

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY • WOODRING COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY STUDIES • HUMAN SERVICES  
PROGRAM

**Human Service Professionals and Community Systems**  
HSP 404 (4 credits)

**Instructor:**

Dr. Brett Coleman



**Catalogue description:**

Study of community systems in relation to human services systems. Emphasis on analyzing theories of community change and examining the roles of human services professionals in communities.

**Learning outcomes:**

1. Analyze community systems and structures; design and evaluate processes to initiate and sustain change through specific strategies, tactics, activities and social policy advocacy.
2. Summarize the historical roots of community development and organizing, advocacy, and social movements.
3. Record, assess, and reflect on experiences with community and the influence of human services values, attitudes, and ethics in relationship to community change.
4. Analyze the systemic issues related to culture, diversity, and social class in the context of community systems.

**Real talk:**

This course is inspired partly by two quotes from the “father” of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (that’s him in the picture).



Lewin said, “If you want to understand something, try to change it.” In this class, we will collaboratively and systematically examine a problem associated with university life, with the goal of trying to create the change necessary to solve that problem. We may succeed, or we may fail. Either way, we will learn a lot about what the words *community* and *systems* mean.

Lewin also said, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.” One cannot change anything without a theory about how to do it. A “theory” is just a set of ideas about how things work. For example, when you are hungry you need to know what food is (and is not), how to get it, and how to prepare it in a way that you can eat it without getting sick. Without a theory of finding, preparing, and eating food, you would die from consuming Lego pieces or poison ivy.

As we examine the university (or some part of it) as a community system, we will apply theoretical concepts to help us understand what that system is, the nature of its problems, and to figure out how to respond to its problems. The best case scenario is that we will contribute to the transformation of university life towards something that is more socially just than what we have now. Ready?

### **How it works:**

This class is based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model. PAR is based on the assumption that members of a community (that's us) are quite knowledgeable about their problems and the solutions to those problems. Combining that *community knowledge* with "academic" or "expert" knowledge (e.g., theory and methodology) can empower the community to control its own destiny, particularly by amplifying the voices of its most disempowered community members.

### **The PAR project:**

This quarter we will pick up where last quarter's class left off. Last quarter's students identified the issue of WWU's response to sexual assault as the community problem to study and intervene in. Their initial round of research revealed some important findings and raised some additional questions that we will engage with this quarter. To that end, here's what we will do:

1. Review the research conducted last quarter and determine how we should proceed this quarter.
2. Collaborate to further develop strategies to understand the *systemic* nature of the problem by applying concepts related to systems theory.
3. Based on that understanding, collaborate to develop strategies to address that problem based on theories of change and community organizing.

Although it is unlikely we will be able to make any significant change in a single quarter (but maybe we will, who knows), if we do good work the next quarter's students will be able to pick up where we left off. Over time, the result could be shaking things up around here (in a good way). I have redesigned this class in this way largely in response to students' complaints about the lack of seriousness and challenge in so many college classes, and their desire to "do something real" in a class like this. This is an opportunity to do something quite real, if you're up for it. But it will only work if we all contribute fully to the process and operate as a team.

## **READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

PAR is an *iterative* process, which means that not everything can be planned ahead of time. Instead, the direction of the project is shaped by what happens at each stage. Therefore, the readings and assignments for this course –as well as their timing- will depend largely on what we decide to do and how we decide to do it. That being said, we will operate according to a basic framework to help get us started and keep us on track throughout the quarter.

### **Readings:**

All of the readings for this class will be provided as pdf files for free. There are no textbooks to buy (you're welcome). Because the aim of this class is to understand *community systems* and their relationship to the Human Services professions, we will read some of the relevant theory about both *community* and *systems*. Those will include some or all of the following:

- Bronfenbrenner, *Ecology of Human Development*
- Brydon-Miller et al., *Why Action Research?*
- Foster-Fishman, *Putting the System Back in Systems Change*

- Kelly, *Towards an Ecological Conception of Preventive Interventions*
- Homan, *Theoretical Frameworks for Community Change*
- Perkins & Long, *Sense of Community and Social Capital*
- Nelson, *Community Psychology and Transformative Policy Change in the Neo-liberal Era*
- Rubin & Rubin, *A Thumbnail Sketch of the History of Community Organizing*
- Yosso, *Whose Culture Has Capital?*

