EPE 674: Theories of College Student Development

Development, Redeveloped: Redesigning a Graduate Course on College Student Development

Course Overview

This course is an examination of theories and related research that inform our understanding of patterns of student growth and development during college years. This course examines major bodies of theory related to college student development and the contexts in which that development occurs. The course entails course readings, participation in online discussions, essay writing, conducting literature reviews, and a group project.

This is a graduate-level course that primarily serves students in our MS in Higher Education and PhD in Studies in Higher Education programs.

Goals for Course Redesign

- ☑ Give learners clear expectations for what they should know or do by the end of each module
- ☑ Make major project instructions and materials clear and easy to follow so learners can focus on the skill, not the logistics
- ☑ Help learners identify, review, and retain the most critical content
- ☑ Strengthen instructor presence

1 *Redesign Highlight*

Created module-level learning objectives and included them in the Module Overview pages within the course, and module wrap-up to-do checklists to help learners move through the course with ease

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- **Explain foundational and contemporary cognitive development frameworks** by describing how students' capacity for meaning-making, epistemic reasoning, and relationship to knowledge changes and deepens over time.
- **Analyze how students at different cognitive developmental stages experience academic and co-curricular environments differently** — including classrooms, advising relationships, and other high-stakes meaning-making contexts.
- **Apply cognitive development theory to student affairs practice** by designing or evaluating approaches that meet students where they are developmentally while intentionally supporting growth toward greater complexity and self-authorship.

Accomplishments

After completing this module, I have:

- ☑ Explained foundational and contemporary cognitive development frameworks.
- ☑ Analyzed how students at different cognitive developmental stages experience academic and co-curricular environments differently.
- ☑ Applied cognitive development theory to student affairs practice.
- ☑ Continued to work on Theory in Practice Project
- ☐ Continued to work on Voice Project

2 *Redesign Highlight*

Created weekly announcements and "My Thoughts" audio clips

Kayla Johnson AUTHOR TEACHER
Created Jun 8 1:53pm | Posted Jul 6 6am

Week 4: Nearly There!

Hello everyone!

Congratulations to those who have successfully submitted your Research Reviews and are well in your way to investigating your "voice". And kudos to those who are struggling this summer, but getting things done...one step at a time.

While teachnically the course doesn't wrap up until next week, I'm considering our remaining time together as "Week 4." Our reading load is lighter this week as you shift to wrapping up assignments.

You have 2 assignments due *next week*:

- Continue working hard with your partner on the **Theory in Practice Project**, which is due no later than next Monday.
- Continue researching and developing your **Voice Project**, which is due no later than next Wednesday.

Don't hesitate to reach out if you need anything. Y'all are either incredibly self sufficient or shy. Stay in touch :)

Dr. J

Reply

Module 4 Introductory Thoughts

Click below to hear my introductory thoughts on Module 4:

0:00/10:22

Alternatively, read the transcript here.

3 *Redesign Highlight*

Created reading summary pages with "Key Takeaways" to highlight critical content

Key Takeaways

- Student development theory has evolved through three waves: foundational, identity-focused, and critical.
- Early theories focused on universal developmental processes but often excluded diverse students.
- Second wave theories introduced social identities and holistic development.
- Third wave theories emphasize power, oppression, and social justice.
- Development is shaped by context, intersectionality, and agency.
- Earlier theories remain useful but must be applied critically.
- Theory becomes meaningful when it supports equity and liberation.

4 *Redesign Highlight*

Edited Voice Project instructions and support materials for ease of use and clarity for learners. This included:

- Created a separate page to explain the rationale for the assignment (so instructions wouldn't get lost)
- Added a "Progress Chart" to support student accountability and idea-sharing

Voice Project

Instructions

Please refer to the **About the Voice Project** page for more information about this assignment.

Completing the Voice Project requires **regular work and planning throughout the semester.** Each week's to-do list suggests activities to help you learn about your chosen voice and connect it to course topics. *You do not need to complete every suggested activity* — they are ideas to guide you.

Your Task

This assignment is ongoing and requires the following:

1. **Choose a Voice:** Choose a perspective **different from your own** and act as an advocate for that perspective. For example, you might choose someone of a different race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, class background, or disability status. Try to choose a perspective you **do not know much about.** Focus on the experience of a **specific person within a group** (for example, a gay Hindu man rather than just "gay men"). Consider both privileged and marginalized perspectives.
2. **Do Research:** Learn about your chosen perspective by:
   1. Reading books or articles (including course readings and other sources)
   2. Exploring websites or online resources
   3. Finding organizations or communities related to that perspective
3. **Talk to People:** If possible, interview or talk with people who share the perspective you chose, such as students, staff, or community members.
4. **Keep a Journal:** Keep a **weekly journal** (starting in Week 2) about what you learn. In **at least 4 entries**, write about:
   1. New ideas or information you discover
   2. Personal reflections
   3. Connections to class topics

Track Your Progress

While not required, you can also use our **Voice Project Progress Chart** to record your progress, keep yourself on track, and draw inspiration from others!

Reflection

Redesigning this course reminded me that clarity is a form of support: when learners know what's expected and where to focus, they can spend their energy on the theory and the skills instead of the logistics. The process also pushed me to see the course through my students' eyes and notice where small barriers had been getting in the way of big ideas. Next, I want to keep refining things based on student feedback and adapt them for other courses in our department.

Acknowledgement: *Extra big thanks to Sarah A.!*

Kayla M. Johnson, PhD
Department of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation
College of Education

2026 Faculty Fellow Course Quality Design Program

College of Education
Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation