

SOWK 499

**SPECIAL TOPICS: ADOLESCENT GANG INTERVENTION
(Undergraduate Course)**

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Children and Families in Urban America Minor Special Topics series will offer students in the college and undergraduates in the minor an opportunity to engage in an area of interest. Special Topics will emphasize current issues that are pressing social problems affecting communities, families, and individuals. Further, these will be areas that are challenging human service workers to provide evidence based interventions and policies. Special Topic areas will focus on Los Angeles and other urban areas. Each Special Topic area will integrate community agencies and institutions within the curriculum to provide hands on experiences for students.

There are more than 400 active gangs in the Los Angeles area with an identified 39,000+ individuals. Gang violence in the past five years has resulted in thousands of violent crimes including homicides, felony assaults, rape, and robberies. During the last five years, there has been an increase in the issue of youth gangs in Los Angeles. Because of this, the growing concern has been on what interventions have been successful as well as what prevention programs may work. This class will examine evidence-based examples of such interventions and prevention programs. This course will center on the incidence of gangs (particularly in the Los Angeles area), gang interventions, and policies developed to address the growing gang situation.

The course will be centered on providing foundation knowledge on gang life and culture, theories of gang involvement, historical context of gangs in Los Angeles, and current interventions and policies in areas addressing the gang “epidemic.” Attention will be given to empirically based theories and frameworks that under-gird strengths-based, empowerment and resiliency-oriented practice. In particular, the course will be concerned with how research has been translated into actual practices (as well as the proof of success or weaknesses of such programs).

Students will interact with human service providers in the area of gang intervention at a micro, mezzo, and macro level. Partnerships with Communities in Schools (CIS), the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office Ad Hoc Committee on Gang Violence and Youth Development, and the LAPD will provide

information and add to student experiences. Students will participate in a community project with one of these partners. The course is organized according to a project based learning model to help students critically analyze gang interventions and policies. This method will also utilize real world problems.

Given the mission and purpose of social work, the course integrates content on the values and ethics of the profession as they pertain to gangs in Los Angeles. Special attention is given to the influence of diversity as characterized by (but not limited to) age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability and religion. The course makes important linkages between course content and social work practice, policy, research, and field instruction.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of the course, students will be able:

1. To critically evaluate the history and incidence of gangs among youth in Los Angeles.
2. To formulate working definitions of the various theories of gang involvement and intervention.
3. To critically analyze the socio-historical-political contexts from which these theories and perspectives emanated and their relation to the social work profession.
4. To develop the analytic tools necessary to integrate and apply multiple, interdisciplinary perspectives using the project based learning method and/or other learning formats.
5. To identify the special influence of diversity (e.g., age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability and religion) on gang culture and peer development.
6. To demonstrate understanding of the influence of interactions among individuals as well as the interactions between individuals and families, groups, organizations, communities, institutions, and larger systems to promote or protect from gang culture.
7. To demonstrate understanding of intervention approaches used by law enforcement, community programs, and schools.
8. To demonstrate understanding of current research and policies in dealing with gang activity in Los Angeles.
9. To develop the facility for oral and written expression and analytic thinking necessary for professional social work practice.

III. COURSE FORMAT

The course will encompass a combination of diverse learning modalities and tools which may include, but are not limited to the following: didactic presentations by the instructor; small and large group discussions; case studies; videos; guest speakers; experiential exercises; and computer-based online activities. The course will primarily utilize a project based learning modality. Students will be challenged to work on real life issues around gangs, partnering with the community organizations. Since students will be using a project based learning modality, formal lectures will be held once a week and workshop sessions (to work on projects) will be held once a week (equaling two meeting times per week).

The online teaching and learning environment provided by the University's Blackboard Academic Suite™ System (<https://blackboard.usc.edu/>) will support access to course-related materials and communication.

