

Course Title: Understanding Suicide

Course Number: HBSP 0682

Course Pre- and Co-requisite(s): None

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(When emailing, please include the course number [HBSP 0682] in the subject line.)

Office Hours: Mondays, 2-3pm; Tuesdays, 1-2pm. Office hours will be held on Zoom. Instructions are available on Canvas.

Course Website: canvas.rutgers.edu

Required Course Text: None. Required reading materials will include a combination of chapter texts, articles, websites, and other sources. All will be posted on Canvas.

Course Description:

This course addresses suicide as a global public health scourge. Students are provided with an overview of contemporary knowledge regarding suicide risk, prevention, and intervention. We will address foundational topics such as definitions, terminology, history, theories, epidemiology, risk assessment methods, and prediction models. Prevention and intervention are considered from both individual- and population-level perspectives. Suicide risk, prevention, and intervention are discussed with respect to diverse identities (e.g., racial and ethnic minoritized groups) and community memberships (e.g., military and veteran populations).

Throughout the course, an emphasis is placed on communicating about suicide in ways that combat stigma, dispel common myths, and promote mental health literacy and empathy. Due to the course focus, we frequently discuss material of a sensitive nature. Respect of any potential emotional response or sharing of personal information by a classmate (should it occur – although it is not necessary or required) is mandatory. Although course materials, requirements, and assignments are standard across all students and won't be modified, students have the right to exercise autonomy around their engagement with specific materials in order to support their own self-care.

Selected Concentration Competencies Addressed: Each concentration/certificate identifies competencies for each degree offered.

The competencies addressed in this course for the Suicide Prevention, Practice, and Policy (SPPP) certificate are:

1. Summarize current evidence for individual-level suicide interventions and population-level suicide prevention strategies.
2. Summarize gold standard assessment tools for suicide risk used in specific contexts.

3. Evaluate the role of social, community, policy, or commercial factors in amplifying or mitigating suicide risk.
4. Evaluate current knowledge about suicide with respect to diverse identities and communities.

The competencies addressed in this course for the MPH in Population Mental Health (PMH) include:

1. Examine the relationship between stigma, population mental health, and health inequity
2. Identify biological, psychological, socioeconomic, structural, or sociocultural correlates of population mental health
3. Evaluate the impact of population mental health burden
4. Evaluate interventions that promote population mental health or wellbeing

Please visit the Concentration webpages on the School of Public Health's website at sph.rutgers.edu for more information about the curriculum and competencies for our degrees and concentrations.

Course Objectives: By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Summarize foundational knowledge regarding suicide and suicide prevention including definitions/terminology, history, and current theories
2. Summarize and evaluate current epidemiologic knowledge about suicide
3. Appraise commonly held beliefs about suicide and how they contribute to stigma and impede intervention and prevention efforts.
4. Summarize current evidence for individual- and population-level suicide prevention/intervention strategies.
5. Appraise contemporary knowledge on the prediction of suicide attempts and mortality.
6. Describe risk and protective factors for the development of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
7. Examine suicide risk with respect to diverse identities and community memberships [including (but not limited to) racial and ethnic minoritized groups; sexual and gender diverse people; military and veteran populations; adolescents; older adults; and people with disabilities].
8. Demonstrate skill in communicating about suicide in ways that combat stigma and promote mental health literacy and empathy.

Linking Competencies/Objectives to Assessments				
SPPP Competency	PMH Competency	Course Objectives(s)	Weeks	Assessment(s)
1	4	4	9-12	- Weekly assignments - Module Exam 2 - Assignment 2 - Assignment 3 - Assignment 4
2	-	5	8	- Weekly assignments - Module Exam 2
3	2,3	2,6	4,6,7	- Weekly assignments - Assignment 4 - Module Exam 1 - Module Exam 2
4	1	7	13-15	- Weekly assignments - Module Exam 1 - Module Exam 2 - Assignment 4
-	1	3,8	2,3,15	- Weekly assignments - Assignment 1 - Assignment 4 - Module Exam 1
-	-	1	1,5	- Weekly assignments - Module Exam 1

Course Communication: The instructor will communicate with students primarily through the tools within the Canvas course. If you have a question that you feel may help other students as well, please post your question in the “Class Help: Ask A Question for your Instructor” discussion thread. If you have a personal concern or question you would like to talk about, please email Dr. Anestis directly or attend office hours. During the work week, Dr. Anestis will aim to respond to personal e-mails or your posts directed to her within 48 hours. For communications posted/emailed over the weekend (starting 5PM EST on Friday), she will try to respond by the end of the business day on Tuesday for most situations. If Dr. Anestis is out of town without Internet access, she will post a note in Canvas in Announcements. The goal will be to post grades within seven days of the final due date of the assignment, unless otherwise stated.

Fostering Course Community: Dr. Anestis will work to foster community through discussion boards, chat sessions, online activities, etc. Students are encouraged to get to know each other and contribute their particular strengths, expertise, and experience to enrich the class. Working with your classmates, explaining concepts to each other, and interacting with your instructor (and course assistant, if assigned) are the most effective ways to understand the course concepts and succeed in this course. By posting questions on Canvas (rather than via email) the entire class has the benefit of learning from the discussions, so please consider posting your question as a first option - using the “Class Help: Ask A Question for your Instructor” discussion thread.

Canvas Announcements: This course will use Announcements in Canvas to share course information, highlight lessons learned, and send reminders. Be sure you review your notification

settings in Canvas so that you receive these Announcements using your preferred contact method. In addition, please be sure to check the Announcements tab at least once each week in the Canvas shell for this course.

Module Schedule: All course deadlines are listed in Eastern Time Zone. Canvas will record all deadlines in this time zone. If you are in a different time zone, plan accordingly. Each week will begin on a **Tuesday (Day 1)** and will end on **Monday (Day 7)**. In order to complete all of the module assignments, you should plan to spend approximately 9 hours per week on the course material for a total of approximately 145 hours of course-related activities (discussion boards, assignments, papers, readings, etc.).

Discussion Board/Annotated Reading Guidelines and Expectations: Prompts and instructions for the discussion boards and group annotated reading (using Hypothesis in Canvas) will be posted on Canvas. You will utilize readings, videos and other information to inform and engage in these activities each week. Respect, critical thinking and application of knowledge will guide these discussions. Original posts for Discussions/Annotations are due by **Thursday (Day 3) at 11:59PM EST** and your replies are due **Sunday (Day 6) at 11:59PM EST**. The instructions and expectations for the Discussion Board and Group Annotated Reading, including rubrics, are posted on Canvas.

Research on Taking Notes and Enhancing Your Attention: Research demonstrates that taking notes by hand rather than on the computer triggers higher-level thinking and leads to higher recall and better understanding (Mueller and Oppenheimer, 2014). Consider taking your notes of the presentations (lectures, other media) by hand either in a notebook or using a smartpen with a tablet – what’s important is writing your notes rather than typing your notes.

Paying attention and holding your attention is important for learning. But it is not as easy as it sounds! There are strategies that can help you enhance your attention. Research on meditation has shown that it can help increase our ability to control our attention by changing our brain structure (Jha, 2011) In addition, our brains are wired to pay attention to whatever is most interesting at any point and we can hold that focus until something else shifts our focus away. By removing or eliminating distractions we can help ourselves to stay focused. While viewing the presentations (lectures) or completing the readings, consider turning your cell phone off to avoid losing focus every time a text message or notification pops up. And if you’re still having trouble resisting the temptation to check your email or surf the web, try downloading a website blocker. These website block applications can help eliminate distractions by blocking the apps or websites that tend to compete for your attention. For a list of sample website block applications, visit <https://freedom.to/blog/8-website-blockers-for-studying-productivity-focus/>.

Diversity Statement: In this class I strive to create an inclusive community, learning from the distinctive perspectives that come from having differing backgrounds and beliefs. We will create a learning community that is a safe environment that fosters an open and honest dialogue on topics that we recognize may be uncomfortable for some. It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. We will reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination when presenting materials and activities that are respectful of diversity, including but not limited to those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and

veteran status. We expect that faculty and students will contribute to creating a respectful and inclusive environment, with disagreements being pursued without personal attacks or acts of aggression. Our goal is to create a safe space that facilitates inquiry and self-expression, while listening and learning from others' viewpoints that may be different from our own.

