



Course Syllabus: Family Focused Social Work Practice

College of Health Sciences and Human Services

Social Work Department

SOWK 4143- X20

Spring 2026

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Tuesdays: 11.00 a.m.-12.00 p.m.; 2.30-3.30 p.m.
Thursdays: 11.00 a.m. -12.00 p.m.; 2.30-3.30 p.m.
Fridays: 3.30-4.30 p.m.

COURSE RATIONALE

The origins of family intervention are deeply rooted in the profession of Social Work. The tradition of viewing the person and the presenting problem in a contextual framework is congruent with the theoretical adherence of social work to an ecological approach. Interpersonal and societal transactions are seen as equally vital areas of both assessment and intervention in social work practice. The family is the basic unit of social analysis in this approach. An understanding of the concepts of family intervention will help prepare students for effective social work practice.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Family Focused Social Work Practice builds on the history and traditions of family intervention in the basic social services. This course examines pertinent practice issues, family therapy concepts, approaches used in contemporary social work intervention, and current research. There is an emphasis on family resilience and applying family intervention concepts with families under economic stress, families within vulnerable populations, and with diverse family structures. A strengths perspective is highlighted as an approach to treatment.

Family Focused Social Work Practice will address the stages of the family life cycle and the implementation of family therapy theories to support practice. Family Focused Social Work Practice will address varying family forms and challenges, ethnic and cultural dimensions, and developmental perspectives on family functioning. In this course there is attention to family intervention with families under economic stress, ethnic and racial minority families, women and alternative lifestyle families.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowledge dimension:

- 1 Integrate information about the social work origin and historical development of family assessment and intervention into present day practice (EPAS 8).

Values dimensions:

- 2 Apply family intervention approaches differentially across the life cycle to families from various groups (EPAS 8).
- 3 Distinguish what constitutes ethical social work family practice with particular attention to various populations (EPAS 8).

Skills dimensions:

- 4 Demonstrate family assessment and intervention concepts within the framework of social work knowledge, values, and skills (EPAS 6 & 7).
- 5 Demonstrate the ability to assess family situations utilizing current research in family intervention (EPAS 4).

Cognitive and affective dimensions:

- 6 Distinguish the theoretical basis and techniques of different family therapy approaches used in contemporary social work intervention (EPAS 8).
- 7 Apply the techniques of various approaches to family intervention from a strengths perspective for assessment and intervention (EPAS 8).

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Nichols, M. P., & Davis, S.D. (2020). *The essentials of family therapy* (7th ed.). New York: Pearson.

Course Instructional Methods

This course is delivered through a combination of lectures, class discussions, and audiovisual presentations. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and actively participate in discussions. Completion of assigned readings prior to class is essential to support meaningful dialogue and engagement.

Note:

Students should communicate with the instructor via **Outlook email** rather than D2L. Emails are typically reviewed on weekdays (excluding weekends), and responses can be expected within **24 hours**. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor by email with any questions or requests for clarification.

D2L

D2L will be used throughout the semester for communication outside of class sessions. Course materials—including the syllabus, PowerPoint presentations, and other relevant resources—will be posted on D2L.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

AI-Generated Submissions:

Writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are core learning outcomes of this course. Accordingly, all writing assignments must be completed independently by the student. The use of AI-generated content (including, but not limited to, tools such as ChatGPT) is not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism, in accordance with college academic integrity policies.

Social Work Program Attendance Policy:

Students are permitted up to **three excused absences**, as defined by the MSU Absence Policy. To receive an excused absence, the student must notify the instructor of the reason for the absence and provide appropriate documentation.

A student who accumulates **five absences** (including excused absences) will receive a **lower letter grade**. A student who reaches **six absences** will be **dropped from the course**. If the sixth absence occurs after the last day to withdraw with a “W,” the student will receive a final grade of “**F**.”

Regular attendance is expected. If a student is unable to attend class, the instructor must be notified **before the class meeting**. In the case of an emergency, the instructor should be notified as soon as possible.

For each **uninformed absence**, **5 points will be deducted** from the class attendance points. The instructor must be notified **directly via email**; notifications through classmates are not acceptable.

