Community Assessment and Intervention Planning Assignment

Conducting an assessment is a fundamental step in any social work or change process. This assignment allows students to conduct a basic community and agency assessment (see homepage | links). Students are expected to use data that is readily available from secondary sources, i.e., books, the library, the Web, or via telephone requests for information. However, if no secondary sources of data are available, students may use primary sources, e.g., interviews with key stakeholders. Students will be expected to share their findings in class as the semester progresses. It is recommended that the grading checklist be reviewed before submitting each section. Feedback will be provided on drafts of assignments emailed at least one week prior to the due date.

Section 1: Condition of concern/social problem (committee)

This section of the assignment allows your committee to specify a condition of your interest and discuss it as a social problem. It contains information such as, but not limited to, the following.

1. The definition of the condition of concern followed by discussion of the following.
   a. Implications of the definition
   b. Who defines the condition of concern as a problem and why
   c. Is there consensus or disagreements that the condition is a problem?
2. A vision statement that gives your group’s ideas on the people and system that might exist if the condition/problem was eliminated.
3. A list of your committee’s guiding principles for intervening in the condition/problem.
4. What is known or not known about the history and causes of the condition/problem.
   a. What is know about communities that have the condition or that never have the condition/problem, that is, what risk and protective factors are associated with the condition?
   b. The politics of the condition/problem. Assessing politics involves examining power, money, and authority related to the condition.
5. Who typically has the problem, extent of the problem, etc?
   a. What national incidence and prevalence data, rates, and norms exist, e.g., one in 10,000 will be a victim.
   b. Is the problem increasing or decreasing?
6. What communities who have the condition/problem typically do about the problem and what has been successful (best practices, model programs, comprehensive services or continuum of care (see course pack: Continuum of Care Concept Handout).
7. A list of the capacities, needs, and barriers identified in this section of the assessment. If none were identified in this section, do not list any. These lists are summaries; they should not present new information. Often what seems like a need might really be a barrier to services or to solving the problem. For example, residents might not need a new service, only transportation to an existing service. Fear and racism might be preventing natural problem solving mechanisms from occurring in a community. You remove barriers differently than you meet needs. Often times, few resources are required to remove barriers.

Section 2: Community experiencing the condition (committee)

This section allows your committee to assess the community experiencing the condition/problem. The course Web site contains many links to relevant data sources. This section includes information such as, but not limited to, the following.

1. Description of the community experiencing the condition in terms of geography, citizens (age, gender, ethnicity, income, etc.) values, beliefs, stories, myths, and any other feature you
feel is important. The assessment can be of a geographic or interest based community, or combination of both. What makes the community a community according to class readings? Who views the community as a community and who does not. Data sources vary from demographics about the community to opinions by a typical resident. A drive or walk around is suggested if it makes sense.

2. What evidence exists that the community is experiencing the condition/problem, e.g., stories in the media, testimony before committees, expert opinion, beliefs, comparisons to national norms, secondary data, primary data, etc. Try to tie the characteristics of the community mentioned in item #1 above to the characteristics of the condition/problem or typical community experiencing the condition in section 1. For example, if you know that a certain ethnic group has a low rate of domestic violence and that ethnic group dominates your community, you would expect low domestic violence and fewer needed services.

3. How well does the community function based on specific criteria (see the course pack reading on Community Well Functioning)?

4. What community forces support change and what forces oppose change? For example, one force is community values. Another discussed throughout this course is diversity. You might discuss the diversity of you community in terms of culture, age, income, and education and whether that diversity is a capacity or need.

5. What stakeholders are associated with this condition/problem in the community? Discuss each stakeholder's proclivity for and against intervening in the condition/problem. For stakeholders that are service delivery providers, only mention them and the fact that they will be described in the next section.

6. The capacities, needs, and barriers identified in this section of the assessment.

If you search and cannot find some of the information above, do not be too concerned. You have identified a need for new information or research.

