

SW 790-006: Advanced Topics in Interpersonal Practice -  
Working with Self-help, Support, and Advocacy Groups  
(including 12-step groups)  
OH: Mon 4:30-6:00 Tues 4:30-6:00 & by appt.  
tpowell@umich.edu

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Fall 2014  
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### **Course Description:**

The course will review studies of the services provided by self-help and mutual aid groups including 12-step groups. The nature of self-help services will be compared and contrasted with those provided by professional help system. The benefits (and risks) of self-help groups will be examined. Special attention will be given to how providers and their agencies can coordinate their activities with self-help groups. Thus, specific strategies that add value to professional services will be discussed. The discussions will include perspectives on how self-help can enhance professional services and vice versa. Ethical issues related to the autonomy of self-help groups and the propriety of professional involvement will be explored in relation to a variety of groups including 12-step groups. Similarities and differences between online and in person groups will be assessed. Patterns of self-help use will be examined by age, class, color, ethnicity, family structure, gender, race, religion or spirituality, immigrant or refugee status, and sexual orientation. These patterns will be analyzed with an aim to developing strategies to mitigate existing discrepancies.

A basic premise of the course is that working with self-help, support, and advocacy groups (including 12-step mutual aid groups) offers opportunities to social workers and other mental health professionals to increase their effectiveness. Many professionals already interact in various ways with self-help and mutual aid groups and many more could do so if they were equipped with requisite knowledge and skills. This course will examine the available knowledge about a variety of empirically supported groups and advocacy organizations. The aim is to enhance provider competencies to use best practices in developing effective strategies for coordinating with self-help and mutual aid groups and fellowships.

### **Course Objectives:**

After participation students will be better able to:

Enable their clients and agencies to access a wide range of self-help, support and advocacy groups.

Distinguish the properties and functions of a variety of self-help and mutual aid groups, including 12-step fellowships.

Facilitate client involvement in self-help groups

Work with clients involved with self-help services to enhance the benefits and reduce the risks associated with both professional and self-help services.

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## Course Design:

The course will utilize lecture, readings, and visits to off-campus self-help groups. The course will also feature presentations by individuals and panels involved with self-help groups.

### Theme Relation to Multiculturalism & Diversity:

Multiculturalism and diversity issues will be presented in relation to the various self-help, support, and advocacy groups. Groups, including 12-step groups will be examined in terms of their relationship with factors such as age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression) marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation.

### Theme Relation to Social Justice:

Self-help and advocacy groups will be examined in relation to their contribution to social justice. They will also be examined as possible barriers to more socially just arrangements

### Theme Relation to Promotion, Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation:

Self-help, support and advocacy groups will be considered as possible resources for the promotion of health and the prevention of problems interfering with well-being

### Theme Relation to Behavioral and Social Science Research:

Behavioral and social science conceptual frameworks and empirical findings will be presented in terms of the effectiveness of self-help and the mechanism through which its effects are mediated.

### Relationship to SW Ethics and Values:

This course will examine ethical issues related to how clients are directed between self-help and professional resources. It will also examine issues related to professional cooperation with self-help groups.

### Intensive Focus on PODS:

This course integrates PODS content and self-help knowledge by investigating how the domain is affected by race/ethnicity, religion, class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability.

**Accommodation:** If you have a disability (mental or physical) and desire accommodation, please let me know right away.

## Class Participation

Thoughtful and insightful participation is preferable to frequent contributions that merely restate presented facts, are not on topic, or make unsubstantiated claims. The best contributions are those that are relevant to the question at hand. They often build on or respond to the observations of others, make links to prior classes, or draw on materials and lessons from other courses. Debates and disagreements can be powerful opportunities for learning. We look forward to these types of dialogues with you. (*My sentiments, however source unknown*).

## SOURCE MATERIALS

**All required readings are available online. In Ctools, click on Forums.**

American Self-Help Clearinghouse

<http://www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/>

<http://www.nami.org/>

<http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>

Sites of local interest

<http://campusmindworks.org/>

<http://mitalk.org/>

[http://hr.umich.edu/mhealthy/programs/mental\\_emotional/understandingu/](http://hr.umich.edu/mhealthy/programs/mental_emotional/understandingu/)

The above three are U-M sites

<http://www2.med.umich.edu/psychiatry/umdc/resourcesupport.cfm> (needs updating, UM Depression Center)

<http://mi.nami.org/> (NAMI, Michigan)

<http://namiwc.org/> (NAMI, Washtenaw County)

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Assignment 1 Ctools/Forums

Respond to two forums by the second week and two for the third week. Select a Forum/reading(s) and post your critique (conversation) by **Monday noon** before the class in which it is scheduled. Review other students' posts and comment (reply to a message) on one of them before **Wednesday 5:00 p.m.**

Deadlines are based on the need to review each other's posts before class. **Five points per forum, total 25 points.** Select your **Forum**, click on **"Attachments"** read the documents, click on **"Discussion,"** click on **"Start a New Conversation,"** enter **"title,"** paste your comments in the text box, click on **"post."**

To read all posts, click on **"Display Message Content."** After reading all the messages, **select one** and click on **"Reply," envelope**, click on the **W button** and paste your comments in the text box and click on **"post."**

The critique should be approximately 150 words or more if you wish.

