



PSYC 315 Pathways to Wellness: Exploring Mental Health, Diagnosis, and Clinical Interventions (Psychopathology)

Course Syllabus Spring Semester 2027

Instructor: Tal Dotan Ben-Soussan, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Course Type: Standard Course

Professor Email: *(Omitted)*

Class Meeting Days/Time: TBD

Office Hours: Wednesday at 8:45am (MPP office, 2nd floor, around the 1st corner from the class)

Course Fees: TBA

Course Description

Mental illness affects one in five Americans at some point in their life. The burden of disease economically and personally is significant. Since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a significant rise in mental illness affecting adolescents. We will discuss the epidemiology of mental illness in general and then look more specifically at some of the various DSM-5 diagnoses.

This course considers how clinicians define a disorder and explains how types of psychopathologies manifest and affect individuals. We will learn about causes and risk factors for mental illness, treatments available and the ethical and legal issues around mental health problems and their clinical management. Throughout the semester we will examine in detail a wide range of pathological conditions: mood disorders, trauma, addictions, personality disorders and psychosis from both a clinical and lived experience perspective.

Learning Outcomes

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

1. *Explain* the integrative biopsychosocial approach to mental illness which acknowledges that biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors interact in developing and managing any mental illness. *Distinguish* between risk factors and causes of abnormal behavior.
2. *List* the main advantages/disadvantages of using a worldwide coding of psychopathologies and how the DSM is used in diagnosing these.
3. *Articulate* the clinical presentation of the main psychiatric pathologies, using DSM 5 criteria.
4. *Understand* cross-cultural differences in defining abnormal psychology, and describe the historical and current differences in treatments between Italy and the United States.

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5. *Explain* the complexity and importance of research into the causes and treatment of psychological disorders.
6. *Explain* the role that stigma has played (and continues to play) in the field of mental health. *Recognize* some common stigmatizing attitudes and describe the impact that stigma has on hindering access to treatment as well as on exacerbating the overall mental health of the person.
7. *Explain* how neuroplasticity, contemplative practices, and environmental factors contribute to resilience, mental health, and recovery

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Office Hours	10%
Weekly Quizzes	10%
Course Journal	10%
Field Trip	5%
Midterm Case Study	20%
Memoir Presentation	15%
Final Case Study	20%

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the midterm and final exams, a final project, written homework assignments, a class journal, and participation.

Attendance (10%)—Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Office Hours (10%)—Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and therefore more likely to ask for help. It also might help for you to ask questions about the various assignments or discuss a paper idea. In this course, you get 5% of your grade for coming twice (once before Week 6, once before week 10) to office hours. See Moodle for a full description of what we can talk about during office hours.

Weekly Quizzes (10%)—Students will be assigned a short quiz every week, which will be due before class time and will not be reopened. The quiz will be on Moodle, and it is not timed. Students can take the quiz as many times as they like, with the recorded grade being the average grade they receive. There will be a combination of technical, methodological, and content questions. The content questions will help students zoom in on the most important ideas of the readings. The methodological questions will test on skills that will pop up every week, like finding an author's argument and assessing sources. The technical questions will help students learn the class's policies and administrative procedures.

Course Journal (10%)—Students will need a notebook at the start of the semester, which they will use as a personal space through which to reflect on course material and ideas; alternately, they can use a Google doc or Word document for these entries. In-class assignments will be regularly scheduled and graded twice throughout the semester, i.e., before the mid-semester break (Week 7) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 5% of your grade, for a total of 10%. See the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

Midterm Case Study (20%)—Students will be given a short vignette depicting a story with a main character suffering from a variety of mental health symptoms. They will be asked to identify the symptoms, the impairment that they cause, and offer one or several possible diagnoses that should be considered when assessing this fictitious character. The vignette will be similar to others used in class activities. Students will then be provided with immediate feedback to learn how to improve their diagnostic knowledge. See the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

Memoir Presentation (15%)—Students are required to read a memoir from the list that provides a personal account of mental illness. They will be asked to provide a written reflection discussing how the memoir changed their perception of mental health struggles and stigma. They will also be doing a presentation with one or more partners where they will provide a summary of the memoir as well as a description of how the author's mental illness manifested according to the memoir. The aim of this assignment is to learn from an extended first-hand account of mental illness. My hope is that this will bring many of the complexities discussed in class to life as well as to humanize these illnesses. See the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

List of memoirs:

1. Dunn, Andy (2022). *Burn Rate*. New York: Random House.
2. Saks, Elyn (2007). *The Centre Cannot Hold*. New York: Hyperion.
3. Nana-Ama Danquah, (1998). *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression*. W. W. Norton & Company.
4. Castner, Brian (2012). *The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life That Follows*. Doubleday
5. Sheff, David (2009). *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction*. Mariner Books.
6. O'Sullivan, Katriona (2023). *Poor*. Sandycove.
7. Gagne, Patric, (2025). *Sociopath: A Memoir*. Bluebird.