IV. COURSE EVALUATION AND GRADING

All students are expected to regularly attend class and be on time. A student with more than two unexcused absences during the course of this class may receive a *no credit*. A student who is tardy three or more times to class may receive a grade of no credit. If a student receives a *no credit* grade in this seminar, they will be required to repeat this class.

Grades pertaining to the assignments and course grades will be based on the following rubric:

93 – 100	A
90 – 92	A-
87 – 89	B+
83 – 86	B
80 – 82	B-
77 – 79	C+
73 – 76	C
70 – 72	C

The student's grade will be based on the following evaluations:

5%	Class Participation
25%	Written Reflections (3 written reflections will be assigned throughout the course).
25%	In Class Midterm
20%	Group Project and Presentation
25%	Take Home Final

Complete details regarding the assignments and due dates will be handed out in class.

V. ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected to attend every class and to remain in class for the duration of the session. Failure to attend class or arriving late may impact your ability to achieve course objectives that could affect your course grade. Students are expected to notify the instructor by telephone or email of any anticipated absence or reason for tardiness.

University of Southern California policy permits students to be excused from class, without penalty, for the observance of religious holy days. This policy also covers scheduled final examinations which conflict with students' observance of a holy day. Students must make arrangements *in advance* to complete class work, which will be missed, or to reschedule an examination, due to holy days observance.

VI. COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Students are expected to attend class sessions, complete all reading assignments, participate in class discussions and activities, submit work on the date and time specified by the instructor, and contribute to an atmosphere of mutual respect and civil discourse. Students will be expected to regularly access their email accounts and/or Blackboard accounts for posted messages, documents, etc., and any other avenue of communication requested by the class instructor.

VII. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Scott, M.K. (2004). *Monster: The autobiography of an L.A. gang member*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Fremon, C. & Brokaw, T. (2004). *G-Dog and the Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the gangs of East Los Angeles*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Articles will be available via the Blackboard system. Articles will be posted no later than the week before they are assigned and can be found in a folder labeled by week under “course documents.”

VIII. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. *Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible.* DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

IX. EMERGENCY RESPONSE INFORMATION

To receive information, call main number (213) 740-2711, press #2. “For recorded announcements, events, emergency communications or critical incident information.”

To leave a message, call (213) 740-8311

For additional university information, please call (213) 740-9233

Or visit university website; <http://emergency.usc.edu>

If it becomes necessary to evacuate the building, please go to the following locations carefully and using stairwells only. Never use elevators in an emergency evacuation.

University Park Campus

MRF – Lot B

SWC – Lot B

WPH – McCarthy Quad

VKC – McCarthy Quad

City Center

Front of the building (12th & Olive)

Orange County Campus

Faculty Parking Lot

Skirball Campus

Front of building

Do not re-enter the building until given the “all clear” by emergency personnel.

COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

NOTE: Readings published before 2000 have been carefully scrutinized and are included in the syllabus because they provide key or seminal information for the overall course content.

January 12: SESSION 1A: Introduction to Course

Welcome and introductions
Introduction to the course
Overview of the learning contract/syllabus

January 14: SESSION 1B: Definition and History of Gangs

Defining gangs
History and function of gangs in the U.S.
The rise of gangs in Los Angeles
Gangs in Bay Area, Orange County, Riverside, and San Diego

Workshop: Media Depictions of Gangs

Students will choose from the following films: “American Me,” “Boys N the Hood,” or “Mi Vida Loca.” They will be asked to write a reflection paper (details to be handed out in class).

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Chapter 1: The Changing Boundaries of Youth Gangs, pp. 3-18.

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1: Gang Prevalence, Proliferation, and Migration, pp. 3-67.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 1: Defining and Measuring the Prevalence of Gangs, pp. 1-28.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1: Introduction: Comparative and Historical Perspectives, pp. 3-11.

Bjerregaard, B. (2002). Self-definitions of gang membership and involvement in delinquent activities. *Youth and Society*, 34(1), 31-55.