The reading critique should include:

**a) A major idea(s) in the article and;**

**b) How these ideas can be applied to your practice. It is of utmost importance to answer the "so what" question. How will these ideas make you a better practitioner?**

The post should discuss your unique impression of the reading, though of course you may refer to other students' posts. You should expect to contribute to the class discussion about the reading even if it comes up after the assigned date. Thus you should remember your post and have a copy handy.

Thoughtful and timely posts, and a response to another student's post, will merit full credit. Late posts receive no credit. Timing is critical because reading and commenting on the articles means you are prepared for class. Thus plan ahead and work ahead if you like so you will get full credit (you can post even if you can't be in class). At the end of the course, you will copy your posts into Ctools/Assignments to facilitate grading.

## Assignment 2 ---Course paper:

After a preliminary literature review and before attending a self-help meeting(s), formulate a question about self-help that can be explored in a **2100– 3000 word paper (3.5 – 6.0 single spaced pages, more if you wish)**

Arrange to attend a self-help meeting alone arriving early and staying late to engage members in conversations related to your question/topic. (Exception: attendance not required for those who have attended numerous self-help meetings.)

Some examples of topics that could be addressed in the paper might include newcomer anxiety, views about professionals by self-help leaders, the nature of self-help networks, opinions about religious/spiritual issues, sensitivity to multicultural issues, and so on.

- Describe the type and location of the meeting.
- Observe participant demographics such as age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, etc.
- Discuss the “culture and feel” of the meeting (e.g., friendly, formal, disorganized, business-like, intellectual, literature oriented, PODS sensitive, etc.).
- Report how you felt about being there and the others that were there?
- **Most importantly discuss the question/topic you used to structure your paper and guide your literature search. The question/topic should be reflected in the title of your paper. Be sure to include a section on how you will use this information in your practice, i.e. practice implications. \*See Appendix**
- **Paper = 60 points due before fourth class, October 22**

Submit Ctools/Assignments in **inline format, single spaced paragraphs. Do not put your name in the body of the paper—the computer recognizes who is posting the paper.**

I would be happy to schedule an appointment to discuss the paper. You do not need to have a firm topic for a conference to be helpful. A conference can help you clarify your interest, settle on a topic, create an outline, develop a literature search strategy, etc. If office hours don't work, give me some times that will work. See appendix for additional tips on this paper

## Assignment 4 --Handout (outline or summary) based on Course Paper

Using your paper as the base, prepare a **one sheet, two page max** outline as a handout for class members. I can make photocopies for the class  
**Due fourth session and worth 15 points.**

Papers should contain references from print journals even if they are accessed electronically. A first-rate paper must build on the best available ideas and data (references) related to the topic. By carefully choosing the most informative references you can take advantage of the work that has already been done. All paper topics (no matter how unique the topic) have relevant references. See me if you're having trouble identifying relevant references.

Preference should be given to references that are peer reviewed, evidence-based, and current. Where available choose high impact, high-quality journals. You should strive to build the paper on informative, comprehensive, insightful references. Systematic reviews of the literature reviews or meta-analyses will

often be most useful.

The answer to what is a sufficient number of references will vary depending on their comprehensiveness and the nature of the paper. However, fewer than four or five should raise a question about whether the topic has been adequately covered, but again remember quality is more important than quantity. When you refer to an article in print even if you access it electronically, you need only cite the print source, i.e., the original source. Most print articles are peer reviewed; Internet content that is not peer reviewed should be carefully evaluated.

