

Bryn Mawr College
Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research
Summer II 2025

SOWK B567 Social Work with Substance Use Disorders
Mondays and Thursdays 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM
June 23 – July 24 2025

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Office Hours Upon Request

Welcome!

This course is going to move fast, but I've designed it to be grounded, meaningful, and manageable. We'll aim for depth over breadth, approaching substance use and recovery through multiple lenses: clinical, systemic, spiritual, and personal. I invite you to think critically, reflect honestly, and engage with humility as we explore what it means to accompany people through substance use, recovery, and everything in between.

You'll be encouraged to connect course content to your values, identities, and lived experiences. Together, we'll challenge assumptions, sit with complexity, and resist the oversimplifications that often show up in both policy and practice. This course asks us to stay curious, be rigorous, and hopefully have some fun while we do it.

Start by reflecting on a few core questions we'll return to often:

- What do I believe about addiction and recovery, and where did those beliefs come from?
- How do I accompany someone in their suffering without trying to fix it?
- How can I hold power responsibly while working in systems that often harm those they claim to help?
- Where do I find hope in this work? And how do I hold its complexity without losing my center?

I'm looking forward to seeing how the space evolves, and learning with you all.

Course Description: This course reviews the major theoretical approaches to understanding substance use disorders and to assessment and treatment with individuals, families, groups, and communities. The pharmacology of drugs and alcohol and the nature of addiction are included, as are the influence of culture, ethnicity, gender, the peer group, and social deviance. The principles of self-help and therapeutic communities are applied.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Critically examine dominant and emerging models of addiction and recovery, including harm reduction, abstinence-based, developmental, and spiritual frameworks.
- 2) Analyze the impact of structural forces such as racism, carcerality, surveillance, and policy on substance use, recovery, and treatment access.
- 3) Reflect on personal values, lived experience, and social location, and explore how these shape your perspective, bias, and capacity to accompany others in substance use work.
- 4) Integrate systemic and identity-based considerations (e.g. race, gender, family systems, spirituality) into conceptualization and treatment planning.
- 5) Begin to shape a working philosophy of care that integrates humility, cultural responsiveness, and your own emerging clinical voice

Master of Social Service Vision, Mission Statement, and Goals

Vision: The GSSWSR aspires to promote social justice and well-being through a variety of trans-disciplinary approaches to scholarship and practice, appropriate to the complexity of social work and social welfare in the United States and Internationally.

Mission: Reflecting the core purpose, values, and ethics of the social work profession, the mission of the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research is to strengthen the social fabric of society by training and preparing a dynamic, diverse, and culturally responsive workforce committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and anti-racism. We prepare diverse students to apply person-in-environment and strengths perspectives to the promotion of well-being and the support of human rights with diverse individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. Students in our program learn about innovative and research informed approaches to practice in current and emerging contexts. Throughout, we are committed to social, economic, racial, and environmental justice, to trauma-awareness, and to the development and implementation of anti-racist and anti-oppressive models of teaching and practice. Our generalist and advanced specialization courses prepare students to work across disciplinary boundaries and to apply their knowledge and skills across a wide range of settings. Within the context of a liberal arts college, and intricately connected to the city of Philadelphia, we are committed to critical thinking in education, and to community-placed research that each contribute to more just and effective systems of care at the local, national, and international levels.

Goals:

- Understand and apply social work ethics to decision-making in practice across systems levels.
- Understand, apply, and evaluate the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive/affective processes for effective and culturally responsive social work practice.

- Understand and apply skills and strategies to promote inclusion, equity, and social, racial, environmental, and economic justice.
- Create and sustain a learning environment that is challenging, interdisciplinary, and supportive. Understand and analyze the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression, and apply this understanding to affirmative and trauma-informed models of practice across systems levels.
- Engage in critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration as key tools for addressing complex social issues.
- Foster a critical awareness of diversity and the social and cultural forces that impact individuals, families, organizations, and communities locally, nationally, and globally.
- Understand and engage in, and evaluate, ethical research-informed practice and the use of evidence-informed approaches to increase the effectiveness of practice across systems levels. Bryn Mawr College's Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research MSS degree is equivalent in both licensure and use to the MSW degree.

Expectations

Attendance: Students are expected to attend the entire class each session every week, with **cameras on**. Timeliness is expected. **More than one absence or repeated lateness will result in a lower overall grade.** Students are expected to notify the instructor prior to any absences or late arrivals and must get missed materials from classmates.

Course Readings: Students are expected to complete and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Class discussions and lectures are designed to be an integration of course material, not a review of all required readings. Students are accountable for assigned materials not covered in class.

Respectful Interactions: Students are expected to interact with instructors and peers in a respectful, professional manner (e.g. active listening in class, use of non-discriminatory language, use of constructive debate and feedback, and appropriate and professional use of email). **Please refrain from use of electronic media including mobile phones and laptops to communicate with others during class time. Please refrain from use of computers and devices for anything besides class during class time.**

Professional Quality of Written Assignments: Students are expected to produce professional quality work. This includes using non-sexist and inclusive language, not engaging in plagiarism or academic dishonesty (intended or unintended), giving credit to original author(s) for concepts and ideas that are not the student's own, and using scholarly references to support one's ideas in APA format. An excellent online resource for APA style is available through the OWL (Online Writing Lab) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

Please review the [GSSWSR 2024-2025 Handbook and Catalog](#) further for more detailed expectations regarding:

- Standard of Professional Behavior for All Contributing Members of the GSSWSR Community
- Professional Commitment to Ethical Behavior
- Attendance Policy
- Evaluating Student Performance in the Classroom
- Plagiarism
- Student Support Services
- Persons with Disabilities Accommodations

Assignments, Due Dates, and Grading Breakdown

A detailed description, expectations, and rubric for each assignment are available on Moodle.

Recovery Meeting Observation (ongoing): Sometime during the course, you'll attend one open recovery meeting of your choice. This could be Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), SMART Recovery, Refuge Recovery, Dharma Recovery, or another open mutual aid, 12-step, or peer support group. You're welcome to attend in person or virtually—whatever feels safe, accessible, and comfortable for you.

The point here isn't to critique or to analyze the model; it's to witness— to notice your own reactions, reflect on the culture and energy of the space, and begin building your felt sense of what recovery looks and sounds like in real life. You're not expected to speak or share at the meeting (though you certainly can if you're moved to).

You'll be invited to share a few takeaways in class in a casual way— not a formal presentation, and you're always free to pass if it doesn't feel right to share aloud. There's no written component unless you want to write about it in your reflection paper. This is a chance to move out of theory and into a real-world space that many of your future clients may spend significant time in.

Note: Please make sure the meeting is *open* to observers and that you attend with respect, discretion, and confidentiality. If you're unsure what meeting to choose or how to find one, I'm happy to help.

Facilitated Class Process & Discussion (ongoing): Each student will take a turn facilitating a segment of our class discussion, either solo or with a partner. This is less about delivering content and more about holding space for a meaningful, grounded conversation. Your job is to guide the group through a thoughtful, engaging dialogue about the topic and readings for that class. You're welcome to bring in your own clinical style— whether that's structured questions, experiential methods, reflection prompts, or just a strong presence and clarity about where we're headed. The vibe is “facilitator,” not “lecturer.”

You'll turn in a short plan the day before and a brief reflection afterward. This is a chance to practice presence, containment, and group leadership— not to be perfect.

Critical Reflection Paper (due 7/3): This short paper (3-4 pages) invites you to reflect on how your personal identities, experiences, and social location shape the way you think about substance use, recovery, and your emerging clinical stance. You'll bring an honest, thoughtful lens to questions like: What assumptions do I carry? What values shape my responses? What personal experiences feel close to this material, and how do they influence how I show up in the room?

You're not expected to share anything you don't feel safe or comfortable disclosing. This is not about self-disclosure for its own sake, nor is it about the specific *content* of your experiences, but rather about understanding yourself as a clinician: where your biases live, where your passion lies, and where you have room to grow.

You'll be expected to cite at least 2-3 readings or sources that have helped you contextualize or deepen your reflections. This assignment bridges the personal and the scholarly, bringing your internal world into conversation with the theories, frameworks, and perspectives we're studying. Think of it as a rehearsal for ethical, self-aware practice.

Position Paper on SUD Practice (due 7/10): This paper (5-6 pages) is where you take a real stance. Choose a core issue in the field— something like harm reduction v. abstinence, coercive treatment, racial disparities, the role of MAT, etc.— and argue your perspective. Write a thoughtful, well-supported, complex piece that shows you can think critically and ethically, not just regurgitate a stance.

You'll cite relevant sources, acknowledge nuance, and stake your claim. I'll provide a list of potential topics, but you can pitch your own, too.

Independent Project (due 7/24): Choose on project format that allows you to bring together what you've learned in this course. The goal is to deepen your clarity, voice, and clinical imagination when it comes to substance use disorder work. There's no "right" way to do this— just choose a format that challenges you meaningfully, fits your emerging style, and helps you connect theory to practice.

You're welcome to build on prior assignments (your Position Paper, reflections, etc.), but you'll need to take it further toward synthesis and real-world application. You'll submit a brief proposal on 7/10, and the final project is due 7/24. During our last class, we'll invite a few people to briefly share their insights or learning moments (totally optional).

Assignment	Weight
Recovery Meeting Attendance	5%
Class Participation	10%
Facilitated Class Process & Discussion	10%
Critical Reflection Paper	10%
Position Paper on SUD Practice	25%

Final Integration Project	40%
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Course Outline

6/23: Substance Use, Stigma, and the Social Work Lens

Required Reading:

- The Serenity Prayer (long form attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr)
- Audre Lorde *A Litany for Survival*
- Netherland & Hansen (2016). *The War on Drugs That Wasn't*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Hansen & Roberts (2012). *Two Tiers of Biomedicalization*
- SAMHSA (2023). *Key Substance Use Indicators*

6/26: Language, Identity, and Theories of Addiction

Required Reading:

- Lavallie & Sasakamoose (2023). *Promoting Indigenous Cultural Responsivity in Addiction Work*

Optional/Encouraged:

- White (2008). *Recovery: Its History and Renaissance*
- Ahsford et al. (2018). *Expanding Language Choice to Reduce Stigma*

6/30: Structural Violence and the Drug War

Required Reading:

- Williams & Cooper (2019). *Reducing Racial Inequities in Health*

Optional/Encouraged:

- *Righteous Dopefiend* Chapter 1. Intimate Apartheid (2009)
- Big Ideas Report *The Social Determinants of Addiction*

7/3: Trauma-Informed Practice and Clinical Foundations (Critical Reflection Paper Due)

Required Reading:

- Mefodeva et al. (2022). *Client and Staff Perceptions of Integrating Trauma-Informed Care*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Covington (2008). *Women and Addiction*
- Tibbitts et al. (2021). *Program Evaluation of Trauma-Informed Yoga*

7/7: Families, Systems, and Intergenerational Recovery

Required Reading:

- Lander et al. (2013). *The Impact of Substance Use Disorders on Families and Children: From Theory to Practice*
- Monari et al. (2024). *Experience of Family Members of Relatives with Substance Use Disorder*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Meulewaeter et al. (2022). *I Grew Up ... Substance Use in the Household*
- Best & Hennessy (2023). *The Science of Recovery Capital*

7/10: Harm-Reduction, Housing, and Human Rights (Position Paper Due)

Required Reading:

- Daniels et al. (2021). *Decolonizing Drug Policy*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Collins et al. (2019). *Project-Based Housing First*
- Hawk et al. (2017). *Harm Reduction Principles*

7/14: Intersectionality, Marginalization, and Ethical Practice

Required Reading:

- Paschen-Wolff et al. (2024). *LGBTQ+ Affirming Substance Use Services*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Delk et al. (2025). *Intersectional Disparities in Treatment Completion*
- Walters et al. (2023). *Intersectional Stigma and Health Inequities*

7/17: Recovery Pathways and Peer Support

Required Reading:

- Kelly et al. (2020). *Systematic Review of Alcoholics Anonymous*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Laudet (2007). *What Does Recovery Mean to You?*
- Zemore et al. (2018). *Longitudinal Study of 12-Step and Alternatives*

7/21: Spirituality, Meaning, and Clinical Integrity

Required Reading:

- Galanter et al. (2021). *The Role of Spirituality in Addiction Medicine*

Optional/Encouraged:

- White (2009). *Mobilization of Community Resources*

7/24: Synthesis, Systems, and Social Work Futures (Independent Projects Due)

Required Reading:

- Benjamin et al. (2022). *Social Workers as Agents for Drug Policy Reform*

Optional/Encouraged:

- Curtis & Eby (2010). *Recovery at Work*

Additional Course Resources

Books and Memoirs

- Righteous Dopefiend by Philippe Bourgois & Jeff Schonberg
- Beautiful Boy by David Sheff
- The Night of the Gun by David Carr
- Unbroken Brain by Maia Szalavitz
- In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts by Gabor Mate
- We are the Luckiest by Laura McKowen

Podcasts and Audio

- Crackdown- investigative journalism by activists who are also drug users
- Back from Broken- Stories of recovery from addiction, trauma, and loss
- Maintenance Phase- Cultural critique around wellness, shame, and substance use discourse

Guides and Toolkits

- Harm Reduction Coalition's Principles of Harm Reduction- www.harmreduction.org
- SAMHSA Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services (TIP 57)
- Shatterproof Addiction Stigma Index