January 19: SESSION 2A: NO CLASS — Martin Luther King’s Birthday

Required Reading:

Scott, M.K. (2004). *Monster: The autobiography of an L.A. gang member*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

January 21: SESSION 2B: Workshop

Students will be trained to examine and analyze demographics of a community in Los Angeles with an identified gang problem.

January 26: SESSION 3A: Anatomy of a Gang

What do gangs “look” like
Organizational structure
Language and symbolism
Gang stereotypes

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Chapter 11: “A cross cultural framework for understanding gangs in Los Angeles.”

Decker, S., Katz, M., & Vincent, W. (2008). Understanding the black box of gang organization: Implications for involvement in violent crime, drug sales, and violent victimization. *Crime Delinquency*, 54.
(<http://cad.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/54/1/153>)

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5: Gang Structures and Group Processes, pp. 162-208.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 3: The Gang Experience, pp. 61-81.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 6: The Structure of the Gang, pp. 70-89.

McGloin, J. M. (2007). The organizational structure of street gangs in Newark, New Jersey: A network analysis methodology. *Journal of Gang Research*, 15(1), pp. 1-34.

January 28: SESSION 3B: Field Trip

Details to be given in class

February 2: SESSION 4A: Culture and Contexts of Gangs

Socialization
Peers
Joining and initiation
Risk Factors
Codes

Required Readings:

Vigil, J.D. (1983). Chicano gangs: One response to Mexican urban adaptation in the Los Angeles area. *Urban Anthropology*, 12 (1) p. 45-75.

Lane, J. & Meeker, J. (2000). Subcultural diversity and the fear of crime and gangs. *Crime and delinquency*. 46(4), 375-417.

Davis, M. (2006). *City of Quartz: Excavating the future in Los Angeles*. Paris: Verso. Chapter 5: Rise of Gang Culture.

Vigil, J. D. (2003). Urban violence and street gangs. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 32, pp. 225-242.

Howell, J. C., & Egley Jr., A. (2005). Moving risk factors into developmental theories of gang membership. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3(4), pp. 334-354.

February 4: SESSION 4B: Culture and Contexts of Gangs (continued)

Social institutions

Community contexts

Ecological perspective

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Chapter 6: Introducing Hoover: I'll Ride for You, Gangsta', pp. 83-100.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 6: Gangs and Social Institutions, pp. 123-140.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 8: The Ecological Context, pp. 110-128.

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4: Individual-Level Context: Risk Factors for Joining Gangs, pp. 139-161 and Chapter 6: Community Contexts, pp. 209-227.

February 9: SESSION 5A: Illegal Activities and Gangs

Criminal behaviors

Violence and theft

Economic considerations and factors

Drug trafficking

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 1, Chapter 3: Initiation of Drug Use, Drug Sales, and Violent Offenders. Part 2, Chapter 7: Gangs and the informal economy

Decker, S. H. (2007). Youth gangs and violent behavior. In D. J. Flannery, A. T. Vazsonyi, & I. D. Waldman (Eds), *The Cambridge handbook of violent behavior and aggression*, (pp. 388-402). New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4: Gangs, Drugs, and Violence, pp. 43-54.

Curtis, R. (2003). The negligible role of gangs in drug distribution in New York City in the 1990s. In L. Kontos & D. Brotherton (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. (pp. 41-61). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

February 11: SESSION 5B: Field Trip

Details to be given in class

Reflection Exercise

Students will be asked to visit a Rehabilitation Center in their area and complete a reflection exercise: Details handed out in Feb 9th class.

February 16: SESSION 6A: NO CLASS — President's Day

February 18: SESSION 6B: Substance Use, Abuse, and Gangs

Alcohol and drug use

Shared risk factors of substance abuse, gang activity, and violence

Prevention and intervention programs

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 1, Chapter 3: Initiation of Drug Use, Drug Sales, and Violent Offenders.

De La Rosa, M., Rugh, D., & Rice, C. (2006). An analysis of risk domains associated with drug transitions of active Latino gang members. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 25(4), pp. 81-90.

