

COURSE SYLLABUS
Systems Theory and Analysis
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Rutgers University
Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology (GSAPP)
Spring 2024

Instructor: Germán A. Cadenas, PhD

Class Meeting: Psych 307

Class Times and Dates: Wednesdays 2pm to 4:45pm

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Office Hours: Wednesdays at noon and by appointment (in person or virtual)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The goals of this course are to help students: a) use systems theory to better understand and deal with the social forces that affect them and their clients; b) become familiar with the organizational dynamics of schools, clinics, hospitals, and other human service organizations; c) learn about how systems concepts are used as a theoretical foundation for work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; d) become familiar with the systemic factors that affect the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based treatment programs; e) learn about the basic principles of community psychology and prevention; and f) become familiar with evidence-based prevention programs. Specifically, we will explore:

1. What is systems theory? *Systems of psychology*. Learn about how systems concepts are used in *cognitive psychology* and as a theoretical foundation for work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
2. What are the social impacts when systems fail? *Social aspects of behavior*. Use systems theory to better understand and deal with the social forces that affect clinical psychologists and their clients, contributing to *individual differences in behavior, human development, psychopathology, cultural and individual diversity, systems of oppression, and health disparities*.
3. What can we do to fix it? *Dissemination and implementation science*. Become familiar with the systemic factors that affect the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based treatment programs and clinical interventions. Become familiar with the organizational dynamics of schools, clinics, hospitals, and other human service organizations where clinical psychologists work. Design a systems intervention using systems theory.

TEXT AND READINGS

Required Text: Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Case, A.D., Scott, V.C., & Wandersman, A. (2020). *Community Psychology: Linking Individuals and Communities* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

<https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/community-psychology-fourth-edition?tab=2>

Required Readings: Readings from additional primary sources will also be provided on Canvas or can be

acquired via the library. These readings are listed in the weekly course outline.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

1. Active Engagement (20 points)

A total of 20 points are allocated toward active engagement in the course throughout the semester. This is reflective of [Rutgers university's Course Attendance Policy](#). Given that the course is largely discussion-based and participatory, active engagement is critical to promote learning. Thus, active engagement includes attending every class meeting, arriving to class on time and staying until the end, responsiveness to instructor and peers, completing assigned readings prior to class meetings, being responsive during dialogues, being supportive to peers, self-reflection, and openness to dialogue and group discussions. If unforeseen and extenuating circumstances may prevent class attendance and engagement, please contact me prior to missing a class.

2. Systemic Change Community Project: Paper (30 points)

This group assignment is worth 30 points and it is designed to further develop skills as a scholar, to collaborate with peers in the class, and to develop a community project addressing a critical systemic issue (ex: racism in educational practices, sexism in the workplace, queer rights in the context of anti-LGBTQ policies, interpersonal conflict and cultural differences in a family unit, health disparities among immigrant communities, lack of access to mental health services based on income and poverty) in collaboration with a community partner (ex: community organization, school, health center, mental health agency, social activism campaign advocacy group, policymakers). To do this, small groups of students (3-4 per group) will fuse academic knowledge and community participation to create the project. The goal is to address a systemic issue impacting a population or community of interest to the student group, to establish a connection with a community partner serving this population/community, to interview this community partner and learn about their needs and strengths, to review the extant relevant literature on this issue, and to articulate how the student group would develop an intervention project addressing this issue in collaboration with the community organization.

Student groups will meet weekly during class, and as needed outside of class, to develop this project. Throughout the semester, the student group will develop a comprehensive 10-page paper (APA style, double-spaced, before references). The paper is to be written for a broad audience, including practitioners, scholars, and community members. The content of the paper is to be grounded in systems theory, fact-based information and research, and interviews conducted with the community partner. Please read the following suggested guidelines and structure for this paper.

