



SASS 517: FAMILY SYSTEM INTERVENTIONS

Instructor: Wallace J. Gingerich, Ph.D., LISW

Full Time Program

Spring 2009

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Class:	Wed. 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.	
Course number:	8869	

Description

This overall purpose of this course is to learn how to use a family systems framework to intervene with individuals and families who are experiencing a difficulty (e.g., child behavior problem) or facing a new challenge (e.g., adoption of a child). A family systems framework looks at individual behavior in the context of the family system, and seeks to understand the purpose the behavior may serve in the family system. Interventions, whether they be with an individual or a family group, are designed to help the family system and its members negotiate their current situation more effectively and move to a new and more satisfactory level of functioning. Learning to think and intervene systemically requires mindfulness and practice, because it is a departure from the more dominant individually-focused framework that views complaints as individual problems in need of individually-focused interventions.

This course examines multiple approaches to family system interventions, and the strategies and methods that flow from each. Students learn a variety of ways of thinking about and working with families, and begin to develop their own personal approach to family systems intervention. Students will practice a variety of intervention methods and techniques, and will develop the ability to self-assess and modify their interventions as needed to be useful to the family.

The course incorporates a constructivist epistemology that acknowledges there are multiple ways of constructing the family's situation, and that alternate constructions have a direct impact on how we assess and intervene with families and what families believe is possible for themselves. Ethical and cultural issues that arise out of a constructivist worldview are critically addressed.

Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course are able to:

1. Apply a family systems framework to their work with individuals and families, as evidenced in a written systemic assessment and written intervention plan (SW Methods)
2. Critically examine how they construct their work with families and how that shapes their interventions, as evidenced in reflections in written assignments (Critical Thinking; Use of Self)
3. Demonstrate systemic interviewing methods as evidenced in a video-recorded role-play interview and written self-assessment (SW Methods; Communicate)
4. Demonstrate the ability to assess and plan an intervention using a selected family therapy approach, as evidenced in an in-class presentation and written intervention plan (SW Methods; Communicate)
5. Assess the effectiveness of the interventions they are using in real time and make adjustments as needed, as evidenced in a video-recorded role-play interview and written self-assessment (SW Methods; Communicate)
6. Evaluate the evidence base for family system interventions, as evidenced in a critical analysis of empirical support for the approaches they draw from in their written systemic assessment and intervention plan (Critical Thinking)
7. Resolve ethical dilemmas arising from use of a constructivist framework in working with families, as evidenced in reflections in written assignments (Values and Ethics)

Methods to Attain Course Objectives

The learning format for this course will include lectures, class exercises and discussions, small group discussion, skill-based role playing, and videos. There is no set format that will be followed every day. The class session might begin with a lecture followed by a lab to develop the related practice skills. At other times, the class might begin with an experiential exercise followed by Instructor input and discussion. Class attendance and participation are required in this course. Each student is expected to share experiences or ideas that will enrich class discussions. Given the experiential nature of the course there are fewer required readings. Assigned readings should be read before class, and students should be prepared to discuss and apply readings during class.

This course will involve experiential exercises and role plays to facilitate the learning of social work practice methods. Students will be expected to apply what they learn to cases and practice specific social work skills. It is expected that students will utilize this time to try on skills that are essential in family system interventions. Naturally, students come to this course with varying degrees of practice experience and skills, creating different levels of ease and ability to function in the assigned roles. Each student is encouraged to take seriously the assigned roles and challenge themselves to further develop their skills. Students with increased levels of practice experience are expected to push themselves to develop further sophistication in their skills and abilities. Efforts extended in role plays will be evaluated by the instructor and included in your participation grade. The instructor will prepare students for role plays through lecture, discussion and assigned readings.

Instructor Responsibilities

- Deliver lectures relevant to learning goals and objectives.
- Develop discussion and exercise materials.
- Arrange for supplemental materials as needed.
- Facilitate small group activities.
- Read and comment on student assignments.
- Evaluate student work and provide feedback.
- Be available to respond to questions by individual students

Student Responsibilities

- Attend class on time and actively participate in class sessions. (Please contact the instructor **in advance** if you will be absent)
- Share ideas, learning, and experiences with the class.
- Complete all assignments on time, including readings, logs and papers.
- Provide feedback on identified learning needs as the course progresses.

Texts

The readings are contained in the following texts and on line on Blackboard. The value of the class discussions and the quality of your course assignments will depend heavily upon your having read the readings and reacting to them critically.

Becvar, D. S. & Becvar, R. J. (2006). *Family therapy: A systemic integration* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

DeJong, P., & Berg, I. K. (2008). *Interviewing for solutions* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA : Thomson Higher Education.

