Suicide Prevention

I. STANDARDIZED COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the public health problem of suicide, with specific attention to prevention, intervention, and postvention related to micro, mezzo, and macro approaches. Students will gain an understanding of suicide epidemiology and underlying theory, as well as risk and protective factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. This course will familiarize students with evidence-based practices and ethical considerations with clients engaging in suicidal thoughts and behaviors, including learning directly from individuals with lived experience with suicidality. Students will also learn about the current state and national strategies for suicide prevention, as well as policies related to suicide. Upon completing course readings, assignments, and activities, students will gain skills in the assessment and management of suicide risk, intervention and treatment techniques with suicidal clients, and postvention approaches with survivors of suicide loss.

II. STANDARDIZED COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the epidemiology and theories of suicide, as well as the various models of suicide prevention.
2. Understand risk and protective factors (at multiple levels) for suicide and identify and understand which social groups are at high risk for suicide.
3. Understand the importance of developing a therapeutic alliance for effectively working with suicidal clients.
4. Demonstrate the ability to listen to suicidal clients actively.
5. Demonstrate reflecting skills necessary to build rapport and trust with suicidal clients.
7. Understand, select and modify appropriate suicide intervention strategies based on continuous clinical assessment.
8. Learn about developing and implementing interventions for individuals with suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

III. TEACHING METHODS

This class takes as its starting point the principles of universal design. Each of us learns differently, and my goal is to facilitate your success by supporting your learning needs. For example, many of us need time to
process our thoughts orally, thus, you can select to submit a video for the class to watch in lieu of an n-vivo presentation. Perhaps the act of writing is difficult. If “talking out” your paper is a strategy that works best, I can help you access dictation and transcription software. Feel free to take breaks throughout class as needed (but do try to arrive on time). Just remember – I can support you best when you let me know your needs.

IV. REQUIRED TEXT AND MATERIALS


All additional readings are listed in the Bibliography below and are posted on Canvas. Because we will use Canvas extensively, it is essential that you check the course site regularly. It can be accessed here: http://canvas.utexas.edu.

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All assignments will be graded on a point system, and grades will be based on the percentage calculated from your point score over the total points possible. Grading rubrics and detailed instructions for completing each assignment can be found in the Assignment Instructions on Canvas. All assignments are due at 10pm unless noted otherwise.

Attendance (24 points). Your success in this course depends on you being present during class. Accordingly, you can earn points if you (1) attend, (2) arrive on time, and (3) stay for the entire class. I also understand that, sometimes, life happens, and these events are often beyond your control. Accordingly, you are allowed two free absences during the term. Use these wisely—you should save it for an illness or emergency that prevents you from attending class. Additionally, in the spirit of universal design, you might require an additional absence after your two free misses. Accordingly, you can have one additional absence, but you must complete a make-up assignment to receive credit for that absence. To use this accommodation, you must notify me in advance and have a documented University accommodation provided by either The Office of Disability and Access or Student Emergency Services.

Summary, Analysis and Reflection (SAR) Papers (25 points each). Throughout the semester, you will have several opportunities to focus on class readings more in depth, and to explore the main themes in these readings through summary, analysis, and reflection. Each paper should be exactly three double-spaced pages, excluding title and reference page. The assigned course readings associated with each SAR are identified in the Course Schedule below.

- Undergraduate Students: Choose two of the four SAR options to complete (50 points total).
- Graduate Students: Choose three of the four SAR papers (75 points total).

Group Project: Public Service Announcement Video (100 points). You will have an opportunity to partner with three to four of your classmates to create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) video to raise awareness about an issue related to suicide prevention, assessment, treatment, postvention, or policy that is of specific interest to you and your group members. PBS.org defines PSAs as “Announcements that inform the public about safety and health information, community services or public affairs. Produced and programmed much like commercials, but usually not produced for profit.” The video should be approximately three to four minutes in length. To successfully complete this assignment, you will submit the following over the course of the semester:
(1) proposal and work plan (25 points); (2) draft of video script and storyboard (40 points); and (3) final video (35 points).

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Sometimes, life rears its ugly head, making it difficult for us to complete our requisite responsibilities. Thus, for one assignment, you get a 72-hour extension without penalty. After that week, I will deduct 5% from the assignment grade every 24 hours that the assignment is not submitted. Please note that late work will not be accepted one week after the deadline (either the stated deadline in the syllabus, or the one-free extended deadline on an assignment). If you have an accommodation for flexible deadlines through D&A, SES, or Title IX, please set up office hours so we can discuss how the late policy applies to you.

Please, if you anticipate being unable to meet an assignment deadline, let me know in advance so we can work together!

VI. CLASS POLICIES

NAMES AND PRONOUNS. At UT, we aim to facilitate advocacy, dialogue, and learning around issues related to gender equity. The ways in which we choose to address one another, through the use of preferred names and pronouns, can be a strategy that fosters an inclusive learning environment. Accordingly, each of us will honor and respect an individual’s request to be addressed according to their preferred name, with correct pronunciation, and gender pronoun. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name, unless they have added a chosen name with the registrar’s office. For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/profile-pronouns. If you would like to update your chosen name with the registrar’s office, please reference http://tinyurl.com/UTNameAndGenderMarker.

OFFICE HOURS. I strongly encourage you to reach out to me so that I can support your engagement and performance in this course. The best way to do this is to come to office hours! If you have questions about assignments, course content, accessibility accommodations, or academic life (e.g., career trajectory, research, mentorship), please reach out to me. I have office hours weekly. You do not bother me by coming to office hours—instead, I view this as an opportunity to facilitate your success in this course and as a doctoral student.

PARTICIPATION. As is the case in most upper-level undergraduate and graduate seminars, you are expected to participate actively in classroom discussions. This means coming to class having completed the readings for that day and bringing both your questions and ideas/thoughts/reflections concerning those readings. I also encourage you to bring “additional” sources of information to share with the class as pertaining to the topic(s) of discussion. This may include sharing information you have learned from other classes, or simply relating your own experiences and observations as it relates to qualitative research. We will be discussing a variety of theoretical ideas and empirical issues that may hold special significance to students. It is important to discuss ideas in a supportive and respectful manner, acknowledging that others may have different opinions. I encourage you to see things from a different point of view and use feedback from each other to augment your ideas. And while I encourage debate and disagreement as a productive aspect of classroom discussion, all students will be expected to always act in a respectful manner toward members of our class. Respect also extends to the ways in which we talk about and discuss survivors of suicide. I will encourage the use of person-centered and destigmatizing language.

TRIGGERING AND CHALLENGING MATERIALS. Suicide can be a triggering and challenging topic for many people, even those with professional training and experience. We all benefit from support during times of struggle. Know you are not alone. If you are experiencing signs of stress, anxiety, depression, academic
concerns, loneliness, difficulty sleeping, or any other concern impacting your well-being – you are strongly encouraged to connect with CMHC. The Counseling and Mental Health Center is located on campus and provides a wide variety of mental health services to UT students including crisis services, counseling services with immediate support and well-being resources. Additionally, CARE Counselors are located within each of the academic schools and colleges. These counselors are familiar with the concerns that are unique to their unit’s students. For more information on CMHC, visit cmhc.utexas.edu or call 512-471-3515.

VII. UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC POLICIES

Grading Scale

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>[No A+]</td>
<td>94.0 and Above</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0 to 93.999</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0 to 89.999</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>84.0 to 86.999</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0 to 83.999</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0 to 73.999</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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Attendance and Academic Behavior. At the University of Texas at Austin, regular attendance at all class meetings is expected. Instructors are responsible for implementing an attendance policy and must notify students of any special attendance requirements. See more information at https://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/attendance/. Furthermore, students are expected to abide by the Standards for Social Work Education (available at https://socialwork.utexas.edu/student-resources/bsw/policies-and-procedures/). The student shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, and keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements.

Religious Holy Days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable period after the absence. A reasonable accommodation does not include substantial modification to academic standards, or adjustments of requirements essential to any program of instruction. Students and instructors who have questions or concerns about academic accommodations for religious observance or religious beliefs may contact the Center for Access and Restorative Engagement at https://community.utexas.edu/care/. The University does not maintain a list of religious holy days.

The University of Texas Honor Code. The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Policy on Academic Integrity. Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and / or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct.

Use of Course Materials. The materials used in this course, including, but not limited to, exams, quizzes, and
homework assignments, are copyright-protected works. Any unauthorized duplication of the course materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of course materials without the specific, express approval of the professor may be a violation of the University’s Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This sharing includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of distributing those materials to other current or future students.

**University Electronic Mail Student Notification.** Electronic mail (email), like postal mail, is a mechanism for official University communication to students. The University will exercise the right to send email communications to all students, and the University will expect that email communications will be received and read in a timely manner. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at [https://it.utexas.edu/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy](https://it.utexas.edu/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy).

**STEVE HICKS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK POLICIES**

**Professional Conduct and Civility in the Classroom.** The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another’s opinions. A course brings together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, physical abilities, religious and political beliefs, national origins, and sexual orientations, among others. We expect to learn from each other in an atmosphere of positive engagement and mutual respect. This atmosphere includes working intentionally to recognize and dismantle racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism in the classroom. Social Work also deals with complex and controversial issues. These issues may be challenging and uncomfortable, and it would be impossible to offer a substantive classroom experience that did not include potentially difficult conversations relating to challenging issues. In this environment, we will be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. Nevertheless, the professor requires that students engage one another with civility, respect, and professionalism.

**Classroom Confidentiality.** Information shared in class about agencies, clients, and personal matters is considered confidential per the NASW Code of Ethics on educational supervision and is protected by regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well. As such, sharing this information with individuals outside of the educational context is not permitted. Violations of confidentiality could result in actions taken according to the policies and procedure for review of academic performance located in sections 3.0, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Standards for Social Work Education.

