

**St. Thomas University**  
**SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

**ScWk 3763 - Social Work and Spirituality**

Fall 2004

Professor Brian Ouellette

**I. Course Description**

The roots of the profession of social work, at least in North America, lie in Judeo-Christian religious traditions. As the profession evolved, its value-base became more secular and for the past seventy years the profession has persistently pursued the scientific ideal. In its attempts to become a credible, scientific profession, social work has distanced itself from the spiritual or religious dimension, has emphasized techniques and intervention strategies, and has neglected the subjective, intuitive, reflective and creative part of the person. In recent years the profession has been influenced by several factors; i) the emergence of a holistic integrative paradigm (particularly in the natural sciences); ii) the development of feminist practice, the 'personal is political ideology' perspective, and the emergence of structural social work as an alternative to conventional social work; and iii) the increased multi-culturalism of its clients and workers. These factors, coupled with a world-wide revived interest in spirituality, have led the profession to the realization that social work must be prepared to work with the whole person (including the spiritual). To accomplish this end the social work professional needs; i) exposure to the religious/spiritual dimension of human behaviour; ii) opportunity to reconcile spiritual beliefs with professional expectations; iii) understanding of the impact of the religious and/or spiritual factors in individual growth, community functioning, policy development and social change; and iv) comfort with integrating the spiritual in practice.

**II. Objectives**

The overall objective of this course is to explore the role of spirituality in social work and to identify how the spiritual dimension can be incorporated into social work practice. This will be achieved via:

- i) a review of the social work literature on spirituality particularly in terms of the historical evolution of social work from charity (influenced by religious beliefs) to the professional and political/structural practice of today (influenced by feminism and the crisis of the welfare state).

- ii) a study of contemporary, traditional and Eastern holistic approaches that illustrate the integration of spirituality and practice.
- iii) an exploration of the stages of spiritual development. Students will be asked to reflect on their own spiritual development and how this impacts on their professional life.
- iv) the development of a conceptual framework for integrating spirituality into social work. The distinctions will be made among values, faith and religion and the criteria for conceptualizing spirituality will be identified. The contribution of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Existentialism, Judaism and Spiritism to social work will be discussed.
- v) the identification of the means to incorporate a spiritual perspective into social work practice. The use of prayer, meditation, contemplation, scripture, and ritual will be explored.

### III. Texts/Readings

There is no assigned text for the course but the two assignments require access to specific texts. Students are encouraged to purchase the following texts

Lozoff, Bo (2000). *It's a Meaningful Life : it just takes practice*, Penguin Books, Toronto.

Hodge, David (2003). *Spiritual Assessment : Handbook for Helping Professionals*,

North A

Assigned reading for specific lectures will be handed out the week prior to the class.

### IV. Assignments and Evaluation

- 45% 1) Book Review: Class participants are asked to do a book review of Bo Lozoff's text, *It's a Meaningful Life*. As well, participants are asked to 'do' two of the practices described in this book, one practice from Part One and one practice from Part Two. This assignment will be in five parts:
- i) A 1-3 page overview of the content of the book as well as general synopsis of the general message of the book.
  - ii) An identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the book.
  - iii) An analysis of the book's connection to social work or social work practice.
  - iv) A description of the two practices you chose to adopt or 'do' for the purpose of this assignment.
  - v) An analysis/description of your personal experience with these practices and your assessment of their applicability to social work practice.
- 45% 2) Personal Paper : Class participants are asked to chose one of the five spiritual assessment tools identified in Hodge's text *Spiritual Assessment* and use this tool

to write (or create) a personal reflection on your own spirituality and your understanding/definition of spirituality. Participants are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this tool as to its applicability to social work practice.

Class participants who cannot or do not want to do this personal paper will have the option to write a formal paper that exhibits thought and literature research. Some suggested topics include:

Religion and Social Work Practice  
Social Work Practice and Fundamentalism  
Spirituality and Group Work  
Spiritual Activities for Direct Practice  
Spirituality and Social Action  
Spirituality in Action: Examples from the Literature  
Native Spirituality and Social Work  
Spirituality and Community/Global Transformation  
Spirituality and the Workplace

10% 3) Class Attendance and Participation

100%

#### **IV. Course Sequence and Content**

##### **A. Introduction and Course Overview**

##### **B. What is Spirituality?**

- i) Definitions
- ii) Changing Landscape
- iii) Components of Spirituality

##### **C. Religion and Spirituality: Distinction and Clarifications**

- i) What is Religion?
- ii) Functions/Dysfunctions
- iii) Religious vs Spiritual Quests
- iv) Religion vs Therapy
- v) Religious vs Secular Values
- vi) New Age

**D. Spirituality and Social Work**

- i) An Historical Overview
- ii) Conceptualizing Spirituality for Social Work
- iii) Spiritual Assessment

**E. Spiritual Development**

- i) Stages of Spiritual Development
- ii) Nurturing One's Spirituality

**F. Models of Integration: Holistic Approaches to Practice**

- i) transpersonal psychology
- ii) feminism
- iii) shamanistic traditions/Native spirituality
- iv) eastern approaches
- v) liberation theology

**G. Spirituality and Structural Social Work**

- i) Social Activism
- ii) Political Spirituality

**H. Integrating Spirituality into Practice**

- i) Direct Practice: an exploration of the use of prayer, meditation and rituals in practice.
- ii) Family Work: recognizing the spiritual and religious influences in the family.
- iii) Group Work: using spiritual groups as a means of empowerment.
- iv) Community Work: responding to community needs and affecting change. ritual as a means of building community.
- v) Policy and Planning: recognizing the impact of religion and pressure groups on policy development.
- vi) Social Activism/Social Justice: political spirituality