I. COURSE PURPOSE

Spirituality has recently begun to emerge as a critical anchor of a holistic approach to social work which views individuals, couples, families, groups, and communities in a bio-psycho-social-spiritual context. To date, the spiritual aspects of social work practice have often not been addressed explicitly in social work education. In a post September 11th, 2001 world, however, drawing from the wellsprings of spirituality seems more widespread, and even more crucial.

Current trends in social work education, including the latest Council on Social Work Education Curriculum Policy Statement, now support the inclusion of content on religious and spiritual diversity. Accordingly, this course is an advanced practice sequence elective that focuses on spiritual aspects of social work practice. The professional values of client self-determination and empowerment will be stressed as diverse spiritual perspectives are explored.

This course will strive to seek a balance of exploring the universalistic as well as the particularistic in relationship to spirituality. Some particularistic religious and/or spiritual traditions will be studied as they exemplify commitments of spirituality and as they intersect with a more universalistic spirituality. The impacts of spiritual and religious systems in relation to diversity (e.g. by gender, social class, ethnicity and culture and sexual orientation) will be considered.

As a practice elective, this course will be anchored in the “Penn Approach” to social work practice and will make linkages directly to students’ practice experience in the field as well as to other curriculum areas such as human behavior theory, social policy, and research.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this course, Spirituality and Social Work Practice, students will demonstrate an ability to:
A. Identify and critically reflect on diverse spiritual perspectives and their implications for social work practice.

B. Understand and analyze the history of the relationship between religion and social work as well as the current state-of-the-art for spiritually-sensitive social work practice.

C. Understand and formulate qualities of a spiritually-sensitive helping relationship and evaluate their own practice accordingly.

D. Understand and critically evaluate guidelines for spiritually-sensitive assessment of human development and well-being.

E. Identify strategies for effective cooperation with religious and non-religious spiritual support systems of clients.

F. Identify and critically evaluate practical and ethical guidelines for utilizing religiously derived social work practice activities, such as religious symbolism, prayer, meditation, and ritual.

G. Understand the supportive and oppressive aspects of religious and spiritual perspectives concerning issues of human diversity, such as gender, race, ethnicity and culture, age, sexual orientation, ability, and social class.

H. Apply to practice a framework of knowledge, values, and skills for spiritually-sensitive social work.

III. COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Spirituality and Social Work Practice” is organized and presented around the following content areas.

   Although American social work originated from religious movements for charity and social service, the past few decades have involved controversy over the connections between religion, spirituality, and social work. Since the mid 1980s, there has been increasing professional support for non-discriminatory and respectful ways of providing spiritually-sensitive social work. Students are familiarized with the history of these connections and
controversies as well as the present state-of-the-art in the development of spiritually-sensitive social work.

2. **The Foundation of Knowledge, Values, Skills, and Experiences for Spiritually-Sensitive Social Work.**
   This course presents a base of knowledge, values, skills and experiences to prepare students for spiritually-sensitive practice by integrating insights from social work and related fields, such as psychotherapy, pastoral counseling, comparative religious studies, and community organizing. Topics include qualities of a spiritually-sensitive helping relationship; assessment of spiritual development, crisis, and well-being; cooperating with religious and non-religious spiritual support systems; and developing practical and ethical guidelines for the use of religiously derived helping resources and techniques, such as religious community resources, symbolism, prayer, meditation, and ritual.

3. **Human Diversity and Spiritually-Sensitive Practice.**
   This course is designed to help students learn how to respond respectfully and competently to clients from diverse religious and non-religious spiritual perspectives. A comparative approach to teaching about religious and spiritual diversity is employed, to provide understanding of diverse perspectives and to foster self-awareness of students about their own spiritual commitments and congruence with professional values. In addition, religious and spiritual systems may support or inhibit, liberate or oppress clients. The potential for liberation or oppression of people, especially in relation to diversity of social class, race, ethnicity or culture, sexual orientation, age, ability, and gender is explored.

4. **Application of a Framework for Spiritually-Sensitive Social Work to Practice.**
   This course provides a general framework for spiritually sensitive practice; however, each student must clarify how to refine and apply this framework in his or her own practice. Therefore, class discussion, assignments, and practice exercises help the student to formulate an individualized practice framework inspired by state-of-the-art professional developments linked to personal interests and value commitments.

**IV. GRADING**

**Attendance and Participation**

Since the success of this course requires active participation and attendance, full attendance is required. Class participation and assignments will all count towards a final letter grade.

**Additional Expectations**

The topic of this course is inherently controversial. Students are expected to communicate between themselves and the instructor in a manner that encourages open dialogue, appreciates
diversity, and tolerates disagreement. Religious proselytization of any kind is prohibited by the instructor or students. We may well challenge each other to pursue understanding of truth, but we may not coerce or denigrate each other on the basis of our own versions of the truth.

