

HOD2670/Psych 2470: Introduction to Community Psychology

Peabody College, Vanderbilt University

Instructor: Douglas D. Perkins

Dept. of Human & Organizational Development Program in Community Research & Action

Course Description: This course provides an overview of theory, research and action in community psychology (CP). CP is the study and application of psychological solutions to community-based social, mental health, and environmental problems. It also explores the relationships between stressful environments, supportive social systems, and individual and family well-being. It emphasizes values, applied research, and action all focused on promoting the welfare of the whole community, especially under-served populations. It focuses on prevention, self-help, empowerment, cultural diversity, and organizational, community, and societal-level action.

How do friends and family help you cope with life's major traumas and daily hassles?

How did the kids, teachers and parents of Project Head Start change the nation's mind about what makes people poor and underachieving?

Why have so many mentally ill and criminally convicted people been "deinstitutionalized," what does that mean, and why have so many become homeless?

How can people organize, work collectively to improve their neighborhoods, workplaces, services, and other community settings, and develop a greater sense of community?

Community psychology answers these and many other questions.

Course Objectives: To introduce students to the basic values, historical influences, theories, and levels and methods of intervention in community psychology. To allow students to relate these to other approaches in psychology and other social sciences and helping professions and to a brief community project or service experience.

Required text: Levine, M., Perkins, D.D., & Perkins, D.V. (2005). Principles of community psychology. (3rd edition) **IMPORTANT: I will put at least 2 copies on Peabody Library reserve in case you don't want to buy the book.** In addition, students will select 1 or 2 supplemental readings for the whole class, based on their seminar paper topics, which will be made available on Blackboard or reserve.

No Prerequisites: A background in psychology is NOT required.

Course Format: Class meetings will be run as a seminar in which the required readings and student projects will be discussed in groups and as a class, along with student presentations and instructor lectures. The exact schedule of topics and reading assignments may change. Be aware of any changes, be prepared for class, and try to obtain a classmate's notes on any class you miss. Please do all of the reading on time, and participate in class. Class attendance is important and may be taken at any time; it will be used to round final grades up or down. Students may share class notes with other students enrolled in the class as a courtesy, but not for pay.

Graded Course Requirements (& % of course grade):

1. Seminar Paper (20%; 3 or 4-page single-spaced; DRAFT DUE 2 DAYS BEFORE PRESENTATION IN CLASS; FINAL DRAFT DUE 1 WEEK AFTER PRESENTATION).

Identify a topic that interests you and the chapter it is most relevant to (which will determine when it will be presented in class). You must have the instructor's approval on a topic by the 2nd

week of class. Do a thorough search, especially of the recent research literature on the topic (e.g., using PsycInfo, Sociological Abstracts, etc.). A week or 2 prior to your scheduled presentation, together with the instructor and TA, you will identify the best 1 or 2 sources (article or book chapter), which may be added to the class schedule for everyone to read. Write a paper, summarizing and critically reviewing and analyzing the literature on that topic, relating it to the text chapter. **Email or hand out your draft paper to the entire class and instructor at least 48 hours before the topic is scheduled. Co-lead class discussion of the chapter and paper on the day it is scheduled. Every student in the class will be expected to read and comment on each seminar paper (in class and on Blackboard, see On-line Discussion, below).** Papers may be revised based on comments and class discussion before being turned in for a grade.

2. Community or Organizational Setting Analysis (20%; map + 3 or 4 single-spaced pages):

Using at least 2 major principles or concepts from community psychology (more than 2 if possible), analyze a community you know from your own experience (current or past; place-based or relational) or one that interests you but that you do not belong to. Try to analyze both strengths and weaknesses of the community. You may consider any aspect of the social, political, economic, or physical environment of the community, but be sure to include both (1) an analysis of the psychological—i.e., behavioral, cognitive, or emotional—aspects of the strength or problem and (2) a drawn cognitive map of the community based on your memory of the physical layout, “anchoring” institutions and meaningful places. Conclude with 1 or 2 detailed paragraphs proposing a possible intervention program or policy, organized at the community, organizational, or societal systems (i.e., not individual or family) level, to address the community’s problems or develop its strengths. These papers will also be discussed in class.

3. Brief Community Intervention Experience (20%; approximately 10 hours in the community, at an agency, or on a project).

This may be a class group project. If not, you will need to identify, and have approved by the instructor, an appropriate independent community service experience. If the latter, you can find service opportunities at the VU Office of Volunteer Activities The community and nonprofit organizations listed with the HOD internship office in Mayborn 104, or from your own experience. **HOD majors may be able to use this project to check out possible internship sites (as long as the agency is public or nonprofit)—check with the internship office.** Let the instructor or TA know if you are having any difficulty at, or finding, your community service experience. Keep a log of your hours on this project, including date, time, activity, and any reflections on the experience. A brief (2-3 SS page) reflection/report and class presentation will be due at the end of the semester.