Arriving late to class or leaving early without prior notice may negatively affect both **attendance and participation grades**.

Class Participation:

Students are expected to contribute to a respectful and productive learning environment by paying attention to lectures, listening to classmates’ contributions, and refraining from disruptive behavior. Active participation in class discussions and activities is expected. All students should engage respectfully with others’ ideas and viewpoints. While differing opinions are welcome, discourse must remain professional and respectful.

Class participation includes not only contributions during scheduled discussions but also engagement during lectures through relevant questions, comments, and examples. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before class and be prepared to participate in discussions related to course topics.

Participation grades will be based on the **quality, relevance, frequency, and substance** of student contributions. The instructor reserves the right to assign participation grades based on professional judgment. General criteria for participation grading are as follows:

- **Poor** (participates only in group discussions): **0–5 points**
- **Fair** (participates occasionally in whole-class discussions in addition to group work): **5–10 points**
- **Good** (participates frequently in whole-class discussions in addition to group work): **10–15 points**
- **Very Good** (participates consistently and meaningfully in whole-class discussions in addition to group work): **15–20 points**

Laptop and Cell Phone regulation:

Photographing, audio or video recording, and text messaging during class are not permitted without prior permission from the instructor. Cell phones must be turned off or

set to vibrate during class. Students may not browse the internet or listen to music on personal devices during class time.

Unauthorized use of electronic devices during class may negatively affect both **attendance and participation grades.**

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is essential to the mission of Midwestern State University. As such, students are expected to perform their own work (except when collaboration is expressly permitted by the course instructor) without the use of any outside resources. Students are not permitted to use old papers when preparing for this paper, nor may they consult with students who have already written the paper. When practiced, academic integrity ensures that all students are fairly graded. Violations to the Academic Integrity Policy undermine the educational process and will not be tolerated. It also demonstrates a lack of respect for oneself, fellow students, and the course instructor and can ruin the university's reputation and the value of the degrees it offers. We all share the obligation to maintain an environment which practices academic integrity. Violators of the Academic Integrity Policy will be subject to failing this course and being reported to the Office of Student affairs for disciplinary action which could result in suspension or expulsion from Midwestern State University.

All students are expected to submit their own original work. The presentation of another's words or ideas as your own, without giving credit to the source is regarded as plagiarism. Academic fraud, plagiarism, dishonesty, and cheating are serious acts of academic misconduct. If you are unclear about the proper use and citation of sources, or the details and guidelines for any assignment, you should discuss your concerns prior to the due date with the instructor.

Academic fraud and cheating include these and other misrepresentations:

- presentation of the ideas of others without credit to the source;
- use of direct quotations without quotation marks and without credit to source;
- paraphrasing without credit to the source;
- participation in group project which presents plagiarized material;
- failure to provide citations for material obtained through electronic research;
- downloading and submitting work from electronic data bases without citation;
- submitting material created/written by someone else as one's own;
- copying from someone else's exam, homework, or laboratory work;
- allowing someone else to copy or submit one's work as his/her own;
- accepting credit for a group project without doing one's share;
- submitting the same paper in more than one course;
- using notes or other materials during test without authorization;

- not following the guidelines specified by instructor for “take home” exams; and
- the fabrication of research data.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Reading Quizzes and Final Exam:

The course includes **three quizzes**, each worth **10 points**, and a **final exam** worth **40 points**. Quizzes will be administered after the completion of designated chapters. The final exam will be given on the date scheduled by the university.

Scantron is **not required** for quizzes but **is required** for the final exam. Both quizzes and the final exam will consist of **multiple-choice and true/false questions**.

Because class presentations draw from the course text, **only material presented in class** will be covered on quizzes and the final exam.

Assignment #1: Family Assessment and Essential Concepts (Meets EPAS 6-8)

The purpose of this assignment is to help you integrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts of family therapy into social work assessment of families.

