

## **Introduction to Social Work (SW-2570-002) Sp25**

Comprehensive and ranked list of the primary themes students addressed when reflecting on the top three concepts they learned in the first half of *Introduction to Social Work*. These themes are ordered from the most commonly mentioned to the least frequent.

### **1. Strength-Based Perspective**

- Students frequently highlighted the importance of focusing on a client's strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- Many emphasized how this approach builds confidence and empowers clients to take control of their own growth.
- This perspective was often linked to self-determination and empowerment.

### **2. Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Levels of Social Work**

- Many students learned about the three levels of social work and their applications.
- They recognized how social work extends beyond individual (micro) interactions to include mezzo (families/groups) and macro (policy/community) interventions.

### **3. Self-Determination and Client Empowerment**

- A significant number of responses discussed how social workers should guide rather than "fix" people.
- Many noted the importance of allowing clients to make their own decisions while providing support and resources.

### **4. Poverty as a Root Cause of Social Issues**

- Numerous students acknowledged poverty as a central issue affecting many social problems.
- Some connected poverty to broader systemic barriers, such as homelessness, substance use, and domestic violence.

### **5. Ecosystems Perspective / Systems Theory**

- Many students learned about the interconnectivity of social, environmental, and biological factors affecting individuals.
- They recognized that a person's situation is influenced by multiple external forces.

### **6. Roles of Social Workers Beyond Child Welfare**

- Several students were surprised to learn about the variety of roles social workers play beyond child protective services.
- Some mentioned roles in mental health, healthcare, policy advocacy, and criminal justice.

## **7. Core Values of Social Work (NASW Code of Ethics)**

- Some students emphasized learning about the six core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.
- A few reflected on how these values shape professional practice.

## **8. Cultural Competency and Inquisitiveness**

- Many recognized the importance of understanding different cultures to provide effective and respectful services.
- Some connected this concept to courses outside of social work, such as African American history or religious studies.

## **9. The Reality of Social Work (Challenging but Necessary Work)**

- Some students expressed newfound appreciation for the complexity and emotional challenges of social work.
- A few mentioned how their perspectives shifted on social issues after exposure to class discussions and real-world examples.

## **10. Systemic Barriers to Social Mobility**

- Several students noted that individuals are often held back by structural barriers rather than personal failings.
- Some connected this insight to the need for policy changes and advocacy.

## **11. Intersectionality and Social Justice**

- A few students learned about intersectionality and how multiple marginalized identities influence a person's experiences.
- Some also mentioned how social workers engage in social justice work beyond direct client interactions.

## **12. The ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) Population**

- A few students found the ALICE framework eye-opening in understanding how many people struggle despite being employed.
- Some noted how income thresholds for assistance programs create unintended hardships for low-income families.

## **13. Social Work's Connection to Policy and Advocacy**

- Some students realized that social work involves more than direct service—it also includes advocating for systemic change.
- A few expressed a newfound interest in policy work.

#### **14. The Phrase “Life is Messy, and People are Even Messier”**

- Several students found this class mantra particularly meaningful.
- They noted that it helped them understand human complexity and the unpredictability of social work practice.

#### **15. The Role of Social Workers in Healthcare**

- A few students were surprised to learn that patient advocates and healthcare social workers play a crucial role in supporting clients.

**Midterm Exam responses from students:** *This was a reflection. No APA formatting required, nor points deducted for grammar/spelling; students could use bullet points when answering the question.*

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The 3 concepts I would say I have learned most about would be generalist social work, strength-based practice, and the importance of self-determination.

-Generalist social work involves intervening in all parts of a client's life to ensure that all factors are accounted for, whether its family members or workplace environment. This approach allows progress to be made with a client's growth as the social worker prioritizes paying attention to each facet of life. This can also include focus on the mezzo scale with communities and macro scale with policymaking.

-Strength-based practice primarily covers using a client's skills and abilities they already have to help build them up. Client's do not want to be felt sorry for, so it's important for a social worker to allow a client to express themselves through their own passions and strengths.

-Self-determination involves allowing the client to make the changes in their own life while the social worker takes the position of a guide or aide. Social workers can't "fix" people, but people can help themselves by growing and taking steps to become better.

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In the first half of this semester, the strengths based perspective, roles of social workers outside of dcs, and cultural inquisitiveness were the top 3 things learned.

1. the strengths based perspective is a way that social workers can help people who feel they are good at nothing to see that they are in fact good at some things, therein gaining a higher sense of self confidence

2. some roles of social workers outside of dcs are working in therapeutic settings, such as mental health therapy, and working in social policy advocacy such as working to obtain reform on social welfare systems

3. cultural inquisitiveness is used in social work to find out how to properly help a client while adhering to the rules of their culture.