4. On-line Discussion (20%). Students must post at least one Blackboard discussion posting (including feedback on other students’ papers/presentations) EACH week and identify 4 (1 each month) to be graded.

Topics can be anything that comes to mind from class discussion, readings, community intervention experience or other assignments, or current events as related to a course topic. I encourage students to use Blackboard discussions [or if you prefer, direct comments to the instructor or TA] to critique any aspect of the course, especially the text-- e.g., how clear and engaging is the writing? How interesting are the topics? Is it too focused on community psychology theory and research and not enough on practice? Too focused on mental health and not enough on social, political, and economic problems? How has the field of community psychology changed over time? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What important topics are missing? Be specific and for however much you suggest adding, try to identify what material in the text you would cut.

5. Quizzes (20%). Instead of exams, there will be between 2 and 4 in-class quizzes; these will be announced in class at least one class session in advance.

For all the above, late work will lose points. Any missing units of work will be graded 0. Please talk to the instructor if you're having problems.

ADA: Students who may need disability-related accommodations should contact the instructor or TA as soon as possible. Also, please contact the Opportunity Development Center: 322-4705.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

The following schedule is flexible with respect to timing of topics. Assignment due dates in bold are not expected to change. Students are responsible for any changes announced in class.

Tu Th Reading/Topic

1. 8/24 Overview of course, syllabus, requirements

Discussion: What is my community and what are its strengths and weaknesses?

2. 8/29 LP&P: Foreword + Introduction: An Overview of Community Psychology

ORIGINS OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY:

3. **8/31 SEMINAR PAPER TOPIC DUE & SCHEDULING of PRESENTATION**

LP&P: Chapter 1. Life is a soap opera

4. 9/5 LP&P: Ch. 2. Origins of Community Psychology in Community Mental Health;
Limitations of traditional psychology: behavioral, social, & testing psychology.

5. 9/7 Deinstitutionalization, Housing and Homelessness: read Strategic Plan for Ending Chronic Homelessness: <http://www.nashville.gov/sservices/homeless/index.htm> ; explore other websites linked at <http://www.nashville.gov/sservices/homeless/resources.htm> , including: U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Research Group on Homelessness & Poverty.

PERSPECTIVES IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY:

6. 9/12 LP&P: Ch. 3. Conceptual Road Map of CP: Dohrenwend stress model; crisis intervention; enhancing psychological, situational, and neighborhood mediators

7. 9/14 LP&P: Ch. 3, continued

8. 9/19 LP&P: Ch. 4. The Ecological Analogy

9. 9/21 LP&P: Ch. 4, continued

email TA identifying 1st Blackboard posting to be graded

10. 9/26 LP&P: Ch. 5. Psychological Conceptions of the Environment

11. 9/28 LP&P: Ch. 5, continued

12. 10/3 LP&P: Ch. 6. Labeling Theory: An Alternative to the Illness Model

13. 10/5 QUIZ #1 ON TEXT & CLASS THROUGH CHAPTER 6

LP&P: Ch. 6, continued

14. 10/10 LP&P: Ch. 7. Adaptation, Crisis (Stress), Coping, and Support

15. 10/12 LP&P: Ch. 7, continued

identify 2nd Blackboard posting to be graded

Oct. break: NO CLASS ON 10/17

APPLICATIONS OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

16. 10/19 LP&P: Ch. 8. Prevention

17. 10/24 LP&P: Ch. 8, continued

18. 10/26 Community or Org. Setting analyses due; discussed in class

19. 10/31 LP&P: Ch. 9. Self Help & Advocacy Groups

20. 11/2 LP&P: Ch. 9, continued

identify 3rd Blackboard posting to be graded

21. 11/7 LP&P: Ch. 10. The Problem of Change

22. 11/9 LP&P: Ch. 10, cont.; reforming human service organizations and institutions; analyzing and intervening in community and organizational settings: discuss community intervention organizations and experiences.

23. 11/14 LP&P: Ch. 11. School Desegregation: A Societal-level Intervention; Diversity issues in CP, psychology, the helping services, society.

24. 11/16 LP&P: Ch. 12. Community Development & Social Action in Community Psychology

-- 11/18-11/26 ***Thanksgiving Break***

25. 11/28 LP&P: Ch. 12, continued

26. 11/30 *identify 4th Blackboard posting to be graded*

LP&P: Ch. 13. Science, Politics, and Ethics of Community Intervention

27. 12/5 International & critical community psychology [readings TBA]

28. 12/7 Last class: Community intervention experiences presented;

--- 12/13 Community intervention experience reflections and logs due