

The Philadelphia Center
Abnormal Psychology IDS 361
Mondays 5:45 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

Instructor: Patria Alvelo, Psy.D., M.A.

Phone: (267) 973-5572

Email: drpatriaalvelo@gmail.com

Course Description:

In this seminar, students will learn how psychological disorders are currently defined, classified, and treated while taking a critical approach to the constructs of mental health and mental illness. This course will examine psychological disorders from biological, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, social, and phenomenological perspectives. In this course, students will learn about the classification and treatment of mental disorders from a “top-down” as well as a “bottom-up” perspective. Students will study the *DSM 5* while reading case studies and materials written from a patient perspective in order to enhance their understanding and empathy for those experiencing mental illness. In addition to lectures and formal assignments, this course will offer an interactive component that includes multimedia presentations, guest speakers, field trips, and opportunities for students to discuss their internship experiences in class.

Course Objectives:

- Develop a basic understanding of the major categories of mental illness through identification of symptoms, symptom severity, and function of symptoms.
- Increase compassion and empathy for individuals and families experiencing mental illness.
- Explore multiple paradigms of defining and identifying mental illness now and throughout history (i.e. behavioral, social, societal, biological/physiological, pragmatic, psychological) and be able to think critically about the benefits and limitations of each approach.
- Exhibit an ability to comprehend and think critically about mental health topics covered in the media and professional journals through participation in class discussions and class assignments.
- Apply course topics to practicum experiences, to inform conceptualization of patients and treatment interventions.
- Develop awareness of impact of mental illness on individuals, families, and society.
- Learn about the mental health system in its current state along with various career/ educational options.

Readings:

Comer, R.J. (2015). *Abnormal psychology* (9th ed.). New York: Worth Publishers. (You do not need to buy the book).

Supplemental readings will be provided in a course packet.

Course Requirements:

Students will demonstrate that they have met course objectives through the following:

- **Weekly reflection papers (20%)** which will cover weekly readings/articles/videos. Students will write brief summaries of and reactions to the readings. This can include relating the readings to other topics covered in class, contemporary issues in the news, or practicum experiences. Questions or areas of confusion can be outlined in the paper, as well as any emotional reactions to the material. I may include specific questions to be answered in a given week. Approx. 1-2 pages each, 12pt font, double spaced. Email paper by 8:00 a.m. Monday.

Grading: based on evidence of completing the readings and reflections/connections made, grammar, and adequate expression of ideas.

- **Quizzes (20%)** Two quizzes will be administered during the semester which will cover topics addressed in class.
- **Case write-up (20%)** This write-up will require students to use a de-identified patient that he or she is working with, a character from a TV show or movie, or create a pseudo-patient. The write-up will include the case history, nature of functioning, and diagnostic rationale. The paper should also include a brief treatment plan. Research on symptoms and treatment should be cited in the write-up. (Ethical issues regarding use of real patients in an educational setting will be thoroughly discussed, as well as what comprises adequate de-identification). (5-6 pages)

Grading: based on thoroughness of paper, accuracy of diagnosis, evidence of research, and writing.

- **Research Presentation (20%)** This course provides an overview of major topics in abnormal psychology, so this project will allow students to choose a more specific topic of interest to present in pairs to the class. Students must use at least 3 research articles and prepare a 15-20 minute presentation to the class. Some possible topic areas include but are certainly not limited to:
 - Current research and treatment of a specific disorder
 - Various treatment efficacies (ECT, cognitive behavioral therapy for social anxiety)
 - Cross-cultural issues
 - Gender and diagnosis
 - Controversial issues related to a specific diagnosis/mental health issue

Grading: based on clarity, organization of presentation, use of 3 or more research articles, evidence of some original thinking based on integration of research cited, evidence of preparation and ability to answer questions about topic.

- **Class Participation (20%)** Class attendance and discussion will be an important component of learning and exploration of topics throughout the course. Class participation includes contributing ideas, asking questions, and exhibiting thoughtfulness around various topics.

Grading: based on class attendance, participation during class discussions, and quality of contributions to class discussions (i.e. reflect thoughtfulness, questions formulated from the readings).

Class Schedule

Week 1: Introductions

Abnormal Psychology: Past & Present (Ch. 1)

Research in Abnormal Psychology (Ch. 2)

Start *Girl, Interrupted*

Week 2: Models of Abnormality (Ch. 3)

Clinical Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment (Ch. 4)

Finish *Girl, Interrupted*

Week 3: Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive, and Related Disorders (Ch. 5)

Week 4: Disorders of Trauma and Stress (Ch. 6)

Case Study: *Brothers*

Week 5: Depressive and Bipolar Disorders (Ch. 7)

Treatment for Depressive and Bipolar Disorders (Ch. 8)

Suicide (Ch. 9)

Week 6: Disorders featuring Somatic Symptoms (Ch. 10)

Eating Disorders (Ch. 11)

Watch *Thin*

Week 7: Quiz 1

Student conferences (one-on-one meetings to check in about projects)

Week 8: Disorders of Gender and Sex (Ch. 13)

Watch documentary

Week 9: Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders (Ch. 14 and 15)

Guest Speaker: Jason Hart, Psy.D.

Case Study: *A Beautiful Mind*

Week 10: Substance Use and Addictive Disorders (Ch. 12)

Case Study: *Rachel Getting Married*

Week 11: Personality Disorders (Ch. 16)

Week 12: Quiz 2

Catch-up and check-in

Week 13: Student Presentations