Rainone, G. A., Schmeidler, J. W., Frank, B., & Smith, R. B. (2006). Violent behavior, substance use, and other delinquent behaviors among middle and high school students. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 4(3), pp. 247-265.

De la Rosa, M. (2005). Substance abuse among Puerto Rican and Dominican gang members in a small city setting. *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, 5(1/2), 21-43.

Current handouts from NIDA (Drug related violence research)

February 23: SESSION 7A: Gender and Gangs

Girl gangs

Gender roles within gangs

Girls and violence

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 3, Chapter 12: The girls in the gang: What we've learned from two decades of research.

Eghigian, M. & Kirby, K. (2006). Girls in gangs: On the rise in America. *Corrections Today*, 68(2), 48-50.

Valdez, A. (2007). *Mexican American girls and gang violence: Beyond risk*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapters 6-8.

Excerpts from: Miranda, M. (2003). *Homegirls in the public sphere*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 5: Female Gang Involvement, pp. 95-121.

Nurge, D. (2003). Liberating yet limiting: The Paradox of female gang membership. In L. Kontos & D. Brotherton (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. (pp. 161-182). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Brotherton, D., & Salazar-Atias, C. (2003). Amor de reina! The pushes and pulls of group membership among the Latin Queens. In L. Kontos & D. Brotherton (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. (pp. 183-209). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

February 25: SESSION 7B: Field Trip
Details to be given in class

March 2: SESSION 8A: Gang Theory
Strain Theory
Cultural Deviance Theories
Control Theory
Social Learning Theory
Rational Choice Theory
Critical Theory

Required Readings:

Sheldon, R., Tracy, S., & Brown, W. (2003). *Youth gangs in American society*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press. Chapter 6: Theories Around Gangs

Brotherton, D. (2008). Beyond social reproduction: Bringing resistance back in gang theory. *Theoretical Criminology*, 25(1), 71-85.

Freng, A. & Finn-Aage, E. (2007). Race and gang affiliation: An examination of multiple marginality. *Justice Quarterly*, 24(4), 600-629.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 10: Theoretical Perspectives, pp. 145-170.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 8: Gang Theory and Policy, pp. 165-179.

Klemp-North, M. (2007). Theoretical foundations for gang membership. *Journal of Gang Research*, 14(4), pp. 11-26.

March 4: **SESSION 8B: Field Trip**
Details to be given in class

March 9: **SESSION 9A: Gangs in American Society**
Inequality
Poverty
School Systems
Social Supports

Required Readings:

Sheldon, R., Tracy, S., & Brown, W. (2003). *Youth gangs in American society*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press. Chapter 7: Gangs in Context: Inequality in American Society

Vigil, Diego (2002). *A Rainbow of gangs*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Brotherton, D. (2003). Education in the reform of street organizations in New York City. In L. Kontos & D. Brotherton (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. (pp. 136-157). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 16: Social Opportunities: Education and Jobs, pp. 262-280.

March 11: **SESSION 9B: Field Trip**
Details to be given in class

March 16: **NO CLASS — Spring Break**

Required Readings:

Fremon, C. & Brokaw, T. (2004). *G-Dog and the Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the gangs of East Los Angeles*, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press.

March 18: **NO CLASS — Spring Break**

Required Readings:

Fremon, C. & Brokaw, T. (2004). *G-Dog and the Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the gangs of East Los Angeles*, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press.

March 23: **SESSION 10A: Community Gang Interventions**
Risk focused
Social development strategies
School based strategies
Community based strategies

Required Readings:

Venkatesh, S.A. (2001). *The social outcomes of street gang involvement*. Unpublished manuscript.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/a0/5f.pdf

Venkatesh, S.A. (1999). Community-based interventions into street gang activity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(5), 551-567.

Meacham, M., & Stokes, T. (2008). The life development of gang members: Intervention at various stages. *The Forensic Examiner*, 17(1), pp. 34-39.

