



DEPARTMENT Humanities and Social Sciences

SW2500(A3): Social Work Theories and Framework of Practice - 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land, and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

INSTRUCTOR:	Beatrice Harris	PHONE:	(780)539-2893
OFFICE:	B301	E-MAIL:	bharris@nwpolytech.ca
OFFICE HOURS:	By appointment		

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: This course introduces key social work theories and frameworks, including systems, psychodynamic, structural, and strengths-based approaches among others. Students will explore how these theories inform assessment and intervention across diverse settings. Through critical reflection and case studies, students will also develop their own personalized framework of practice, integrating theory with real-world application to enhance their effectiveness in working with individuals, families, and communities.

PREREQUISITE(S)/COREQUISITE:

Complete all of the following
SW1000, SW1010, SW1110, SW1120

REQUIRED TEXT/RESOURCE MATERIALS:

Howe, D. (2009). *A brief introduction to social work theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.

DELIVERY MODE(S): On-Campus

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe key social work theories and frameworks, including systems, psychodynamic, structural, and strengths-based approaches.
- Explain how theoretical perspectives inform assessment, intervention, and evaluation in diverse social work settings.
- Apply selected theories to case studies involving individuals, families, and communities to demonstrate understanding of theory-to-practice connections.
- Critically analyze the strengths, limitations, and cultural relevance of major social work theories in relation to practice with diverse and marginalized populations.
- Integrate personal values and professional ethics with theoretical knowledge to begin developing a personalized framework for social work practice.
- Reflect on how theory influences one's understanding of power, privilege, and oppression in social work practice.
- Demonstrate beginning competence in selecting and articulating theoretical approaches appropriate to specific practice contexts.

TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page <http://www.transferalberta.ca>

**** Grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

EVALUATIONS:

Assignment	Weight	Due Date	Format
1. Theory Exploration Project	15%	Friday, October 16	4-5 pages, APA 7th ed.
2. Personalized Framework of Practice	25%	Friday, December 1	6-8 pages, APA 7th ed.
3. Participation Self-Evaluation	15%	Monday, December 7	Self-evaluation form
Midterm Exam	20%	Friday, October 23	1.5 hours, multiple choice + short answer
Final Exam	25%	TBD	1.5 hours, multiple choice + short answer

GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most universities will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is **less than C-**.

Grading Chart

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines		Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100		C+	2.3	67-69
A	4.0	85-94		C	2.0	63-66
A-	3.7	80-84		C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	77-79		D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	73-76		D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-72		F	0.0	00-49

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings	Assignments / Notes
Week 1	Fri. Sept. 4	Syllabus and Course Overview	None - course syllabus review	
	Mon. Sept. 7	LABOUR DAY - NO CLASS		
Week 2	Fri. Sept. 11 & Mon. Sept. 14	Introduction to Social Work Theory; Psychodynamic and Attachment Theories	Ch. 1-6: Social Work Theory; Origins; Casework and Social Reform; Cause and Function; Psychoanalytic Theory; Attachment Theory	
Week 3	Fri. Sept. 18 & Mon. Sept. 21	Behavioural, Cognitive, and CBT Approaches	Ch. 7-9: Behavioural Therapies; Cognitive Therapies; Cognitive-Behavioural Social Work	
Week 4	Fri. Sept. 25 & Mon. Sept. 28	Task-Centred and Solution-Focused Practice	Ch. 10 & 12: Task-Centred Work; Solution-Focused Approaches	
	Wed. Sept. 30	NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH & RECONCILIATION (not a scheduled class day)		
Week 5	Fri. Oct. 2 & Mon. Oct. 5	Strengths-Based Practice	Ch. 13: The Strengths Perspective	
Week 6	Fri. Oct. 9	Systems and Ecological Approaches	Ch. 14: Systemic and Ecological Approaches	
	Mon. Oct. 12	THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS		
Week 7	Fri. Oct. 16 & Mon. Oct. 19	Radical and Critical Social Work	Ch. 15-16: Radical Social Work; Critical Social Work	Assignment #1: Theory Exploration Project DUE Fri. Oct. 16
Week 8	Fri. Oct. 23 & Mon. Oct. 26	Midterm Exam / Feminist, Anti-Oppressive Practice, and Empowerment	Ch. 17-18: Feminist Social Work; Anti-Oppressive Practices and Empowerment (taught Mon. Oct. 26)	MIDTERM EXAM Fri. Oct. 23
Week 9	Fri. Oct. 30 & Mon. Nov. 2	Relationship-Based and Person-Centred Practice	Ch. 19-20: Relationship-Based Social Work; Person-Centred Approaches	
Week 10	Fri. Nov. 6	Reflection, Reflexivity, and Use of Self	Ch. 21: Reflection and Reflexivity	
	Mon. Nov. 9 - Fri. Nov. 13	FALL BREAK - NO CLASSES (full week)		