Course Topics and Readings

January 14 – Introduction to Course and Self-Assessment

Introduction to course objectives, assignments and expectations
Self-assessment of knowledge and skills in family systems intervention
Creating a baseline interview video

January 21 – The Paradigm Shift in Family Therapy

Becvar & Becvar

- Ch. 1 Two different worldviews
- Ch. 2 The historical perspective
- Ch. 3 The paradigmatic shift of systems theory
- Ch. 4 Postmodernism and family therapy

De Jong & Berg

- Ch. 1 From problem solving to solution building

January 28 – From Problem Solving to Solution Building

De Jong & Berg

- Ch. 2 Solution building: The basics
- Ch. 3 Skills for not knowing
- Ch. 4 Getting started: How to pay attention to what the client wants
- Ch. 9 Interviewing clients in involuntary situations: Children, dyads and mandated

February 4 – Miracle Question and Exceptions

De Jong & Berg

- Ch. 5 How to amplify what clients want: The miracle question
- Ch. 6 Exploring for exceptions: Building on client strengths and successes

February 11 – Formulating Feedback and Keeping the Focus on Change

De Jong & Berg

- Ch. 7 Formulating feedback for clients
- Ch. 8 Later sessions: Finding, amplifying, and measuring client progress

February 18 – Systemic Family Assessment

Becvar & Becvar

- Ch. 7 Natural systems theory
- Ch. 9 The structural approach
- Ch.14 Family assessment

February 25 – Assessment in the Context of the Family Life Cycle

Becvar & Becvar

Ch. 5 The family: Process, development, and context

Thomas, V., & Ozechowski, T. J. (2000). A test of the Circumplex model of marital and family systems using the Clinical Rating Scale. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 26,523-534.

March 4 – From Assessment to Intervention

Becvar & Becvar

Ch. 7 Natural systems theory (reprise)

Ch. 9 The structural approach (reprise)

Ch. 12 Behavioral/cognitive approaches

Ch. 15 Therapeutic intervention and strategies

De Jong & Berg

Ch.2 Solution building: The basic (reprise)

Appendix: Protocol for first sessions

March 11 – SPRING BREAK!

March 18 – Comparative Presentations on Four Family Therapy Approaches

March 25 – The Evidence Base for Family Therapy: Therapeutic Approach and Common Factors

Becvar & Becvar

Ch.17 Research in family therapy

Wampold, B. E. (2007). Psychotherapy: *The* humanistic (and effective) treatment. American Psychologist, 21, 857-873.

April 1 – Special Topic: Responsive Teaching

April 8 – Special Topic: Multisystemic Family Therapy (MST)

April 15 – Special Topic: Supervision and Therapy Teams

Becvar & Becvar

Ch.16 Training and supervision

De Jong & Berg

Ch.13 Agency, group and community practice

April 22 – Thinking about Thinking; Ethical Issues in Family Therapy

Becvar & Becvar

Ch.18 Epistemological challenges: thinking about our thinking

De Jong & Berg

Ch.12 Professional values and human diversity

Ch.15 Theoretical implications

Assignments

In keeping with the applied focus of the course, the assignments ask you to apply the theory and techniques learned in class to a family system you are working with in your job or field placement. Even if your work is with single individuals, a family systems perspective is relevant and you can use the case for your assignments. You will also be doing two role play interviews with a person playing the role of another client or person.

1. Your first assignment (ungraded) is a 2-3 page introduction of yourself. Begin by telling me a little about your professional interests, your experience, and your career goals. If there is anything about your family and/or your personal interests that might be relevant to your learning in this course I'd like you to talk about that also. Now tell me what the concept "family systems" means to you, and how does it influence the way you see the world and work with your clients. Finally, describe an individual or family you are working with that you may be able to use as the basis for later assignments in the course. [ungraded; 2-3 pages; due January 21]
2. Your second assignment (which you will hand in with the third assignment) is a 10-minute video recording (audio will be ok if you can't do video) of an initial interview with a role-play client. If you can arrange to do this with a classmate it will increase your learning, but if not you may use a colleague at work or a friend (not a family member) to role play the client. The role play client should play a real person she/he is familiar with so they can play the role with authenticity. Conduct this interview in your usual way – you don't need to be perfect or do anything new. We will use this assignment as a baseline of your interviewing skills as you begin the course. You can use the interviewing rooms at MSASS that are equipped with digital recording equipment, or you can use your own equipment or that of your field agency. We will not use your recording in class without your permission, so don't worry what your classmates will think about your interview. [ungraded, 10 minute recording, due January 28]
3. For your third assignment meet again with your role play client from assignment #2 and re-record the interview. Start at the beginning again, but this time use the ideas and techniques you learned from your readings and class sessions. Before you do this interview you should review your first interview in light of what you have learned and

identify several specific areas you would like to change or improve. In other words, be specific and intentional about the changes you would like to see in your interviewing.