Select a family that you know well. To ensure confidentiality, give fictitious names for family members and do not share your relationship with this family. Utilizing essential concepts in family therapy (read chapter 3 from the textbook) and knowledge of family life cycle stages, complete a family assessment addressing each of the following items:

Describe Family:

Identify and describe family members. Discuss the impact of the characteristics of each of the family members on the family as a unit.

Apply Fundamental Concepts and Terms:

Apply and discuss fundamental concepts and terms (cybernetics, systems theory, general systems theory, constructivism, social constructionism, and attachment theory) to the family and its members.

Apply Working Concepts of Family Therapy:

Apply and discuss working concepts of family therapy (interpersonal context, complementarity, circular causality, triangles, process/content, and family structure).

Family Life Cycle Stages:

Identify and discuss the family's current life cycle stage. How has the family's progression through previous life cycle stages impacted their current stage? How is the family prepared or not prepared to enter the next family life cycle stage?

Requirements:

The assignment must meet the following requirements:

1. Include a title page, and a references page.
2. Abstract is NOT required.
3. Double-space throughout, leaving a one-inch margin on all sides.
4. As permitted by APA, use an easily readable font such as, Times New Roman (12-point), or Calibri (11-point), or Arial (11-point), or Lucida Sans Unicode (10-point), or Georgia (11-point). Whichever font you choose, you should use the same font and font size throughout the assignment.
5. Provide relevant section headings.
6. The required writing style is that of the American Psychological Association (APA) Publications Manual (7th ed.).
7. The assignment should not exceed 5-7 pages, including the cover page and the references page(s).
8. Review peer-reviewed journal articles (not less than 2) published within the last 5 years. Further details (if needed) will be provided via email to individual students or to the class who need further clarification. The total number of references should not be less than 3 (including the textbook). APA format (7th ed.) is required throughout the assignment.
9. ***Please note that assignments that do not meet the criterion in terms of the required number of sources (including peer-reviewed journals) will be given a "C" grade.**
10. Review carefully the rubric given below:

Criteria	Unsatisfactory	Struggling	Good	Proficient
Clarity	0-3 Ideas confusing, disconnected, and purpose is unclear.	3-6 Ideas somewhat clear, somewhat connected, and purpose is somewhat clear.	6-10 Ideas fairly clear, fairly connected, and purpose is fairly clear.	10-15 Ideas clear, well connected, and purpose is clear.
Content	0-5 Less adequate or inadequate; citations are not connected or connected poorly	5-10 Somewhat adequate; citations are connected somewhat well	10-20 Adequate; citations are connected well	20-30 Comprehensive; citations are connected very well
Relevance	0-5 Sources are not relevant. Poor connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	5-10 Relevance of the sources is not obvious. Fair connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	10-15 Relevance of the sources is somewhat obvious; good connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	15-20 Peer-reviewed journal articles are within the last 5 years; relevance of the sources is obvious; excellent connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).
Logic	0-5 The transition between ideas is extremely weak.	5-10 There are several weak transitions between ideas.	10-15 There are very few weak transitions between ideas.	15-20 There are clear and effective transitions between ideas.
Writing Mechanics	0-3 4 or more violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	3-6 No more than 3 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	6-10 No more than 2 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	10-15 Appropriate use of APA formatting and appropriate use of grammar and punctuation.

Assignment #2: Research Paper on Social Work Assessment and Intervention with a Family System (Meets EPAS 4, 6-8)

This assignment is designed to allow the application of current research in family therapy, ethnicity, ethics, the strengths perspective, and family life cycle events to contemporary social work practice with a family system.

To ensure confidentiality, exclude or disguise any identifying information. Utilizing current research in family therapy, ethnicity, ethics, the strengths perspective, and family life cycle events, complete an assessment and plan for social work intervention addressing each of the following items:

Describe Family:

Describe the family, including their ethnicity (you may either use the same family described in the first assignment or choose a different family), presenting problem, and stage of the family life cycle. On a separate page, complete a 3-generation genogram. The genogram must be clear and must include the genogram symbols, clearly denoting what those symbols mean for the three generations.