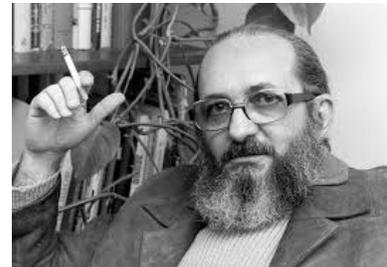
Additional readings specific to PAR methodology will also be assigned. The list of readings below may be adjusted to meet the needs of our developing PAR project. That is, we may add to it, take some readings out, or replace something on the list with something more relevant to what we are doing. Because this class is *participatory* in nature, you are encouraged to suggest readings that might be useful for our project.

**\*\*IMPORTANT NOTE ON READING\*\***

You are expected to read all of the assigned reading *closely* and *actively*. Some of the readings for this class will be very dense and difficult to understand. If you find yourself struggling with a reading, that is a good sign. Don't give up on it. Out of that struggle comes intellectual growth. Think of it like a workout to build your intellectual muscles. It might not feel very good at the time, but in the end you will be stronger and healthier, intellectually. Here's the best advice I ever got for dealing with difficult readings: "*Focus on the sentences that make sense.*" If you follow that advice, it will change your life.

**Assignments:**

The assignments below are based on a theory of *praxis* as described by Paulo Freire (that's him in the picture) in the book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed\**. Praxis refers to a cycle of action and reflection meant to facilitate people's engagement with the world as active subjects involved in making the world what it is (or can be), rather than passive objects with no influence or power. Praxis leads to the development of *critical consciousness*, meaning the ability to understand sociopolitical contradictions in order to take action to change them. Praxis and critical consciousness are more collective than individual phenomena. Fuller descriptions of assignments will be posted to Canvas, including a link where you will turn them in.



(\*Note: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is not required reading for this course. But it is recommended reading for anyone interested in the relationship between education and social justice. Talk to me about getting your hands on a copy!)

*Collaborative quizzes:*

**25 points\*\***

There will be several quizzes this quarter (about five, give or take, depending on how the project develops) on anything relevant to the course (including the syllabus, readings, lectures and discussions etc.). They will be collaborative, meaning that you will be able to discuss the answers with your classmates and ask me clarifying questions. The first one will be on this syllabus, so make sure you read this whole thing so you don't let down your fellow community members.

*Defining the problem:*

**20 points**

Our first task as a group will be to review the research done last quarter and develop a shared definition of the problem we are studying, which will serve to focus our efforts moving forward. While much of this work will be done together in class, you will also

submit a brief (1 to 3 page) description of the problem that incorporates concepts from systems change theory.

*Studying the problem:*

**20 points**

Once we develop a shared understanding of the problem, we will have to develop a strategy for further study, building on the work of last quarter's students. That strategy may include continuing the data collection and analysis started last quarter, and/or collecting/analyzing new data to answer new questions raised (in the context of community based research this can include both "traditional" and "non-traditional" research methods). The work of collecting and analyzing data will be divided up into smaller parts, and accomplished by work groups assigned to each part. You will be assigned -as a member of a work group- to carry out the necessary work and present to the class what your group did. Your group's presentation should include relevant documentation (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, Word documents, etc.) that 1) incorporates relevant systems theory concepts and 2) can be revisited in the future, if need be. *It should also include strategies for holding group members accountable for their share of the work, as well as the group's accountability to individual members.*

*Responding to the problem:*

**20 points**

Based on the identification and systematic study of the problem, we will need to devise a strategy to respond to the problem in some way, including a plan to evaluate whether the response had the desired effect. Because we are interested not just in systems, but *community systems*, the response should include some form of community engagement such as organizing, consciousness raising, etc. Your work group you will submit a *response plan* that incorporates theoretical concepts relevant to understanding and organizing communities. Your response plan should be detailed and comprehensive enough that someone new to the project (like next quarter's students) could easily understand it and put it into practice. *It should also include strategies for holding group members accountable for their share of the work, as well as the group's accountability to individual members.*

*Final paper:*

**50 points**

The last assignment is intended for you to think through how the process described above (and the lessons learned from it) can be applied to the human services field generally. You will write an 8- to 10-page paper that incorporates elements from the previous assignments, applies relevant concepts from the course readings, and discusses the implications of what you learned for the human services field(s) you are most interested in. **An outline (or rough draft if you prefer) will be due on week 6 (10 points) and the final paper (40 points) will be due Monday 6/11.**

*Meeting with the professor*

**15 points**

At least one meeting with me is required by the end of the quarter. The purpose of the meeting is to give you the opportunity to check in on your understanding of the class and the material we cover, and to address any questions, problems, etc. you may have with the class, the program, or your relationship to the human services field generally. While you can discuss whatever you need to, you must come to the meeting prepared to discuss at least the following:

1. Anything from the class that you have trouble understanding, need clarification on, or just want to discuss in more depth (e.g., because you find it interesting). **(5 pts.)**

2. The usefulness (or lack thereof) of the PAR process for the human services work you are interested in doing in the future (it's okay if you're not sure what you want to do, but be prepared to discuss an idea or two). **(5 pts.)**
3. The value of understanding *community systems* for responding to the social issues you are most interested in. **(5 pts.)**

I will ask you about these three things during the meeting (and your responses to them will determine your grade for this assignment). But you should feel free to bring up anything else you would like to talk about, *relevant to the class*.

**Note:** *If you have a hard time making an in-person meeting, video or phone calls can be arranged (or even a series of emails if that's what it takes).*

*Participation and contribution*

**50 points**

In order for this class project (all social things are projects) to be even remotely successful, *your full participation is required*, and you will be expected to make the best possible contribution you are capable of to the collaboration. Because it is so important, *participation and contribution* make up about 25% of your final grade. *Participation and contribution* refer to the obvious things like, showing up to class, showing the appropriate levels of respect, being willing to challenge yourself and others, and doing what needs to be done related to the collaborative work we will do. It also means communicating with me *and your group members* if you will be unable to meet your obligations (or just need some extra help), and being willing to find an equitable solution if a member of your group (or the class in general) is not pulling their weight. The point is, we're all in this together and that depends on everyone doing their part to the best of their ability. *You are strongly encouraged to talk to me if you are having significant challenges that will get in the way of your full participation.*

**SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND POINTS AVAILABLE**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b># of Points</b>	<b>Due Date*</b>
Collaborative quizzes	25**	About every other week
Problem Description	20	April 17
Study Plan	20	April 24
Paper Outline	10	May 9
Response Plan	20	May 16
Meet w/ prof.	15	Office hours or by appt.
Final Paper	40	June 11
Participation & contribution	50	<i>Always</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200***</b>	

\*Due dates are subject to change

\*\*The number of quiz points available may change if the number of quizzes changes

\*\*\*The total points available may change depending on the number of quizzes, or other changes to the syllabus

## CLASS CALENDAR

The schedule below is a *rough estimate* of this quarter's timeline. Given the collaborative and ambiguous nature of PAR, this schedule and its contents are likely to change.

Date	Session Topics & Activities	Reading to be done before class	Assignments
<b>Week 1</b> 4/4	Course intro: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Syllabus quiz</li> <li>• Intro to community systems</li> <li>• Review last quarter's work</li> </ul>		
<b>Week 2</b> 4/11	Defining Systems and Systems Change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sense of the reading</li> <li>• Strategizing to study community issues/problems</li> </ul>	Foster-Fishman, <i>Putting the System Back in Systems Change</i>	
<b>Week 3</b> 4/18	What is Community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sense of the reading</li> <li>• Finalize plan of study</li> </ul>	Coleman, <i>Summary and Chapter 6</i>  OPTIONAL: Perkins & Long, <i>Sense of Community and Social Capital</i>	<b>Due:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem Descriptions</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b> 4/25	Studying the Problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess plan of study progress</li> </ul>	Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. <i>Why action research?</i>	<b>Due:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study Plans</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b> 5/2	Studying the Problem cont'd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sense of the reading</li> <li>• <i>From Mad House to Our House Parts 1&amp;2</i></li> <li>• Plan of study and findings presentations</li> </ul>	Nelson, <i>Community Psychology and Transformative Policy Change in the Neo-liberal Era</i>	
<b>Week 6</b> 5/9	Translating Research into Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sense of the reading</li> <li>• Developing a response plan</li> </ul>	Rubin & Rubin, <i>A Thumbnail Sketch of the History of Community Organizing</i>	<b>Due:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Paper Outline</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b> 5/16	Translating Research into Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sense of the reading</li> <li>• Developing a response plan</li> </ul>	Yosso, <i>Whose Culture Has Capital?</i>	<b>Due:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response plans</li> </ul>