After you complete the re-make of your interview review it in comparison with your first recording and assess how you did, paying particular attention to the changes you wanted to make this time around. What did you do well this time, and what areas need continued attention? Did your client respond any differently this time around? What difference do you think that made for your client? What areas do you want to continue working on? We'll talk more about this in class and I'll also circulate the rubric I will use for grading and giving you feedback on this assignment so you can use it as a guide. Turn in your first video along with this one and your self-assessment. [10-minute recording, 6-8 page self-assessment, **30% of course grade**, due February 25]

4. This is a mini group presentation in which you will apply an assigned family therapy approach to a common case I will present in the previous class. We will have four group presentations, with the objective being to see how different approaches construct a particular family situation and intervene accordingly. We'll discuss the format and content requirements for these presentations in class. [15-20 minute group presentation, **10% of course grade**, due March 18]
5. Your fifth assignment is a systemic assessment of the family system you are working with, following the outline in Becvar & Becvar, pp. 290-29. I'll have more to say about this in class, and will distribute the grading rubric before the assignment is due. [5-8 pages, **25% of course grade**, due April 1]
6. Your sixth assignment builds on the systemic assessment you did above, and describes an intervention approach you used (or would like to use) with the family system you wrote about in your assessment. An important part of this assignment will be a review the evidence base for your approach. We'll go over the specific requirements for this assignment in class. [5-8 pages, **25% of course grade**, due April 22]
7. Ten percent of your course grade will be based on your professionalism – being on time to class, turning work in on time, contributing to class discussion, and helping to build a learning community. [**10% of course grade**]

Grading

The overall standard I use in my grading is this: Do you demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to evaluate your practice at a level expected of a masters level social worker? You will receive a letter grade for each assignment based on the criteria below, and your course grade will be a weighted average of the grades for your assignments (see above).

Grade	Points	Meaning	Explanation
A	4	Outstanding/Superior	Exceptional performance; consistently exceeds expectations
A-	3.7	Excellent	Strong performance; often exceeds expectations
B+	3.3	Very Good	Consistently meets and occasionally exceeds expectations
B	3	Good	Meets expectations
B-	2.7	Somewhat Below Expectations	Sometimes falls short of expectations
C+	2.3	Often Below Expectations	Often falls short of expectations
C	2	Below Expectations	Unevenness or inconsistent in grasp of content and experience
C-	1.7	Well Below Expectations	Very inconsistent in grasp of content and experience
F	0	Fail	Complete lack of grasp of content and experience; does not meet minimal expectations
I	0	Incomplete	Automatically becomes an "F" by instructor if work is not completed within the specified time period
W	0	Withdrew	Official withdrawal

Philosophy of Learning and Grading

The purpose of this course is for you to learn to practice systemically with individuals and families. My job is to design assignments and provide you with feedback that assists you in your learning and lets you know if you are performing up to professional social work standards. In terms of your grade for the course, the "bottom line" is whether you are competent in the material by the end of the course. If it takes you the entire semester to learn some of the material, so be it. The important thing is to keep working until you get it!

What this means to you is this. If the assignments you turn in are deficient, you may revise and resubmit them for re-grading. Your final grade for the course will be based on your best work at the end of the semester for each of the assignments. To have this option available on the final assignment you will need to hand it in by the 3rd to last class so you will have time to revise it if needed.

Course Policies

Regular and prompt class attendance is necessary for you to master the course material. Please let me know in advance if you are unable to attend class on a given day. I will deduct 5 points from your course grade for each unexcused absence. If you miss more than three classes, for any reason, you will be required to withdraw from the course.

Please, turn off your cell phone!

I expect all of us to conduct ourselves in accord with the Professional Conduct statement in the Student Handbook.

Please follow the Guidelines for Writing Papers included at the end of the syllabus.

Be sure to avoid plagiarism (see Guidelines for Writing Papers).

Please stay within the suggested page limits for each assignment. (Please, no tiny fonts or skimpy margins!)

Late papers (turned in after class on due date) are subject to a 5 point deduction.

I will consider giving an Incomplete for the course only if you have been making satisfactory progress, but are unable to complete all work on time due to an unforeseen circumstance (e.g., illness, death in family, etc.). Please see me if you need to arrange for an Incomplete. You will need to have a signed Incomplete Form on file with the office of Student Services by the last day of class.

Students with Disabilities

Academic accommodations are available to students with documented disabilities. In order to access the accommodations for which you may be qualified, please register with the office of Disability Resources (ESS, Sears 470). The staff there will verify your need for specific accommodations and provide you with a memo to inform me of your needs. Once you have received this memo, please make an appointment to see me privately to discuss your needs. Please be aware that any needed accommodations cannot be implemented retroactively; therefore timely notification of your needs is in your best interest.

Office Hours

Office hours are by appointment and can be almost any day or time – phone or email me, or see me after class, to set up a time.

Online Course Evaluations

The course evaluation is designed to assess the quality of the course, the instruction, and the effect that both had on your learning. Evaluations need to be completed within a two-week time frame: one week prior to and one week after the close of classes. The link for completing evaluations is as follows: <https://its-services.case.edu/course-evals/evaluate>

The evaluation serves several important functions. Personally, it allows you to reflect on the course and how it impacted your learning. Educationally, it allows the Curriculum Committee

to assess the quality of the course in the overall programming for social work practice. Administratively, faculty use the feedback to improve instruction. Therefore, it plays a significant role in the school, and your full and careful attention is appreciated.

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