Guide and Suggested Structure for the Paper

	Guide	Length	Points Allocated	Due Date
a)	Identify a systemic issue that impacts a population or community of interest to the student group and make the case as to why it is a problem. Conduct a literature review highlighting what is known about this issue in the academic literature and what has been done to address it	4 pages	10 points	February 26
b)	Contact a potential organization partner serving this community directly (ex: community agency, school,	2 pages	5 points	March 26

	school district, college/university, etc.) and conduct an interview with them to better understand the needs and strengths of this population/community. Provide a summary of the interview and what you learned			
c)	Using your systems theory, review of literature, and understanding of the needs/strengths of the population/community of interest, describe the development of an intervention project that addresses the issue identified by the student group. Please center your intervention at any ecological level (ex: individual, group, institutional, district, neighborhood/city/state, social, political). Please feel free to be creative and to place the intervention at a level (e.g., individual, group, institutional, community, city, state, national) that maximizes positive impact and resources.	4 pages	10 points	May 6
APA style	The paper is to be consistent with APA publication guidelines, including 1 inch margins, Times New Roman font, 12 pt. font size, double spacing paragraphs, use of in-text citations and reference page, use of heading and subheading rules	10 pages	5 points (1/2 point per page)	On each due date above

3. Systemic Change Community Project: Presentation (20 points)

The student groups will prepare and deliver a 20-minute presentation describing the community project and how it was developed. The presentation is to include reflections on what was learned about systems theory from engaging with a community partner, and the major takeaways from this experience. Student groups will also present the project to their community partner and will seek feedback on the project. The presentation will be accompanied by PowerPoint slides and any other visual aids of the group's choice. This assignment is worth 20 points and presentations will take place during the last 2 days of class (4/23 and 4/30).

4. Written Reflections on Community Scenarios (30 points)

Each chapter in the Kloos et al. (2020) textbook begins with an Opening Exercise that offers a real-life scenario or example in which psychologists could find themselves applying their skills for systems change. This assignment provides an opportunity for students to choose 2 of these scenarios reflect upon how they would approach it as psychologists. The goal is for students to demonstrate how they would conceptualize the issue in the scenario, how they would collaborate with the community that is described, and the solutions and interventions for systems change that they would offer. **Students may answer the questions (What Do you Think?) posed at the end of the Opening Exercise. Each written reflection has a maximum of 2-pages in length.** Each written reflection is worth 15 points and can be submitted anytime throughout the semester (final due date is 4/30).

GRADES

Letter grades for the semester are assigned following Rutgers University's [Grades and Symbols Policy](#) and GSAPP's [Grading Processes](#). In this course, grades are based on the total number of points students receive in the 4 assignments above. There are a total of 400 points possible. The following legend describes the allocation of grades based on total points:

A	= 93 - 100 points	(93% +)	B+	= 87 - 89 points	(87-89%)
A-	= 90 – 92 points	(90-92%)	B	= 83 - 86 points	(83-86%)
			B-	= 80 - 82 points	(80-82%)
C+	= 77 - 79 points	(77-79%)	F	= 70 and below	(< 70%)
C	= 70 – 76 points	(70-76%)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All written assignments will be submitted through Canvas. - Written assignments are automatically checked for plagiarism and originality built-in tools within Canvas. - Written assignments should follow APA style guidelines (7th edition). - Assignments are due at the beginning of each class on the date assigned. A letter grade is deducted from total assignment grade each day an assignment is late. - Exceptions are possible under extreme circumstances; please contact me prior to missing a due date to discuss any barriers to completing assignments. 					