Apply and Compare Family Therapy Models:

***Select a school/model of family therapy** and apply it to the case. A major model of family therapy (for example, Strategic Family Therapy) must be chosen. Provide an assessment and intervention plan based on this model. ***Select a second school/model of family therapy** (for example, Structural Family Therapy) and provide an assessment and intervention plan based on the second model. Compare the benefits and problems of the two models for the family and the social worker.

Interactions between Life Cycle Stages:

Discuss interactions between the **client's** life cycle stage and **your own** life cycle stage. What potential problems do you need to consider?

Class Presentation:

In addition to the written assignment, each student will deliver an in-class **PowerPoint presentation** lasting **15–20 minutes**. The presentation file must be emailed to the instructor **at least 24 hours prior** to the scheduled presentation date. Late submissions will negatively affect the **presentation grade**.

Slides should be clear and readable, and the presentation should emphasize **analysis of the selected family therapy models** rather than reading from slides. The presentation must also incorporate **relevant scholarly sources**.

Requirements:

The assignment must meet the following requirements:

1. Include a title page, and a references page.
2. Abstract is NOT required.
3. Double-space throughout, leaving a one-inch margin on all sides.
4. As permitted by APA, use an easily readable font such as, Times New Roman (12-point), or Calibri (11-point), or Arial (11-point), or Lucida Sans Unicode (10-point), or Georgia (11-point). Whichever font you choose, you should use the same font and font size throughout the assignment.
5. Provide relevant section headings.
6. The required writing style is that of the American Psychological Association (APA) Publications Manual (7th ed.).
7. The assignment should not exceed 5-7 pages, including the cover page and the references page(s) but excluding the genogram.
8. Review peer-reviewed journal articles (not less than 3) published within the last 5 years. Further details (if needed) will be provided via email to individual students or to the class who need further clarification. The total number of references should not be less than 4 (including the textbook). APA format (7th ed.) is required throughout the assignment.
9. ***Please note that assignments that do not meet the criterion in terms of the required number of sources (including peer-reviewed journals) will be given a "C" grade.**
10. Review carefully the rubric given below:

Criteria	Unsatisfactory	Struggling	Good	Proficient
Clarity	0-3 Ideas confusing, disconnected, and purpose is unclear.	3-6 Ideas somewhat clear, somewhat connected, and purpose is somewhat clear.	6-10 Ideas fairly clear, fairly connected, and purpose is fairly clear.	10-15 Ideas clear, well connected, and purpose is clear.
Content	0-5 Less adequate or inadequate; citations are not connected or connected poorly	5-10 Somewhat adequate; citations are connected somewhat well	10-20 Adequate; citations are connected well	20-30 Comprehensive; citations are connected very well
Relevance	0-5 Sources are not relevant. Poor connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	5-10 Relevance of the sources is not obvious. Fair connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	10-15 Relevance of the sources is somewhat obvious; good connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).	15-20 Peer-reviewed journal articles are within the last 5 years; relevance of the sources is obvious; excellent connection has been made between the sources and the points made by the writer(s).
Logic	0-5 The transition between ideas is extremely weak.	5-10 There are several weak transitions between ideas.	10-15 There are very few weak transitions between ideas.	15-20 There are clear and effective transitions between ideas.
Writing Mechanics	0-3 4 or more violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	3-6 No more than 3 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	6-10 No more than 2 violations of APA format, grammar or punctuation.	10-15 Appropriate use of APA formatting and appropriate use of grammar and punctuation.

EVALUATION OF COURSE OUTCOMES:

The student's achievement will be evaluated on the basis of written assignments, class exams, class attendance, and class participation.

The final grade will be calculated based upon the points that a student has accumulated throughout the term. A student may earn points as shown in the following table:

Grading:

Table 1:

Assignments	Points
Reading quizzes	30
Class Attendance	20
Class participation	20
Assignment # 1	100
Assignment # 2	125
Final Exam	40
Total	335

GRADING SCALE

The total grade for the course is an accumulation of the points earned on each assignment. **The following letter grades are used:**

- A=90% of available points
- B=80-89% of available points
- C=70-79 % of available points
- D=60-69% of available points
- F=0-59% of available points

Social Work Program Grade Policy (this is applicable ONLY for social work majors):

A course grade of **below a C** or an average of below 70% will be considered a **failing grade**. Students **must repeat** social work **courses** in which they receive a grade of **D or F**.

