

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
School of Social Policy & Practice

SW782: Mental Health Practice with U.S. Veterans

Wednesdays 4:00 pm – 6:30 pm Caster Building Room A-17

**** Class starts at 4:00 pm with a 30-minute class discussion 4:00 – 4:30 pm**

Presentation by module speaker(s) starts at 4:30 and ends at 6:30 pm**

Instructor:

E-mail address:

TA:

E-mail address:

Office:

Office hours: By appointment

Office hours: By appointment

Course Overview

This course is the first of a two-course sequence required for students in the P.E.A.R.L.S. program. The beginning of the course will introduce students to social work practice in the Veterans Administration; to understanding military culture and working competently culturally and ethically, and to being knowledgeable about the recovery orientation and the employment of peer specialists within the Veterans Administration. The course will then move to surveying the primary mental health conditions and issues among veterans, including suicide risk, aging and mental health, substance abuse, posttraumatic stress, domestic violence, grief, loss, and bereavement in military families, criminal justice, and homelessness,. Many of the classes will be taught by social workers from Philadelphia VA Medical Center.

Course Objectives:

1. To gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers in the VA system;
2. To gain an understanding of military culture and its impact on family life;
3. To gain an understanding of cultural competent service provision and ethical challenges in working with veterans;
4. To understand what a recovery service orientation is and the employment of peer specialists in the VA system;
5. To have basic knowledge of psychiatric diagnoses, specifically substance abuse and post -traumatic stress disorders (PTSD);
6. To have a basic understanding of suicide risk assessment and management and grief and loss in the military;
7. To have an understanding of special veteran populations, including veterans with a history of homelessness, veterans who are criminal justice involved, victims of domestic violence, women, and older adults and practice issues in working with these populations.

Course Requirements

Each week will begin with a 30-minute discussion session focusing on class readings of the week in order to gauge the students' thoughts, responses, and feelings on readings. Students will work in pairs to lead the discussion. Students leading the discussion are expected to give a summary of the readings and formulate 3-5 questions to facilitate critical thinking over the reading material. The discussion session

will be followed by a two-hour lecture delivered by VA social workers or mental health researchers/practitioners specializing in settings serving veterans.

Students are expected to attend all classes, be on time and stay for the entire class, do all written assignments on time (if late they will be graded down one grade), read assigned material, and be prepared to discuss all assigned readings in class. **Note that there may be additional readings assigned besides those listed on the syllabus.**

In the event that you are unable to attend class for any reason, you must notify your instructor in advance and discuss how you can make up the content of the class. Similarly, if you are going to be late for class, you need to inform the instructor. Excessive absenteeism, i.e., missing more than two classes, is considered a serious problem that will be handled by meeting with you and determining the necessary course of action. Excessive absenteeism may result in failure of the course.

Students are also expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. Students are expected to be familiar with the Code, which can be found <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>.

Students are required to use APA reference style –
American Psychological Assn. (2012). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th Ed. Washington DC: Author

Assignments:

All assignments should be uploaded on Canvas the day they are due under the assignment tab so they can be checked for plagiarism in Turnitin. **All written assignments should be double-spaced.**

Ongoing class participation: 20% of final grade

There are two components for assessing class participation: 1) leading class discussion and 2) turning in 5 brief responses/journals (3 before the Spring Break and 2 after the Spring Break). Students will take turns to lead class discussion in pairs based on the reading assignments of the week. Each student will lead discussion twice during the semester. Length of each brief response/journal should be between half a page and one page. Brief responses/journals will be not given a letter grade.

Individual paper 1: 20% of final grade (due February 24, 2016):

1. **Target population:** Select a target population relevant to the course, such as veterans experiencing homelessness, veterans with suicidal risk, aging veterans, veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD, veterans with substance abuse issues, etc.
2. **Practice Issue:** Designate a practice issue relevant to this population, such as depression, end of life issues, homelessness and housing instability, etc. Can be at any level of practice—macro, mezzo, or micro.
3. **Needs Assessment:** Conduct a review of the literature of this issue, such as prevalence of the problem, needs of the population, service use in the VA system using peer reviewed journal articles. You may also include clinical articles and governmental publications, or reports published by research institutes.

