

Faculty Showcase '07

Sponsored by Academic Technology at Simmons College



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Goals

- Learn how to adequately assess and appropriately respond to the psychological needs of patients encountered in clinical practice.
- Can identify indicators of mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, grief, depression), know how to respond appropriately, and understand the role that counseling plays in their profession.
- Develop a broadened repertoire of interpersonal and communication skills.
- Use self-assessment to develop deeper understanding of themselves as clinical practitioners and as communicators.

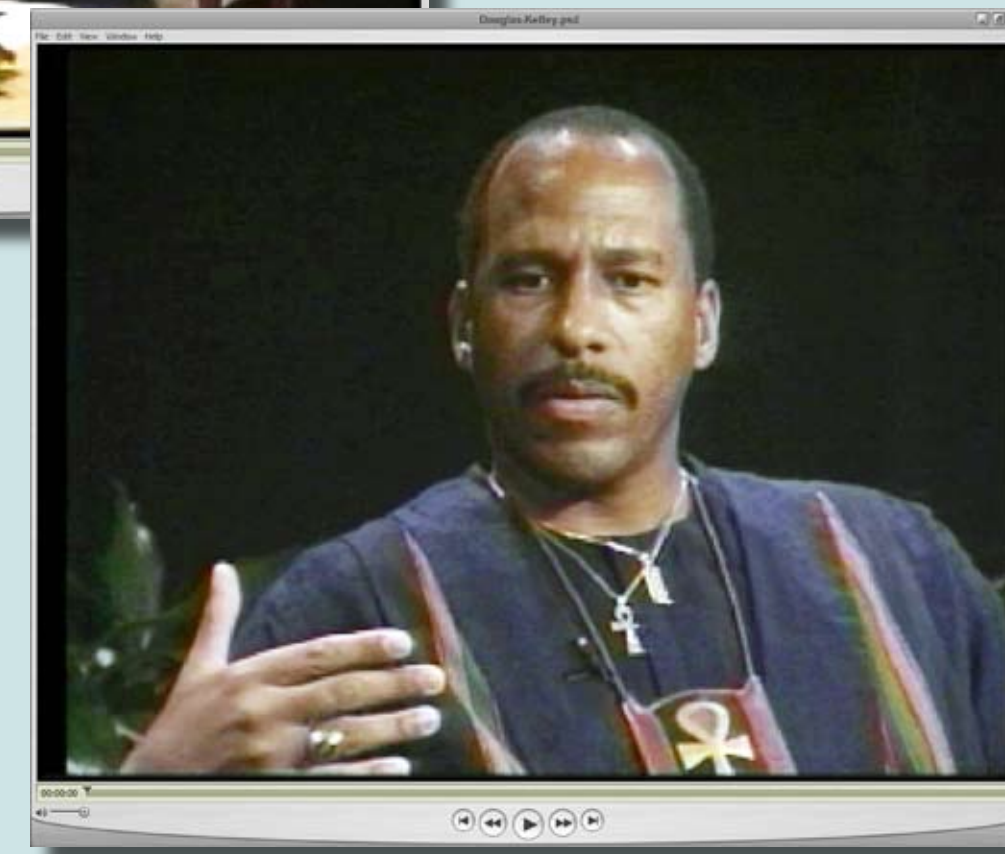
You Must be Kidding: Teaching Interpersonal Skills to Healthcare Providers in an Online Environment

Project Overview

This online course for graduate students in health sciences was designed specifically for seasoned professionals, with an emphasis on student leadership and participation. Over the past four years since I've been teaching the course, it has been incredibly rewarding to experience the powerful discussions led by the students in response to specific questions each week. The students engage in respectful, challenging, and wide-ranging conversations that are enriched by the reading and by bringing in their own experiences as either health-care professionals or recipients.

Several mechanisms, including reflection, practice, and observation, are built into the course to facilitate learning opportunities to build interpersonal skills, increased awareness of common mental health issues, and strategies for crisis management. In the online environment, I have relied upon the use of video to ensure common situations for observation. In one module, we use a brief video of a counseling encounter between a young man and his therapist to build observation and active listening skills. The students are asked to view the video and respond to questions that elicit their observations about verbal and non-verbal behaviors, such as eye contact, vocal qualities, attentive body language, and movement harmonics. The shared experience of discussing these aspects of the video enables the students to deepen their understanding – the students comment on each other's observations, often going back to the video and noticing something new that another student

had observed. This shared experience sets the stage for the next week's exercise, which is to individually practice types of statements (i.e., single-word encouragers, restatements, paraphrases, and summarizations) with a friend or family member.



