



University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice  
**SWRK783: Advanced Mental Health Practice with Veterans**  
Fall Semester 2021-22  
Course Syllabus

Instructor: Leah Blain, Ph.D.	Office: 3535 Market St., Rm 676
E-mail address: leblain@pennmedicine.upenn.edu	Office hours: By appointment through e-mail (Zoom or in person)

**Class times:**

Wednesdays, 3:30 – 6:00 pm

- 3:30 – 4:30: agenda setting and class discussion
- 4:30 – 5:30: speaker presentation
- 5:30 – 6:00: Q&A and de-brief

(Please note: We will deviate slightly from this schedule on some class meeting dates based on the availability of our guest speakers.)

**Location:**

3535 Market St., Room 640  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

**Course Overview:**

This clinical practice elective course is open to all students and is also required for students in the Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) MSW Scholars Program. The advanced practice course introduces students to evidence-based clinical practice with a diverse Veteran community, and includes screening, assessment, and treatment for traumatic experiences and various psychiatric disorders including: depression and anxiety/mood disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse disorder (SUD). Specific attention will be given to suicide risk management, including Safety Planning and lethal means counseling. The course will also cover important topics of collaborative care and inter-professional teamwork, particularly important for organizations serving Veterans and their family members. The majority of class sessions will feature experienced clinicians working with Veterans at the Corporal Michael Crescenz Veterans Administration Medical Center (CMC VAMC), along with presentations from Vet Center staff and the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania, an outpatient mental health clinic located within the Perelman School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To gain an understanding of evidence-based practices for working with US military Veterans and hone critical thinking and writing skills to be able to evaluate current and emerging research.
2. To further understanding of collaborative care and systems serving Veterans and their families, including working on interprofessional teams and access issues facing Veterans.
3. To gain an familiarity with the assessment and treatment of common behavioral health concerns, including unipolar depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use disorders.

4. To gain an understanding of common stressors facing veterans (e.g., Moral Injury, TBI, MST) as well as effective methods of addressing these injuries.
5. To be able to demonstrate an advanced understanding of suicide risk management guidelines and best practices.
6. To gain an understanding of best practices related to homelessness in a Veteran population.

### **Course Expectations and Requirements:**

#### **Required Textbooks: n/a**

Journal articles and other readings are found on the CANVAS course website.

### **Course Expectations and Requirements:**

#### ➤ What is Expected of 2<sup>nd</sup> YR MSW Advanced Practice Students:

- Come to class focused, present, and prepared, having read and thought about the assigned readings prior to each session.
- Participate actively and relevantly in class discussions and experiential exercises/activities
- Submit written assignments on time; (if late they will be graded down one grade, e.g. A to A-)
- Not submitting assignments will result in a course failure
- Familiarize yourself with CANVAS course website online as needed.
- **Cell phones are not to be used during the class unless otherwise specified**

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 at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>.

Students are required to use APA reference style –

American Psychological Assn. (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Washington DC: Author

#### ➤ Class Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all classes. If a student is unable to attend class, they should inform the instructor in advance of class. A message on the instructor's voice mail or e-mail is sufficient. If there is a problem, let us know and we can problem solve. Attendance will be taken at all class sessions. If the student misses a class, the student is responsible for making up any missed work and for obtaining any other information that was disseminated in class from student colleagues. Students who miss 3 classes, for any reason, will not be eligible to receive credit for the course and will be required to withdraw or receive a failing grade. Please note, it is not always possible to make up missed time because of the nature of some courses.

#### ➤ Evaluating your Work

- 1) Quality of written assignments: all papers are to be of graduate level quality, well documented with proper sources and citations, using APA format, and submitted on time. If the paper is late, please review the late assignment policy below. Papers will be evaluated based on the assignment requirements, level of critical thought and analysis, student self-awareness and reflection, clarity of understanding and explication of the course concepts, use of the current empirical literature, use of relevant field internship case examples, and writing quality.

- 2) Class participation: attendance, being present in the moment, quality and quantity of oral participation, participation in experiential exercises, evidence of preparation for class, and peer discussion assignments, and presentations

- Late Paper Policy: Please note that there will be no extensions on assignments. For each day that an assignment is late, one grade point will be automatically deducted prior to reading and grading the paper (e.g., from A to A-; A- to B+ etc.). Again, please, don't let this happen. Papers are due as noted by the time in this syllabus and on their due date. Please upload all assignments to CANVAS in **WORD.doc format only**.
- Professional Code of Conduct: Failure to meet generally accepted social work standards of professional conduct, personal integrity or emotional stability requisite for professional practice, as well as inappropriate or disruptive behavior toward student colleagues, faculty, or staff (at school or field placement) will be the basis for academic review based on the MSW Student Policies & Procedures.
- Professional Performance Standards (MSW Program): All students must meet required standards of behavior for professional social work practice. The standards, along with related skill areas and required behaviors for each, are delineated in the SP2 Student Handbook.
- Incompletes: A grade of Incomplete is given at the end of the semester only when a student has discussed the matter with the instructor and there are extenuating circumstances that clearly justify an extension beyond the requirements established for the other students in the class.
- Academic Accommodations: Academic accommodations are available to students with documented disabilities. In order to access the accommodations for which you may be qualified, please register with the office of Disability Services: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>. The staff there will verify your need for specific accommodations and provide you with a memo to inform me of your needs. Once you have received this memo, please make an appointment to see me privately to discuss your needs. Please be aware that any needed accommodations cannot be implemented retroactively; therefore, timely notification of your needs is in your best interest.

### **Course Assignments:**

All assignments should be uploaded to CANVAS in a WORD (.docx) file by the day/time they are due. At the university, all assignments are checked for plagiarism via the University's Turnitin software service.

All submitted assignment files **must follow the same basic protocol** – lower case first initial, lower case last name, course number, dash -, and sequential numbering of the assignment. Your first submission file name should end in -1 such as **bsmith(swrk783)-1.docx** The following assignments will have file names in numerical order of submission.

### **Assignment #1**

#### **Issue brief**

***Due 10/20/21 at 3:30pm in Canvas***

The purpose of this exercise is to develop critical thinking and writing skills, take a deeper look at a topic of interest from the first weeks, and to develop professional presentation skills. You will need to choose one of the topics presented during the first 6 weeks and prepare a 2-3 page issue brief. The issue brief is a short, neutral summary of best available evidence, or what is known about a particular

issue or problem. It is widely used across government, healthcare, and non-profit service organizations. Knowing how to construct and present an issue effectively can help you secure funding, training, and resources in competitive environments.

## **The Framework of an Issue Brief**

### *Issue*

State the issue for consideration. Briefly state what is important to you in the context of a current public or health policy issue and the relevance of the issue to your intended audience (you can imagine a fictitious audience for this assignment or write this for submission to a policy journal for extra credit.)

### *Recommendation*

State the action you seek in connection with the above-stated issue. The recommendation should be for a program, policy, or intervention in this assignment.

### *Background*

Provide supporting information relevant to the issue and recommendation:

- List any organizational policy that supports or is relevant to the issue;
- List the actions you employ or activities in which you engage in that demonstrate the importance of that issue to you;
- List the current evidence-base that supports your actions or activities or suggests that these actions or activities lead to a given outcome; and
- List the evidence-base used to establish the laws or regulatory framework listed above.

### *References/Resources*

- List the appropriate citations for the evidence-base you provide within the issue brief.
- List any additional resources that you deem important to support your recommendation

## **Assignment #2**

### **PTSD critical analysis**

#### **Due date 11/10/21 @ 3:30pm**

PTSD, PTS, Moral Injury and a Strengths-Based Perspective. Write a 4-6 page paper contrasting primary models of post-combat traumatic stress response. In the paper answer the following questions:

- What are the core assumptions of each given perspective?
- What is trauma and how is it different than other life events?
- Are these models interchangeable? What are the implications of adopting one perspective over another?
- How do the different perspectives lend themselves to developing different interventions?
- What discrepancies, if any, do you feel should be addressed or resolved in future revisions of the DSM.

