

**George Mason University
Graduate School of Education**

Alternative Education Program

Professor: Teresa M. Zutter

Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Day: Wednesday

Location: Providence Hill

Course Time: 4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

EDAE 603: Communication and Management Strategies for Alternative Education (3 credits)

Course Purpose: This course assists students in developing greater expertise in crisis management, resolving conflicts, implementing effective peer mediation, and establishing positive peer and adult relationships. It examines the importance of and strategies for working successfully with families and diverse populations, as well as the relationships of families of at-risk students and other professionals who work with them. Strategies for working with students who are very difficult to teach, who are dually diagnosed, and who are substance abusers will also be presented. In addition, strategies for establishing collaborative partnerships with families of at-risk students resulting in a family-centered approach to service delivery will be emphasized. The course requires students (1) to examine their values and beliefs about working with very difficult students, those who are substance abusers, and families, (2) to challenge their assumptions, and (3) to critically analyze their professional roles in working with these at-risk students and their families.

Instructional Objectives: Upon completion of the course students will be able to

1. Discuss the legislation (Comprehensive Services Act of 1992 for At-risk Youth and Families), theories and research supporting a family-centered approach for at-risk youth in alternative education settings.
2. Discuss theories and research regarding behavior change, crisis management, resolving conflicts, and implementing peer mediation for at-risk youth in alternative education settings.
3. Identify strategies for working with at-risk students in alternative education settings and who are considered “very difficult”, who are dually diagnosed (emotionally disturbed and learning disabled), and who may be substance abusers.
4. Describe practices for working with at-risk youth and their families that are effective.
5. Analyze personal values, beliefs and cultural biases regarding at-risk youth and their families.
6. Identify strategies that support and assist at-risk youth and their families to identify their priorities, resources, and concerns.

Course Methods: This course is structured around assigned readings, reflections and class discussion on those readings, and some lecture. In addition, other activities will be implemented during the course sessions, such as: small group problem solving, simulations, case studies, readings, role-plays, and student projects. Using a variety of activities such as these, assists students in making the transition from theory and knowledge --- to practice.

Texts:

Dallman-Jones, Anthony. 2004. Shadow Children: Understanding the Nation's #1 Problem. National At-Risk Education Network.

Other Readings as Assigned.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance in class is mandatory, as discussions, lectures, small group and hands-on activities are all-important parts of the course.
2. Each student is expected to complete all readings and participate in all class activities.
3. Each student is expected to participate in and complete all classroom projects.
4. Students who must miss a session are responsible for notifying the instructor (preferably in advance) and for completing any assignments, readings, etc. before the beginning of the next session.
5. All written assignments must be completed on a word processor. Assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the session on the date due. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with the instructor.

Course Assignments:

Assignment #1 – A behavior change project for an alternative education student. 30%

This will focus on helping the student change his/her behavior (academic or social/emotional) in such a way as to benefit the student. Specifics will be provided in class lecture and handouts.

Assignment #2 – Five Current Articles Relevant to Alternative Education Students. 20%

These should focus on such topics as **Changing (improving) A Student's Behavior(s), Working with Families and/or Agencies for At-Risk Students, Resolving Conflicts, Crisis Management, How to Implement Peer Mediation, or other** as approved.

Select articles (no older than 5 years) on the above subjects. In no more than 5 pages, (1 page per article), include the following:

- An analysis of the article in relation to alternative
- Your reaction and reflection
- What you learned
- How you may change your interactions with at-risk students and their families of at-risk students in your current or intended alternative education setting --- based on what you read and learned

Assignment #3 – Professional Perspective, Family-Centered Planning, Family Support, or Philosophy Project – Choice of 4 options or develop a project with instructor's approval - 30%

Option 1 - Applying a Family-Centered Perspective

Arrange to observe at least one Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or IEP meeting (if it's regarding an alt ed student). The IFSP is required by the Comprehensive Services Act for At-risk Youth and Their Families of 1992. Consent will be needed from families and professionals involved. Use your class notes related to the IFSP/IEP principles of a family-centered services as a guide for your observations. Critique the meeting from a family-centered perspective. Do not include any identifying information about the family. Your report should include the following:

- a) brief description of what occurred in terms of pre-conference planning, initial conference proceedings (setting the stage), review of assessment information or progress, development of goals or outcomes, determination of placement or services, and closure of the meeting.
- b) description of the roles of the family and the roles of the professionals in the system/s.
- c) what you identified as strengths of the system from a family-centered perspective, and
- d) your recommendations for changes to make the system more family-centered.
- e) how this information impacts your planning for the at-risk student in your current or intended alternative education setting.

Option 2 – Professional's Perspective

This could be accomplished by a "whole class-arranged" visit and tour at Mountain View Alternative Education Center in Centreville.

Arrange to interview at least two professionals who work with at-risk students in alternative education settings. These professionals should not work for the same agency or school, and the settings should be different from those you have used in other alternative education graduate courses. Ask them to describe the following aspects of their work: referral and intake, assessment, IFSP/IEP development, parent conferences, behavior change, and transitions. Using your text and class notes, prepare a written synthesis of the interview and critique each from a family-centered perspective. Do not include names of professionals. Include the following in your paper:

- a) a brief description of the system components listed above
- b) description of the role of the family and role of the professionals in the alternative education setting
- c) what you identified as strengths of the alternative education setting from an at-risk youth and family-centered perspective, and
- d) your recommendations for changes to make the alternative education setting more responsive to families of at-risk students.

Option 3 – Individualized Family Support Plan

Become involved with a family of an at-risk youth in your current or intended alternative education program and their "case worker" over the time period of this course. Do an initial interview with both parties using a written instrument or interview protocol to identify priorities, resources, and

concerns. With permission assist in the development of an IFSP or IEP. Monitor plan implementation, student's success, and family's satisfaction with the program via biweekly interviews. Provide parent support to effectively participate in assessing and revising the student's plan. Summarize the experience in a paper, which includes:

- a) a copy of the completed instrument used to identify priorities, resources, and concerns
- b) summary of the concerns, priorities, and resources identified by the family and the providers
- c) outcomes desired by the family and a plan for working toward those outcomes
- d) your reaction to the process, the strengths and limitations of the plan that was developed and any changes you would recommend in repeating this process with another family of an at-risk youth.

Option 4 - Personal Philosophy Statement

Describe your personal philosophy for interacting and working with at-risk students in alternative education settings and their families. Describe how you apply this philosophy in your present work or would apply it in your intended work. Identify barriers to implementing your philosophy and describe strategies to use for overcoming barriers. Provide specific examples.

At the end of the course, you will revisit your statement with the course information in mind. Revise it if you feel your thinking has changed and comment on why it has changed. If you have not changed your philosophy, comment on why it remains unchanged. Cite readings and class discussion as relevant. (1 – 2 pages)

Assignment 4 – Class Presentation – 20 points

Based on one of the above 3 assignments, design and prepare to present a 10-minute “debriefing” on the project to the class via a poster presentation. Prepare and distribute at least a one-page abstract of your project with key references one week before your presentation. The presentation should be a culminating activity for the class, which reflects a synthesis of information and skills acquired through the course applied to the selected topic. It must be related to the topics addressed in this course. Before you begin, prepare an outline or brief description of the proposed project for approval by the course instructor.

This presentation may be based on:

- a) behavior change project for an alternative education student.
- b) library research (e.g. an in-depth exploration of a current issue regarding strategies for working with at-risk youth (in an alternative education setting) and/or their families; strategies for working with students involved with substance abuse; strategies for working with at-risk youth who are considered very difficult to work with).
- c) field research (e.g. interviews with alternative education teachers in a variety of settings or with at-risk families who represent different stages of the family life cycle with a comparison and analysis of the interview material).
- d) application (e.g. development of a workshop on a particular topic relevant to this course); or a combination of several approaches.

Evaluation

Since this is a graduate level course, high quality work is expected on all assignments and in class. Points for all graded assignments will be based on the scope, quality, and creativity of the assignments. All assignments are due at the beginning of the class session indicated. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior arrangements with the instructor.

Points will be assigned to all graded assignments using a rubric process developed by the class participants and the course instructor. Prior to the date for any assignment, the class will participate in the development of an assessment rubric. This rubric will result from a discussion of applicable course objectives and an elaboration of qualities and components associated with excellence in completion of the assignment.

When assignments are presented on the designated due date, class participants and/or the instructor will complete an assessment of the assignment using the rubric created in class. When class participants are involved in using the rubric as well as the instructor, class participants' ratings on the rubric will be averaged. Then the class participants' average will be averaged with the instructor's ratings on the rubric to compute a final point value for assignments. In this way, the development of the rubric will inform the final completion of the assignments as well as serve as the instrument for assessment and determination of points awarded.

Grading Scale	
4 points	A
3 points	B
2 points	C
1 point	D
0 points	F

Course Requirement	% of grade
Behavior Change Project	30
Articles	20
Professional, Family, Philosophy, etc	30
Presentation	20
Total	100%

NOTE: Please contact the instructor as soon as possible if a) you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, b) you have a medical emergency, or c) you need to make special arrangements.

Course Schedule (may change if necessary)

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
September 22	Introduction & Overview of the Course and options. Functional assessment and Information on behavior change project.	Chapter 1&2	
September 29	Research Day	Chapter 3	
October 6	Collecting and Graphing Baseline Data Developing the Mindset of Conflict as a Manageable Challenge Classroom Climate in an Alternative Education Setting	Chapter 4&5	
October 13	Single Subject Designs & How They Relate to Changing Behaviors Typical Classroom Management Techniques That Fail When Used in Alternative Education Settings Bring your article to class to discuss. CSA Overview	Chapter 6	1st draft of personal philosophy statement if this is selected Article 1
October 20	Increasing Positive Behaviors by Special Arrangement of the Consequences Practical Tips for Successful Behavior Management in Alternative Education Programs	Chapter 7	Article 2
October 27	Decreasing Negative Behaviors by Special Arrangement of the Consequences Understanding and Dealing with Aggression in At-risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings	Chapter 8&9	Article 3
November 3	Reinforcement, Stimulus, Control, Shaping Sixteen Tips for Dealing with Aggressive Behaviors in At-risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings	Chapter 10	Article 4
November 10	Providing for Generalization of Behavior Change to Other Settings Dealing with Verbal Aggression in At-risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings	Chapters 11 & 12	Article 5
November 17	Teaching Students to Manage their Own Behavior! Using Time-out Effectively with At-risk Youth How to Bully-proof Your Alternative Education Classroom	Chapter 13	
November 23	Thanksgiving Eve Dealing with Physical Aggression in At-Risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings How to Break Up Fights in Alternative Education Settings	Chapter 14&15	
December 1	Strategies for Working Effectively with Families of At-Risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings Police Intervention and Community Agency Involvement Regarding At-Risk Youth in Alternative Education Settings	Chapter 16&17	Assignment #3

December 8	Administrative Issues in Alternative Education Settings Discussion Topics Related to the Course and Catch-up as needed	Chapter 18	Assignment #1 Bring 2 copies of final draft for a peer activity & Final Draft of Philosophy Statement (if selected)
December 15	Presentation of Projects and Celebration		