APA PROFESSION-WIDE COMPETENCIES & DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

This course aims to facilitate the following (bolded) Profession-Wide Competencies as outlined in the [Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology](#):

- i. **Research**
- ii. **Ethical and legal standards**
- iii. **Individual and cultural diversity**
- iv. **Professional values, attitudes, and behaviors**
- v. **Communication and interpersonal skills**
- vi. **Assessment**
- vii. **Intervention**
- viii. **Supervision**
- ix. **Consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills**

The course is also designed to facilitate the following (marked with an asterisk *) [Competency Benchmarks in Professional Psychology](#):

1. ***Professional Values and Attitudes:** as evidenced in behavior and comportsment that reflect the values and attitudes of psychology.
2. ***Individual and Cultural Diversity:** Awareness, sensitivity and skills in working professionally with diverse individuals, groups and communities who represent various cultural and personal background and characteristics defined broadly and consistent with APA policy.
3. ***Ethical Legal Standards and Policy:** Application of ethical concepts and awareness of legal issues regarding professional activities with individuals, groups, and organizations.
4. ***Reflective Practice/Self-Assessment/Self-Care:** Practice conducted with personal and professional self-awareness and reflection; with awareness of competencies; with appropriate self-care.
5. ***Relationships:** Relate effectively and meaningfully with individuals, groups, and/or communities.

6. ***Scientific Knowledge and Methods:** Understanding of research, research methodology, techniques of data collection and analysis, biological bases of behavior, cognitive-affective bases of behavior, and development across the lifespan. Respect for scientifically derived knowledge.
7. ***Research/Evaluation:** Generating research that contributes to the professional knowledge base and/or evaluates the effectiveness of various professional activities.
8. ***Evidence-Based Practice:** Integration of research and clinical expertise in the context of patient factors.
9. **Assessment:** Assessment and diagnosis of problems, capabilities and issues associated with individuals, groups, and/or organizations.
10. ***Intervention:** Interventions designed to alleviate suffering and to promote health and well-being of individuals, groups, and/or organizations.
11. ***Consultation:** The ability to provide expert guidance or professional assistance in response to a client's needs or goals.
12. **Teaching:** Providing instruction, disseminating knowledge, and evaluating acquisition of knowledge and skill in professional psychology.
13. **Supervision:** Supervision and training in the professional knowledge base of enhancing and monitoring the professional functioning of others.
14. ***Interdisciplinary Systems:** Knowledge of key issues and concepts in related disciplines. Identify and interact with professionals in multiple disciplines.
15. ***Management-Administration:** Manage the direct delivery of services (DDS) and/or the administration of organizations, programs, or agencies (OPA).
16. ***Advocacy:** Actions targeting the impact of social, political, economic or cultural factors to promote change at the individual (client), institutional, and/or systems level.

CLASS FORMAT

This course meets weekly for approximately 2.75 hours during the designated day and time. The course is designed to meet in person, with flexibility for virtual meetings and remote learning due to unrepresented circumstances, such as changes related to COVID-19. The course is envisioned to function as a largely discussion-based one, with high emphasis on dialogue centered on assigned readings and students' self-reflection. The course also has an applied component, which is particularly facilitated by developing a community project in small groups. Multimedia content and hands-on activities are also used to support learning objectives.

POLICIES: COURSE, GSAPP, & UNIVERSITY

This course is designed to provide an inclusive and intellectually stimulating learning environment that affirms the university mission: *"Rutgers is dedicated to teaching that meets the highest standards of excellence, to conducting research that breaks new ground, and to providing services, solutions, and clinical care that help individuals and the local, national, and global communities where they live."* This entails that instructional practices are guided by [Rutgers University's Academic Policies](#) and by [GSAPP Policies and Procedures](#).

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to display academic integrity in all aspects of the course, including in written assignments, class dialogues, presentations, and collaboration with the community. If in doubt about whether something would violate academic integrity, please contact me. I am available to consult and discuss academic integrity and tips for ensuring originality in your work. This course follows Rutgers University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Resources for students regarding academic integrity, identifying and

avoiding academic dishonesty, citations, and writing instructions can be found in the [Academic Integrity – New Brunswick website](#).