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I have learned a lot over the perspective of the course so far. The number one thing that I've learned would be Micro, Mezzo and Macro. These all represent different ways of helping people in the social work field. Micro represents individual work with a client, Mezzo is group help so like if an immediate family counseling session. Last but not least is Macro which is community help within the field and that could simply be public speaking about social work. The next thing I learned was simply "Life is messy and people are even messier" you have drilled this to us since day 1 and it simply means that no matter what occurs in your life, it doesn't have to shape you.

The last thing is strengths based perspectives which is focusing on a client's strengths in order to build them back up from a hard time.

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. Systematic Barriers keep people from attaining goals they seek, not every one is just lazy and unwilling but they are being held back by barriers from becoming better

. poverty is the root cause for most of the worlds problems, poverty causes homelessness, drug abuse, domestic abuse, etc. If we find some way to assist with poverty and economic issues, we can better help most of the other issues that stem from poverty

. finding one issue and addressing it does do good, but it is not the best course of action. This course of action can only be done as a residual approach. To truly help someone you must identify their own strengths and work to bring hem out and empower them. A person must be willing to help themselves to get better.

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The three concepts that I have learned this half of the semester are the six core values of social work, the three principal's levels of social work, and last but not least the grands challenging, specially the most common one "Poverty"

The six core values of social work really helped me understanding what social work is real about. The first four core values are the required homework that me as a profession has to do to my client for example: services-- it's a must for me to come up with anything, any resource for my client to get what they need. Social justice -- help requires me to treat my client fairly regardless of their gender or race. Dignity and worth of the person is a profession act that requires to me to understand that everyone as values and I as profession should treat them with respect and dignity regardless of the situation. Importance of human relations understanding the client's relations ships and always lives a room for "person straintent" so that my client can decides for themselves. And the last two are for a social work to keep improving as professionals, gaining knowledge and skills.

The three principals levels of social work are Micro, Mezzo, Macro; founded in t=system theory three Ms emphasizes identifying which levels is the social work working in. Micro is working with individuals, families, and smalls groups, while Mezzo is working with organizations like schools to provide council. and Macro is to work with larger groups.

the grand challenging surprised me a lot knowing that poverty is the main issue that cause all this other challenges. i really never thought of that. it helps me because is something i will always be challenging myself in findings ways to reduce poverty

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The three concepts that I learn this first half of the semester is learning about how poverty is the number 1 issues in social problems. It explain why there's so many programs for finacal aid like food stamp, WIC for baby stuff, and unemployment aid. Also how strengths-based perspective allow clients have the capacity to solve their problems and that social workers should focus on enhancing those capacities. Finally, how Ecosystems Perspective connect to the phrase "life is mess but people are even messier", Coble 2025.

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The first of three concepts is the ecosystems approach, which is taking into consideration a person's biological, spiritual, socioeconomic, and general environmental factors that affect their health alongside what care they will need. Another concept that has stuck out to me has been self-determination. Anyone who is receiving help has to have the motivation to make changes in their life, nobody can force them; all I can do is show somebody how to do something, I cannot make them do it. This goes hand-in-hand with the strengths-based perspective, which focuses on the thing an individual is good at, builds on those, and acts as a springboard for them to make necessary changes in their lives.

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Due to my childhood and personal experiences, not much that I have learned in this class this semester is new to me. However, I was not aware that social work covered as much as it did. I was under the impression that social work was strictly child welfare. This course has taught me that almost all mental health issues, drug problems, and so much more also fall under social work. Even as a child who had both good and bad experiences with dcs, I thought social workers were just meant to either say a child is safe at home or remove them from the home. It has been so interesting learning that they are more rounded around equality and helping those in need to find the resources for them.

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One that stuck with me is the dignity and worth of a person. Because a lot of people get torn down in this world and they shut the world out and don't get the resources they need. So, it's important to make the person feel wanted, respected, and important. Showing them no matter what they still matter, and they can still strive in life. Showing professional behavior, a lot of times we can go places and not get that professional behavior out of that worker, and it makes you not want to return to that establishment. If we make sure we're also being professional no matter the circumstances it gives not only a good look on our job, but it shows we can work through those tough situations and still so respect. How life is messy, and people are messier, and this is so true so I love that you taught us this saying because it helps me remember I'm not always going to make everybody happy, I might not always get it right but if I continue to follow my guidelines then I can be a great social worker.

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Within this first half of the semester, I have discovered that my passion for social work has not been misplaced. The theories and concepts I have learned has reinforced my interest. The first concept is intersectionality, which means that every marginalized group a client is associated with "intersects" to make them who they are. Residual approach means using direct support as a last resort whenever all other measures have failed. Finally, cultural competency is being educated on different cultures to tailor your responses and resources to your client (in fact, I am taking an African American history class and an introduction to religious studies class for this purpose).