Required citations:

<https://cswe.org/Education-Resources/2015-Curricular-Guides/Military-Social-Work/MilitarySW2018.aspx>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18329146/>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15927781/>

[https://www.sheldonhub.org/usercontent/sitecontentuploads/3/92D00AA2F618149F979A1277D0033657/moral\\_injury-shay.pdf](https://www.sheldonhub.org/usercontent/sitecontentuploads/3/92D00AA2F618149F979A1277D0033657/moral_injury-shay.pdf)

<file:///C:/Users/cshel/Downloads/DrescherFoyKelly2011.pdf>

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND\\_OP389.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND_OP389.pdf)

### **Assignment #3**

#### **Critical Analysis of Choice**

**11/22/21 @ 5pm for feedback prior to presentation**

**OR 12/1/21 @ 3:30pm (if not already submitted)**

Students will choose a topic from the year, or from the list below, and write a 3-5 page brief noting the following considerations of a given topic. This paper is not an opinion piece and should present objective facts and balanced considerations. Formatting guides will be provided on CANVAS.

- Overview of the topic
- Policy and practice significance of the topic
- Critical review of current evidence-based research on the topic
- Applicability to diverse veteran populations (diversity in terms of socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and war-cohorts)
- Ethical considerations
- Implications for social work practice
- Summary Take Home Points
- Appendix – (citations with abstracts)

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Use of evidence-based practices
- Service animals
- Service-connected disability ratings
- Discharge status/access to care
- Means restriction for suicide prevention
- Service availability for sexual, gender, and reproductive identities
- Another pre-approved topic area (email ideas/requests to instructor)

This paper will serve as a guide for a 15-20 minute presentation (with 5-10 minutes of discussion) on the given topic over the last 2 weeks of class.

#### **Course Grading Policy:**

Assignment 1	= 20%
Assignment 2	= 20%
Assignment 3 - paper	= 20%
- presentation	= 20%
Class participation	= 20%

Key components for assessing class participation:

1. Students will take turns to lead class discussion in pairs based on the reading assignment and/or speaker presentation of the previous week. Each student will lead discussion **3 times** during the semester.

2. In class discussion contributions and thoughtful engagement with presenters.
3. Discussion Board posts in Canvas, as assigned.

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. At the end of the course, the student's performance will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- 1) Quality of written assignments: papers should be of graduate-level quality, well documented, and submitted on time. See late paper policy in previous section.
- 2) Class participation: attendance and quality of oral participation, and participation in experiential exercises as appropriate.
- 3) Demonstration of having completed assigned readings and having understood course concepts.

### **Grading:**

97-100: A+ -  
 94-96: A  
 90-93: A-  
 87-89: B+  
 84-86: B  
 80-83: B-  
 77-79: C+  
 74-76: C  
 70-73: C-  
 60-69: D  
 Below 60: F

### **Schedule of Topics**

#### **Week 1:**

**Syllabus review, Overview of Barriers to Care and Behavioral Health Access Points for Veterans**

#### Readings:

*Please review the following digital resources and bring any questions you have to discuss in class:*

National Council on Disability

- Components of the Health Care System  
<https://ncd.gov/publications/2009/March042009/section5/>
- Barriers to Seeking Care  
<https://ncd.gov/publications/2009/March042009/section6/>

RAND: Veterans Barriers to Care

<https://www.rand.org/health-care/projects/navigating-mental-health-care-for-veterans/barriers-to-care.html>

- Explore at least 2 linkages of interest

Cohen Veterans Network webpage:

<https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org/>

Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania:

**Week 2:**

**NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)**

**CANVAS – Asynchronous Online Integrating Clinical Skills**

- 1) Complete the CDP Military Culture: Enhancing Clinical Competence Course

<https://deploymentpsych.org/Military-Culture-Enhancing-Competence-Course-Description>

**Description:** This training module is for civilian mental health providers who want to develop a better understanding about how the military works and who comprises the armed forces. It provides an overview of military culture to include basics about its history, organizational structure, core values, branches of the service, mission, and operations, as well as the differences between the active and reserve components. Participants acquire greater competency in working with Service members by learning military culture and terminology, and by discussing how aspects of the military culture impact behaviors and perspectives.