Please use the underlined headings for your paper. Paper should be about 5 pages, excluding references. You should have at least 5 references from peer reviewed journals. Additional credible sources may be used. Instructors will be available to review an outline of your paper if you submit your outline on or before February 24, 2016.

Individual paper 2: 40% of final grade (March 30, 2016):

1. Revise 1-3 from individual paper 1 based on instructor's feedback and changes in your own learning.
2. Intervention Response to Needs Assessment: Review the literature for interventions/ strategies used to address the problem, summarizing what the literature indicates regarding their effectiveness, including assessing whether there are particular ones that have been employed in the VA system.
3. Designated Intervention: Assessment of an intervention you would select to address the issue, articulate your rationale for selecting the specific intervention or strategy, and assess whether or not it is appropriate for veterans and/or for a veteran setting. In what settings have the intervention been used? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention?
4. Implementation Plan: Discuss what it would take to implement such an intervention within the VA setting or agency that services veterans. What environmental supports would be needed? What training if any would be needed? What additional resources, e.g., financial, staff, etc. would be needed?
5. Feasibility Assessment: How feasible is it to implement the intervention? What modifications might be made to increase the feasibility of implementing the intervention?

Please use underlined headings for your paper. Paper should be 10-12 pages, excluding references and you should have at least 8-10 references from peer reviewed journals. Additional credible sources can be used. Instructors will be available to review an outline of your paper if you submit the outline on or before March 30, 2016.

Group project: 20% of the final grade (Final Report due on April 30, 2016)

Students in the class will participate in one of the following three group projects. The grade for the project will be based on the following: 1) product of the project [10%], 2) 25-minute verbal presentation of the project (including Q&A) [2%], and 3) 5-page written report (can be in bullet form) summarizing what the group has learned from the project [8%].

1. Create a binder of resources for veterans including benefits and supports in the following areas:
 - a. Income security and support
 - b. Housing and homelessness
 - c. Physical health
 - d. Behavioral health
2. Compile a list of veteran and veteran-related organizations (An example that is close to home is: Eternal Solider—homepage: <http://www.eternalsoldier.org/>)
 - a. Categorization of organizations by their focus of interest
 - b. For each organization, write up a synopsis about the organization.
3. Compile a list of important literary works and movies/documentaries featuring the behavioral health of veterans and related topics. From the list, select three literary works and three movies/documentaries to review.
 - a. Examples of books: *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien (Vietnam Era); *Redeployment* by Phil Klay (Iraq/Afghanistan Era); *Platoon Leader* by James R. McDonough (Vietnam Era); *On Killing* by Dave Grossman

- b. Examples of movies: “Full Metal Jacket” directed by Stanley Kubrick which gives an understanding of the Basic Training Experience and the Vietnam War. “Apocalypse Now” directed by Francis Ford Coppola which is another Vietnam Era Movie.

You may include the following evaluation questions in the 5-page written report:

- 1) What are the learning objectives of this project?
- 2) What are the assumptions the group have made in undertaking the project?
- 3) What are the inputs used to generate the project outputs?
- 4) What outputs are generated from the project?
- 5) What outcomes are achieved from the project?
- 6) What are the external factors (facilitators and barriers) that influence the project?

ALL COURSE READINGS ARE AVAILABLE on CANVAS.

Course Grading Policy:

Class participation = 20%
Individual paper 1 = 20%
Individual paper 2 = 40%
Group project = 20%

The final course grade is based on the student’s performance in both class and in their written work. Please refer to the MSW Student Handbook for the School’s grading policy. Students whose performance is minimal or failing at midterm will be notified in writing.

Students are encouraged to provide on-going feedback to the instructor regarding the quality of the course content and instruction.

Schedule of Topics and Required Readings/Assignment Due Dates

January 20, 2016

Social Work & the Veterans Administration
Lori Breen—VA Social Worker

This module introduces students to an overview of social work in the VA system. The Veteran's point-of-view regarding VA and social work supports will be discussed and general information about the VA will be provided. A brief description of the history of social work in the VA will be shared along with how social work is aligned with current VA values and strategic planning. The role of the social worker in the VA system will be explored. Recent Veteran statistics will be discussed in addition to the current challenges that social workers face in providing supports to Veterans. Innovative responses to these challenges will be shared.

Readings:

NASW Standards for Social Work Practice with Service Members, Veterans, & their Families, NASW, 2012.

Franklin, E. (2009). The emerging needs of veterans: A call to action for the social work profession. *Health & Social Work*, 34, 163-167.

U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2015). MyVA Integrated Plan (MIP) July 30, 2015.

January 27, 2016

Military Culture & Military Families
Brian Newhart & Amy Gedrich—VA Social Workers

Military life is full of demands and expectations that are considerably different than those encountered in the civilian world, and those demands exist not only for the service member, but also for their entire family. The module will consist of a lecture, discussion and group exercises and role play designed to enhance the understanding of military life and how this experience impacts the return to civilian world. Students will increase their understanding of how time in the military shapes future life goals and social interactions with families, friends, co-workers, employers, and any other relationships the Veteran may have, and how this lifestyle impacts the Veteran's family and also shapes their future.

Readings:

McCarthy, M. (Oct. 29, 2013). Vets struggle after returning from Afghanistan, *Dayton Daily News*.

Military. Com Deployment: An Overview

U.S Dept of Veterans Affairs. (Sept, 2008). *Returning from the war zone: A Guide for Military Personnel*.

U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs. (March, 2009). *Returning from the war zone: A guide for families of military members*.

February 3, 2016

Cultural Competence in Veterans Administration
Megan Farley – VA Social Worker

This module will explore the unique aspects of military culture, as well as the challenges to providing unique, culturally-sensitive supports to a diverse Veteran population. Students will explore how the labeling and pathologizing of Veterans' experiences within such a culture can increase stigma and decrease one's willingness to access VA mental health services. Students will examine how social stigma contributes to the perpetuation of symptoms and explore strategies for facilitating social change for Veterans served within the VA system and society as a whole.

Readings:

Sutherland, D. (2013, February 11). Unseen wounds: Leaving the war is half the battle... *Philadelphia Inquirer*.
http://articles.philly.com/2013-02-11/news/37022089_1_department-of-veterans-affairs-million-veterans-war

Brown, T.T. (2009). Societal culture and the new Veteran. *International Journal of Scholarly Academic Intellectual Diversity*, 11(1).
http://www.ncdsv.org/images/Brown_SocietalCultureAndTheNewVeteran_2009.pdf

Weiss, E., & Coll, J.E. (ND). The influence of military culture and Veteran worldviews on mental health treatment: Practice implications for combat Veteran help-seeking and wellness. *The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society*, 1(2), 75-86.

February 10, 2016

Ethical Challenges Working with the Military
Ariel Drobnes – VA Social Worker

Key ethical issues in social work practice when working with the Military are explored throughout this lecture and discussion. Beginning with a brief history of the relationship between the Social Work profession and the Military; then proceeding to delve into Military culture with a focus on the following: core values and moral/social responsibilities. Emphasis will be given to ethical decision making in Military Social Work. Readings are augmented by small and large group exercises.

Readings:

Daley, J. (2013). Ethical decision making in military social work. In Rubin, A., Weiss, E., & Coll, J. (eds). *Handbook of Military Social Work* (pp. 51-66). Hoboken, NJ. Wiley.

Jackson, K. (2013). Working with veterans and military families. *Social Work Today*, 13 (2), 12.

Pfaff, T. (2011). *Resolving Ethical Challenges in an Era of Persistent Conflict*. Professional Military Ethics Monograph Series, Vol. 3, Strategic Studies Institute.

Robinson, P. (Spring 2007). Ethics training and development in the military. *Parameters*, 23-36.

February 17, 2016

Suicide Risk and Management

Cate Revak & Jeff Allen—P.E.A.R.L.S. 2016

As members of the armed forces, veterans are exposed to a level of aggression, violence and trauma that many individuals never experience. These experiences can be devastating to their emotional stability and inhibit their abilities to function at their highest capacity. By being proactive about suicide recognition, prevention and treatment, we can help the soldiers succeed in their lives on the home front. This module will explore suicide prevention and protective measures when working with the American Veteran. The lecturer will provide a comprehensive model of suicide prevention and identify the best practice tools and methods in assisting with this issue. Students will be familiarized with the VA system and its resources. To help students learn through experience, students will be provided case studies and some roll playing exercises.

Readings:

Bryan, C., Jennings, K., Jobes, D. & Bradley, J. (2012). Understanding and preventing military suicide. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 16, 95-110/

Suicide Risk Assessment Guide

Documentary: Crisis hotline: veterans press 1 /an HBO Documentary Film; in association with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA); directed by Ellen Goosenberg Kent; produced by Dana Perry; production company, Perry Films Inc. [2014]
On reserve: Van Pelt - Video Collection (ask at Circulation Desk). DVD 027 360.

February 24, 2016

Overview of Psychiatric Diagnoses

Paul A. Kettl—VA Psychiatrist

Effective military social work begins with high quality case conceptualization. This module will examine mental health diagnostic challenges specific to Veterans. Discussion will include (a) the DSM diagnoses commonly applied to Military populations, (b) methods for diagnosing and conceptualizing cases in the real world, and (c) the repercussions of applying mental health diagnoses to Veterans.

Readings:

Seal, K. H., Metzler, T. J., Gima, K. S., Bertenthal, D., Maguen, S., & Marmar, C. R. (2009). Trends and risk factors for mental health diagnoses among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans using Department of Veterans Affairs health care, 2002-2008. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(9), 1651-1658.

Eisen, S., Bottonari, K., Glickman, M., et al (2011). The incremental value of self-reported mental health measures in predicting functional outcomes of veterans. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 38(2), 170-190.

Albright, G., Goldman, R., Shockley, K. M., McDevitt, F., & Akabas, S. (2012). Using an avatar-based simulation to train families to motivate veterans with post-deployment stress to seek help at the VA. *Games for Health: Research, Development, and Clinical Applications*, 1(1), 2128.

March 2, 2016

Recovery Orientation & Peer Specialists

Phyllis Solomon—SP2 Professor

Ronnie Dennis, Peer Specialist, Veterans Empowerment Center

In response to the President Commission on Mental Health in 2003 that indicated mental health care needs to be more recovery oriented, the VA set out an agenda to hire peer support persons throughout the VA system. Peer support is employing veterans with serious mental illness helping others like themselves. This module will discuss a recovery orientation, the research on peer specialists, the experiences, issues, and challenges in employing peer support specialists in mental health system generally and specifically within the VA system.

Readings:

Barber, J., Rosenheck, R., Armstrong, M., & Resnick, S. (2008). Monitoring the dissemination of peer support in the VA healthcare system. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 44, 433-441.

Chinman, M., Salzer, M., Mazza, D. (2013). National survey on implementation of peer specialists in the VA: Implications for training and facilitation. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 35, 470-473.

Chinman, M., Lucksted, A., Gresen, R., Davis, M. et al (2008). Early experiences of employing consumer-providers in the VA. *Psychiatric Services*, 59, 1315-1321.

Eisen, S., Schultz, M., Mueller, L, Degenhart, C. et al (2012). Outcome of a randomized study of a mental health peer education and support group in the VA. *Psychiatric Services*, 63, 1243-1246.

Herbert, M., Drebing, C., Rosenheck, R., Young, A., & Armstrong, M. (2008). Integrating peer support initiatives in a large healthcare organization. *Psychological Services*, 5, 216-227.

Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R., Sullivan, J., & Harkness, L. (2011). A group-intensive peer support model of case management for supported housing. *Psychological Services*, 8, 251-259.

March 9, 2016

No class – Spring Break

March 16, 2016

Substance Abuse Disorders Assessment & Treatment

Jim McKay, Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry & Scientific Director, Penn-VA, Center on Addictions

The presentation will address how substance use disorders (SUD) are assessed and treated in the VA system, within SUD specialty care, primary care, and integrated behavioral health teams. The VA Uniform Services Handbook, which describes the specific services that are to be provided in VA settings, will be reviewed and discussed. The move within the VA to stress measurement-based care and wider use of evidenced-based pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy for addiction will be outlined.

Readings:

VHA Handbook – VHA Programs for Veterans with substance use disorders (SUD)

Rash, C., DePhilipis, D., McKay, J., Drapkin, M., & Petry, N. (2013). Training workshops positively impact beliefs about contingency management in a nationwide dissemination effort. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*. 5, 306-312.

March 23, 2016

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Jason Lorber—VA Social Worker

This class will provide a brief history of the evolution of PTSD in the American Soldier. The diagnostic criteria for PTSD, trauma-related disorders, and Traumatic Brain Injury will be discussed with video footage providing Veteran accounts of their experiences with PTSD. Evidence-based practices and other services available for Veterans with PTSD will be explored. The various roles of a social worker involved with Veterans and their families experiencing PTSD will be examined.

Readings:

Murdock, M, Sayer, N., Spont, M. et al (2011). Long-term outcomes of disability benefits in US Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 68, 1072-1080.

Najavits, L, Kivlahan, D., & Kosten, T. (2011). A national survey of clinicians' views of evidence-based therapies for PTSD and substance abuse. *Addiction Research and Theory*. 19, 138-147.

March 30, 2016

Aging & Mental health in Veterans

Joel Streim, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, Consultant in Geriatric Psychiatry at Philadelphia VA Medical Center

This session will combine lecture and discussion to provide students with (1) an overview of the mental health problems and challenges faced by aging Veterans; (2) an understanding of the aspects of aging and mental health that are unique to Veterans; (3) an appreciation of recent innovations in delivery of mental health services to Veterans; and (4) an awareness of evolving roles for social workers in the mental healthcare workforce in the current era of healthcare reform. Topics covered will include medical-psychiatric co-morbidity, cognitive loss, disability, decision-making capacity, dependency vs. autonomy, and caregiver support for family members.

Readings:

Tew, J., Jlaus, J., & Oslin, DW (2010). The behavioral health laboratory. Building a stronger foundation for the patient-centered medical home. *Families, Systems, & Health*. 28, 130-45.

Nichols, L.O., Martindale-Adams, J., Burns, R., & Graney, M.J., & Zuber, J. (2011). Translation of a dementia caregiver support program in a health care system-REACH-VA. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 171, 353-359.

April 6, 2016

Women and the Military (including Domestic Violence)

Jovonna Jones – VA Social Worker

Women in the military experience their service time differently than men do. Using video, readings and group discussion, this module serves as an introduction to a variety of women's roles in the military as well as to the adjustment women experience after their service time ends.

Readings:

Street, A., Gradus, J., Glassan, H. et al (2013). Gender differences among veterans deployed in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 28 (Suppl 2), S556-S562.

Yan, G., McAndrew, L., D'Andrea, E., et al (2012). Self-reported stressors of National Guard women veterans before and after deployment: the relevance of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Internal Medicine*, 28 (Suppl 2) S549-55.

Hamilton, A., Posa, I., Washington, D. (2011). "Homelessness and trauma go hand-in-hand": Pathways to homelessness among women veterans. *Women's Health Issues*, 45, S203-S209.

Covington, S. (2008). Women and addiction: A trauma-informed approach. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Supplement 5, 377-385. (Optional)

April 13, 2016

Grief, Loss & Bereavement in Military Families

Jennifer Goodson – VA Social Worker

Grief and loss are inevitable experiences for all human beings and can be even more complex among service members, Veterans, and their families. This class will provide a general understanding of grief and loss, as well as unique factors that influence the healing process within the military population.

