

SOWK 7840
SEMINAR ON LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

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Classroom: Pine Hall, Room 113
Semester: Spring 2014
Credits: Three

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

This course addresses issues of loss and bereavement and is designed for graduate students from diverse disciplines, particularly social work, psychology, education, and nursing.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The primary goal of this course is to equip students entering the helping professions with the tools required to assist clients deal with loss, bereavement and mourning. This is not a “death and dying” course, for the losses clients encounter might include; chronic illnesses experienced by oneself or a significant other, aging, divorce, the loss of work, moving to a new town, children moving out of the house, or the loss of meaning in ones life.

One of the greatest challenges many of us face in our personal and professional lives comes from dealing (or not dealing) with issues stemming from the losses we (and/or those we care for/about) encounter in our lives. One reason some of us find it difficult to deal with loss is that there is often a strong emotional aspect to our reactions, a strong emotional component that accompanies many instances of loss. Therefore this course will address three distinct but inter-related realms: Cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

COURSE OUTCOMES:

After completing this course students are expected to be able to:

1. Define and differentiate the basic concepts associated with loss, grief, bereavement and mourning. Cognitive
2. Demonstrate and discuss in writing at least two theoretical approaches to help clients who are dealing with loss. Cognitive

3. Demonstrate knowledge of policy issues related to delivery of treatment for bereavement and loss. Cognitive
4. Explore and share personal issues related to the experience of grief and loss across the life span. Affective, Cognitive
5. Clearly differentiate the varieties of loss and grieving, and how these differences impact social work practice with clients. Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive
6. Specify at least five critical issues in social work assessment of grief and mourning. Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive
7. Identify at least five strategies for dealing with different forms of loss. Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive
8. Demonstrate knowledge of diversity issues, regarding specifics of how different cultures respond to loss and grief. Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive
9. Discuss and clearly describe in writing how a client's environment impacts her/his responses to effectively dealing with loss and bereavement, from an ecological systems perspective. Cognitive

Required Readings:

TEXT: Walsh, Katherine. (2012). *Grief and Loss: Theories and Skills for the Helping Professions*. Pearson. (Second Edition)

Readings available online: There are a number of required and optional readings available through the course shell.

COURSE STRUCTURE, REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

The course is designed to insure that each student masters both the basic knowledge and skill required to work effectively with clients facing a wide range of losses, and a more in-depth knowledge of one particular type of loss.

ASSIGNMENTS

Mastery of course objectives will be gained and evaluated through:

1. Weekly Check-in

- a. The goal of this activity is to help you solidify your knowledge base, clarify issues that you find confusing, and help the instructor focus on areas of concern. These consist of VERY short postings about each week's activities.
- b. Due the Monday after each week ends
- c. **15 @ 2 points = 30 points**

2. Weekly on-line case study discussions

- a. There will be at least one on-line discussion each week, in which you will reflect on and/or apply content from the week to personal and/or professional situations. You will also be expected to read, think about, and comment on your colleagues postings.
- b. Due dates TBD in our first face to face meeting.
- c. **Up to 15 @ 10 points = 150 points**

3. Bi-weekly Reflective Journals

- a. This allows you time and space to reflect on issues that have been covered in the course or that have come up for you during the semester.
- b. These will often be more affective/personal than other assignments.
- c. Due every other Monday, beginning April 27th
- d. **7 @ 10 points = 80 points**

4. Occasional Short papers

- a. The purpose of these short essays (no more than five pages) is to allow you to explore a specific topic in some depth. While I have ideas for some of these (Five Wishes, Three Months to Live), others might come from student's interests or concerns
- b. These will be assigned as appropriate
- c. **Up to 5 @ 15 points each = 75 points max**

5. Special Topics paper

- a. The goal of this activity is for you to explore a **specific type of loss** in some depth, and to share what you find with your colleagues.
- b. You will select a specific loss/population you are interested in, and address it in great depth.
- c. Form of submission to be determined at first class (Blog, Papers....)
- d. Due April 7th
- e. **100 points**

6. Special Topic paper reviews

- a. The purpose of this review is to deepen your understanding of a variety of losses and reactions to those losses based on the GQUATs that others have done.
- b. After you have read each of your colleagues GQUAT paper/presentation, you will write a short paper based on what you learned and what questions the presentations brought up for you.
- c. Due April 28th
- d. **Up to 12 @ 8 points each = 96 points max**