Week 11	Mon. Nov. 16	Wellbeing and Contemporary Perspectives	Ch. 22-23: Wellbeing; Brains for Social Workers	
Week 12	Fri. Nov. 20 & Mon. Nov. 23	Integrating Theory into Social Work Practice	Ch. 24: Critical Best Practice	
Week 13	Fri. Nov. 27 & Mon. Nov. 30	Selecting and Combining Theoretical Approaches	Ch. 25: The Best in Theory	Assignment #2 Personalized Framework of Practice DUE Dec. 1 st
Week 14	Fri. Dec. 4 & Mon. Dec. 7	Applying Theory to Individuals, Families, and Communities / Personalized Framework of Practice / Course Wrap-Up		Assignment #3: Participation Self-Evaluation Due Dec.
Final Exam	Dec. 12 - Dec. 19	Final Exam		FINAL EXAM PERIOD - exact date TBD within this window

Note: Course schedule is tentative and may be adjusted as needed.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment #1: Theory Exploration Project

Worth: 15% of your final grade

Due Date: Friday, October 16, 2026

Length: 4 to 5 pages of written content (title page and reference page do not count)

Format: Double spaced, APA 7th edition

References: At least 2 scholarly references. Your course textbook can be one of them.

Objective

In this assignment, you will use one social work theory to help you understand a challenging situation. You can choose a situation from your personal life, your work, your studies, your volunteer experience, or your community. You do not need previous social work experience to complete this assignment.

Step 1: Choose a Challenging Situation

- Choose a situation from your personal, professional, academic, volunteer, or community experience.
- The situation can involve a conflict, a difficult decision, a relationship concern, a workplace issue, a school issue, a personal challenge, or another experience that social work theory can help explain.
- The situation does not need to be extreme or highly personal. Choose something you feel comfortable writing about.

Step 2: Choose One Social Work Theory

- Select one theory or framework from the course textbook.
- Explain why you think this theory is a good fit for your situation.

Protecting Confidentiality

You must protect the privacy of everyone involved in your situation. Please follow these steps:

1. Change all names and identifying details.
2. Do not name any workplace, school, agency, organization, or community if doing so could identify someone.
3. Change small details when needed to protect people's privacy. This is allowed as long as it does not change the main lesson of your paper.

Sections to Include in Your Paper

Use clear headings to organize your paper. You can use the section names below as your headings.

1. Introduction

Briefly introduce the situation. Identify the main challenge. State the theory you chose and explain why you chose it.

2. Overview of the Theory

Explain the main ideas and assumptions of the theory in your own words. Briefly explain how social workers use this theory in practice.

3. Description of the Situation

Describe what happened, who was involved, and any important background information. Identify any strengths, supports, or resources that were present in the situation.

4. Applying the Theory

Explain how the theory helps you understand the situation. Discuss what the theory helps you notice, what factors seem important, and how the theory changes the way you understand what happened.

5. Cultural, Social, and Ethical Considerations

Discuss any cultural, social, structural, or ethical factors that matter in this situation. Only include the factors that are relevant to your situation.

6. Strengths and Limitations of the Theory

Explain what the theory helps you understand well. Explain what the theory may overlook or not fully explain.

7. Conclusion

Summarize how the theory helped you understand the situation. Explain whether you found the theory useful, and why.

Reminder: This assignment is not simply a report about a social work theory. The focus of your paper should be applying the theory to your chosen situation. Use examples from your situation to show how the theory helps you understand, assess, and respond to what happened.

Guiding Questions

Use these questions to guide your writing. You do not need to answer every question directly or in order.

- What happened, and what was the main challenge?
- How does your chosen theory help explain the situation?
- What does the theory help you notice or understand differently?
- What additional information would you want to know?
- What response or intervention might be helpful?
- How does that response connect to the theory?

- What cultural, social, structural, or ethical factors should be considered?
- What are the strengths and limitations of using this theory?

Submission

4. Upload your completed assignment to Brightspace by the due date.
5. Check that the correct file was uploaded successfully before you leave Brightspace.

A detailed grading rubric will be provided separately.

Assignment #2: Personalized Framework of Practice

Worth: 25% of your final grade

Due Date: December 1, 2026

Length: 6 to 8 pages, double spaced (title page and reference list do not count)

Format: APA 7th edition

Objective

The purpose of this assignment is to integrate your course learning into a personalized framework for social work practice. You will identify the area of social work in which you hope to practice and examine how your values and theoretical perspectives will guide your work.

Your paper should be personalized. Throughout each section, include specific examples, experiences, or reflections from your own life or field experience, not just a general description of theory. Papers that stay only at the theoretical level, without personal examples, will lose marks.

Assignment Instructions

Develop a personalized framework of practice that addresses each of the following sections:

1. Introduction

- Identify the area of social work practice in which you hope to work, such as child and youth services, healthcare, addictions, community practice, or work with individuals experiencing intimate partner violence.
- Explain why you are interested in this area of practice.
- Briefly introduce the primary and secondary theories you have selected.

2. Personal, Social, and Professional Values

- Examine how your personal, social, and professional values have influenced your choice of practice area.
- Discuss how your experiences, identity, beliefs, culture, or worldview may shape your approach to social work practice.
- Identify any potential value conflicts or biases that you may need to remain aware of in practice.

3. Primary Theory

- Select one theory or practice model that will primarily guide your social work practice.
- Describe the theory's central concepts and assumptions.
- Explain why this theory is appropriate for your chosen area of practice.

Example: a student interested in working with women experiencing intimate partner violence might select feminist theory as their primary theoretical perspective.

4. Strengths and Limitations of the Primary Theory

- Critically examine the strengths of your selected theory.
- Discussing its limitations, including any populations, experiences, or social conditions it may not fully address.
- Consider whether the theory is culturally responsive and appropriate for working with diverse individuals, families, groups, and communities.

5. Secondary Theory or Practice Model

- Select a second theory or practice model that complements your primary theory.
- Explain how the secondary theory addresses limitations or gaps in the primary theory.
- Describe how the two theories can be integrated into a coherent framework for practice.

Example: trauma-informed practice (primary) combined with strengths-based practice (secondary). The second theory helps re-center a client's capabilities alongside the first theory's focus on the impact of trauma.

6. Application to Social Work Practice

Demonstrate how your personalized framework would inform your work with:

- Individuals
- Families or groups
- Communities or organizations

Provide practical examples of how your selected theories would influence assessment, relationship building, intervention, advocacy, and decision making within your chosen area of practice.

You do not need to address every combination of client system and practice activity. Choose the examples that are most relevant to your practice area and discuss them in depth, rather than covering all of them briefly.

7. Conclusion

- Summarize the main components of your personalized framework.
- Explain how this framework will support reflective and effective social work practice.
- Identify how your framework may continue to develop as you gain further knowledge and professional experience.

Suggested Length Guide

As a rough guide for pacing your writing across the 6 to 8 pages, keep the Introduction and Conclusion concise (about half a page each). Sections 3 through 6 (Primary Theory, Strengths and Limitations, Secondary Theory, and Application to Practice) should form the bulk of your paper, with Application to Practice typically being your longest section.

Research Requirements

Your paper must include:

- The course textbook, cited in at least two different sections of your paper (for example, in your discussion of theory and in your application section), not only in the introduction.
- At least four scholarly, peer-reviewed sources, published within the last 5 years (2021 to present) where possible.

Use APA 7th edition for all in-text citations and references. The title page and reference list are not included in the 6 to 8 page requirement.

APA Formatting Reminders

- Double spacing throughout

- Page numbers in the top right corner
- 0.5-inch paragraph indentation for new paragraphs
- Proper APA title page (title, your name, course, instructor, date)
- Reference list on its own page, alphabetized, with hanging indents

A detailed grading rubric will be provided separately.

Assignment #3: Participation Self-Evaluation

Worth: 15% of your final grade

Due Date: Monday, December 7, 2026

Objective

This assignment gives you a chance to reflect on your attendance, participation, and engagement throughout the course.

Instructions

- Near the end of the course, you will receive a Participation Self-Evaluation Form.
- Use the form to reflect on these five areas: attendance and preparation for class, participation in class discussions and activities, participation in group work, engagement with course materials, and contributions to a respectful learning environment.
- For each area, write specific examples from the course. Do not just say "I participated well." Instead, describe what you did and when.
- After completing the form, suggest a participation grade that you believe you earned.
- Submit your completed form

How Your Grade Will Be Decided

Your instructor will review your self-evaluation alongside your actual attendance and participation records. Your instructor may adjust your suggested grade. The final decision belongs to the instructor.

Reminder: Your suggested grade must be supported by honest reflection and specific examples. General statements without examples will not be accepted. The instructor makes the final decision on your participation grade.

Midterm Exam

Date: Friday, October 23, 2026

Time Allowed: 1.5 hours

Format: Multiple-choice and short-answer questions

Worth: 20% of your final grade

The exam will have two parts:

- Part A: Multiple Choice. Each question will have one correct answer.
- Part B: Short Answer. Answer each question in a few sentences or a short paragraph. Some questions may ask you to apply a theory or concept to a brief social work scenario.

Chapters and Concepts Covered: A detailed study guide will be provided

Final Exam

Date: TBD

Time Allowed: 1.5 hours

Format: Multiple-choice and short-answer questions

Worth: 25% of your final grade

Exam Format

The exam will have two parts:

- Part A: Multiple Choice. Each question will have one correct answer.
- Part B: Short Answer. Answer each question in a few sentences or a short paragraph. Some questions may ask you to compare theoretical approaches or apply a theory to a brief social work scenario.

Chapters and Concepts Covered: A detailed study guide will be provided

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, arrive prepared, and participate actively in course activities and discussions.

Being prepared includes completing assigned readings, reviewing course materials, and completing any required activities before class. Students are expected to contribute respectfully to discussions and engage with perspectives, experiences, and ideas that may differ from their own.

Students are also responsible for monitoring Brightspace regularly for course announcements, readings, assignment instructions, due dates, grades, and other important course information.

Late Assignments

Unless prior arrangements have been approved by the instructor, a 5% deduction will be applied for each calendar day an assignment is submitted late.

Students experiencing circumstances that may affect their ability to meet a deadline are encouraged to contact the instructor as early as possible.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Students are not permitted to use generative artificial intelligence tools to write, rewrite, paraphrase, or substantially produce written assignments for this course unless the instructor has provided explicit permission for a specific activity.

Examples of generative AI tools include ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, Claude, and similar technologies.

Written assignments must reflect the student's own thinking, analysis, and writing. Submitting AI-generated or substantially AI-produced work as one's own may be addressed as an academic integrity concern in accordance with Northwestern Polytechnic policies.

If students are unsure whether a particular use of AI is permitted, they should ask the instructor before using the tool or submitting the assignment.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic integrity is an important part of the learning environment. Students are expected to complete their academic work honestly and in accordance with Northwestern Polytechnic policies.

Academic misconduct may include, but is not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, submitting work completed by another person, unauthorized use of artificial intelligence, or using other unauthorized materials or technologies.

For definitions of academic misconduct, procedures, and possible consequences, students should refer to Northwestern Polytechnic's Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy and related academic policies available through the Polytechnic's Policy Directory:

<https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/polytechnic-leadership/policies-directory>

Note: Academic and administrative policies are available through the same Policy Directory.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Students are responsible for reviewing the course syllabus, assignment instructions, grading rubrics, and information posted on Brightspace throughout the semester.

If clarification is needed regarding course expectations, assignments, permitted use of technology, or other course policies, students are encouraged to contact the instructor before the applicable deadline.