High quality health care involves comprehensive and coordinated care, which depends largely on the individual care provider's interpersonal and communication skills. By leading, participating and synthesizing discussions participants learn how to adequately assess and appropriately respond to the psychological needs of patients encountered in clinical practice.

Participants have an opportunity to use and refine their interpersonal skills, increase their awareness and ability to identify common mental health issues, and learn how these behaviors may be manifested in a clinical setting (crises, heightened anxiety, somatic problems, grief, depression, self destructive behaviors, trauma). Participants

broaden their professional repertoire of skills and enhance their abilities as providers and as members of a health care team. Participants identify relevant professional literature and sources of information specific to class topics and their fields. Throughout the course, participants practice self-assessment thereby promoting an understanding of self, counseling in their profession, and personal growth.

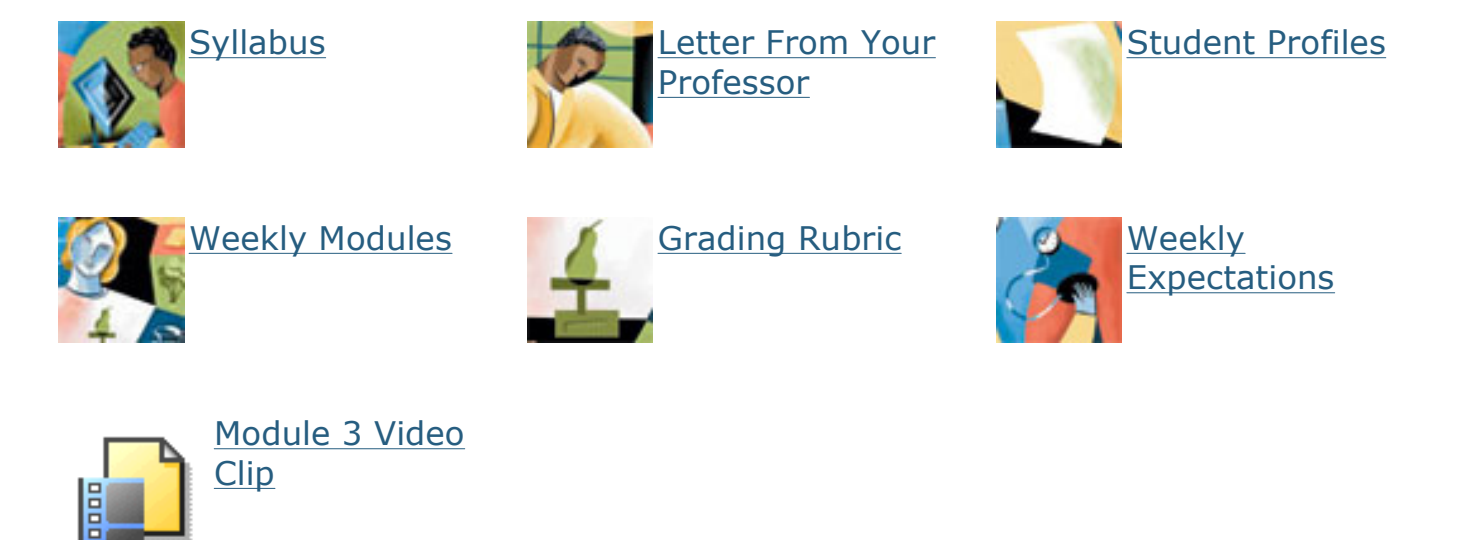
Video stills courtesy of Ivey, A.E. and Ivey, M.B. (2006) *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society* (6th edition). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole - Thomson Learning.

Applications Beyond

There is much to be learned from a participatory approach to teaching, particularly in the online environment. Although it seems incongruous at first thought, computer-based technology provides several avenues that can foster the teaching of 'soft' skills, such as those taught in this course. Posting initial responses and responding to group discussions facilitates interaction through narrative, unlike private journaling or essays seen only by an instructor.



Advanced Counseling & Interpersonal Skills



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Obviously, the use of visual and audio formats allows for simulated experience and observation. At a basic level, the organization of course materials in web space provides consistent access regardless of a student's location. Even time for learning may be enhanced – students in the past have commented that they sometimes 'check in' several times a day to participate in and contribute to discussions.