

**SELF-INJURY AND SUICIDE: PSYC 480**  
**Winter 2020**

**Wednesday 1PM – 230PM**

**Friday 11:30AM – 1PM**

**Location: Walter Light Hall, room 212**

**Instructor: Dr. Jeremy G. Stewart**  
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**Course Description**

Why do people intentionally hurt themselves? Humans are instinctually driven (and biologically programmed) to preserve our own lives and avoid harm. Yet, worldwide, more than 800,000 people die by suicide, and many, many more purposefully hurt themselves without intending to die as a result (i.e., non-suicidal self-injury [NSSI]).

In this course, students will develop an advanced understanding of the empirical and theoretical literature in the area of self-injurious behaviors, specifically suicide and NSSI. The course will focus on the following broad areas: (a) definition, phenomenology, assessment, and epidemiology; (b) modern theories (e.g., ideation-to-action frameworks for understanding suicide); (c) transdiagnostic risk factors (i.e., social, cognitive-affective, and biological processes); (d) intervention, prevention, and postvention; and (e) special topics (e.g., suicide in the media).

**Intended Student Learning Outcomes**

To complete this course students will demonstrate:

1. The ability to properly define and differentiate different kinds of suicidal and non-suicidal thoughts and behaviours.
2. Knowledge of the etiology (e.g., prevalence, global differences in suicide rates) and dominant theoretical frameworks of suicide and NSSI.
3. An understanding of the up-to-date empirical literature on the risk factors for suicide and NSSI, with a focus on novel transdiagnostic processes.
4. Familiarity with the extant literature on evidence-based intervention, prevention, and postvention (e.g., helping loved ones of suicide decedents) of suicide and NSSI.

**Readings**

Readings for the course will consist of primary empirical articles, review papers, and book chapters. The articles are all available to download from Queen's library. The URL for each of the readings is provided in the reading list (see "Required and Suggested Reading List"). To access the readings, first ensure that you are connected to the Queen's server (either from an on-campus computer, or remotely). Then, simply click on the URL and you will be directed to a page that will allow you to download a copy of the article.

**\*\*You must be connected to the Queen's server to receive free downloads of these articles\*\***

All students are required to read the article(s)/chapter(s) listed in the "Required and Suggested Reading List" to facilitate in-class discussions. Required (mandatory) readings are denoted with \*\* and supplemental (helpful, but not mandatory) readings are denoted with ^. The supplemental readings are a good start for

group presentations (see below) where the expectation is to move beyond the mandatory articles. Discussion questions (see below) will be based on the required and supplemental readings for each class.

### Course Format

The course will largely consist of discussion (guided and unstructured) and small group activities. There will be brief didactic lectures led by the instructor at the beginning and end of the course.

Approximately 1/2 of the classes will involve presentations and discussions moderated by the students (in groups of 2-3; see below). In these sessions, students will be responsible for presenting and discussing the required (and supplemental) articles. However, for all classes, all students are expected to come to class prepared to critically discuss the material.

During the first class period, there will be 5 minutes in which students will complete a poll listing their top five rank ordered choices for a presentation topic/date. Between the first and second class, you will be assigned a top and placed in a group with 1-2 other students based on mutually-preferred topics. NOTE: if many students choose the same topics as their first/second choices, the people assigned those topics will be determined randomly. Partners will work together to prepare the presentation and each is expected to contribute equally to the presentation. Students will be assigned their own separate grades for the presentation. Students are also expected to hand in independent assignments (see below).

