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WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO DEVELOP A PSYCHEDELIC COURSE?

My clinical background is in infectious disease, including significant trauma-based work. I was interested in the data I began to see about the potential for psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT) to help patients who have experienced trauma. But none of UNC's 12 MSW programs had a course on psychedelic-assisted therapy, so I pursued the idea of offering one. It's important that higher education supports North Carolina's social workers to potentially work in psychedelic-assisted therapy in the future.

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP YOUR COURSE?

First, every course in our school must align with [Council on Social Work Education \(CSWE\)](#) learning objectives. CSWE has nine objectives, and courses must connect to six or seven of these to be approved by the Faculty Senate. This structure defined the course foundation.

I started my own education by taking a course through Fluence on psychedelic integration and harm reduction. Then, I recruited local clinicians to partner with me in course development, and our school hosted an in-depth, in-house talk within our clinical lecture series. I also found key partners including private practices doing psychedelic-assisted therapy work, a clinician at the Asheville VA working with MDMA in clinical trials, and a social worker at UNC who had just started to recruit for a trial testing psilocybin for major depressive disorder.

For curriculum development, I found important support through the immersive education program at the Usona Institute, which provided very helpful materials as well as the team at Columbia University who made their materials open source. From a university perspective, we hope the seminar begins to document student interest in psychedelic medicine and makes the case for a larger, campus-wide undergraduate course in the future.

CAN YOU PROVIDE A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF YOUR COURSE CONTENT?

Psychedelic Assisted Therapy for Substance Use and Mood Disorders will be a seven-week advanced practice elective covering research and therapeutic uses of psychedelic medicine and models of psychedelic-assisted therapy for substance use disorders, mood disorders, and PTSD. Over the seven weeks, we cover the history and overview of psychedelic use; research ethics; ketamine-assisted psychotherapy; psilocybin; MDMA; 5-MeO-DMT; microdosing, death, dying, and palliative care; and psychedelic integration/client panel. The course has eight course contributors, including me.

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS YOU TEACH?

Psychedelic Assisted Therapy for Substance Use and Mood Disorders will be offered for the first time in the Spring of 2025, so we do not yet have enrollment data for the class.

But it will be open to any final year MSW student in the school across any cohort, or to interested students from other schools (with approval). I am eager to publicize the course across our schools of social work, education, psychology, and public health.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETE YOUR COURSE?

I expect most students to arrive in the classroom with very little understanding of psychedelics. I hope they walk away with a cautious and realistic perspective. These compounds are not a fix-all; we must approach this work from the perspective of data and science. Students need important background in history, contraindications, ethical issues, access, and integration.

I hope we can begin to develop the North Carolina workforce for psychedelic-assisted therapy work in the future, since all students taking the course will have some basic foundation in psychology.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COURSE?

I have six objectives for the course: (1) discuss the history of psychedelic use including historical and western uses of psychedelic medicine to examine broad cultural perspectives; (2) explore research surrounding the clinical indications for psychedelics with a focus on MDMA, psilocybin, and ketamine; 5-MeO-DMT (3) demonstrate how to screen and assess patients for psychedelic-assisted therapy, including knowledge of indications, contraindications, cultural, identity, and other safety considerations; (4) explore ethical issues and concerns surrounding psychedelic-assisted therapy for substance use disorders and mood disorders including recreational use; (5) understand the historical and present legal and regulatory context of psychedelics in the United States; and (6) understand the process and implementation of preparation and integration of psychedelic experiences in clinically significant contexts.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR PSYCHEDELIC COURSE CONTENT AT YOUR INSTITUTION?

First, I am hoping to expand this half-semester offering (1.5 credits) to a full-semester offering (3 credits). I would also like to build out clinical practicum opportunities that offer robust training for future employment in the field.

Over the next five years, I hope we see FDA approval of a psychedelic compound, which would build momentum for this work in North Carolina and elsewhere. Regardless, I believe this course should be expanded from 7 to 13 weeks.

Beyond UNC, I am working with social work instructors across North Carolina universities to potentially draft a survey. The survey would be sent to social work schools across North Carolina, seeking information on interest in psychedelic work and teaching. Our goal is to build a more local, connected cohort of interested instructors.

To get in touch with Alyssa and other academic leaders introducing psychedelic coursework in their institutions, please visit our [*Psychedelic Therapy Curriculum Contact List*](#)