This course combines educational methods of lecture, discussion and experiential exercises. The instructor will seek consent from all students for participation in experiential exercises. Students must make clear to each other and the instructor their comfort or discomfort with proposed exercises, so that modifications can be made and a consensus of agreement can be achieved.

Any self-disclosure that could result from the papers or class discussion will be voluntary on the part of the student. At no time should the confidentiality of clients be violated. Students who have special educational needs of any kind, including those related to learning disabilities, other disabilities, English as a second language, or religious observance, should discuss necessary accommodations with the instructors within the first two sessions of the course.

V. ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1: Self-reflection paper (6-7 pages, typed double spaced, plus citations).

Due 7th Class session, February 24, 2005.

The “Self-Reflection Paper” is designed to help you make connections between required course readings, issues in your personal life and professional development, and to make decisions about specific actions you wish to take to promote your competence for spiritually-sensitive practice.

You will notice during your reading that certain strong positive or negative reactions are stimulated. Observe how your reactions relate not only to what is being said, but also to what it is about your own strengths, limitations, values, biases, and spiritual orientation that predisposes you to respond this way. As you reflect, you will become aware of a few common themes of personal and professional growth. In the paper, please articulate one major theme and its implications for your growth. Cite sources and passages to which you are responding.

The paper must use the following headings:

I. Introduction (1 page)
Briefly introduce the theme you will discuss and why you chose to discuss it.

II. A Theme for Personal and Professional Growth (4 pages)
Discuss in detail one major theme that links issues of personal and professional growth. Explain what it is about you, your spiritual experience and perspective that makes this important. Give specific examples of how this theme was triggered by readings.

III. Commitment to Growth (1 page)
Identify at least two specific activities which you commit to do that will promote growth in your spiritually-sensitive practice, related to this theme. Give specific plans and time frame
for how you will carry these out. Explain how these activities will help you to deal with the growth theme.

Assignment #2: YOU MAY CHOOSE OPTION A OR B TO FULFIL ASSIGNMENT 2.

Due April 3, 2005.

→ OPTION A:

Conceptual Framework for Practice Project (10 pages, typed, double-spaced, plus citations, photographs or other appendices).

This project is designed to help you connect cognitive and experimental learning to support the development of a personal framework for spiritually-sensitive social work practice. Therefore, it requires you to integrate knowledge and insight from your own personal self-reflection, course discussion and readings, additional readings specific to your interests, and experiential exploration of a spiritual tradition or perspective that relates to your practice. Since this is integrative and complex, the expectation is that you begin work on this project from the outset of the semester. It is due April 3, 2005, such that the projects can be shared in class. Please remember to give specific citations from scholarly and other sources to support your ideas in all parts of the paper.

Use the following outline and headings to organize your paper:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Framework for Spiritually Sensitive Practice
   Summarize the primary values, concepts and skills that guide your approach to spiritually sensitive practice. Explain how these derive from your religious and/or spiritual perspective and link to your professional practice interests. What do you mean by spiritually sensitive practice?

2. The Practice Situation
   Choose a professional (or volunteer, if necessary) social work practice situation that will be the focus for your application of your spiritual perspective in this paper. For example, you might select a current practice example in working with an individual, family, or group in micro practice; you might discuss an agency administration issue, a community organizing activity or policy action situation. Give the background of the client system, including the presenting problem or issue that creates the need for helping.

II. EXPLORING THE CLIENT’S SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE
1. **Assessment of the Client’s Spiritual Perspective**  
Ask the client to describe his/her spiritual perspective, how it developed since childhood, and how it is relevant to the present situation, and future possibilities for growth. Consider the spiritual and religious aspects of the client’s needs, strengths, resources, and goals. Consider relevant aspects of the client’s environment.

2. **Exploration of the Client’s Spiritual Perspective**  
Once you know what the client’s spiritual perspective is, you need to explore it to obtain direct personal experiential understanding about it. For example, you could attend a spiritual service or religious community event that is relevant. You could contact community leaders in the relevant tradition and ask for information and personal stories about how this spiritual perspective offers help or resources that could be of direct or indirect benefit to the client. (Do not identify the client without formal permission.) Collect documentation that illustrates key symbols, ideas, or rituals, as relevant (e.g. objects, documents, pictures, photographs). Combine this information together with information you can find in the scholarly literature. Give a description about these key ideas, symbols, and practices that are relevant to the client’s situation. Clarify the relevant psychological, social, physical, or spiritual resources available to the client in the context of his/her spiritual perspective and community.

III. **DESIGNING SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE PRACTICE**

1. **Connection of Your Framework to the Client’s Perspective**  
Explain how you will make a connection between your own personal spirituality, your framework for spiritually sensitive practice, and the client’s particular spiritual perspective and situation. What are the ethical and practical considerations?

2. **Plan for Practice**  
Specify a plan for how you could do (or actually are doing) spiritually sensitive practice to address the client’s needs, strengths, and goals. How will you apply your own framework for practice and the information about the client’s spiritual perspective? How will this affect the nature of your helping relationship? What specific helping activities will you use?