### **Grading Rubric for papers**

**Paper builds on best available literature 20 points**

**Quality of analysis and discussion, 20 points**

**Implications for practice (what you learned and how you will use it) 20 points**

**Total = 60**

**The paper is due in Ctools/Assignments (Inline format, single space) November 7 before class**

Five Forums	25
Course paper	60
Class handout	15
Total	100

#### Final Grade

100	A+	95-99	A
90-94	A-	87 - 89	B+
83-86	B	80-82	B-
77-79	C+	73-76	C
70-72	C-	63-69	D
60-62	D-	≤ 59	E

From the *Student Guide*

#### **Grades in Academic Courses**

Letter grades from "A" through "E" are given for class performance. "A" grades are given for exceptional individual performance and mastery of the material. The use of "A+", "A", and "A-" distinguish the degree of superiority. "B" grades are given to students who demonstrate mastery of the material. "B+" is used for students who perform just above the mastery level but not in an exceptional manner. "B-" is used for students just below the mastery level. "C" grades are given when mastery of the material is minimal. A "C -" is the lowest grade which carries credit. "D" grades indicate deficiency and carry no credit. "E" grades indicate failure and carry no credit.

*The fine print is for problems that I hope won't arise. But just in case, here are the rules: If you miss more than one session (30 minutes or more late or leaving early counts as a missed session), the grade will be lowered five points for each session beyond one that is not made up. Even when the miss is for completely legitimate reasons, missing more than one session simply means you've had only part of the course. To make up a session find out from other students what was covered and develop a make-up plan to be submitted via email for my approval. The plan should focus on the topic of the missed session, and should involve three or more hours of effort.*

*In fairness to other students, papers cannot be rewritten for a higher grade except when the initial grade is the equivalent of C- or below. In that case the paper can be rewritten and the grade will be the average of the first and second paper. I am, of course, available to meet with you to explain my comments on your paper and to suggest ways to strengthen your work.*

*If you would like me to reconsider your grade, please submit in writing your evaluation of the paper and your reasons for the request before asking for an appointment. Please refer to any conference about the paper and the understanding we had about the goals and the content of the paper.*

### **Preliminary Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments**

9-24      Conceptions of self-help, mutual help, support groups  
Epidemiology of self-help.  
The effectiveness of self-help  
The mechanisms of self-help  
**A.A. panel**

#### **Review of syllabus and assignments**

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10-1      **NAMI Barb Higman, Bob Nassauer, Angela**

Self-help group presentation  
Discussion of readings

Powell & Kurtz, in press

Borkman, 1976

Discussion of Forums including questions below

Describe your field of practice interest.

Identify the self-help or support groups relevant to this field of practice.

Select the one(s) you plan to visit

Discuss the question that will organize your visit and that will be the theme of your paper

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10-8

#### **Children of Hoarders (Elizabeth Nelson)**

White, 2014, pp. 190-91, 199-212

Riessman 1965

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10-15

#### **No class: Self-help visits and paper preparation**

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10-22

#### **Student presentations Paper due**

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10-29

#### **Student presentations Review and wrap-up**

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## Appendix

**The instructions are for an AA/NA visit. However, as far as it is feasible you should follow similar or parallel procedures for other self-help group such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), DBSA (Depression Bipolar Support Alliance), Recovery International, Schizophrenics Anonymous.**

For the AA/NA option, attend one or more meetings. (If you are an experienced meeting goer, you needn't attend meetings and we should discuss a more advanced assignment) The meeting must be an “open” meeting (open meetings generally have a speaker and everyone is welcome, closed meetings are for those who identify as addicts/alcoholics ONLY). Meetings generally last about an hour. Two meetings of different groups or the same group would be better but it may not be possible given your time constraints.

You **must attend the meeting alone** so that you can experience some of the same uneasiness a client may experience when a treatment program or court mandates attendance.

### **Before going to the meeting, access:**

[http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/First\\_AA\\_Meeting.html](http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/First_AA_Meeting.html)

### **Read the following:**

*Introduction*

*Types of AA meetings*

*Rituals and Readings (what goes on in a meeting)*

*The problem of Fear*

Now find Narcotics Anonymous and/or Alcoholics Anonymous websites and locate area meetings. Find an **OPEN meeting** and attend. <http://www.hvai.org/>

**Arrive early, browse the literature, start a conversation with someone. Members are generally very helpful to newcomers. After the meeting, talk to at least two people about your questions and what you want to learn. Ask them what they think is the most important thing for you to learn.**

Do not take notes in the meeting and respect the anonymity of the members (no real names in assignment as well). Do tell members that you are there as a student.

Be aware that every meeting has its own “culture” and comment on the culture of this particular meeting. Take care to be respectful of others in their own environment.

**Your paper should incorporate references that enable you to build on what is known about A.A., NA, and other self-help groups.**

**Discuss how you will use this research (your visit and reading of the literature) in your social work practice. You may want to discuss how you will facilitate involvement in a group or integrate your client's self-help experience with professional services. This may require some discussion of the effective ingredients of self-help involvement. Please see me for additional ideas that might suit your interests.**