Harvard Extension School - PSYC E-1014
The Psychology of Trauma and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Spring Term 2016

Instructor: Sarah Erb, Ph.D.

Teaching Assistant: Janie Jun, Ph.D.

Class Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 5:30-7:30pm

Location: Sever Hall, Room 202

Office Hours: By appointment. Dr. Erb is also available after class as needed.

Contact Info: SarahErb@fas.harvard.edu – Dr. Erb will check her email daily and respond to student emails within 24 hours (weekdays) to 48 hours (weekends). Dr. Jun’s email is TBA.

Course Website: https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/8444

OBJECTIVES: This course explores the psychological impact of many different types of trauma, including military combat, accidents and life-threatening events, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, natural disasters, and childhood physical and sexual abuse. Our emphasis is on the psychological theories used to explain and treat symptoms associated with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While discussing PTSD, we cover diagnostic methods, research on prevalence and policy issues, comorbid psychological and medical diagnoses, and social correlates. In addition to exploring the challenges associated with PTSD, we discuss mechanisms of positive change following a traumatic event, such as post-traumatic growth. Lectures on course topics are designed to be as interactive as possible by utilizing multimedia, in-class activities, small group discussions, and class preparation assignments.

COURSE FORMAT and EXPECTATIONS: This course involves both lecture and small group discussion components. I am passionate about this seminar topic and enthusiastic about teaching in general. Thus, I have striven to choose thought-provoking lecture topics, class activities, and optional readings that are engaging and meaningful. In exchange, I expect students to come to class ready to actively and respectfully contribute to discussions of the topics listed on this syllabus and to abide by Harvard University academic policies while completing assignments. Students are also encouraged to maintain active and open communication with me regarding any concerns or questions, and are expected to check their Harvard University email accounts regularly.

Course readings listing on this syllabus are optional. Although exam questions will not test information in the readings that is not also covered during course lectures, students who complete the readings are likely improve their exam performance and learn the most from the course. Therefore, students are recommended, but not required, to engage with the course readings listed on this syllabus. Many of the optional readings are from: Friedman, M. J., Keane, T. M., Resick, P. A. (Eds.). (2014). Handbook of PTSD. New York: The Guilford Press.

Note: Many students may have personally experienced trauma or know friends or family members who have been exposed to traumatic events. With this in mind, all students should discuss course topics respectfully and empathically. No one should feel pushed to discuss their own experiences with trauma, and those who choose to share their experiences should consider appropriate and professional ways to self-disclose. Alternative assignments are available to those who anticipate that watching course videos would be more emotionally evocative than they would prefer. Lastly, students should keep in mind that this course is not designed to be a self-help mechanism or to assist students with their own (or others’) psychological challenges.
UNDERGRADUATE COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **Exam 1 (40%) – March 9th**
  - Both exams consist of 40 to 50 multiple choice questions, covering material presented during class lectures. Students are encouraged to use the study guides provided by the instructor as they prepare for the exams. Taking notes during class and completing optional reading are recommended.

- **Exam 2 (40%) – May 11th**
  - In-class participation and class preparation assignments (20%)
    - Students earn participation points through their involvement in daily small-group discussions and completing 4 class preparation assignments. Detailed instructions for each of the preparation assignments are provided on the course website. The assignments should be completed prior to class, and turned in online (via the canvas website) or in hard-copy at the beginning of class:
      - **PTSD AboutFace Website Exploration – February 3rd**
        - Explore http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/. You will share your reactions to the videos on the website in small group discussions.
      - **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention, Support, & Resource-Related Organizations– March 2nd**
        - Choose and explore 2 national organizations that strive to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault and provide support/resources for survivors. You will share your reactions in small group discussions.
        - **You have a choice of completing either this assignment or the following assignment.**
      - **Reactions to “The Invisible War” – March 2nd**
        - Watch “The Invisible War” film and reflect on your reactions to the film and issues surrounding military sexual trauma.
        - **You have a choice of completing either this assignment or the previous assignment.**
      - **Controversial PTSD Topic Investigation – April 27th**
        - Choose a controversial PTSD topic and collect enough information about it (e.g., via research articles, media/press articles) to take an informed stance on the issue. You will discuss your findings in small groups.
      - **Resiliency and Posttraumatic Growth Research – May 4th**
        - Find and read 1 empirical article related to posttraumatic growth / resiliency after trauma exposure. You will share the research findings of this article with your classmates in small groups.
GRADUATE COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **Exam 1 (35%) – March 9th**
  - Both exams consist of 40 to 50 multiple choice questions, covering material presented during class lectures. Students are encouraged to use the study guides provided by the instructor as they prepare for the exams. Taking notes during class and completing optional reading are recommended.