**Unanticipated Distress.** Students may experience unexpected and/or distressing reactions to course readings, videos, conversations, and assignments. If so, students are encouraged to inform the professor. The professor can be responsive and supportive regarding students’ participation in course assignments and activities, but students are responsible for communicating clearly what kind of support is desired. If counseling is needed, students may contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center at 512-471-3515 or online at [https://cmhc.utexas.edu/](https://cmhc.utexas.edu/).

**Policy on Social Media and Professional Communication.** Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and
prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other forms of electronic communication (e.g. blogs) must be mindful of how their communication may be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image.

Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students’ social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including any information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in any way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.

Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

RESOURCES, PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION, AND SAFETY

Disability Accommodation Statement. If you are a student with a disability or think you may have a disability and need accommodations, please contact Disability and Access (D&A). You may refer to D&A’s website for contact and more information: https://community.utexas.edu/disability/. If you are already registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and how they apply in my class.

Behavior Concerns and Covid-19 Advice Line (BCCAL). If students have concerns about their behavioral health, or if they are concerned about the behavioral health of someone else, students may use the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns. This service is provided through a partnership between the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line. The Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line has been expanded to support The University of Texas at Austin community during the COVID-19 pandemic. By calling 512-232-5050 - Option 2 for COVID-19, students, faculty, and staff can be assisted in English and Spanish with COVID-19 support.

Covid-19 Related Information. The University’s policies and practices related to the pandemic may be accessed at: https://protect.utexas.edu/

Title IX Reporting. In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the University of Texas at Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct on the basis of sex https://titleix.utexas.edu/. Faculty, field instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking, dating violence, or any other forms of sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University’s Title IX
Coordinator. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at [https://titleix.utexas.edu/](https://titleix.utexas.edu/).

**Title IX Accommodations for Those Pregnant, Nursing and Parenting.** Pregnant, nursing and parenting students, faculty, and staff are eligible for accommodations through the Title IX Office that support equal access to education and work and prevent discrimination. Students may reach out to the Title IX Office for help with accommodations to make up missed classes, complete missed coursework, keep them safe in the classroom, apply for leaves of absence, receive priority registration and other related support. Faculty and staff, including undergraduate students who work on campus and graduate student employees, may reach out for assistance with job or schedule restructuring and obtaining modified or additional work equipment. Visit the [Title IX pregnancy and parenting resource page](https://titleix.utexas.edu/) for more information or contact the Title IX Support and Resources team connect with a Case Manager.

**Campus Carry Policy.** The University’s policy on campus carry may be found here: [https://campuscarry.utexas.edu](https://campuscarry.utexas.edu).

**Safety.** As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy.** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors in the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor’s instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

**VIII. COURSE SCHEDULE**
*Undergraduate students: Please choose two readings to review each week. Graduate students: Please review all listed readings.*

**WEEK 1 | January 18 | Course Introduction & Definitions**

**WEEK 2 | January 25 | Theories of Suicide and Suicide Risk**

**Readings:**

**WEEK 3 | February 1 | Risk and Protective Factors**

**Readings:**

**WEEK 4 | February 8 | Public Health Approaches to Suicide Prevention**

**Assignments:**
- SAR #1 Due at 10pm *(Choose two readings from Weeks 2-4 to focus on in your SAR)*
- Graduate students: Complete Counseling on Access to Lethal Means training and submit a copy of certificate to Canvas. The training is free and takes approximately two hours to complete. Access online training here: [http://training.sprc.org/](http://training.sprc.org/)

**Readings:**

**WEEK 5 | February 15 | Suicide Risk Screening and Assessment**

**Readings:**

**WEEK 6 | February 22 | Crisis Management**

**Assignments:**
- Proposal and Work Plan for PSA Video Due at 10pm

**Readings:**

**WEEK 7 | February 29 | Safety Planning and Brief Interventions**

**Assignments**
- SAR #2 Due at 10 pm *(Choose two readings from Weeks 5-7 to focus on in your SAR)*

**Readings:**

**WEEK 8 | March 7 | Settings-Based Suicide Prevention, Part I**

**Readings:**

**WEEK 9 | March 21 | Settings-Based Suicide Prevention, Part II**

**Assignments:**
- Draft of PSA Video Script and Storyboard Due at 10pm

**Readings:**

**WEEK 10 | March 28 | Lived Experience**
Assignments:

- SAR #3 Due at 10pm (Choose two readings from Weeks 8-10 to focus on in your SAR)

Readings:


WEEK 11 | April 4 | Postvention

Readings:


WEEK 12 | April 11 | Policy Implications

Readings:


WEEK 13 | April 18 | Ethical, Moral, & Social Justice Considerations

Assignments:

- SAR #4 Due at 10pm (Choose two readings from Weeks 8-10 to focus on in your SAR)

Readings:


WEEK 14 | April 25 | Group Presentations & Course Conclusion

Assignments:

- Group Presentations Due at 2:30pm

XI. BIBLIOGRAPHY


