UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

SW 513 Lifespan and Neurophysiologic Development in a Cultural, Ecological, and Transactional Framework (4 credit hours)
Online Section 010
Fall, 2018

Instructor: Stefanie Pilkay, PhD
Office: Online Only
Email: spilkay@vols.utk.edu
Class meetings: Online Only
Wednesdays 6:15pm-7:15pm EST

Code of Conduct
It is the student's responsibility to have read the College of Social Work Ethical Academic and Professional Conduct Code that is in the College of Social Work MSSW Handbook (www.csw.utk.edu). Students are also expected to sign and adhere to the Social Work Field Placement Code of Conduct.

The Honor Statement
An essential feature of The University of Tennessee is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the University, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity. (Hilltopics).

If you have any doubt about the use of others' work, see the discussion of this topic on the “Blackboard Resources” link on Blackboard. This is a very serious matter.

University Civility Statement
Civility is genuine respect and regard for others: politeness, consideration, tact, good manners, graciousness, cordiality, affability, amiability and courteousness. Civility enhances academic freedom and integrity, and is a prerequisite to the free exchange of ideas and knowledge in the learning community. Our community consists of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and campus visitors. Community members affect each other's well-being and have a shared interest in creating and sustaining an environment where all community members and their points of view are valued and respected. Affirming the value of each member of the university community, the campus asks that all its members adhere to the principles of civility and community adopted by the campus: http://civility.utk.edu/

Disability
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or if you have emergency information to share, please contact The University of Tennessee Office of Disability Services at 100 Dunford Hall (865-974-6087). This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.
I am pleased to provide all the accommodations required by ODS for your disability. I am not permitted to provide disability accommodations unless you are registered with ODS and I have a letter.

Dimensions of Diversity
The College of Social Work and the University of Tennessee welcome and honor all people. In accordance with the U.S. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the U.S. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE 2015 Educational Policy Statement), “the dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including” age, class, color, culture, mental or physical disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender identity, immigration status, marital status, national origin, political ideology, race, regionality, religion and spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. The College values intellectual curiosity, pursuit of knowledge, and academic freedom and integrity. “A person's diverse life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim” (CSWE 2015 Educational Policy Statement). The College of Social Work promotes social justice and social change, and strives to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.

Course Description
This is a cross-listed course, and both BSSW Honors and MSSW students are expected to follow this syllabus, including assignments and due dates.

This is a required Foundation course covering theories, frameworks, and research that address culturally sensitive understanding of human development and behavior; and effects of risk/protective factors, culture, and other environmental effects, such as poverty, or developmental milestones. It emphasizes neurophysiologic development across the lifespan, starting with early childhood; the profound influence of the environment on these processes; and implications for early prevention, treatment, policies, and services. It also covers the identification, assessment, and treatment of developmental delays and neurodevelopmental disorders. Processes critical to understanding human behavior and community risk and resilience for vulnerable populations are emphasized.

This course examines frameworks, theories, and research that address a culturally sensitive understanding of human development and behavior. Lifespan and neurophysiologic development in an ecological and transactional framework provides a foundation for understanding the processes of human development and how these processes are influenced by culture and the environment. The course examines the effects of risk and protective factors at various ecological levels, such as attachment, poverty, and culture on developmental milestones. It includes neurophysiologic development across the lifespan, starting with early childhood; the profound influence of the environment on these processes; and implications for early prevention, treatment, policies, and services. Typical development will be covered as well as atypical developmental patterns that are consistent with neurodevelopmental disorders. Processes critical to human behavior and risk and resilience for vulnerable populations are emphasized to understand individual or family behavior.

Content in this course will be illustrated and centered around a case study approach in which students read case studies that are paired with theoretical and research material. Class discussion about the theoretical and research material will be linked to case studies,
and students will use theory and research to construct hypotheses about individual or family adaptation to the environment. In addition, students will practice forming research questions and going to the literature to assess what is known about their questions.

Course Rationale
To practice accountably and effectively, social workers must be able to understand their clients and their presenting issues within their clients’ environmental, cultural, and developmental contexts. In supportive environments, individuals flourish as they progress through developmental stages and stage-salient tasks. Other environments, because of risk factors associated with them, are less supportive of wellbeing. Even so, brain plasticity provides humans with an amazing capacity to adapt to these less supportive and sometimes frankly maladaptive environments, although sometimes at great cost to themselves. Especially for young children, the costs to the developing brain of less adaptive environments are profound because their brains actually become organized around repeated experiences within these less adaptive environments. Neurophysiologic changes and behaviors resulting from these earlier less adaptive environments are often conceptualized by clinicians as psychopathology or presenting problems of clients.