- **Exam 2 (35%) – May 11th**
  - In-class participation and class preparation assignments (15%)
    - Students earn participation points through their involvement in daily small-group discussions and completing 3 class preparation assignments. Detailed instructions for each of the preparation assignments are provided on the course website. The assignments should be completed prior to class, and turned in online (via the canvas website) or in hard-copy at the beginning of class:
      - **PTSD AboutFace Website Exploration – February 3rd**
        - Explore http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/. You will share your reactions to the videos on the website in small group discussions.
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- **Literature Review on a PTSD Controversial Topic (15%) – April 27th**
  - Graduate students will be required to complete an APA-formatted literature review paper of at least 4 pages of text (using at least 5 references, 3 of which should be empirical articles) on any controversial topic related to PTSD. Detailed guidelines for literature review papers will be provided in a separate document. You are encouraged to be creative and choose a topic you will enjoy delving into. *Important dates:*
    - Literature review topic due: March 23rd
    - Outline & references due: April 13th
    - Paper due: April 27th
GRADING SCALE:

Final grades for both undergraduate and graduate students will be determined according to the scale below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Course Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
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EXTENSION SCHOOL POLICIES:

The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit [www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility) for more information.

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity)) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism)), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>CLASS PREPARATION ASSIGNMENTS &amp; OPTIONAL READINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jan 27 | - Overview of the course  
- Intro to trauma  
- Overview, prevalence, & history of PTSD  
|       | - Chapter 1 – PTSD from DSM-III to DSM-5: Progress & Challenges  
For a more in-depth historical exploration of how cultural, social, economic, and political forces have influenced the mental health field’s understanding of PTSD, see: Chapter 3 – The History of Psychic Trauma.  
For a more detailed and nuanced discussion of the challenges of estimating PTSD prevalence, see: Chapter 6 – Epidemiology of Trauma & PTSD.  
For a more exhaustive history of the theoretical & empirical basis for PTSD, see: Chapter 4 – A Psychological History of PTSD. |
| Feb 3  | - PTSD Diagnostics  
|       | - Assignment Due: PTSD AboutFace Website Exploration  
- Chapter 2 – DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD  
For a much more extensive discussion of PTSD assessment instruments and procedures than will be covered in this course, see: Chapter 20 – Assessment of PTSD and Its Comorbidities in Adults and Chapter 21 – Assessment of Childhood PTSD. |
| Feb 10 | - Psychological Theories of PTSD  
|       | - Chapter 9 – Psychological Theories of PTSD  
For more details about methodological challenges associated with estimating prevalence, risk, and protective factors of childhood PTSD, see: Chapter 7 – Child Traumatic Stress: Prevalence, Trends, Risk, & Impact.  
For a discussion of epidemiological studies & prevalence estimates of widely studied groups of older trauma survivors, see Chapter 19 – Trauma in Older Adults. |
| Feb 17 | - PTSD across the lifespan  
- Risk Pathways for PTSD  
- Psychological and Social Comorbidities  
|       | - Chapter 18 – A Developmental Perspective on Childhood Traumatic Stress  
| Feb 24 | - Assignment Due: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention, Support, & Resource-Related Organizations OR Reactions to “The Invisible War”  
- Chapter 17 – Gender Issues in PTSD  
For more details regarding the “The Invisible War” & MST, see: The Invisible War: Discussion and Resource Guide PDF. |
| March 2| - Gender Differences  
- Military Sexual Trauma  
|       | - Chapter 17 – Gender Issues in PTSD  
For more details... |
<p>| March 9| EXAM 1 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
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| March 23   | • Medical Comorbidities of PTSD<br>• Biological Processes related to PTSD<br>• Graduate students’ lit review topics due.  
  • Chapter 10 – Neurocognitive Alterations Associated with PTSD: Neuropsychological Deficits, Information-Processing Biases, and Implications for Mild Traumatic Brain Injury.  
| March 30   | PTSD Treatments:  
  • Cognitive Processing Therapy  
  • Prolonged Exposure | • Chapter 23 – Psychosocial Treatments for Adults with PTSD | For more details about other population-specific interventions, see: Chapter 25 – Empirically Supported Couple & Family Therapies for PTSD. |
| April 6    | PTSD Treatments:  
  • Psychosocial Treatments for Children & Adolescents  
  • Early Interventions | • Chapter 24 – Psychosocial Treatments for Children and Adolescents with PTSD  
  • Chapter 22 – Early Interventions for Trauma |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| April 13   | PTSD Treatments:  
  • Pharmacotherapy  
  • Brain Changes associated with PTSD treatment | • Graduate students’ lit review outline and references due.  
  • Chapter 27 – Pharmacotherapy for PTSD  
| April 20   | • Film Viewing & Discussion: “This Is Life With Lisa Ling: Jungle Fix” | For a more detailed perspective on psychedelic substances and pharmacotherapy, see: Sessa, B. (2015). Why Psychiatry needs psychedelics and psychedelics needs psychiatry, Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 46(1), 57-62. |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| April 27   | | • Assignment Due: Controversial PTSD Topic Investigation. |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| April 27   | • PTSD Controversies | |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| May 4      | • Resiliency & Posttraumatic Growth | • Assignment Due: Resiliency and Posttraumatic Growth Research  
  • Chapter 33 - Resilience  
| May 11     | | EXAM 2 | |