Final Case Study (20%)—Students will be given another short vignette depicting a story with a main character suffering from a variety of mental health symptoms. They will be asked to identify the symptoms, the impairment that they cause, and offer one or several possible diagnoses that should be considered when assessing this fictitious character. The vignette will be similar to others used in class activities and

to the midterm case study. A prompt with a description of the format and how to prepare will be available in Moodle.

Trip to Bosco di Puck, Cortona (Pelliccione therapeutic woods). Asylum (5%)—Students will visit the former asylum of Maggiano in the province of Lucca. The asylum, originally a 15th-century monastery, was converted into a psychiatric hospital in 1773 and operated until its closure in 1999. This visit will highlight key aspects of the history of psychopathology and provide an in-depth look at an important chapter in the history of mental health treatments: the closure of state psychiatric hospitals as part of the mental health reform known as deinstitutionalization. Students are expected to prepare at least one question aimed at understanding how the specifics of this hospital fit into the larger historical context in which it operated. In addition, they will be required to provide a one-page reflection paper. For information about the visit date and time, please check the Moodle course page.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused “sick days” and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student’s final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students’ grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled. Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided. Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute’s Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

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Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source, use of an AI bot) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing Chat GPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom & Laptop Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class.

An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, ear buds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation for a student or we are working on literature searches or research as part of an in-class assignment, or if you have an accommodation for vision.

Personal Concerns

The course will cover issues that often occur among college students. Some of you may have dealt with or may currently be dealing with sensitive issues related to what we review in this class. However, please keep in mind that class is not an appropriate space to share specific details about serious psychological or emotional issues. If you are struggling with an emotional or psychiatric problem and require help, please be aware that professional mental health services are available to students while abroad.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Course Materials Readings All reading materials will be made available in digital format on Moodle. Please see “Umbra Institute Course Materials - Textbooks and Readers” handout provided in the orientation folder for more information.

Week 1

Introduction to the Course

Day 1:

Introduction to the Course

Day 2:

What is Psychopathology? Causes, classifications, & the importance of research

Readings:

- Jill M. Hooley, Matthew K. Nock, James N. Butcher (2020) *Abnormal Psychology, (18th ed.)*. Pearson Education (Essex, UK), **read Chapter 1 (Abnormal Psychology: Overview and Research Approaches) pages 26-40**
- Brendan Kelly (2022) - *In Search of Madness: A Psychiatrists' Travels Through the History of Mental Illness*, Gill & Macmillan (Dublin, Ireland), **read Introduction and Chapter 1**

Week 2

Day 1:

The DSM, Assessments, and Diagnosis

Day 2:

Anxiety Disorders

Readings:

- Kawa, S., Giordano, J. **A brief historicity of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Issues and implications for the future of psychiatric canon and practice.** *Philos Ethics Humanit Med* 7, 2 (2012).
- American Psychiatric Association (2023). **Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev. or DSM-5-TR), read Use of the Manual, pages 21-29**
- Hays, P. A., & Erford, B. T. (2023). **Clinical Interviewing.** *The Cambridge Handbook of Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis* (pp.113-122)
- Butcher (2020) *Abnormal Psychology* - **read Chapter 6: Panic, Anxiety, Obsessions and Their Disorders, pages 185-215**

Week 3

Day 1:

Mental Health Through the Ages: From Ancient Beliefs to Modern Science

Day 2:

ADHD

Readings:

- Kelly (2022) - *In Search of Madness: A Psychiatrists' Travels Through the History of Mental Illness*, Gill & Macmillan, **Chapter 5: Treatments: Managing Mental Disorder in the Past**

- Jena, Bapu (Host), (2023, July 11). **Tom Brady, A.D.H.D., and a Really Bad Headache.** Freakonomics Radio, [Audio podcast episode]. Retrieved from <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/tom-brady-adhd-and-a-really-bad-headache/>
- American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision Dsm-5-TR read “**Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**”, pages 68-76
- Simone Varrasi, Francesco Maria Boccaccio, Claudia Savia Guerrera, Giuseppe Alessio Platania, Concetta Pirrone, and Sabrina Castellano (2018). **Schooling and Occupational Outcomes in Adults with ADHD: Predictors of Success and Support Strategies for Effective Learning.** *Education Sciences* 13, no. 1: 37

Week 4

Day 1:

Stress and Mental Health

Day 2:

PTSD

Readings:

- Felitti, VJ, Anda, RF, Nordenberg, D, Williamson, DF, Spitz, AM, Edwards, V, Koss, MP, & Marks, JS. (1998). **Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study.** *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.
- Bonanno GA, Westphal M, Mancini AD. **Resilience to loss and potential trauma.** *Annu Rev Clin Psychol.* 2011;7:511-35. doi: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032210-104526. PMID: 21091190.
- Mitchell, J.M., Bogenschutz, M., Lilienstein, A. et al. (2021) **MDMA-assisted therapy for severe PTSD: a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled phase 3 study.** *Nat Med* 27, 1025–1033
- Jones, E., Vermaas, R. H., McCartney, H., Beech, C., Palmer, I., Hyams, K., & Wessely, S. (2003). **Flashbacks and post-traumatic stress disorder: The genesis of a 20th-century diagnosis.** *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 182(4), 343-347.

Week 5

Day 1:

Depression

Day 2:

Stigma and Psychopathology

Readings:

- Martin LA, Neighbors HW, Griffith DM. **The Experience of Symptoms of Depression in Men vs Women: Analysis of the National Comorbidity Survey Replication.** *JAMA Psychiatry.* 2013;70(10):1100–1106.
- Cosgrove L, Patterson EH, Bursztajn HJ. **Industry influence on mental health research: Depression as a case example.** *Front Med.* 2023;10:1320304. doi:10.3389/fmed.2023.1320304
- Daniel Alexander Benjamin Walsh and Juliet Louise Hallam Foster. **A Call to Action. A Critical Review of Mental Health Related Anti-stigma Campaigns.** *Front Public Health.* 2021 Jan 8;8:569539. PMID: 33490010; PMCID: PMC7820374
- Dirk Corstens, Eleanor Longden, Simon McCarthy-Jones, Rachel Waddingham, Neil Thomas. **Emerging Perspectives From the Hearing Voices Movement: Implications for Research and Practice,** *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, Volume 40, Issue Suppl_4, July 2014, Pages S285–S294.

Week 6

Day 1 (Mon Feb 23rd):

Memoir presentations - Research and psychology

Day 2:

Psychotic Disorders

Video: TED Talk - *The voices in my head* (Eleanor Longden)

Readings:

- Butcher (2020) *Abnormal Psychology* - Chapter 1 (Abnormal Psychology: Overview and Research Approaches) pages 40-55
- Mary Purugganan, Jan Hewitt (2004) **How to Read a Scientific Article.** (*Supported by the Cain Project for Engineering and Professional Communication Rice University. Format PDF. Last accessed on 5/29/24.* <http://www.owlnet.rice.edu/~cainproj/courses/HowToReadSciArticle.pdf>
- Dubner, S. (Host), (2024, June 4). **Why Is There So Much Fraud in Academia?**. Freakonomics Radio, [Audio podcast episode]. Retrieved from <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/why-is-there-so-much-fraud-in-academia/>
- Oltmanns & Martin (2019) *Case Studies in Abnormal Psychology, 11th Ed*, read Chapter 3: **Schizophrenia with Paranoid Delusions** (pages 57-68)
- Longden, E. (2013, August 8). **The voices in my head [Video].** *TED Talks.* https://www.ted.com/talks/eleanor_longden_the_voices_in_my_head?language=en

[Fall Break - March 1st -7th]

Week 7

Day 1:

Mental Health Treatments

Day 2:

Italy and USA differences and similarities in the deinstitutionalization process – From Asylums to The Community: Changes in mental health care and legislation

Day 3 (Fri March 13th):

Field Trip to the Asylum

Readings:

- Steven C. Hayes, Stefan G. Hofmann (2021) **“Third-wave” cognitive and behavioral therapies and the emergence of a process-based approach to intervention in psychiatry.** *World Psychiatry Volume20, Issue3 October 2021 Pages 363-375.*
- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). **A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program.** *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69(1), 28-44*
- Dumont, Matthew P., and Dora M. Dumont. **Deinstitutionalization in the United States and Italy: A Historical Survey.** *International Journal of Mental Health 37, no. 4 (2008): 61–70*
- Matthew S. Lebowitz (2019), **Implications of Genetic and Other Biological Explanations for Thinking about Mental Disorders,** *Hastings Cent Rep. 2019 May; 49(Suppl 1): S82–S87.*

Week 8

Day 1:

Bipolar and related disorders

Day 2 (Wed March 18th):

Midterm Case Study and review

Readings:

- American Psychiatric Association (2023) Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev. or DSM-5-TR) - **read Bipolar Disorders pg. 139**
- Kelly (2022) - *In Search of Madness: A Psychiatrists' Travels Through the History of Mental Illness*, Gill & Macmillan, **Chapter 8. Mental Health and Mental Illness: A Manifesto** pgs 210-229

Week 9

Day 1:

Alcohol and Drug Dependency

Video 15 mins: [Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong | Johann Hari](#)

Day 2:

Opioids, stimulants and other drugs

Video 24 mins: [America's Deadliest Drug: Fentanyl | Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj | Netflix](#)

Video 2 mins: [Motivational Interviewing \(MI\) Video with MI Founder William Miller](#)

Readings:

- Tembo C, Burns S, Kalembo F. **The association between levels of alcohol consumption and mental health problems and academic performance among young university students.** *PLoS One.* 2017 Jun 28;12(6):e0178142. PMID: 28658300; PMCID: PMC5489147
- GBD 2016 Alcohol Collaborators. **Alcohol use and burden for 195 countries and territories, 1990-2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016.** *Lancet.* 2018 Sep 22;392(10152):1015-1035
- William R. Miller, Alyssa A. Forcehimes, and Allen Zweben (2019) **Treating addiction - A guide for professionals (2nd ed.)**, The Guilford Press, (New York & London) **read Chapter 2: What is addiction?, pages 12-30**
- Miller et al. (2019) **Treating addiction - A guide for professionals (2nd ed.)**, **read Chapter 3: How do Drugs Work?, pages 31-50**

Week 10

Day 1:

Gender Dysphoria

Day 2:

Eating disorders

Readings:

- Margulies IG, Chuang C, Travieso R, Zhu V, Persing JA, Steinbacher DM, Zellner EG. **Preferences of Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Persons in Gender-Confirming Surgical Care: A Cross-Sectional Study.** *Annals of Plastic Surgery* 2021 Jan; 86(1):82-88
- Ethan Watters (2011) - *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the Western Mind*, Free Press (New York, NY), **read - Chapter 1: The Rise of Anorexia in Hong Kong, pages 9-63**

Week 11

Day 1:

(Easter Holiday April 6th—**NO CLASS**)

Day 2:

Personality Disorders

Readings:

- Marchese, D. (2024, Feb 23). **What it's like to be a sociopath.** *The New York Times*.
- Chow RTS, Yu R, Geddes JR, Fazel S. **Personality disorders, violence and antisocial behaviour: updated systematic review and meta-regression analysis.** *The British Journal of Psychiatry*. Published online 2024:1-11. doi:10.1192/bjp.2024.226

Week 12

Day 1:

Causal Factors Review

Day 2:

Game show review

Readings:

- Hazell CM, Berry C, Bogen-Johnston L, Banerjee M. **Creating a hierarchy of mental health stigma: testing the effect of psychiatric diagnosis on stigma.** *BJPsych Open*. 2022 Sep 26;8(5):e174. PMID: 36156196; PMCID: PMC9534883
- Wyatt, W. & Midkiff, Donna. (2006). **Biological Psychiatry: A Practice In Search of a Science.** *Behavior and Social Issues*. 15. 10.5210/bsi.v15i2.372.

Week 13— Final Classes, Final Exams, & Special Academic Events Week

Day 1 (April 20th):

Final Case Study (60 minutes, in class): A Case Study.

Bibliography/Recommended Readings

1. Oltmanns, T. F. & Martin, M. T. (2019). *Case Studies in Abnormal Psychology (11th ed.)*, Wiley
2. Butcher (2020) *Abnormal Psychology*. Pearson Education
3. Slade, Priebe (2006) *Choosing Methods in Mental Health Research: Mental Health Research from Theory to Practice*, Routledge
4. American Psychiatric Association (2023). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev. or DSM-5-TR)
5. Brendan Kelly (2022) *A Psychiatrist's Travels Through the History of Mental Illness*. Gill Books
6. Watters E. (2011) *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the Western Mind*. Free Press
7. Alyssa Miller, William Richard Zweben, Allen (2019) *Treating addiction - A guide for professionals (2nd ed.)*. The Guilford Press

Memoirs:

8. Dunn, A. (2022). *Burn Rate*. Random House
9. Saks, E. (2007) *The Centre Cannot Hold*. New York Hyperion
10. Nana-Ama D. (1998). *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression*. W. W. Norton & Company
11. Castner, B. (2012) *The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life That Follows*. Doubleday
12. Sheff, D. (2009). *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction*. Mariner Books
13. Katriona O'Sullivan (2023) *Poor*. Sandycove
14. Gagne, Patric, (2025). *Sociopath: A Memoir*. Bluebird.