Rutgers Librarians: Students may contact a Rutgers Librarian for assistance and guidance with assignments, academic integrity (e.g., developing references and citations), and access scholarly materials. GSAPP is covered by Samantha Kannegiser:

- [Library](#): Samantha Kannegiser, Student Success Librarian, Liaison to Business, Economics, Childhood Studies, and Psychology, [Paul Robeson Library](#), Rutgers-Camden
- Link to schedule meeting: <https://libcal.rutgers.edu/appointments/samantha>
- Phone number: (856) 225-2832 (leave a message);
email: samantha.kannegiser@rutgers.edu
- <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/ask>

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Given the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in academic settings, this course follows the [Guidance on the use of AI at Rutgers](#). This course is designed to promote critical thinking and intellectual development among graduate students at Rutgers. To this end, it is expected that all written materials submitted by students will be created by them and will be original work. In accordance with [Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy](#), it is expected that students will create original work “without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations.” While [AI technologies at Rutgers](#) are available and are permissible to be used by students, it is the expectation that students will not use more than 10% assistance from AI in developing any material or assignment for this course.

Religious Holiday Policy

All religions and spiritual beliefs are equally respected and welcomed in this course. Please contact me to make any accommodations in the event you will miss class for religious or spiritual reasons. This course follows [Rutgers University’s Religious Holiday Policy](#).

Students with Disabilities

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and [provide documentation](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’s disability services office will provide you and your instructor with a Letter of Accommodations. Please discuss the accommodations with your instructors as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the [registration form](#).

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

In this course, we acknowledge that learning takes place in Piscataway, on the land of the [Lenape peoples](#).

All students are welcomed, affirmed, and respected in this course, including students from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education and in psychology, and those who are underserved and marginalized in society at large. This includes racially and ethnically minoritized students (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color), students from low socioeconomic households and communities, women and gender minoritized students, students with disabilities, students who are immigrants or from international backgrounds, and students who identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and allies (LGBTQIAA), among many other groups.

As an advocate for educational equity, I can assist in connecting with resources on campus to concerns that may interfere with your student success. Rutgers provides several [resources to support the success of all students](#). Moreover, the [Cultural Collaborative](#) within the Division of Student Affairs hosts a number of [diversity and inclusion initiatives](#) and centers that offer safe spaces, programming, and advocacy. These include the Asian American Cultural Center, Center for Latino Arts and Culture, Center for Social Justice Education and LGBTQ Communities, and the Paul Robeson Cultural Center.

COURSE TIMELINE & READING LIST

Week	Date	Topics	Community Project Stage	Readings and Assignments
1	1/22/25	Introductions, Multicultural Guidelines	Brainstorm Systemic Issues	Clauss-Ehlers, C. S., Chiriboga, D. A., Hunter, S. J., Roysircar, G., & Tummala-Narra, P. (2019). <i>APA Multicultural Guidelines</i> executive summary: Ecological approach to context, identity, and intersectionality. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 74(2), 232–244. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000382
2	1/29/25	Systems of Oppression & Liberation Psychology	Choose Systemic Issues and Form Groups	<p>Chavis, A. Z., & Hill, M. S. (2008). Integrating multiple intersecting identities: A multicultural conceptualization of the power and control wheel. <i>Women & Therapy</i>, 32(1), 121-149, DOI: 10.1080/02703140802384552</p> <p>Montero, M., Sonn, C. C., & Burton, M. (2017). Community psychology and liberation psychology: A creative synergy for an ethical and transformative praxis. In M. A. Bond, I. Serrano-García, C. B. Keys, & M. Shinn (Eds.), <i>APA handbook of community psychology: Theoretical foundations, core concepts, and emerging challenges</i> (pp. 149–167). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/14953-007</p> <p>Singh, M.N., Gudiño, O.G. Translating Liberation Psychology for Children and Adolescents from Historically Marginalized Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds: A Synthesis of the Literature. <i>Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev</i> 26, 65–81 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-022-00416-1</p>
3	2/5/25	Community Psychology	Begin Literature Review	Chapters 1 and 2 in in Kloos et al., (2020) text
4	2/12/25	Community Research	Continue Literature Review	Chapters 3 and 4 in Kloos et al., (2020) text
5	2/19/25	Understanding Communities	Identify Potential Community Partners	Chapters 5, 6, and 7 in Kloos et al., (2020) text Group Working Session – Identifying a Community Partner