- 2) Share your reactions on CANVAS by **Thursday 9/9/21 @ 11:59pm**

- a. Including take aways from the training course.
  - i. Anything that surprised you
  - ii. 2-3 key “take away” for your clinical practice
- b. Reflect on how you do/will incorporate an understanding of military culture into your clinical approach. Including:
  - i. What might you do, say, etc. differently when working with a Veteran?
  - ii. How will military cultural knowledge impact your thinking about cases?
  - iii. What potential challenges could you foresee in working with Veterans, and how do/would you try to address them?
  - iv. What strengths does military culture offer that you can/do incorporate?

- 3) Provide thoughtful online responses to each of your classmates’ initial responses by **Monday 9/13/21 @ 5pm.**

- a. For example: Did you find similarities or differences with your own approaches? Would you do anything differently now that you have reviewed other student responses?

**Week 3:**

**Suicide Risk Assessment and Management Guidelines**

Jackson, C., & Branson, Y. (2012). Assessing and responding to suicidal risk among OIF/OEF veterans. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practice with the military* (pp. 164-179). New York: Routledge.

Dobscha, S.K., et al. (2013). Brief assessment for suicidal ideation in OEF/OIF veterans with positive depression screens. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 35, 272-278

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.

#### **Week 4:**

##### **Homelessness in the Veteran Population**

###### Readings:

-Perl, L. (2015). 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 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (Part One). Washington, DC: Author.

-<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

-<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-2.pdf>

-[https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Vets\\_Case\\_Study\\_Philadelphia\\_Aug2016.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Vets_Case_Study_Philadelphia_Aug2016.pdf)

#### **Week 5:**

##### **Military Sexual Trauma**

###### Readings:

- Northcut, T. B., & Kienow, A. (2014). The Trauma Trifecta of Military Sexual Trauma: A Case Study Illustrating the Integration of Mind and Body in Clinical Work with Survivors of MST. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 42(3), 247-259. doi:10.1007/s10615-014-0479-0

-Hoyt, T., Rielage, J. K., & Williams, L. F. (2011). Military Sexual Trauma in Men: A Review of Reported Rates. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 12(3), 244-260. doi:10.1080/15299732.2011.542612

#### **Week 6:**

##### **Traumatic Brain Injury**

###### Readings:

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence website

<https://health.mil/About-MHS/OASDHA/Defense-Health-Agency/Research-and-Development/Traumatic-Brain-Injury-Center-of-Excellence>

- All 6 main tabs

VA TBI Website

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/tbi/index.asp>

#### **Week 7:**

##### **Moral Injury**

###### Readings:

-Litz, B., et al. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*.

-Wood, D. (2014). Moral Injury. Huffington Post. <http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/moral->



**Week 8:**

**Serving LGBTQ+ Veterans**

Readings:

- Chen, J. A., Granato, H., Shipherd, J. C., Simpson, T., & Lehavot, K. (2017). A qualitative analysis of transgender veterans' lived experiences. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 4(1), 63-74. doi:10.1037/sgd0000217
- Johnson, L., Shipherd, J., & Walton, H. M. (2016). The psychologist's role in transgender-specific care with U.S. veterans. *Psychological Services*, 13(1), 69-76. doi:10.1037/ser0000030

**Week 9:**

**Women Veterans' Mental Health**

Readings:

TBA

**Week 10:**

**Substance Use Disorders**

Readings:

Roy, M., & Skidmore, W.C. Substance use disorders in veterans: A clinical overview of assessment and treatment of substance use disorders in veterans and service members. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practice with the military*, (pp. 215-235). New York: Routledge.