The intention is not to cause discomfort or offense; however, the impact of what happens in class cannot and will not be ignored. To alleviate any discomfort that may occur, you may:

1. Discuss the situation in a meeting with me outside of the classroom.
2. Discuss the situation in class. There is a possibility that one or more students have had a similar response to the discussion or materials. Addressing the issue as a group will allow you to gain a more thorough understanding of the issue and the course materials.
3. Contact the Office of Student Services if you are uncomfortable speaking with your professor or in front of your classmates. Seek another more comfortable avenue to address the issue.

Course Requirements and Grading:

ASSIGNMENTS	DUE	GRADE VALUE (percentage of grade)
Weekly Assignments. Our greatest class resource is you! Your thoughts, ideas, questions, and comments will enrich everyone's learning experience. Weekly tasks will involve discussion boards, group reading annotation tasks, and/or brief knowledge quizzes. Be prepared by watching the lectures and reading the course articles. More details are provided on Canvas.	WEEKLY, DATES VARY	10
Assignment 1: Media communication about suicide. Each student will locate a media piece (e.g., article, video news segment, radio segment, podcast) on suicide in the last 12 months and develop an Op-Ed for laypeople critiquing the quality of the communication about suicide in the selected piece and discussing the role of the media in perpetuating suicide stigma. More details are provided on Canvas.	Sept. 23	15
Assignment 2: Crisis response planning. After watching a mock interview of a suicide risk assessment, each student will create a mock crisis response plan. More details are provided on Canvas.	Nov. 11	15
Assignment 3: Select a suicide prevention strategy. Pretend you are either a hospital administrator or leader in a state department of health. Select one evidence-based suicide prevention strategy that could be feasibly implemented in your setting/for your population. Create a 1-page informational handout that is intended to teach your colleagues about the strategy AND convince them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First Draft: Nov. 18 - Two Peer Reviews: Nov. 25 - Final Draft: Dec. 2 	15

that it should be adopted in your settings. More details are provided on Canvas.		
Assignment 4: Suicide in specific populations/communities. Each student will select a specific community or population that isn't comprehensively covered in class. Some examples include (but aren't limited to): occupational groups (e.g., veterinarians), users of opioids, firearm owners, immigrant/refugee populations, people with intersecting identifies (e.g., gay Hispanic youth, transgender veterans). Then each student will: 1) prepare and record a 10-minute presentation for the class on suicide in that community/population (e.g., definitions, epidemiology, and prevention/intervention considerations), and 2) Create an informational message for the community/population about suicide risk and resources specific to them, using any format - provided it is selected specifically for the population (e.g., podcast, infographic, Tiktok, Twitter, etc.). More details are provided on Canvas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic Selection: Sept. 16 - Epidemiology slides: Sept. 30 - Risk/Protective factors slides: Oct. 21 - First draft, full presentation: Oct. 28 - Two Peer Reviews: Nov. 4 - Final Presentation and Informational Message: Dec. 16 	20
Module Examinations. Two online module exams will be based on readings and presentation materials. The first will cover modules 1-6 and the second modules 7-14. These online module exams will be timed, and students must complete each of them independently but can use readings and notes. Students will be able to start the exam when they choose after it opens, but it must be completed by the deadline. Once started, the exam timer also starts.	Exam 1: Oct. 14 Exam 2: Dec. 9	25
TOTAL:		100

Grading Policy: 94 – 100 A
 90 – <94 A-
 87 – <90 B+
 84 – <87 B
 80 – <84 B-
 77 – <80 C+
 70 – <77 C
 <70 F

Assignment Standards:

Independent Work: The assignments and examinations are to be done INDEPENDENTLY, not with other classmates, unless otherwise stated by the instructor. Individual assignments are expected to be independent and original work.

Course Policy on Generative AI: The use of ChatGPT (or other similar tools or software that generate suggested text) is not allowed to produce or complete any assignments for this course, including generation of ideas, writing of text, or rewriting your own work. A student who is found to have used AI-generated content for an assignment by AI will receive a zero and be considered a violation of academic integrity.

Lateness: Assignments turned in after the official collection period are considered late. Unless the instructor and student come to an arrangement at least one week before class, there is a 20% penalty for written work turned in late. Assignments are posted to Canvas by the due date. If you need to turn in something after the due date due, please discuss it with the instructor **BEFORE** the due date to avoid point penalty. Please note: if entries for the Discussion Board or the Group Annotated Reading are late, they will be graded as “zero.”