Elizalde, T. M., & Ramírez, G. A. (2008). Effective *intervention* with gangs and gang members. In C. Franklin, M. B. Harris, & P. Allen-Meares (Eds). *The school practitioner's concise companion to preventing violence and conflict. The school practitioner's concise companions.* (pp. 141-156). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.

Goldstein, A.P. & Kodluboy, D.W. (1998). *Gangs in schools: Signs, symbols, and solutions.* Champaign, IL: Research Press. Part 2 Effective Interventions: Chapters 6-8, pp. 103-216.

March 25: SESSION 10B: Workshop

Students will be trained in researching Evidence Based Practice Interventions. Details will be provided in class on March 23rd.

March 30: SESSION 11A: Community Gang Interventions (continued)

Required Readings:

Vigil, Diego (2002). *A Rainbow of gangs.* Austin: University of Texas Press. Chapter 10: Arturo's Story, "Where is my father?"

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 4, Chapter 17: New Approaches to the Strategic Prevention of Gang and Group-Involved Violence, pp. 271-286.

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (1998). *Confronting gangs: Crime and community.* Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. Chapter 7: Responding to Gang-Related Crime and Delinquency, pp. 141-163.

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies.* New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 3: Six Major Gang Control Programs, pp. 88-136.

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies.* New York: NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7: Multiple Goals for Gang Control Programs and Policies, pp. 231-245.

April 1: SESSION 11B: Podcast

Students will be asked to listen to a podcast on gang intervention policy.

April 6: SESSION 12A: Gang Policies

Legal interventions
Role of gang task forces

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 4, Chapter 16 and 18: Gang Research and Public Policy

Barajas, F. (2007). An invading army: A civil gang injunction in a Southern California Chicana/o Community. *Latino Studies*. 5(4), 393-408.

Katz, C. (2007). The establishment of a police gang unit: An examination of organizational and environmental factors. *Criminology*, 39(1), 37-74.

Klein, M. W., & Maxson, C. L. (2006). *Street gangs, patterns and policies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 8: A Model for Policy Changes, pp. 246-266.

Siegel, L. (2003). Gangs and the law. In L. Kontos & D. Brotherton (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. (pp. 213-227). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction Strategy:
http://www.ci.la.ca.us/mayor/myrpress/mayormyrpress27452222_04182007.pdf

Gang Intervention Model (hand-out)

April 8: **SESSION 12B: Workshop**
TO BE ANNOUNCED

April 13: **SESSION 13A: Global Perspectives**
International gang issues
Impact of migration and immigration on gangs
Impact of immigration policies on gangs
Gangs and terrorism

Required Readings:

Carlsson, Y., & Decker, S. H. (2005). Gang and youth prevention and intervention: Contrasting the experience of the Scandinavian Welfare State with the United States. In S. H. Decker & F. M. Weerman (Eds.), *European street gangs and troublesome youth groups*, (pp. 259-286). Landam, MD: Altamira Press.

Hand-outs from Los Angeles Summit on International Gangs

April 15: **SESSION 13B: Workshop**
Students will use this week to refine multi-media presentations (to be presented at the end of the course).

April 20: **SESSION 14A: Forward Looking Trends**
Next steps
School involvement
Possible partnerships for interventions

Youth empowerment

Required Readings:

Huff, R. (2001). *Gangs in America III*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Part 3, Chapter 14: Chinese gangs: Familial and cultural dynamics. Part 4, Chapter 17: New Approaches to the Strategic Prevention of Gang and Group involved violence.

Gardner, T., Dishion, T., & Connell, A. (2008). Adolescent self-regulation as resilience: Resistance to anti-social behavior with the deviant peer context. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36(2), 273-285.

- April 22: SESSION 14B: Workshop**
TO BE ANNOUNCED
- April 27: SESSION 15A: Student Presentations**
- April 29: SESSION 15B: Student Presentations and Wrap**
- May 11: Final Exam Due**