6	2/26/25	Collective and Community Responses to Challenges	Share Insights from Literature Review	*Due: Literature Review for Community Project Chapters 8 and 9 in Kloos et al., (2020) text
7	3/5/25	Prevention	Develop Interview Protocol	Chapters 10, 11, and 12 in Kloos et al., (2020) text
8	3/12/25	Community and Social Change	Prepare/Conduct Interview	Chapters 13 and 14 in Kloos et al., (2020) text Cadenas, G. A., Morrissey, M. B., Miodus, S., Cardenas Bautista, E., Hernández, M., Daruwalla, S., Rami, F., & Hurtado, G. (2022). A model of collaborative immigration advocacy to prevent policy-based trauma and harm. <i>Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy</i> . Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001330
9	3/19/24	Spring Recess – No Class Meeting		
10	3/26/25	Family, Couples, and Group Interventions	Share Insights from Interview	*Due: Interview with Community Partner von Sydow, K., Beher, S., Schweitzer, J., & Retzlaff, R. (2010). The efficacy of systemic therapy with adult patients: A meta-content analysis of 38 randomized controlled trials. <i>Family process, 49</i> (4), 457-485. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01334.x Burlingame, G. M., Fuhriman, A., & Mosier, J. (2003). The differential effectiveness of group psychotherapy: A meta-analytic perspective. <i>Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 7</i> (1), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.7.1.3 Navarro, J.L., Tudge, J.R.H. Technologizing Bronfenbrenner: Neo-ecological Theory. <i>Curr Psychol 42</i> , 19338–19354 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02738-3
11	4/2/25	Social Determinants of Health	Discuss Theory to Guide Intervention	Donkin, A., Goldblatt, P., Allen, J., Nathanson, V., & Marmot, M. (2018). Global action on the social

				<p>determinants of health. <i>BMJ Glob Health</i>, 3(Suppl 1), e000603. doi: 10.1136/bmigh-2017-000603</p> <p>Braveman, P., Egerter, S., & Williams, D. R. (2011). The social determinants of health: coming of age. <i>Annual review of public health</i>, 32, 381-398. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031210-101218</p>
12	4/9/25	Vocational, Industrial and Organizational Psychology	Discuss Intervention Parameters and Implementation	<p>Gelfand, M. J., Aycan, Z., Erez, M., & Leung, K. (2017). Cross-cultural industrial organizational psychology and organizational behavior: A hundred-year journey. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>, 102(3), 514–529. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000186</p> <p>Duffy, R. D., Blustein, D. L., Diemer, M. A., & Autin, K. L. (2016). The Psychology of Working Theory. <i>Journal of Counseling Psychology</i>, 63(2), 127–148. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000140</p>
13	4/16/25	Educational Equity	Discuss Assessment of Intervention	<p>Ledesma, M. C., & Calderón, D. (2015). Critical Race Theory in Education: A Review of Past Literature and a Look to the Future. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>, 21(3),206222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825</p> <p>Jemal, A. Critical Consciousness: A Critique and Critical Analysis of the Literature. <i>Urban Rev</i> 49, 602–626 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0411-3</p>
14	4/23/24	Review & Project Presentations		*Due: Community Project Presentations
15	4/30/25	Project Presentations		<p>*Due: Community Project Presentations</p> <p>*Due: Reflections on Community Scenarios</p>
16	5/6/25	<p>Week of Final Exams – No Class Meeting</p> <p>*Due: Community Project Paper</p>		