Readings:

LaMorie, J.H. (2013). Grief, loss, and bereavement in military families. In Rubin, A., Weiss, E., & Coll, J. (eds). *Handbook of military social work*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, N.J.

US Department of Veterans Affairs (June 2004). *Traumatic grief: Symptomatology and treatment in the Iraq War Veteran*. In *Iraq War Clinician Guide* (2nd ed.) (pp. 75-78).

Litz, B.T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W.P., Silva, C., et al. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 695-706.

April 20, 2016

Veterans & the Criminal Justice System Peg Maynard—VJO VA Social Worker

This class will provide an overview of the demographics of Veterans involved in the criminal justice system and the prevalent psychosocial needs of this population. Presentation by the facilitator, article review, and video account from Veterans will establish a foundation for group discussion. The history of Veterans Justice Programs will be presented, and barriers in this field will be explored.

Readings:

Clark, S., McGuire, J., & Blue-Howells, J. (2010). Development of veterans treatment course: Local and legislative initiatives. *Drug Court Review*. VII (1). 171-208.

Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R., Kaspro, W., & McGuire, J. (2013). Risk of incarceration and other characteristics of Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans in state and federal prisons. *Psychiatric Services*, 64, 36-43.

April 27, 2016

Homelessness & Housing Support Services Casey McCollum—VA Social Worker

This session will focus on housing instability and homelessness risk among veterans in the United States, with particular attention to the definition of homelessness, the prevalence of homelessness among veterans, and risk factors for homelessness risk and housing instability. In addition, the federal government's response, in terms of both policy and practice, to homelessness among veterans will be considered and the work that the research community is doing to evaluate these efforts.

Readings:

Perl, L. (2014). Veterans and homelessness. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34024.pdf>

Veteran section (Section 5, p. 40-49) in: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2014). The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (Part One). Washington, DC: Author.
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2014-AHAR-Part1.pdf>

Class schedule & assignment due dates

Week	Date	Topic	Speakers
1	1/20/2016	Social Work & the Veterans Administration	Lori Breen, VA Social Worker
2	1/27/2016	Military Culture & Military Families	Brian Newhart & Amy Gedrich—VA Social Workers
3	2/3/2016	Cultural Competence in Veterans Administration	Megan Farley – VA Social Worker
4	2/10/2016	Ethical Challenges Working with the Military	Ariel Drobnos – VA Social Worker
5	2/17/2016	Suicide Risk and Management	Cate Revak (PEARLS 2016) Jeff Allen (PEARLS 2016)
6	2/24/2016	Overview of Psychiatric Diagnoses	Paul A. Kettl—VA Psychiatrist
<i>Individual paper 1 due (February 24, 2016)</i>			
7	3/2/2016	Recovery Orientation & Peer Specialists	Phyllis Solomon—SP2 Ronnie Dennis, Peer Specialist, Veterans Empowerment Center
8	3/9/2016	No class – Spring Break	
9	3/16/2016	Substance Abuse Disorders Assessment & Treatment	Jim McKay, Penn-VA, Center on Addictions
10	3/23/2016	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Jason Lorber– VA Social Worker
11	3/30/2016	Aging & Mental health in Veterans	Joel Streim, MD, Philadelphia VA Medical Center
<i>Individual paper 2 due (March 30, 2016)</i>			
12	4/6/2016	Women and the Military (including Domestic Violence)	Jovonna Jones – VA Social Worker
15	4/13/2016	Grief, Loss & Bereavement in Military Families	Jennifer Goodson – VA Social Worker
14	4/20/2016	Veterans & the Criminal Justice System	Peg Maynard – VJO VA Social Worker
15	4/27/2016	Homelessness & Housing Support Services	Casey McCollum – VA Social Worker
<i>Group project due (April 30, 2016)</i>			