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The top thing I have learned in Intro to Social Work so far is not necessarily a topic we have learned in class but a second nature topic that you learn while learning the right ways to do things. I have noticed that there is a huge gap in the social work path and there is a huge need for good social workers. There are so many people being left without help that needs to be fixed. Another big takeaway for me was how huge of a problem poverty is for us in the state of

Tennessee. It affects so many life that you do not even realize it touches. The lack of help in this area makes me want to fight for this that much harder. Another thing that has really stuck with me is as we talk and travel to these services around Murfreesboro, it really opens your eyes to what is going on in your community around you that you might not have noticed before. After this first half of the semester in this class, my point of view has really changed on a lot of things that I did not even realize were problems before hand.

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The top three things I have learned is....

1. I have learned that you can't help someone until they have hit rock bottom for themselves. This means that unless the client is ready to get them the help, they need and resources that social workers can provide for them, then they aren't going to get better. They need to want it for themselves.
2. I have been able to learn more about types of families and how even though it seems great, all of these families struggle just as much as any other, if not more. Understanding more types and their disadvantages helps me to understand an insight on someone just based on their type of family.
3. Lastly, I have learned that social work is not just a fun little job you get to do just because you think it is easy. Social work is so much more to that. You are helping shape people's lives by your help and resources.

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The core competencies of social work first shocked me that there are so many issues, then empowered me because there are so many different individuals, groups and communities and that we as social workers can support and intervene with policy practice. Secondly, the ALICE presentation was eye opening, the statistics of childhood and family income is shocking. The poverty line is incredibly ineffective and more deserves needing communities that must stay below a certain income level to continue receiving support, a family could lose \$500 a month from a \$5 pay raise. Lastly, the most impactful thing I heard this semester was "you fix no one," this really simple statement has made a huge difference in my life personally and I am sure that it will impact me professionally. Meaning that you can't make people change, only give them resources to make better choices; it is incredibly easy for me to slip into a role of trying to make someone's life better for them but this very simple statement brought me out of that pattern.

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The top three concepts that I have learned in Social Work so far would be the importance of self-determination, poverty, and cultural competence. I have learned that self-determination is the principle that clients are free to make their own decisions and that it is not the social worker's job to try to fix and change everyone. All the social worker does is provide guidance and empower clients to make their own decision that they think is best. I learned that poverty is the root of all social issues in social work and can lead to issues such as substance abuse and depression. I also learned about what cultural competency was and how it is important when working with clients from different backgrounds. Cultural competence, or cultural awareness, is having an understanding of different cultural backgrounds of the clients that you are working with to be able to provide services that are relevant to your client and build a trusted connection with clients.

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In the first half of this semester, I have learned so much but there are three concepts that have been engraved in my head. Strength-based perspective is one and it focuses on building and enhancing existing skills the client already has. This is one of the ways that helps client find what they are good at. Empowerment is also very important and goes hand in hand with strength-based perspective since it is building the client up and showing them that there are good resources and skills out there and not just bad. Also, advocacy is the action of trying to show other social worker and the public that issue is a problem and there needs to be more resources for those individuals who didn't have it at first.

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During the first half of this semester, I was able to expand my knowledge of social work greatly. I learned the 6 core values of social work. Dignity and worth of each person, integrity, social justice, service, importance of human relationships, and competence. I also learned that when assisting clients, we often can refer them to larger organizations to gain further help if needed. This can include Domestic Violence Centers, Rehabilitation Centers, and further therapy if needed. Another key takeaway that I have learned is that poverty is the root cause for problems. I also learned that when dealing with a client, it is crucial that you understand and evaluate their backgrounds because this has an effect on how they react and deal with situations.

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The three concepts that I have learned in this class

- Understanding that social workers are not limited to working in a certain area, and that they can be found working in hospitals, schools, and other places in the community.

- I learned how social work can have a role in criminal justice. When dealing with situations of abuse or assault, social workers . After learning that, it made sense why social work, psychology, and criminal justice are in the same academic building.

- I learned about what micro, mezzo, and macro is in social work terms. Micro is one-on-one which could mean (example: a social worker communicating with a client about their needs), Macro is a individual with a group of people (a social worker communicating with a small group of individuals to discuss their needs, could be a family), and macro, which is a social worker coming together to help out a community.

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The ecosystems approach expands upon things I either already knew from the varied people in which I have in my life or have interacted with through my life, everyone knows the world based on where they come from and their own experiences. But getting more details on how the immediate and general society in which a person grew up in or their parents grew up in broadens the possibilities of how many things we have to take in consideration when dealing with people as not just a profession but in daily life. The role that social workers play in the health care system goes beyond what I had realized, I did not know that patient advocates were social workers and finding this out actually makes me more likely to utilize them if needed in the future as I was apprehensive in the past not realizing that their role was actually ethical and for the purpose of advocating me and not just to protect the hospital as I previously believed. Most important to myself, learning about how interactive social work is with social policy and the importance to social justice for a social worker to be informed on such policies. This was not something I had considered previously when I knew I was going to minor in Social Work.