GRADING SCALE

91-100% = A

81-90% = B

71-80% = C

61-70% = D

Below 61% = F

COURSE OUTLINE

This seminar is designed to meet both the formal course objectives and the personal objectives of those of you taking this course. Thus the precise format of the course is flexible, with the instructor reserving the right to alter readings (but not due dates for assignments) to address student needs. Still and all, the basic structure of the course is:

Week One: Starting January 13th : First face to face meeting (1/18/2014)

Topic: Overview of loss, grief and mourning: important terms (sensitizing concepts) and theories of loss and mourning

Week Two: Starting January 20th

Topic: Introduction and Symbolic Loss
Readings from Walsh: Chapters 1 and 2

Week Three: Starting January 27th

Topic: Self-preparation and self-care
Reading from Walsh: Chapter 3

Week Four Starting February 3rd : Second face to face meeting (2/8/2014)

Topic: Theories of Grief and Mourning/ Normal and Complicated Grief and Mourning/ The “grief work” hypothesis
Readings from Walsh: Chapter 7

Week Five: Starting February 10th

Topic: continuation of week Four

Week Six: Starting February 17th

Topic: Working and not “working” with those who experience loss
Readings from Walsh: Chapter 10

Week Seven: Starting February 24th

Topic: continuation of week six

Week Eight: Starting March 3rd Third face to face meeting 3/8/2014

Topic: Topic: Anticipatory and Preparatory grief
Readings from Walsh: Chapter 9 (first part)

Week Nine: Starting March 10th

Topic: Working with older adults and End of Life Issues
Readings from Walsh: Chapter 9 (second part), 6

Spring Break: March 17th – March 23rd

Week Ten: Starting March 24th

Topic: Spiritual and Cultural Issues

Readings from Walsh: Chapter 8

Week Eleven: Starting March 31st Fourth face to face meeting 4/5/2014

Topic: Working with children

Readings from Walsh: Chapters 4.

Week Twelve: Starting April 7th

Topic: Working with young and middle adults

Readings from Walsh: Chapter 5.

Week Thirteen: Starting April 14th

Topic: Groups and Organizations

Readings from Walsh: Chapter 11

Week Fourteen: Starting April 21st Fifth and final face to face meeting 4/26/2014

Topic: Self-care and compassion fatigue

Readings from Walsh: Chapter 13.

Week Fifteen: Starting April 28th

Topic: Communities and Traumatic Grief

Readings from Walsh: Chapter 12

May 5th – last day of class

POCO MAP

FPO 2. Demonstrate the ability to apply critical thinking within the context of professional social work practice

7840-4: Discuss and explain in writing personal issues related to the experience of grief and loss across the life span, linking those issues to both practice wisdom and formal theory.

FPO 4. Using the strengths perspective, practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills that are appropriate for the range of human differences.

7840-8: Demonstrate knowledge of diversity issues, regarding specifics of how different cultures respond to loss and grief.

FPO 9. Demonstrate the ability to analyze, formulate, and influence social policies.

7840-3: Demonstrate knowledge of policy issues related to delivery of treatment for bereavement and loss.

FPO 10. Evaluate and apply research findings to practice and evaluate individual practice interventions at multi levels appropriately.

7890-3: Understand and formulate qualities of a spiritually-sensitive helping relationship and evaluate their own practice and its outcomes accordingly.

CPO 17. Demonstrate an ability to analyze and critically evaluate the contextual elements to inform social work practice.

7840-9: Discuss and clearly describe in writing how a client's environment impacts her/his responses to effectively dealing with loss and bereavement, from an ecological systems perspective.

CPO 19. Demonstrate the ability to practice at increasing levels of complexity using specialized theories and practice methods.

7840-1: Define and differentiate the basic concepts of loss, grief, bereavement and mourning.

7840-2: Demonstrate and discuss in writing at least two theoretical approaches to help clients who are dealing with loss, as measured by clear presentation of a chosen theoretical approach in papers, as well as participation in classroom discussions and small group activities related to this topic.

7840-5: Clearly differentiate the varieties of loss and grieving, and how these impact social work practice.

7840-6: Specify at least five critical issues in social work assessment of grief and mourning.

7840-7: Identify at least five strategies for dealing with caregiver stress.

COURSE AND DIVISION POLICIES

The goal of the Division of Social Work is to prepare students for the professional practice of social work. The Division requires students to adhere to professional practices and standards in all classes and practicum. These practices and standards are outlined in the MSW Student Code of Conduct which can be found on pages 23-27 of the current *MSW Student Handbook*. The Code of Conduct must be signed by all students beginning MSW students.