**Week 11:**

**Evidence-Based Assessment and Treatment of PTSD**

Readings

National Center for PTSD (Review the VA website)

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/overview/index.asp>

Powers, M.B., Halpern, J.M., Ferenschalk, M.P., Gillihan, S.J., and Foa, E.B., (2010). A meta-analytic review of prolonged exposure for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Clin. Psychol. Rev.* 30(6):635–641.

Monson, C. et al. (2006). Cognitive Processing Therapy for veterans with military-related PTSD. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 898-907.

Forbes, D. et al. (2012). A multisite randomized controlled effectiveness trial of CPT for military-related PTSD. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 26, 442-452

**Week 12:**

**Collaborative Care for Depression and Anxiety**

Readings:

Practice Foundations Manual:

Volume 1 (Building a Strong Foundation; particularly pages 9-24: ([https://www.mirecc.va.gov/cihvisn2/Documents/Provider\\_Education\\_Handouts/Vol\\_1\\_Building\\_a\\_Strong\\_Foundation.pdf](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/cihvisn2/Documents/Provider_Education_Handouts/Vol_1_Building_a_Strong_Foundation.pdf))

-<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1484620/>

-<https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/ps.2008.59.7.776>

-<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3889933/>

Review the following websites:

-<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/primarycare/PCMHI.asp>

-[https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn4/BHL/BHL\\_home.asp](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn4/BHL/BHL_home.asp)

**Week 13:**

NO CLASS- Thanksgiving Break

**Week 14:**

**Presentations**

**Week 15:**

**Presentations**

**Class Schedule**

Week	Date	Topic	Speakers
1	9/1/2021	Course Introduction & Syllabus Review  Provider Panel: Access to Care in Veteran-Serving Spaces	Instructor  Professional panel: Leah Blain, PhD., Cohen Clinic at Penn Phillip Grant, LCSW, Readjustment Counselor, Norristown Vet Center Richard Prebil, Esq., Veterans Advocacy Clinic
2	9/8/2021	NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)	Online engagement via CANVAS
3	9/15/2021	Suicide Risk Assessment and Management Guidelines  Class discussion 1	Leah Blain, PhD., Clinic Director, Cohen Clinic at Penn
4	9/22/2021	Homelessness in the Veteran Population  Class discussion 2	Dennis Culhane, PhD Dana and Andrew Stone Chair in Social Policy

5	9/29/2021	Military Sexual Trauma Class discussion 3	Shelby Munschauer, Psy.D., Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator, CMC VAMC Louis Rivera, Ph.D., MST Co-coordinator
6	10/6/2021	Traumatic Brain Injury Class discussion 4	VA Polytrauma Team Kelly Heath, MD Rosette Biester, Ph.D. Keith Robinson, MD Amy Gedrich, LCSW Brian Newhart, LCSW
7	10/13/2021	Moral Injury Class discussion 5	CMC VAMC Moral Injury Group
8	10/20/2021	Serving LGBTQ+ Veterans Class discussion 6	Pending Assignment 1 due: 10/20/21 @ 3:30pm
9	10/27/2021	Women Veterans and Mental Health Class discussion 7	Ellen Koucky, Ph.D., Staff Psychologist and MST Coordinator Jesse Brown VAMC
10	11/3/2021	Substance Use Disorder Treatment Class discussion 8	Pending
11	11/10/2021	Overview of EBP Treatment Modalities for PTSD Exposure Therapy, Cognitive Therapy Class discussion 9	Crystal Shelton, DSW, Founder of Lucid Clinical Services Chief Clinical Officer of Cohen Veterans Network (2016 – 2020) Assignment 2 Due: 11/10/21 by 3:30pm
12	11/17/2021	Collaborative Care for Depression and Anxiety Class discussion 10	Holly Sairsingh, DSW – VA Social Worker, BHL Unit
13	11/24/2021	No Class Friday Schedule	Assignment 3 Deadline (with feedback): 11/22/21 by 5pm *if you would like feedback prior to your presentation
14	12/1/2021	Student presentations	Assignment 3 Due: 12/1/21 @ 3:30pm (if not already submitted)

15	12/8/2021	Student presentations	
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