Understanding human development as a series of processes mediated by the brain within an environment-dependent context profoundly reframes not only our understanding of our clients and their environments, but also how to intervene appropriately with clients and their environments. This different understanding of human development also suggests the critical importance of effective prevention programs and social policies that promote wellbeing, as well as interventions directed at changing the larger environments of individuals. Thus, knowledge gained in this course will allow social workers not only to better understand, contextualize, and assess clients and their presenting problems, but also to develop more appropriate interventions, prevention programs, or policies for working with or for the benefit of clients and for the necessary environments to support human wellbeing.

Course Competencies:

By the completion of this course, the students are expected to be able to demonstrate (through course activities, assignments, and/or exams):

1. Articulate, critically analyze, and apply an ecological, transactional theoretical framework (risk and resilience) and developmental perspective of adaptive and maladaptive human development and behavior across the lifespan to the understanding and assessment of and engagement with client systems and to reciprocal relations at the micro, mezzo and macro levels (among individuals, families, groups, neighborhoods, local organizations and large organizations, communities, and societies.) 6.1, 7.2 (content: neurophysiology, attachment theory and other theories of human behavior and the social environment; risk and resilience; cultural similarities and differences in development and behavior.)

   This competency is demonstrated in CTEs 1-6 and in class writing, discussion, and participation.

2. Assess the validity of historically significant theories of human behavior and
development for current social issues and problems at the micro, mezzo and macro levels that clients/client systems experience. 4.2, 7.2 (content: brief comparisons and contrasts of major historical theories as appropriate, including psychoanalytic theory, Piaget, Kohleberg, Erikson, Vygotsky, and others to inform practice).

This competency is demonstrated in CTEs 1-6 and in class writing, discussion, and participation.

3. Evaluate and apply evidence-based theories of human development and behavior that are sensitive to gender, class, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, family structure, disability status, and worldview. 2.1, 4.2, 4.3 (content: evidence for application of attachment theory and neurophysiology with specific attention to gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, family structure, disability status, and worldview and capacity to improve practice and service delivery).

This competency is demonstrated in CTEs 1-6 and in class writing, discussion, and participation.

4. Explain the roles of neurophysiology, adaptive and maladaptive environments, and experiences, including the effects of trauma and chronic stress, on brain development and the role of genetics and epigenesist in development during the sensitive period of the first three years of life and across the life span. 4.3, 7.2 (content: basic introduction to Mendelian genetics and the Human Genome Project; epigenesist and gene expression; effects of stress and trauma on hormones, brain development, and gene expression; effects of early deprivation and parenting on brain development and gene expression; Hobfoll’s conservation of resources theory; major developmental disabilities across the life span; explain how this research can impact practice and service delivery).

This competency is demonstrated in CTEs 1-6 and in class writing, discussion, and participation.

5. Apply theories of human behavior in the social environment to practice in the micro, mezzo and macro arenas. Understand the application of empirical evidence and theory to address questions about human development and behavior across the lifespan. 4.2, 6.1, 7.2, 8.2, 9.2 (content: use and application of theories; how theories are applied to practice; application of theories in the engagement, assessment, intervention and evaluation of practice).

This competency is demonstrated in CTEs 1-6, as students select appropriate research articles to respond to the CTE assignment.
Finally, a note about this class: This is a tough course that takes quite a bit of time. Expect to spend about 12-15 hours per week reading and writing.

### Class Schedule and Required Readings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 22 (Wed.)</td>
<td>Preparing for the Semester</td>
<td>Discuss syllabus and course expectations. <strong>Students should study the syllabus and the Blackboard website before class, and you are responsible for all information in this syllabus.</strong> Bring any questions you have to the online session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


September 12
Unit III: Stress, Trauma, and Hormones
CTE 2 due Midnight, Sep 18 (addresses competencies 1-5)

Cowan 2013. The lasting impact of early-life adversity on individuals and their descendants: potential mechanisms and hope for intervention.


Sep 19
Unit IV: Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation


---

**Unit V: Pregnancy & Birth**

**CTE 3 due Midnight, October 2 (addresses competencies 1-5)**


Oct. 10
Unit VII: Childhood
CTE 4 due Midnight, Oct. 16 (addresses competencies 1-5)


Oct. 17
Unit IX: Childhood: Autism Spectrum and Developmental Disorders

“We need to talk about Kevin” and “Temple Grandin” movie clips and discussion.