The following standards are not negotiable: Students may depend on well-planned classes and knowledgeable instructors. Professors are committed to the facilitation of student success. Learning is a complex phenomenon for which BOTH instructors and students are responsible. Evaluation criteria are stated clearly in the syllabus. However, if students have questions about grading, it is the students' responsibility to discuss these matters with their instructors. The course syllabus represents a contract between students and the instructor. Professors reserve the right to modify syllabi, and students will be notified in writing when such changes are made. Likewise, students are responsible for reading and following instructions on the syllabi.

Class Attendance. Because the MSW Program is a professional program, class attendance is **MANDATORY**. The Attendance Policy is extremely important and can be found in the current *MSW Student Handbook* on page 19. Students are expected to be on time for class and to return from breaks in a timely manner. Likewise, students are expected to participate in class discussions and activities.

Submission of Assignments. All assignments must be submitted **ON TIME** and **IN THE MANNER** directed by the faculty (e.g., brought to class, sent to an assignment drop box, etc). Deadlines are extremely important for professional social workers. Additional information about assignment submission is found in the Attendance Policy.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not acceptable in a professional social work program. Students who engage in this type behavior risk failure on specific assignments, in the course, and possible dismissal from the MSW Program. Academic dishonesty is prohibited by the university as well as the Division of Social Work. The following link outlines university policies: <http://ww2.valdosta.edu/academic/AcademicHonestyatVSU.shtml> The Academic Dishonesty Policy for the Division of Social Work is found in the *MSW Student Handbook*.

Incompletes: Incomplete grades are given only in cases of extreme emergency with proper documentation, and are granted only with the prior approval of the instructor. Policies governing Incompletes are found in the *MSW Student Handbook*.

Academic Performance: Students are expected to maintain a 3.00 grade point average in the MSW Program. A discussion of all academic expectations and grading can be found in the *MSW Student Handbook*, including the Division's policy of Academic Deficiency Points given for grades lower than C.

Cancellation of Classes: The University President may cancel classes under specific emergency conditions. The most frequent cause of cancellation is inclement weather. Please check the main page of the VSU web site if you have concerns about inclement weather or an emergency situation: <http://www.valdosta.edu>

ADDITIONAL STUDENT INFORMATION

Technology Assistance: Students having technology problems may contact the Help Desk: <http://www.valdosta.edu/helpdesk/> 229.245.4357 or helpdesk@valdosta.edu. Their hours are 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM, Mondays – Thursdays; 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM, Fridays; 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM, Saturdays; and 1:00 PM – 9:00 PM, Sundays. If students are having problems with BlazeView, they may seek assistance at the following link: <http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/elearning/main/current-students/student-resources/blazeview-d2l.php>

Specific Learning Needs: Students requiring classroom accommodations or modifications because of a documented disability should discuss their needs with the professor at the beginning of the semester. Students who are not registered with the Access Office for students with Disabilities should contact VSU's Access Office: <http://www.valdosta.edu/access/> 229.2498, 229.219.1348 (TTY). The link for the office is access@valdosta.edu / and the office is located in Room 1115 Nevins Hall.

Students Experiencing Academic Difficulties: Students with academic concerns are strongly encouraged to contact the staff of the Student Success Center:

<http://www.valdosta.edu/ssc/> 229.333.7570. The Center, whose link is: ssc@valdosta.edu, is located on first floor of Langdale Hall on the main VSU campus. Services provided by the Success Center include tutoring, writing assistance, and help with time management. Students are encouraged to make appointments with Center Staff through the web link or by telephone. The Center is available to all VSU students, and evening appointments are available.

Additional services include the Counseling Center:

<http://www.valdosta.edu/counseling/>, 229.333.5940 pjaynor@valdosta.edu .

Services are free of charge to students with emotional/mental, social, substance abuse and other problems. Physical health services are available the Farber Health Center:

<http://services.valdosta.edu/health/> 229.333.5886

<http://services.valdosta.edu/auxiliary/contact.aspx?Dept=health>.

Emergency Campus Policy: The Police Contact Number is **229.259.5555**. The Campus Police Division is located in Pine Hall. Officers will escort students on campus, and emergency phones are placed across campus. STUDENTS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO PROGRAM THE CAMPUS EMERGENCY NUMBER, 911 (for local police) and *447 (GA State Highway Patrol) INTO THEIR CELL PHONE.