IV. **CONCLUSION**

Discuss how you changed or grew through the process of developing this framework for spiritually sensitive practice.

NOTE: Any student who wishes to negotiate an alternative to this project must do so during the first four class meetings. A written agreement must be made.
⇒ OPTION B:

**Cross-Perspective Experiential Log.**

Each student will select a spiritual perspective/tradition other than their own that they would like to learn more about. For example, if Christian, students will observe/participate in a non-Christian service or tradition (e.g., Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, First Nations, etc.). Students must gain permission for participation from appropriate sources (e.g., spiritual leaders; members of church, synagogue or temple, etc.) and explain that their involvement is linked to a course assignment. Students should also inquire about appropriate attire and level of participation.

The log should be approximately 8-10 pages in length, including: a) a description of the experience; b) a discussion of the student’s reactions to the experience; and c) a discussion of the implications of the experience for the student’s practice with clients from this spiritual perspective/tradition; d) scholarly citations.

An alternative experience that students may select is observation of a group such as Alcoholics Anonymous. The same requirements and guidelines delineated in option B above apply to this choice of experience.

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**VI. COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

**TEXTBOOKS**

**Required Reading:**


Suggested Reading:


COURSE SCHEDULE

SESSION 1  Topics:
January 13, 2005
1. Introduction to Spirituality and Social Work/Overview of course
2. Mutual Introductions
3. Defining spirituality, religion, and faith (See Class Handouts)

Readings:


Suggested Readings:

SESSION 2  Topics:
January 20, 2005
1. Spiritual identity and professional practice.
2. General Conceptual Framework for Spiritually Sensitive Practice

Readings:


Suggested Readings:


SESSION 3

Topics:
January 27, 2005
1. Spiritual Diversity in Social Work; A Panoply of Paths
   A. Universal existential issues
   B. Jewish, Christian, Buddhist Perspectives
   C. Alternative Spiritual Styles
   D. Shamanic/Animist Perspectives
   E. Feminist Spiritual Perspectives

Readings:


Suggested Readings:


SESSION 4  NO CLASS
February 3, 2005

SESSION 5  NO CLASS
February 10, 2005

RETREAT—SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2005—10AM-5PM in lieu of sessions 4, 5, 6

Topic: The meaning of spirituality: Professional and personal journeys.

Theoretical explorations and experiential exercises will be woven together.

Held at Penn School of Social Work.

Readings:


Frankl, V., Man’s Search for Meaning (Excluding Section on Logotherapy)

Fowler Book, Part 3: pp. 89 to end


Suggested Readings:

See Class Handouts


SESSION 6
February 17, 2005

SESSION 7
February 24, 2005

Guest Presenter: Kevin Damitz, M.S.W.

1. Reflections on the use of spiritual self in practice and administration.
2. Spiritually sensitive helping relationships

Assignment #1 due
Readings:
Text Chap. 6, 8 and 9; Loewenberg Chap. 5


Suggested Readings:


SESSION 8
Topics:
March 3, 2005

1. Social Work in Religious Settings
2. Social Work with Religious/Spiritual Clients
3. Twelve-Step Programs

Readings:


Suggested Readings:

Lovinger Book, pp. 1-34.


March 10, 2005  SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES

SESSION 9  March 17, 2005  Topics:
1. Spirituality in Personal and Professional Healing
2) Assessing a Healthy or Broken Spirit

Readings:

Suggested Readings:

SESSION 10  March 24, 2005  Topics:
2. Assessing a Healthy or Broken Spirit. Part 2

Readings:

Suggested Readings:
SESSION 11  
March 31, 2005  
Topics:  
  Guest Presenter: John Preston. Thera Vedam Monk  
  1. Mindfulness Meditation—The end of evasion

Suggested Readings:  


SESSION 12  
April 7, 2005  
Topics:  
  1. Students presentation and discussion of assignment #2  
  2. Ritual Prayer and Meditation

Readings:  
Text 175-182 of Chap. 4 and Chap. 3


Suggested Readings:  


SESSION 13  
April 14, 2005  
Topics:  
  2. Linking personal and professional growth

Suggested Readings:  

SESSION 14
April 21, 2005

Topics:
1. Continuation of discussion of assignment two
2. “Agenda for Today and Tomorrow”

Readings:
Loewenberg Book Chapter 7: “Agenda for Today and Tomorrow” pp. 149-151.

SESSION 15
April 28, 2005

Topics:
1. Evaluation and Celebration

My special thanks to Edward R. Canda for permission to utilize and adapt his material.
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   dimension of social work. Social Thought, 13(1), 12-23.

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   13(3), 238-256.

   Contemporary Social Work, 69(7), 443-452.


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   Supervisor, 8(2), 125-140.

   Turner (Eds.), Catholic Social Work: A Contemporary Overview, Ottawa: Catholic 
   Charities Council of Canada, pp. 6-27.


   Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.


COURSE BULKPACK AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES


