SOCW 435: Critical Perspectives in Mental Health Practice

Course Description

This social work course examines the concepts of mental health and mental illness from both critical and practice-based perspectives. The readings give an overview of key areas in knowledge and theory, and provide practical information about how to work within various service contexts. Throughout this course, particular attention is given to the historical, socio-cultural, and political connections to mental illness and addictions—and this information is presented in a way that reflects a diversity of paradigms and standpoints. Audio-visual content is included to expand on the readings, and learning activities are designed to focus on student collaboration, multiple learning styles, and practical application of knowledge and skills.

Course Overview & Prerequisites

This course is available to third, fourth-year, and MSW social work students who have an interest in obtaining a critical and practical introduction to mental health practice. To prepare for Social Work 435, students should take Social Work 323 as a pre/co-requisite.

Course Goals & Objectives

The overall objectives of this course are for you to:

1. Learn about the subjective/personal impact of mental illness and addictions for those who are affected, and explore your own experiences with these issues
2. Locate and challenge your biases regarding concepts of mental illness, with a focus on understanding how your views have been influenced and informed
3. Develop a critical understanding of historical viewpoints of mental illness, and show a general knowledge of current theories/perspectives
4. Explore key aspects of critical and anti-oppressive perspectives as they relate to the field of mental health. This includes identifying multiple
viewpoints, locating dominant and marginalized voices, understanding socio-cultural and political connections to mental health issues, and seeking areas for advocacy and change
5. Demonstrate a critical and mainstream understanding of intervention approaches in mental health—including diagnosis, medications, and best practice
6. Demonstrate an understanding of client contributions to the mental health field such as self-determination, rights issues, self-help, and reducing stigma
7. Use these course readings to develop a model of mental health and addictions practice that you would envision using with individuals, families, groups, and communities
8. Learn and participate in the distance education course environment

Course Structure and Outline
The content in this course is presented in twelve separate units as outlined:

Unit 1: Social Work Practice and Education in Mental Health
Unit 2: Responses to Mental Distress: Past, Present, and Beyond
Unit 3: Current Conceptualizations of Mental Health and Illness
Unit 4: Examining the Process of Assessment and Diagnosis
Unit 5: Overview of the Diagnostic Categories of Mental Disorders
Unit 6: Understanding Epidemiology across Lifespan and Culture
Unit 7: Mandated Mental Health Treatments: Issues and Debates
Unit 8: Suicide: Prevalence Rates, Risk Factors, and Responses
Unit 9: Medication and Medical Treatment: Uses and Abuses
Unit 10: The Search for Best Practices in Mental Health Treatment
Unit 11: Client Contributions to Mental Health Practice
Unit 12: Self-Care and the Future of Mental Health Practice
Course Text & Materials

All required course readings are provided on the course site.

All films/video are provided as direct links on the course site.

UNIT 1

Learning Activity 1.1 – Introductions

Start date: Week 1
Due date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 1
Grade: not graded – posting is optional
Post: to the Activity 1.1 – Introductions discussion topic

Post a class introduction that includes where you live, outlines your learning goals for this course, and gives a brief description of your interest and professional/work experience with mental health issues. You may at this point also decide to self-locate by sharing any personal experiences you’ve had with mental illness, but only if this feels comfortable. It is of course important to be mindful at all times that personal information offered in class postings is to be treated with respect and confidentiality (note that under certain circumstances, program and development staff at UVic can access these discussion postings).

UNIT 2

Learning Activity 2.1 – Group Posting

Start date: Week 2
Due date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 2
Grade: 2 percent total deduction is made if posting is not submitted by due date
Length: 150-250 words
Post: to your LA 2.1 – Group Posting discussion topic (ie: Group #1)

Consider the historical developments that have occurred in the conceptualization and treatment of mental health problems as outlined in the unit readings. Write a brief posting to your small group that describes your personal reactions to these
readings, and explores how this information might assist you to approach mental health practice from a critical perspective. In addition to your initial posting, you are also encouraged to reflect and comment on group members’ postings.

UNIT 3

No assignment for this week

UNIT 4

Learning Activity 4.1 – Short Essay

Start date: Week 2
Due date: 11:55 pm Friday, Week 4
Grade: 25 percent of the total grade
Length: 750-1000 words
Submit: to the LA 4.1 drop-box on this course site by 11:55 pm Friday, Week 4
(PDF files are the preferred submission format)

Refer to the readings in Units 2 and 3 that outline various historical developments and introduce current theories of mental illness. Based on your analysis of these readings, write a short essay in which you will:

- Summarize the primary descriptive themes seen throughout various time periods and cultures to explain the causes of mental illness
- Describe a model(s) of mental illness that best reflects your personal view, and can adequately explain a range of mental health struggles
- Articulate the unique contribution that you think critical social workers can offer to professional practice in the mental health field

