrate:

1. Their understanding of the conceptual framework for social work practice with families from a systems perspective
2. Their competence in articulating the impact of psychosocial developmental tasks of the family life cycle
3. Their competence in articulating key concepts of different family systems frameworks
4. Their understanding and sensitivity to the profound influence that culture, ethnicity, race and class have on family functioning
5. Their understanding of issues such as mental/physical illness, alcoholism and domestic violence from a family systems perspective.
6. Their skill base for assessment and interventions with families from a systems perspective

These objectives are assessed in written papers, role-plays and classroom participation.
CSWE competency (engagement/assessment/treatment planning and interventions)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

There will be two assignments for this course, a mid-term presentation accompanied by a paper and a final term paper due at the end of the semester. The specific requirements of each written assignment can be found at the end of the outline. Late papers will result in lower grades.

**PLAGIARISM:**

Students should remember that the School will not condone plagiarism in any form and will sanction acts of plagiarism. A student who presents someone else's work as his or her own work is stealing from the authors or persons who did the original thinking and writing. Plagiarism occurs when a student directly copies another's work without citation; when a student paraphrases major aspects of another's work without citation; and when a student combines the work of different authors into a new statement without reference to those authors. It is also plagiarism to use the ideas and/or work of another student and present them as your own. It is *not* plagiarism to formulate your own presentation of an idea or concept as a reaction to someone else's work; however, the work to which you are reacting should be discussed and appropriately cited. Any student who can be shown to have plagiarized any part of any assignment in this course will automatically **FAIL** the course and will be referred to the Associate Dean for disciplinary action, which may include expulsion.

**HIPAA ALERT:**

In line with the new HIPAA regulations concerning protected health information, it is important that you understand that any case information you present from your work will need to be de-identified. What this means is that any information that would allow another to identify the person needs to be changed or eliminated. This includes obvious things like names and birth dates but may also contain other information that is so unique to the person that it will allow for identification, including diagnosis, race/ethnicity, or gender. If diagnosis, race/ethnicity, gender is directly related to the case presentation it can be included if it will not allow for identification.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations are asked to make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, Rochelle Kohn, Beren Campus, 917-326-4828, rkohn1@yu.edu, Abby Kelsen, Wilf Campus, 646-685-0118, akelsen@yu.edu, during the first week of class. After approval for accommodations is granted, please submit your accommodations letter to Disability Services Office immediately.
REQUIRED TEXTS


SESSION OUTLINE

LEARNING THEME I: Introduction to Systems language and concepts

(Sessions 1-3) Classroom Focus: Introduction to the basic concepts of systems approach, family structures, developmental life stages of the family, ethical dimensions of family work.

READINGS


**LEARNING THEME II: Theoretical Foundations of Systems Approaches**  
(Sessions 4-10)

Classroom Focus: The conceptual framework of key Systems approaches, e.g.; Psychodynamic, Transgenerational, Structural, Strategic,

& Narrative therapies

**READINGS**


Ch.7 Psychodynamic Models.  
Ch.8 Transgenerational Models.  
Ch.10 The Structural Model.  
Ch.11 Strategic Models.  
Ch.17 Comparative View of Family Theories and Therapies.


Learning theme III: Therapeutic Techniques

(Sessions 11-12) Classroom Focus: The skill base of family systems; family genograms and ecograms, sculpting, choreography

Readings


**LEARNING THEME IV: Special Dimensions as they Impact Family Life**

(Sessions 13-14) Classroom Focus: The psychosocial impact of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation & gender on family functioning. The psychosocial impact of mental illness, physical illness, substance abuse/alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse, terrorism and trauma on family life.

**READINGS**


Goldenberg, I., & Goldenberg, H. (2013) Ch. 3 Gender, Culture, and Ethnicity in Family functioning,


**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

There will be two assignments for this course, a mid-term presentation accompanied by a brief paper and a final term paper due at the end of the semester. *Late papers will result in lower grades.*

**Assignment I Mid-Term**

**Due: Session 7**

1. **The written portion of mid-term assignment:**

Each student is to develop a discussion that defines and analyzes the following components of a family. The family can be drawn from their field work, literature or film.

A. Homeostasis, Hierarchy, Boundaries, Systems and subsystems and Coalitions/alliances

B. The impact of the developmental life cycle on the presenting problem(s)

C. The impact of race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, immigration or any other sociocultural factor on family's perspective of presenting problem.

[This is to be a scholarly 6-8 page paper drawing from relevant literature and developing an analysis of key family systems concepts as they relate to a family system]
2. **The oral portion of mid-term assignment:**

Each student will be responsible for organizing and participating in a brief role-play (based on the family they have written about) that illustrates systemic assessment and intervention skills with this family system.

**Assignment II- Final Term Paper**  
**Due: Session 13**

Choose a family you have been working with (or from literature/film) and develop a discussion using a family systems approach to the following issues:

1. Briefly describe the structure of the family systems using systems concepts.

2. Describe the specific psychosocial tasks facing this family in respect to the developmental phase in their life cycle.

3. How has the family manifested both motivation for change and resistance to change?

4. Describe how a practitioner using a systems approach might perceive of the problem differently than the family might.

5. Of the theoretical approaches and interventions covered in the course,  
   a) which might be the most effective with this family (explain your rationale)  
   b) how would you employ this approach in assessment and intervention with this family?

6. Make sure to include any ethical dilemmas that may present themselves.

(CSWE competencies 2.1.10b, c; 2.1.6; 2.1.2; 2.1.7; 2.1.3)

**Format for Written Assignments**  
Papers are to draw on relevant literature covered in the course and should conform to APA academic style to include citations and bibliography. All authors and sources of ideas or fact, whether quoted directly or paraphrased in your own words, must be given due credit through the use of APA citations.

**Other Recommended Family Systems Readings (Classic and Current)**


Psychotherapy Networker, 36, 6.


