UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

SW 513 Lifespan and Neurophysiologic Development in a Cultural, Ecological, and Transactional Framework (4 credit hours) and Social Work 317 (Honors) - Human Behavior in the Social Environment (3 credit hours)

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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.utk.csw.edu).

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, http://dos.utk.edu/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.

The University gives faculty wide latitude in how they handle cheating (plagiarism). If I discover that you have cheated, you will automatically fail the course, and I will move to have you dismissed from the program. Plagiarism is conclusive evidence that a student does not have the character to be a social worker.

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.

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.

**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 presenting problems, 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 (risk and resilience) and developmental perspective of adaptive and maladaptive human development and behavior across the lifespan to the understanding and assessment of client systems and to reciprocal relations among individuals and families. (HBSE-F.1, Pops at-risk & SJ-F.1; Diversity-F.3, F.4; CT/EBP-F.1). (content: attachment theory and neurophysiology as the major foundations with brief comparisons and contrasts to others; risk and resilience; cultural similarities and differences in development and behavior."

   **This competency is demonstrated in each week's CTE 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 that clients experience. (HBSE-F.2; Diversity-F.3, F.4; CT/EBP-F.1, F.2, F.3). (content: brief comparisons and contrasts of major historical theories as appropriate, including psychoanalytic theory, Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Vygotsky, and others).

   **This competency is demonstrated in each week's CTE and in class writing, discussion, and participation.**

3. Evaluate and apply [selected] 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. (HBSE-F.3; Pops at-risk & SJ-F.4; Values/ethics-F.1; Diversity-F.3, F.4; CT/EBP-F.1, F.3, F.4) (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).

   **This competency is demonstrated in each week's CTE 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 epigenesis in development during the sensitive period of the first three years of life and across the life span. (HBSE- F.4; CT/EBP-F.3, F.4, F.5). (content: basic introduction to Mendelian genetics and the Human Genome Project; epigenesis 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).

   **This competency is demonstrated in each week's CTE and in class writing, discussion, and participation.**
5. Conduct a scientific review of empirical evidence and theory to address questions about human development and behavior across the lifespan. (Values/ethics-F.3; HBSE-F.7; CT/EBP-F.3, F.4, F.5). (content: construction and use of theories; how theories are tested; examples and meaning of testing of attachment, neurophysiological theories, and other theories across the lifespan; comparisons and contrast to non-evidence-based theories).

This competency is demonstrated in each week’s CTE, as students select appropriate research articles to respond to the CTE assignment.

Finally, a personal 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, including time in class, reading, and writing. Remember that this is a 4-credit course. Remember also that graduate school is on a whole new level; it is not just more of the same kind of work you did as an undergraduate.

Class Schedule and Required Readings:

August 19 (Wed.)
Preparing for the Semester

Review of syllabus, course expectations. Students should study the syllabus and the Blackboard website before class, and you are responsible for all information in this syllabus. Bring any questions you have to class.

August 24, 26
Unit I: Genetics and Epigenetics
CTE 1 due 8:00 AM, August 25

1. Genetic disorders (link on Bb page).

2. Genetics interactive tutorial (link on Bb page)

3. Required blog (link on Bb page): 

4. The 5-HTT Gene (link on Bb page)


August 31, September 2
Unit II: Brain and Behavior
CTE 2 due 8:00 AM, September 1


September 9, 14
Unit III: Stress, Trauma, and Hormones
CTE 3 due 8:00 AM, Sep 10


**Sep 16**
**Unit 5: Resilience**


**Sep 21, 23**
**Unit IV: Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation**
**CTE 4 due 8:00 AM, Sep 22**


**Sep. 28, 30**
**Unit V: Pregnancy & Birth**
**CTE5 due 8:00 AM, Sep. 29**


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**Oct. 5, 7**
**Unit VI: Infancy**
**CTE6 due 8:00 AM, Oct. 6**


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**Oct. 12, 14**
**Unit VII: Childhood**
**CTE 7 due 8:00 AM, Oct. 13**


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**Oct 19, 21**

Unit VIII: Childhood (Continued)

**CTE 8 due 8:00 AM, Oct 20**

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**Oct 26, 28**

Unit IX: Adolescence

**CTE 9 due 8:00 AM, Oct 27**

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**Nov 2, 4**

Unit X: Transition to young adulthood: 18-25

**CTE 10 due 8:00 AM, Nov 3**

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**Nov. 9, 11**

**Unit XI: Adulthood**

**CTE 11 due 8:00 AM, Nov 10**


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**Nov 16, 18, 23**

**Unit XII: Aging**

**CTE 12 due 8:00 AM, November 17**


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**November 30**

**Wrap-up**
No readings.

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.

Your grade in this class is based on:

** Weekly critical thinking exercises (100%)  
The good news: There is no final exam.

Grading values for MSSW students:

A = 94-100  
A- = 92-93  
B+ = 89-91  
B = 86-88  
B- = 84-85  
C+ = 80-83  
C = 77-82  
C- = 74-76  
D+ = 72-73  
D = 69-71  
F = <69

The professor reserves the right to lower your participation grade for inappropriate use of computers and cell phones in class, as well as failure to “be present” and participate.

CTEs

Each week, students will complete a critical thinking exercise demonstrating understanding and application of that week’s readings. Each unit’s exercise will appear on the "Critical Thinking Exercises" link at the bottom of the unit page the week before it is due. CTEs are always due at 8:00 AM on the Tuesday after the first class on the topic (with one exception noted—Labor Day weekend).

(There are 12 CTEs, and your grade will be calculated from your best 10 grades. Thus, you may skip up to 2 CTEs (earning 0s) if you wish, or you may do all 12 and I will use your highest 10 grades.

I am trying a new approach this year. In the past, CTEs were due the Sunday before the first class on the topic; now they are due on the Tuesday morning between the two class sessions. With this new system, you may bring a draft of your CTE to Monday’s class and make any revisions you want based on the lecture and discussion. You also may ask any
questions you want about your CTE and listen to other students’ questions and answers so that you can make revisions that night.

**Caution:** It will be impossible to submit your CTE when it is due if you do not come to class having read all the readings and completed a draft. This is a great opportunity to improve your CTEs.

Even if you miss class, you still must complete the critical thinking exercise within the required time frame. Late work cannot be turned in more than 5 days late, and then the grade will be recorded as a zero (0).

**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 BlackBoard, and I will demonstrate how to do that during the first class session. There are two ways to send me your assignment on BlackBoard: cut and paste into the box or upload your Word file. I will only accept the latter. Do not cut and paste into the box. I will not grade it.

ONLY MICROSOFT WORD AND PLAIN TEXT CAN BE SUBMITTED. I cannot read other formats.

Yes, I know it’s hard to say what you want to say in 250 words. You have to be clear and concise. Remember that I don’t expect you to provide as much info as you could in 1000 words.

References

Each paper must include references to (not just listed, but woven in) a majority of the required readings for that week, including all that are appropriate to the question. In addition, you must select and integrate at least one scholarly article from the literature that you find yourself. Your grade will reflect the relevance, timeliness (with this material, articles from 2000 are old), and quality of the article you select. Just adding an article to your reference section will not help your grade; it should be integrated in a way that demonstrates your understanding and integration of it. It should be clear to me what this reference added to your thinking and understanding of the material. (Note: I frequently look at these articles to verify your understanding.) Do not use textbooks or Wikipedia as references.

Your paper should include a “References” page as shown in APA format, including class readings used (not just read) and the references you find on your own. The reference section is not included in your word limit.

You would do well to read the exercise instructions before doing the readings, so that you can be alert to meaningful material in the readings. If you do not spend adequate time on this assignment, it will be reflected in your grade.

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.

As part of the goal to teach you to write, the University permits professors to require students to work with the Writing Center on their papers. This is a resource in the English
Department that provides one-on-one writing tutors, and it has been very helpful to my students in the past. If you are required to work with the Writing Center, I will notify you within the first few weeks of class. Even if I do not require you to go to the WC, you may find it helpful if your writing needs improvement. See the UT Writing Center link under "Resources" on this Online@utk web site.

**Attendance and Participation**

There is no substitute for class attendance. Class experiences are not duplicated in the readings, and crucial learning occurs during class. Class discussions will point out the highlights of the reading material, indicating what you should pay particular attention to in the readings. Class exercises, videos, or speakers will provide examples or illustrations of important material; this learning cannot be made up if it’s missed. Most importantly, class discussions and contributions by your fellow students make up a majority of your thinking and learning.

Please note that these facts apply irrespective of any reason for absence, so I suggest that you save your absences for illnesses and true emergencies. Work-related absences, including court appearances, are not an exception.

It is also important that you be on time to class, as it is disruptive to me and to the class for students to arrive late. Please figure the traffic and parking into the time you leave for class!!! These things are predictable and therefore are not excuses for being late. Don’t act surprised that traffic is heavy and parking is scarce!! This is UT!! And traffic is especially awful now. Expect it!

**Class discussion**

In a good class, you learn as much from each other as you do from the professor, so students are required to be part of class discussions. This includes asking questions, answering when called upon (which I will do randomly and regularly). You will not be penalized for giving a "wrong" answer, but you will be penalized for not being "present" and indicating you are following the discussion.

This also includes your response to the occasional request to complete out-of-class exercises and bring material to class. In the class, I will call on students to provide material about these out-of-class exercises. Note: study the vocabulary before each class and be ready to define the terms for the class.