Grading:

This assignment will be graded based on the following criteria:

- Thorough integration of the course readings into your essay
- Originality of thought and depth of critical analysis in your essay
- Ability to provide a clear and concise response to all 3 assignment sections
- Quality of writing, grammar, and proper source referencing (use formal APA referencing format with a reference list)
UNIT 5

Learning Activity 5.1 – Practice Quiz

Start date: Monday, Week 5
Quiz Due date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 5 (available Monday to Sunday)
Quiz Grade: practice quiz is optional, and the score is for feedback only

In this practice quiz, you are given various case descriptions of clients from which you are to select the most appropriate diagnoses. The answers for these quiz questions should be drawn from the online DSM-5 provided in the Unit 5 readings. This open-book practice quiz will consist of 5 case descriptions with a series of multiple-choice answers, and the timer will be set for 90 minutes. You will be given 1 attempt, and after taking the quiz you can then log back on and review your score with an explanation for each answer.

This optional practice quiz is designed to help you become familiar with the online testing process, and receive concrete learning feedback. Completing the quiz will also assist you to identify computer-related technical difficulties so you have time to address any problems before the graded quiz starts next week. It is strongly advised that you complete the practice quiz on the same computer that you intend to use for the graded quiz, and you are responsible for contacting the Helpdesk to sort out any problems in advance of attempting the graded quiz. Please address problems as early as possible, as the Helpdesk is only available during limited hours and is in high demand. While taking the quiz, you can see the time remaining and check your progress by using the summary guide to the right of the screen. If you have time left over, you can also go back and re-check your answers.

Learning Activity 5.2 – Group Posting

Posting Due date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 5
Grade: 2 percent total deduction is made if posting is not submitted by due date
Posting Length: 150-250 words
Post: to your Activity 5.2 – Group Posting discussion topic (ie: Group #1)

After you complete the practice quizzes, you are encouraged to reflect on this experience of providing a diagnosis based on case descriptions. Write a brief
posting to your small group that describes your personal reactions to this exercise, and any other comments you’d like to include. In addition to your initial posting, you are also encouraged to reflect and comment on group members’ postings.

UNIT 6

Learning Activity 6.1 – Graded Quiz

Grade: 20 percent of the total grade
Earliest start date: 6:00 am Wednesday, Week 6
Latest completion date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 6

In this open-book quiz, you are given 10 case descriptions from which you are to select the most appropriate diagnoses in a multiple-choice format. All answers for this graded quiz should be drawn from the online DSM-5 provided in the Unit 5 readings. The overall design and content of this quiz is the same as the practice quizzes offered in Week 5, and the timer will be set for 180 minutes. Once the quiz completion date is closed (11:59 pm, Sunday), you will then be able to log back on and review your score with an explanation for each answer.

The availability period for writing this online quiz starts at 6:00 am Wednesday, Week 6 and ends at 11:59 pm (Midnight) Sunday, Week 6. You are allowed one attempt to complete the quiz, and it is strongly recommended that you not leave the quiz until the last few hours in case you have any technical problems. While taking the quiz, you can see the time remaining and check your progress by using the summary guide to the right of the screen. Always save each answer before moving on to the next question. If you have time left over, you can also go back and re-check your answers.

UVIC Policies That Apply To Writing Online Quizzes

An online quiz in distance education is considered an open-book exercise in which students are permitted to have their required course materials in front of them as they write the quiz. However, students are not permitted to exchange information about the quiz with other students, either while writing the quiz or after completing the quiz. Students are not permitted to copy or download quiz information.

Students should be familiar with the UVIC Policy on Academic Integrity stipulated in the UVIC calendar. In particular, the following clauses are relevant to the online
quiz: “Cheating on assignments, tests, and exams includes, but is not limited to sharing information or answers when doing take-home assignments, tests and examinations except where the instructor has authorized collaborative work. This would include information on quiz content and questions. Candidates found communicating with one another in any way will be considered to be in violation of the University Policy on Academic Integrity.”

UNIT 7

Learning Activity 7.1 – Group Posting

Start date: Week 7
Due date: 11:59 pm Sunday, Week 7
Grade: 2 percent total deduction is made if posting is not submitted by due date
Length: 150-250 words
Post: to your LA 7.1 – Group Posting discussion topic (ie: Group #1)

Consider the range of information about mental health law and mandated treatment provided in the unit readings for this week. Write a brief posting to your small group that describes your personal reactions to these readings, and explores how a critical social worker might balance the diverse—and at times opposing—needs represented in this practice area. In addition to your initial posting, you are also encouraged to reflect and comment on group members’ postings.