Note: This grade policy is in effect since the Fall of 2020.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will negatively affect the final grade. **Only assignments submitted through D2L will be accepted and graded.** Late submissions will incur a penalty of **5 points per day**. Assignments will **not be accepted more than two days after the due date**.

Students are encouraged to begin assignments early to avoid issues related to technology, printing, or personal emergencies. Students who need assistance with writing are strongly encouraged to seek support from the **University Writing Center**.

Course Changes:

Although careful planning, study, and research have gone into the design of this course and its learning opportunities, some of the most meaningful learning may occur in unexpected moments. While these moments cannot always be anticipated, the instructor may respond to them as they arise. Accordingly, the instructor reserves the right to modify the course schedule, assignments, or examination dates as necessary to enhance learning.

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#)

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [Safety / Emergency Procedures](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “*Run. Hide. Fight.*” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: ["Run. Hide. Fight."](#)

Weather Closure Practice:

During inclement weather, notification occurs through official campus channels and in communication with the local news networks. MSU channels include MSU Alert, MSU Safety app, Postmaster, and website headers. MSU Police and the Office of Marketing and Public Information. Classes will either be held or not held, depending on the university’s delay/closure times.

Important Dates

Final Deadline for May graduates to file for graduation: February 26, 2026.

Last Day to drop with a grade of “W:” April 29, 2026

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability

will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Student Life - Disability](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

Week	Chapters	Assignments
Week 1 (January 20, Tuesday & January 22, Thursday, 2026)	Course Introduction Ch.1: The evolution of family therapy	N/A
Week 2 (January 27, Tuesday & January 29, Thursday)	Ch.2: Basic techniques of family therapy Ch. 3: The fundamental concepts of family therapy	N/A
Week 3 (February 3, Tuesday & February 5, Thursday)	Ch.4: Bowen Family Systems Therapy	N/A
Week 4 (February 10, Tuesday & February 12, Thursday)	Ch.4: Bowen Family Systems Therapy cont....	Assignment # 1 due by 11.59 p.m. on February 13, Friday (to be submitted in D2L DropBox)
Week 5 (February 17, Tuesday & February 19, Thursday)	Ch.5: Strategic Family Therapy Ch.6: Structural Family Therapy	N/A
Week 6 (February 24, Tuesday & February 26, Thursday)	Ch.6: Structural Family Therapy cont....	
Week 7 (March 3, Tuesday & March 5, Thursday)	Ch.7: Experiential Family Therapy	N/A
Spring Break- No classes (March 9-14)	N/A	N/A
Week 8 (March 17, Tuesday & March 19, Thursday)	Ch.7: Experiential Family Therapy cont....	N/A

Week	Chapters	Assignments
Week 9 (March 24, Tuesday & March 26, Thursday)	Ch.8: Psychoanalytic Family Therapy	N/A
Week 10 (March 31, Tuesday)	Ch.8: Psychoanalytic Family Therapy cont....	N/A
Holiday Break-No Class (April 2-4)	N/A	N/A
Week 11 (April 7, Tuesday & April 9, Thursday)	Ch. 9: Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy	N/A
Week 12 (April 14, Tuesday & April 16, Thursday)	Ch. 9: Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy cont....	N/A
Week 13 (April 21, Tuesday & April 23, Thursday)	Ch. 11: Solution- Focused Therapy	
Week 14 (April 28, Tuesday & April 30, Thursday)	Ch. 11: Solution- Focused Therapy cont....	N/A
Week 15 (May 5, Tuesday & May 7, Thursday)	Ch. 12: Narrative Therapy Class Presentations	Assignment # 2 due by 11.59 p.m. on May 8, Friday (to be submitted in D2L DropBox) PowerPoints due 24 hours prior to presentation
Week 16 (May 11, Monday)	Final Exam (1.00-3.00 p.m.)	N/A

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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