Grammar/Spelling. If more than eight (8) gross punctuation, grammar or spelling errors occur in the written assignments, they will be returned with no grade. These can be resubmitted within one week with a five (5) point penalty or the student can accept a failing grade. There is a formal policy on plagiarism in the college catalog that will be the policy for the class.

Citations. Citation style for references in written assignments is American Psychological Association (APA). Please use this APA citation style for all references. If you are unfamiliar with APA style, these references are useful:

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html
- <https://libguides.rutgers.edu/CitingSources/apa>

Course Materials. Readings, presentations, and assignments will be available on Canvas. Students are responsible and will be held accountable for all materials and assignments posted on Canvas.

Margins and Page Limits Requirements. Refer to each assignment instructions for margins and page limit requirements. A deduction of 10% will occur if assignment over the maximum page limit. Assignment instructions will be available on CANVAS.

Extra Credit. Extra credit opportunities, if offered, will be posted on Canvas.

Course Schedule: SUBJECT TO CHANGE

MODULE	DAY 1	COURSE TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS (DUE DATE)
1	Sept. 3	Course Overview and Introduction to Suicidology	Syllabus annotation (Day 7) CDC Uniform Definition Quiz (Day 7)
2	Sept. 10	Myths about Suicide and Suicide Stigma	Module 2 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Knowledge Check & Reflection: Stigma (Day 7) Assignment 4 Topic Selection (Day 7)
3	Sept. 17	The Role of Media in Suicide Risk and Prevention	Module 3 Group Reading Annotation & Replies (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 1 (Day 7)
4	Sept. 24	Epidemiology of Suicide	Module 4 Group Reading Annotation & Replies (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 4 Epidemiology Slides (Day 7)
5	Oct. 1	History and Theories	Module 5 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6)
6	Oct. 8	Social determinants of suicide	Module 6 Group Reading Annotation & Replies (Day 3 & 6) Exam 1 (Day 7)
7	Oct. 15	Physical Health and Disability	Module 7 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 4 Risk/Protective Factor Slides (Day 7)
8	Oct. 22	Suicide Assessment and Prediction of Suicide Risk	Module 8 Group Reading Annotation & Replies (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 4 Full Presentation First Draft (Day 7)
9	Oct. 29	Individual-Level Interventions for Suicide within the Healthcare System: Part 1	Module 9 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 4 Peer Reviews (Day 7)
10	Nov. 5	Individual-Level Interventions for Suicide within the Healthcare System: Part 2	Module 10 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 2 (Day 7)
11	Nov. 12	Psychiatric Hospitalization & Individual-Level Interventions Outside of the healthcare system	Module 11 Group Reading Annotation & Replies (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 3 First Draft (Day 7)
12	Nov. 19	Population-level interventions	Module 12 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Assignment 3 Peer Reviews (Day 7)
13	Nov. 26	Communities disproportionately impacted by suicide: Part 1 ***School of Public Health Thanksgiving Recess – Nov. 28-Dec. 1***	Assignment 3 Final Draft (Day 7)
14	Dec. 3	Communities disproportionately impacted by suicide: Part 2	Module 14 Discussion & Reply (Day 3 & 6) Exam 2
15	Dec. 10	Assignment 4 presentations	Assignment 4 Full Presentation Final Draft (Day 7) Assignment 4 Informational Message (Day 7)

Learning Management System: Canvas will be used throughout the semester for course syllabus, assignments, announcements, communication and/or other course-related activities. It is the student's responsibility to familiarize themselves with Canvas and check it regularly. If you have difficulties accessing Canvas, please inform the instructor and Canvas Support (help@oit.rutgers.edu). Canvas is accessible at canvas.rutgers.edu.

School of Public Health Honor Code: The School of Public Health Honor Code is found in the School Catalog (sph.rutgers.edu/academics/catalog.html). Each student bears a fundamental responsibility for maintaining academic integrity and intellectual honesty in his or her graduate work. For example, all students are expected to observe the generally accepted principles of scholarly work, to submit their own rather than another's work, to refrain from falsifying data, and to refrain from receiving and/or giving aid on examinations or other assigned work requiring independent effort. In submitting written material, the writer takes full responsibility for the work as a whole and implies that, except as properly noted by use of quotation marks, footnotes, etc., both the ideas and the works used are his or her own. In addition to maintaining personal academic integrity, each student is expected to contribute to the academic integrity of the School community by not facilitating inappropriate use of her/his own work by others and by reporting acts of academic dishonesty by others to an appropriate school authority. It should be clearly understood that plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can lead to sanctions up to and including separation from the Rutgers School of Public Health.