UNIT 8

No assignment for this week

UNIT 9

Learning Activity 9.1 – Information Pamphlet

Start date: Week 7
Due date: 11:55 pm Friday, Week 9
Grade: 25 percent of the total grade
Length: approximately 1000 words
Submit: to the LA 9.1 drop-box on this course site by 11:55 pm Friday, Week 9
Imagine that you have been hired by an agency to provide practical information for the natural caregivers (partners, family, friends) of someone who is suicidal. Your task is to develop an information pamphlet/booklet that will assist these caregivers to recognize suicide risks, understand basic mental health law, and identify services available in their community. If you wish, you may also tailor your information to address a particular at-risk client group (based on age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, culture/ethnicity, etc.). Keep in mind that the caregivers who read this pamphlet will have varying levels of literacy, and will benefit most from a concise, easy-to-read presentation. To prepare for this assignment, you should review the readings in Units 7 and 8, and conduct research in your community (via interviews, web searches, etc.) to determine what services and protocols are in place.

In this assignment you are encouraged to be creative in your presentation format. For example, you might use bullets, pictures, pamphlet format, PowerPoint, or Prezi. What’s important is that you provide clear, easy-to-read information geared toward caregivers which outlines the following information:

- A review of the common risk factors and warning signs of suicide
- A basic description of provincial mental health law used to ensure safety
- A summary of the emergency services and protocols available in your community/city. This should include a brief description of the services provided, internet links, applicable phone numbers, etc.

**Grading:**

This assignment will be graded based on the following criteria:

- Thorough integration of the course readings into your pamphlet
- Ability to provide a clear response to all 3 assignment components
- Presentation of information that reflects compassion and sensitivity for the intended readers (natural caregivers of someone who is suicidal)
- Accessible writing style and creativity in your presentation (direct APA referencing is not required, but please provide a reference list at the end of your document, or attach in drop-box as a separate document)

**UNIT 10**

**Learning Activity 10.1 – Group Posting**
Consider the range of information about best practices and evidence-based research provided in the unit readings for this week. Write a brief posting to your small group that describes your personal reactions to these readings, and explores how a critical social work perspective might add to the conversations and debates about this topic. In addition to your initial posting, you are also encouraged to reflect and comment on group members’ postings.

UNIT 11

No assignment for this week
UNIT 12

Learning Activity 12.1 – Special Topic Paper

Start date: Week 9
Due date: 11:55 pm Friday, Week 12
Grade: 30 percent of the total grade
Length: 1000-1250 words
Submit: to the LA 12.1 drop-box on this course site by 11:55 pm Friday, Week 12 (PDF files are the preferred format)

For this assignment, your task is to review and synthesize the information from Units 9 through 11 to create a special topic paper. Imagine that you are a new social worker in a mental health agency, and you have been asked to give a presentation on a particular type of mental illness. Your colleagues (who may include nurses, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists) have asked that this presentation include a literature review, summary of best practices, and overview of consumer perspectives. Your aim as a critical social worker is to also present this information in a way that is socio-political, rights-focused, and strengths-based.

Your first step is to decide on a topic area and conduct a library search for articles. The preferred articles for this assignment will be topic summaries or literature reviews, as they will often include information on prevalence rates, theories about causality, and treatments. Two or three well-written articles will likely be sufficient for this paper, although additional research usually results in higher marks.

Once you have selected and reviewed these articles on your topic area (ie: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm), you should then reflect on the readings from Units 9 to 11 and consider how medications, best counselling practices, and consumer perspectives should be applied. Your final result should be a presentation that includes and integrates the following information:

1. An introduction to your topic that includes a description of its effects on people, its prevalence rates, and theories of causality. This information is usually provided in literature review articles, but details can also be found on various websites related to mental health and illness.

2. An introduction to the concept of evidence-based practice, and a discussion about which practices are seen to be most effective for your topic area. This
section can include medications, counselling, community interventions, and might also note specific debates in the field.

3. An overview of factors that promote mental health as identified by clients, consumers, and survivors. This information from the unit readings should then be linked and integrated with your chosen topic area.

4. In your final section, your task is to also emphasize a critical social work perspective on this topic. This might include an overview of socio-political, rights-focused, and strengths-based factors that need to be noted, and can include any large or small-scale advocacy efforts that might create positive change with respect to the topic you have chosen.

This paper should be written in APA format with a reference list that cites all sources used (readings, web sites, etc). Please use section headings, as these will improve your paper by keeping you on track and making it easier for the reader. It’s also important that the writing is clear and concise, and that you remember your audience: colleagues from various disciplines who have asked you to educate them on this topic. As a social worker, you can also play an important additional role by sharing your unique approach that includes a critical standpoint, a focus on client advocacy, and a commitment to social change.

**Grading:**

This assignment will be graded based on the following criteria:

- Thorough integration of the course readings into your paper
- Originality of thought and depth of critical analysis in your paper
- Ability to provide a concise response to all 4 assignment sections
- Quality of writing, grammar, and proper source referencing (use formal APA referencing format with a reference list)