<b>Week 8</b> 5/23	Implementing and Assessing Response Plans	TBD	
<b>Week 9</b> 5/30	Implementing and Assessing Response Plans	TBD	
<b>Week 10</b> 6/6	Reflecting on the Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess our progress/success</li> <li>Prep for Fall quarter</li> </ul>		
<b>Week 11</b> 6/13	<b>FINALS WEEK - NO CLASS</b>		<b>Final paper due Monday, 6/11 at 9:00 a.m.</b>

### Policies

#### **Academic Integrity**

Western Washington University expects its students to read, understand, and follow the policy and procedures regarding academic integrity as set forth in the *WWU Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedure* (see Appendix D of the University Bulletin). WWU's Integrity Website [www.wwu.edu/integrity](http://www.wwu.edu/integrity) provides all the information you need, including why integrity is important, how to promote it, as well as types of academic dishonesty and how to avoid them, *particularly plagiarism*. It also includes WWU's policy and procedures on academic honesty (appendix D of the WWU Catalog). Final papers will be automatically checked for matching text, using plagiarism detection software (TurnItIn) through Canvas. *Instances of plagiarism can receive a failing grade and be reported to the Provost's office.*

#### **Student Services**

Western encourages students to seek assistance and support at the onset of an illness, difficulty, or crisis.

- In the case of a medical concern or question, please contact the [Student Health Center](#): 650-3400
- In the case of an emotional or psychological concern or question, please contact the [Counseling Center](#): 650-3400
- In the case of a health and safety concern, please contact the [University Police](#): 650-3555
- In the case of a family or personal crisis or emergency, please contact the [Dean of Students](#): 650-3775

#### **Booze and Other Drugs**

Please don't come to class intoxicated. First of all, that's bush league! Second, if you think being drunk or high during a college class is a good idea, you're probably not good at being drunk or high; that is, you *might* have a problem and need help. If that's the case, please visit the counseling center. They will help you (plus, you're already paying for it).

### **Late Work Policy**

My policy on late work is: *Don't be late*. I will only accept assignments after the deadline if you have a *legitimate* reason for being late. Legit reasons include: illness, emergency, and social and/or emotional crisis. If you need an extension, I ask that you talk to me about it as soon as possible. I won't require documentation, but I will peer into your soul to determine if you are being truthful. Like you, my time is limited and precious. If you turn in something late without my approval, I will ignore it.

### **“K” Grade Policy**

Students who request a “K” (incomplete) grade must be doing acceptable work up until the 7th week in order to be eligible to receive an incomplete. “The grade of **K (Incomplete)** is given only to a student...when extenuating circumstances make it impossible to complete course requirements on schedule.” (Extenuating circumstances do not include mere lateness in completing work.) Students must **ask** for the “K” grade and a contract must be completed stating what must be accomplished to satisfy the incomplete. A date of completion must be specified on the contract. Students will be given the grade earned at the time of the incomplete contract minus any points associated with incomplete assignments if course work is not completed as agreed when the contract expires. Please review the statement regarding the assignment of incomplete grades in the Western Washington University Bulletin.

### **Reasonable Accommodation Policy**

It is the policy of Western Washington University to provide reasonable accommodation to the known physical, sensory, or mental limitations of qualified individuals except where such accommodation would impose undue hardship on the institution. To request accommodation, contact WWU [disAbility Resources for Students](#) at 360-650-3083. It is important to set this up by the first week of class. Also, don't hesitate to remind me if I fail to provide reasonable accommodations. As an “able” person, I have been socialized to view the world from a very limited perspective, and I appreciate being held accountable for my ignorance.