Use of Generative AI: Each instructor at the School of Public Health determines how generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) may or may not be used in their course. Please check with your instructor regarding the specific policy for their course. However, the use of generative AI in academic coursework is integrally related to academic integrity and is governed by the School's Honor Code. It is a violation of the Honor Code policy for students to represent work they did not do as their own, and work generated by an AI system, such as ChatGPT, falls under that policy.

Students with Disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student must apply for Services by first completing a Registration Form with the Rutgers Office of Disability Services (ODS) at ods.rutgers.edu. The student will also be required to participate in an ODS intake interview and provide documentation. If reasonable accommodations are granted, ODS will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations which should be shared with your instructors as early in your courses as possible.

Commitment to Safe Learning Environment: The Rutgers School of Public Health is committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the School as a whole. Free expression in an academic community is essential to the mission of providing the highest caliber of education possible. The School encourages civil discourse, reasoned thought, sustained discussion, and constructive engagement. Provocative ideas respectfully presented are an expected result. An enlightened academic community, however, connects freedom with responsibility. The School encourages all students to disclose any situations where you may feel unsafe, discriminated against, or harassed. Harassment or discrimination of any kind will be not tolerated and violations may lead to disciplinary actions.

Student Well-Being: The School of Public Health recognizes that students may experience stressors or challenges that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. If the source of your stressors or challenges is academic, students are encouraged to discuss these challenges and circumstances with their instructor, if they feel they may need additional support or temporary accommodations at the beginning or during this course. The course instructor may consider making reasonable temporary adjustments depending on the student's situation. For personal concerns or if additional support is needed, students may reach out to the [Office of Student Affairs](#) or any of the appropriate referral resources listed on the [SPH Student Connect](#) Canvas page.

Reporting Discrimination or Harassment: If you experience any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. You may report such incidents to the [RBHS Title IX Office](#) or to the School of Public Health's [Office of Student Affairs](#). Rutgers University has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. If you experience any other form of discrimination or harassment, including racial, ethnic, religious, political, or academic, please report any such incidents to the School's [Office of Student Affairs](#). The School strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of discrimination or harassment to the School. Please be aware that all Rutgers employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as advocates, counselors, clergy and healthcare providers as listed in Appendix A to [Policy 10.3.12](#)) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the School and potentially the University. For example, if you tell a faculty or staff member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty or staff member must share that information with the [RBHS Title IX Coordinator](#). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of resources in Appendix A to University [Policy 10.3.12](#). For more information about your options at Rutgers, please visit [Rutgers Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance](#).

Overview of School Policies: Academic and non-academic policies and procedures, such as Auditing a Course, Retaking Courses, Grade Grievance and others that cover registration, courses and grading, academic standing and progress, student rights and responsibilities, graduation and more may be found under [Policies](#) on the School of Public Health website. Below are select specific policies; however, students are responsible for keeping informed about academic and non-academic policies and procedures beyond those noted on this syllabus.

Graduate Student Computer Policy: Students are required to possess a personal laptop, no older than approximately two years, that must meet minimum requirements which may be found online at: sph.rutgers.edu/student-life/computer-support.html

Policy Concerning Use of Recording Devices and Other Electronic Communications Systems: When personally owned communication/recording devices are used by students to record lectures and/or classroom lessons, such use must be authorized by the faculty member or instructor who must give either oral or written permission prior to the start of the semester and identify restrictions, if any, on the use of mobile communications or recording devices.

Policy Concerning Use of Turnitin: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com (directly or via learning management system, i.e. Canvas) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.

Withdrawal/Refund Schedule: Students who stop attending their course(s) without submitting a completed [Add/Drop Course](#) form will receive a failing grade. Furthermore, students dropping to zero credits for the semester are considered withdrawn and must submit a completed [Leave of Absence](#) form from the School of Public Health's Office of Student Affairs. The School of Public Health refunds tuition only. Administrative and technology fees are non-refundable. You may find the Withdrawal/Refund Schedule on the School of Public Health website at: sph.rutgers.edu/academics/academic-calendar.html