

SW 790-003: Social Work and the Animal-Human Bond

Spring/Summer, 2012
June 14 & 21, 8:30-4:30

Kristine Siefert, Ph.D., MPH, ACSW
ksiefert@umich.edu

2846 SSWB
(734) 763-6201

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

A growing body of research documents the importance of the relationship between humans and animals, ranging from significance of companion animals and the need for social support for bereaved pet owners to the relationship between animal abuse and child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse. In addition, the therapeutic benefits of animals are well-established, and pet-facilitated therapy is highly consistent with classic social work approaches to problem-solving and promoting optimal adjustment between the client and his/her environment. This two-day mini-course addresses the social work practice implications of the complex bond between humans and other animals. Topics covered will include 1) an overview of the relationship between humans and animals and why related knowledge, attitudes, and skills are important for social workers; 2) animals as pets and their health and mental health benefits over the life course; 3) pet-facilitated psychotherapy and the use of service animals; 4) animal abuse and its relationship to domestic violence; and 5) ethical issues and controversies, including animal rights, animals and research, vegetarianism, and social work and speciesism.

2. COURSE CONTENT

Since this is a mini-course, it is not possible to cover each of the above topics in detail. Thus, this course will provide an overview of each topic, including suggested readings and resources. The mini-course will focus primarily on those topics with immediate relevance to social work practice: animals as pets and their role in human well-being, including issues related to the loss of a companion animal; the use of animal-assisted therapy, service animals, and other animal-assisted interventions; and the assessment and treatment of animal abusers.

3. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who complete the course will be able to:

- 1) Identify the health and mental health benefits of companion animals over the life course, including their documented role in promoting physical and psychological health among children and the elderly;
- 2) Assess the attachment between clients and their pets and provide appropriate support to clients experiencing the loss of a pet;
- 3) Describe indications for, potential benefits of, and potential risks (for both human and animal) of animal-assisted interventions ranging from pet-facilitated therapy to service animals; and
- 4) Describe current approaches to the assessment and treatment of animal abusers.

4. RELATIONSHIP OF THE COURSE TO CURRICULAR THEMES

Theme Relation to Multiculturalism & Diversity:

Cross-cultural differences and findings from studies of ethnic diversity and the animal-human bond are presented. An important focus of the course is the role of animals in promoting inclusion and quality of life for people with physical or mental health challenges.

Theme Relation to Social Justice:

Protection and promotion of animal well-being and prevention of animal abuse and neglect are addressed, including assessment and treatment of animal abusers. The role of companion, therapy, and service animals in empowering people with disabilities is examined.

Theme Relation to Promotion, Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation:

The impact of the animal-human bond on health and mental over the life course is examined and the role of companion animals in promoting health and mental health is discussed. Components of the animal-human relationship are examined and interventions to support clients facing pet loss are presented.

Theme Relation to Behavioral and Social Science Research:

Behavioral and social science research is presented throughout the course and includes findings from studies of the animal-human bond in social work, medicine, veterinary medicine, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, and public health, as well as psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Relationship to SW Ethics and Values:

Ethical aspects of animal-human relationships, animal rights, “speciesism,” and implications for social work are an important component of the course.

5. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Academic Conduct and Integrity

Please see the Student Code of Academic and Professional Conduct in the *Student Guide to the Master's in Social Work Degree Program* (<http://www.ssw.umich.edu/studentGuide/2012/>) for a discussion of student responsibilities for academic conduct and integrity. Students who are found responsible for academic misconduct are subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the School of Social Work, revocation of degree, or any other sanction deemed appropriate to address the violation.

B. Attendance and Participation

Attendance at all class sessions and active participation in class activities is required. In consideration of your classmates, please arrive on time and remember to turn off your cell phone. Please do not text-message, read your e-mail, surf the Internet, etc. during class. If you are on call, please let me know in advance and set your pager to vibrate.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodation for a disability or any other special need, please let me know so that I can work out the necessary arrangements.

Religious Observances

Please notify me if religious observances conflict with any part of the class so that I can make appropriate arrangements.

C. Assignments

Course assignments include participation in class activities and discussions, completion of the required readings, and completion of two brief assignments. Details will be provided in a separate handout. Required readings are available through the University Library's Electronic Journals (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/ejournals/>) and on the course website in CTools.

D. Grading

Grading for the course is satisfactory/unsatisfactory and is based on attendance, participation in class activities, and successful completion of the course assignments.

COURSE SCHEDULE

June 14

- 8:30-9:00 *Introductions and Overview*
- 9:00-10:15 *Animal-Human Bond Over the Life Course*
- 10:15-10:30 Break
- 10:30-12:00 *Helping Clients Cope with the Loss of A Companion Animal* (Linda L. Lawrence, MSW, LMSW, Coordinator of Veterinary Social Work Services, Michigan State University)
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch
- 1:00-2:15 *Therapy and Service Animals: Improving Quality of Life and Access for All* (Anna Ercoli Schnitzer, Disabilities Issues Librarian, University of Michigan Health Sciences Libraries)
- 2:15-2:30 Break
- 2:30-4:00 *Paws With a Cause Demonstration* (Diane Barrett, Paws With a Cause SE Michigan Client Services Representative)
- 4:00--4:30 *Summary*

June 21

- 8:30-8:45 *Overview of Day II*
- 8:45-10:00 *Animal-Human Relationships: Ethical Issues and Controversies*
- 10:00-10:15 Break

10:15-11:15	<i>Lessons from a Disaster</i>
11:15-12:00	<i>Social Work Practice and the Animal-Human Bond: Overview</i>
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:00	<i>Assessment and Treatment of Animal Abusers: Introduction to The AniCare Model</i> (Dr. Kenneth Shapiro, Executive Director, Animals & Society Institute, via Skype)
2:00-2:15	Break
2:15-2:45	<i>Animal-Assisted Interventions: Overview</i>
2:45-4:15	<i>Animal Assisted Therapy</i> (Amy Johnson, Director, Animal Assisted Therapy Certificate Program, Oakland University)
4:15-4:30	<i>Summary</i>

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Most of the journal articles below are available on our CTools website. Those marked * can be accessed through UM's Interlibrary Loan Service (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/interlibrary-loan>). Most journal articles are also available through the University Library's Electronic Journals (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/ejournals/>).

The Animal-Human Bond: Overview

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Virues-Ortega J & Buela-Casal G (2006). Psychophysiological Effects of Animal-Human Interaction: Theoretical Issues and Long-Term Interaction Effects. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 294 (1): 52-57.

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