Oct. 24
Unit IX: Adolescence and Transition to Adulthood
CTE 5 due Midnight, Nov 6 (addresses competencies 1-5)

Clips of “Country Boys” and discussion.


Paus 2008—psychiatric illnesses start in adolescence

**Nov 7**

**Unit XII: Adulthood & Aging**


**November 14: Mental Illness, Genes, and the Brain**

**CTE 6 due midnight Nov 27 (addresses competencies 1-5)**


**November 28: Part I: Addiction, Genes, and the Brain**

**Part II: Resilience**


**Grades and Assignments**

This course provides information that is crucial to the rest of your MSSW studies. You can expect to devote about 10-12 hours per week to the class, including in-class time, readings, preparation of papers, and communication with the professor and your fellow students. There is no short-cut; class attendance and readings are necessary for you to learn this material, which is truly a foundation for the rest of your studies. The instructor reserves the right to subtract up to 10 points from your final average for excessive absences. The professor also reserves the right to lower your final letter grade in cases of unprofessional behavior in class (including using your phone or using your computer inappropriately). I will notify you that you are at risk before this happens. Your grade may be lowered more than once.

Your grade in this class is based on:

** Critical thinking exercises (100%)**

The good news: There is no final exam.

Grading values for MSSW students:

- A  = 95-100
- A- = 91-94
- B+ = 88-90
- B  = 84-87
- B- = 80-83
- C+ = 77-79
- C  = 74-76
- C- = 72-73
- D/F = <72

**CTEs**

Addresses course competencies 1-5, dimensions: Knowledge, Cognitive and affective processes
Students will complete a critical thinking exercise demonstrating understanding and application of the required readings. CTEs are always due by midnight after class discussion and prior to the next live session.

Purposes

The weekly critical thinking assignments are designed to accomplish five purposes:

1. Assure that you come to class ready to discuss the material in an informed, critical way. I do not repeat everything that is important in lectures. Rather, I build on it.

2. Demonstrate that you read and understood the readings (and therefore your answers should integrate important points from the readings). Use the important constructs found in the glossary appropriately. Don't just use the terms; integrate them into your papers in ways that clearly demonstrate your understanding.

3. Demonstrate your critical thinking about the material (and therefore your answers should not just regurgitate what you read, but should integrate and synthesize the material in a meaningful way and be critical, analytical, and thoughtful). Do not summarize the articles.

4. Guide the instructor in planning class sessions to clarify, elaborate, and discuss the material based on class members’ levels of understanding. If I note common misunderstandings or shallow understanding of important issues, we will spend time on those issues in class. In cases where it is clear that all students understand important material, I may present more advanced material.

5. Enhance your abilities to write critical scholarly papers. Therefore I provide extensive feedback, and I expect to see my comments reflected in future papers.

As you write your paper, think of 2 overarching goals:
(1) to address the question I ask
(2) to demonstrate conclusively that you read and understood the readings

Format

Papers must be written in the American Psychological Association (APA) style. After the first two weeks you will lose significant points for failing to adhere faithfully to the style. Szuchman and Thomlinson (available on Amazon) is a good reference for the style, and there also are many www links to guide you, as well. See my hints for writing good papers under “CTEs”. (Please note: APA style is complicated. You can't fake it, so use the book.) Also see the Purdue Writing Lab resource on Blackboard.

Each question will ask you to use and synthesize material from the readings and sometimes to apply those readings to scenarios, social work applications, or your personal life. Think of each answer as a formal paper (in terms of writing and presentation), though it is shorter.

All papers must be no more than 250 words, not counting references. (This is not a suggested maximum; do not go over, as I will quit reading at 250.) You do not need to write...
an abstract. There is no minimum length, but you need to fully answer the question as well as you can within 250 words. Your references in text (Combs-Orme, 2013) do not count in the total.

Hint: When you finish your paper, go back through to look for unnecessary words. Wordiness just obscures your meaning. Very and the often add nothing.

IMPORTANT: Papers must be submitted on Canvas. Upload your word file into the Canvas assignment link. I have had difficulty with other formats and emailed submissions.

References

Each paper must include references to (not just listed, but woven in) the required readings for those units as appropriate to the question.

Your paper should include a “References” page as shown in APA format. The reference section is not included in your word limit.

IMPORTANT: Writing skills are important, including grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, organization, and vocabulary. Please regard these assignments as an opportunity to sharpen the writing skills you will need throughout your time in the MSSW program.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance policy:
Attendance is especially important since the skills taught in this class are essential to your professional development and have direct application in future courses, field placements, and practice experiences. Students are expected to attend each class prepared, and participate frequently in class discussions.