Section 3: Current service delivery system (committee)

Before you can intervene into the condition/problem your community is experiencing, you need to understand the existing service delivery system. This section contains information such as, but not limited to, the following:

1. A list of agencies/programs and their services under the headings in your continuum of care identified in section 1 #6. Often an inventory of existing agencies can be developed from the Yellow Pages or the Blue Book of United Way. Sometimes a “First Call for Help” or “Help Hotline” has a complete listing of agencies, programs, and the services each program provides. The Web also contains much information about agencies.

2. For the five most relevant service providers, list the agency name, location, mission, programs, services, number served, trend data, and any eligibility requirements. The intent here is to use secondary sources of data to address all the items in this section with the exception of the detailed analysis of a major agency, which should be able to be handled by a phone call to the agency. You should determine if SSW intern is with the agency and work with the intern if possible.

3. A detailed analysis of one major agency. Provide the vision, mission, goals, objectives, service programs, the number served in each program, the number on waiting lists for each program, organizational chart, budget, and evaluation mechanisms. This is a mini agency assessment. Include in this mini-analysis any conclusions you are able to make about the agency in terms of capacities, needs, barriers, and recommended changes.

4. Evidence that current service delivery system (all agencies combined) is effective, e.g., agency evaluations, best practices followed, etc? Present the criteria for success and the evidence that agencies are successful. Note that reduction of the problem or client change are the most difficult measures of success to obtain. A successful program may be one with a
more “user friendly” intervention as measured by high use or client satisfaction. Other evidence on effectiveness can come from the following.

a. The course pack systems theory reading applies systems theory to the SSW as gives some results of the analysis. A successful system according to systems theory would include one with a goal that provides overall direction, feedback, evaluation and control mechanisms, etc. You might look for system characteristics such as community goals, community planning, cross cutting services, strong feedback and control mechanisms, boundary spanning activities, and the linking of information/services via web sites.

b. Compare the existing service delivery system to any model or successful systems/services, or to systems in ‘model’ communities identified in section 1.

c. Compare the services in your community to the continuum of care in item 1. What services are missing or seem inadequate from this analysis?

5. List the capacities, needs, and barriers identified in this section of the assessment.

Section 4: Assessment and Intervention Plan (individual)

The final product contains the essential information from sections 1-3 above along with new information such as listed below. Put text from sections 1-3 that has already been graded in blue. It will not be regarded but all identified problems must be fixed. In addition, it will be graded on how well it fits together as an assessment. Look at the grading criteria for details. This paper should have at least 4 pages of new content. Put all new and revised text in black. Any wording from the example in the course pack should reference the course pack.

1. A one page executive summary that summarizes the essence of the whole report.

2. An introduction that describes your committee, its sanction, key stakeholders, the process used to assess the condition and develop the plan, and your committee’s vision and guiding principles.

3. A description of the condition/problem, the community experiencing the condition, and the current service delivery system.

4. A summary list of capacities, barriers, and needs in priority order. As before, do not go beyond the data presented, i.e., each capacity, need, and barrier should be traceable to supporting logic or evidence in your assessment. Include the process and criteria for developing your priorities.

5. A statement of goals and objectives (outcome and process) to build on the capacities and meet the needs. You can use planning, action, and development intervention strategies in your process objectives.

6. Possible strategies that could be used to implement the community goals and objectives along with any recommendations that the committee wants to make. These might address the political realities of the condition/problem and implementation. Be sure recommendations are supported by the information in your assessment.

7. A conclusion that reiterates the key points and calls for future action, if needed.

8. A reference list containing the resources used and documents cited in the paper.

The Final Assessment and Intervention Plan should be 15 pages excluding the cover page, table of contents, and reference list. It can be single spaced, but should be well formatted and easy to read. Use type no smaller than Times Roman font size 11. The intervention plan (5-8 above) should comprise approximately five pages of the document.

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