### Evaluation

<b>Class Presentation:</b>	<b>30%</b>	
Presentation	25%	
Peer Questions	5%	
<b>Writing Assignments:</b>	<b>30%</b>	
Assignment 1	10%	<b>DUE January 24</b>
Assignment 2	10%	<b>DUE February 14</b>
Assignment 3	10%	<b>DUE March 20</b>
<b>Discussion Questions:</b>	<b>10%</b>	
<b>Debunking Suicide Myths:</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>DUE April 10</b>
Blog Post	20%	
Twitter Thread	5%	
<b>Participation/Attendance:</b>	<b>5%</b>	

### Course Requirements

- A. Class Presentation:** Groups of 2-3 students will conduct a 30-minute oral presentation to the class on a topic from the syllabus. Students will collaborate in creating and delivering the presentation, although each person is graded individually. *Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor during office hours to help prepare for their presentation. Presentations will occur in classes in Weeks 5 to 12, inclusive. The presentation must be presented on the day listed in the syllabus for that topic. Changes will not be made to the syllabus.*

Students will coherently summarize, expand upon, and discuss one of the articles for their assigned topic (these can be required readings, or, with instructor permission, supplemental readings). It is not enough

to ONLY use the information directly from the article – students should aim to integrate information from other assigned articles from that week and/or their own examination of relevant literature. Particularly, outside sources should be used to expand on the introductory materials relevant to the focal article, and to add depth and breadth to the discussion.

The presentation will be followed by 15 minutes for questions from students and the professor.

Grading for the presentations will be weighted in the following manner (TOTAL: 25%):

Comprehensiveness and synthesis of the content	9%
Incorporation of sources beyond the target article	3%
Clarity, organization, and succinctness of presentation (including visuals)	3%
Ability to pose novel research questions and generate discussion	5%
Ability to answer questions accurately and appropriately	5%

The remainder of the presentation grade (5%) will be determined by how well students formulate and ask questions of their peers' presentations. The **rubric for peer questions is below**:

Needs Improvement – Infrequent questions. Comments do not show understanding of topic (0-1%)

Developing – Infrequent questions. Comments do not expand beyond the content presented (2%)

Accomplished – Regular comments. Comments show strong understanding of the topic and occasionally generate further discussion (3-4%)

Exemplary – Comments routinely reflect deeper understanding of material. Student makes links among and between readings and topics across multiple lessons. Comments contribute to, and at times shape, the overall class discussion (5%)

- B. Writing Assignments:** Three (3) writing assignments, each worth 10% of students' final grade, will be assigned throughout the term. These will require students to **BRIEFLY (500 words max)** respond to one or more specific questions that will be assigned a minimum of two (2) classes ahead of time by the instructor.

Writing assignments will be graded on the following general criteria:

Summarizing information (e.g., scientific articles) accurately and concisely	5%
Presenting a clear perspective that is grounded in reviewed information	2%
Creativity	1%
Sentence structure, grammar, spelling, etc, and staying within word limit	1%
Overall organization of the writing assignment	1%

- C. Discussion Questions:** For Weeks 2-12 inclusive, students will submit one (1) discussion question on the readings via onQ by no later than 6PM on the day before the class. **Late questions will not be accepted and will receive a grade of 0.** Discussion questions are intended to encourage students to review the assigned readings, stimulate thinking on course topics, and to improve the caliber of in-class discussions. Each question will be worth 0.5% of students' final grade. **Below is the grading rubric:**

0% - Not submitted or submitted late OR completely irrelevant to the assigned reading(s).

0.25% - Submitted. Question reflects surface-level observation, or restates questions already posed by the authors of the paper. Does not include anything creative; does not synthesize material.

0.50% - Submitted. Question reflects a detailed read of the paper, and clear efforts to integrate paper content with students' knowledge/observations, and/or other course content. Question is creative and integrative.

**D. Debunking Suicide Myths:** Students will write a **blog post** (20%) about a common misunderstanding about suicide. The instructor will provide a list of suicide myths to choose from; students may also use a myth that is not from the list, but in this case, prior approval from the instructor is required. The blog should be written for a general audience BUT it should include scientific findings from the course AND the students' own literature search/review. The main goal of the blog is to share approachable, accurate suicide science with non-scientists. **The blog post should be no longer than 1000 WORDS.**

Good examples of how to make scientific writing more accessible to non-scientist audiences can be found at The Conversation Canada (<https://theconversation.com/ca>). [NOTE: Your blog post can be slightly less formal than a Conversation piece, but the articles are still solid examples].

Grading of the **blog post** will be based on clearly identifying the topic and motivating the importance of the topic (i.e., the myth in question) (3%), the appropriateness of the literature used (e.g., is it up-to-date? did the student demonstrate an understanding of the information) (5%), the synthesis of the content, and its use in clearly and unequivocally debunking the myth (5%), the appropriateness for a general audience (e.g., engaging; not too technical; walking the reader through important points) (3%), and the quality and readability of the writing (e.g., grammar, spelling, syntax, sentence structure) (3%).

Students will also create an accompanying **Twitter "thread"** (i.e., a series of tweets) summarizing the key points of their blog posts. Twitter threads are often used in the **#AcademicTwitter** community to summarize full scientific articles with the goal of reaching a broader audience. The best threads can stand alone, are clear, and do not try to do too much. To create the "thread" each student will submit a document with five (5) 120-character "tweets" summarizing the key points of the blog post. Each Twitter thread will be assessed according to the following criteria:

Adherence to the format (i.e., 120 characters or fewer)	1%
Interpretability without reading the blog post	1%
Clarity and style (e.g., grammar, syntax, spelling)	1%
Choice of key points	1%
Degree to which thread engages audience / builds interest	1%

**E. Participation / Attendance:** Students are expected to attend every class and must notify the instructor in advance if they will be absent (NOTE: students who are absent without notification or reason will receive a deduction of 1% from their participation grade. Students who provide advance notification for missing class will not be graded for that class). In class, students are expected to discuss the assigned readings, engage in small group activities, and contribute to a safe and respectful class culture. Participation marks will be based on attendance and participation (e.g., asking questions; providing remarks on peer comments; contributing to small group deliverables).

### **Grading Method**

All components of this course will receive numerical percentage marks. The final grade you receive for the course will be derived by converting your numerical course average to a letter grade according to Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale:

**Grade Numerical Course Average (Range)**

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
C+	67-69
C	63-66
C-	60-62
D+	57-59
D	53-56
D-	50-52
F	49 and below

**Late Policy**

Late discussion questions will not be accepted (see above). Students who miss class without notifying the instructor in advance will receive a deduction of 1% from their participation grade. Group presentations must be given on the date on which they are scheduled; late presentations will not be accepted.

For writing assignments and the final assignment, I will accommodate anyone with a documented family or medical emergency, or exceptional emergency-type situations of other kinds. Other than these exceptions, deductions of 5% will be assessed for each day that an assignment is late (see also “Academic Considerations for Students in Extenuating Circumstances” below).

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

Academic Integrity is constituted by the six core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage (see [www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org)). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities <http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senate/report-principles-and-priorities>).

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1 <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/regulations/academic-regulations/regulation-1>), on the Arts and Science website (see <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academics/undergraduate/academic-integrity>), and from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

**Turnitin Statement**

This course makes use of Turnitin, a third-party application that helps maintain standards of excellence in academic integrity. Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to through onQ

to Turnitin. In doing so, students' work will be included as source documents in the Turnitin reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism.

Turnitin is a suite of tools that provide instructors with information about the authenticity of submitted work and facilitates the process of grading. Turnitin compares submitted files against its extensive database of content, and produces a similarity report and a similarity score for each assignment. A similarity score is the percentage of a document that is similar to content held within the database. Turnitin does not determine if an instance of plagiarism has occurred. Instead, it gives instructors the information they need to determine the authenticity of work as a part of a larger process.

Please read Turnitin's [Privacy Pledge, Privacy Policy, and Terms of Service](#), which governs users' relationship with Turnitin. Also, please note that Turnitin uses cookies and other tracking technologies; however, in its service contract with Queen's Turnitin has agreed that neither Turnitin nor its third-party partners will use data collected through cookies or other tracking technologies for marketing or advertising purposes. For further information about how you can exercise control over cookies, see [Turnitin's Privacy Policy](#)

Turnitin may provide other services that are not connected to the purpose for which Queen's University has engaged Turnitin. Your independent use of Turnitin's other services is subject solely to Turnitin's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, and Queen's University has no liability for any independent interaction you choose to have with Turnitin.

### **Copyright of Course Materials**

Course materials created by the course instructor, including all slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other similar course materials, are the intellectual property of the instructor. It is a departure from academic integrity to distribute, publicly post, sell or otherwise disseminate an instructor's course materials or to provide an instructor's course materials to anyone else for distribution, posting, sale or other means of dissemination, without the instructor's express consent. A student who engages in such conduct may be subject to penalty for a departure from academic integrity and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.

### **Acknowledgment of Territory**

Queen's University is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory.

### **Accommodations Statement**

Queen's University is committed to achieving full accessibility for people with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. The Senate Policy for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities was approved at Senate in November 2016 (see <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslcwww/files/files/policies/senateandtrustees/ACADACCOMMPOLICY2016.pdf>). If you are a student with a disability and think you may need academic accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, including important deadlines, please visit the QSAS website at: <http://www.queensu.ca/studentwellness/accessibility-services/>

### **Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances**

Queen's University is committed to providing academic consideration to students experiencing extenuating circumstances that are beyond their control and are interfering with their ability to complete academic requirements related to a course for a short period of time, not to exceed three months. Students receiving academic consideration must meet all essential requirements of a course. The Senate Policy on Academic

Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances was approved at Senate in April, 2017 (see <http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslcwww/files/files/policies/senateandtrustees/Academic%20Considerations%20for%20Extenuating%20Circumstances%20Policy%20Final.pdf>) Each Faculty has developed a protocol to provide a consistent and equitable approach in dealing with requests for academic consideration for students facing extenuating circumstances. Arts and Science undergraduate students can find the Faculty of Arts and Science protocol and the portal where a request can be submitted at: <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/accommodations>. Students in other Faculties and Schools who are enrolled in this course should refer to the protocol for their home Faculty.

If you need to request academic consideration for this course, you will be required to provide the name and email address of the instructor/coordinator. Please use the following:

Instructor/Coordinator Name: Dr. Jeremy Stewart

Instructor/Coordinator email address: [jeremy.stewart@queensu.ca](mailto:jeremy.stewart@queensu.ca)

## Course Outline

### **Week 1: Introduction and Definitions**

- January 8 Introduction / Syllabus; Defining Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors (STBs)  
 January 10 Defining STBs (cont.); Defining Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)

### **Week 2: Epidemiology and Assessment**

- January 15 Self-Injurious Thought and Behaviors: A Global Perspective  
 January 17 Assessing Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviours

### **Week 3: Theories of Suicide and NSSI**

- January 22 Theories of Suicide  
 January 24 Theories of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury **[WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE]**

### **Week 4: Suicide Risk Factors I**

- January 29 Introduction; Mental Disorders  
 January 31 Stress and Bullying

### **Week 5: Suicide Risk Factors II**

- February 5 Suicide Cognition\*\*  
 February 7 Neuropsychological Processes\*\*

### **Week 6: Suicide Risk Factors III**

- February 12 Reward Processes\*\*  
 February 14 Decision-Making\*\* **[WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE]**

### **Week 7: READING WEEK (NO CLASSES)**

### **Week 8: NSSI Risk Factors I**

- February 26 Emotions and Emotion Regulation\*\*  
 February 28 Social Processes\*\*



**Week 9: NSSI Risk Factors II**

March 4 Pain\*\*

March 6 Self-Criticism\*\*

**Week 10: Intervention**

March 11 Psychotherapeutic Interventions\*\*

March 13 Novel Interventions\*\*

**Week 11: Prevention and postvention**

March 18 Prevention\*\*

March 20 Postvention\*\* [WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE]

**Week 12: Under-represented individuals**

March 25 Culture, Sexual Identity, and Gender Identity

March 27 First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples

**Week 13: Special topics**

April 1 Social Media

April 3 Lived Experience

Debunking Suicide Myths Assignment is due **April 10**\*\*

**\*\* indicates a student presentation topic.**