Course Description (for the Bulletin): Open to PhD students only. Trauma, individual and collective, is prevalent and intersects with many social policy fields from substance abuse to sustainable development, from personal safety to national security. As a health issue, trauma is woven into our social fabric and implicated in family dynamics, labor relations, immigration, disasters, conflict, and more. This seminar explores types (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional, intergenerational, cumulative, complex, vicarious) and consequences of trauma, attending to historical, cultural, and social shaping of causes, experiences, and responses. Topics include embodiment, resilience, and measurement. Attention is focused on the existing state of knowledge, challenges in conducting research, and the development of trauma-informed practice and policy.

Additional Description: Trauma, which we will be exploring together during this half-semester course, is a difficult topic for everyone and lived experience for many. Given the prevalence of trauma and its imprint on individuals and society, it is important for all of us to be trauma-informed. While we are together as a community of inquiry this semester, I encourage us each to presuppose trauma, that is, to adopt a universal presumption of trauma, recognizing that it may be part of the life of any individual. I would argue further that such a perspective is good scholarly practice and good human practice. If, when, and how to share traumatic experiences are individual decisions; protecting privacy is a shared responsibility.

In keeping with The Heller School’s multi-disciplinary nature, readings are from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, education, psychology, public health, social policy, social work, and sociology. In keeping with Heller’s domestic and global focus, readings include studies done in the United States and abroad. Lastly, in the spirit of the diversity initiative at Heller and Brandeis as a whole, authors from various backgrounds are represented.

Our work in the course includes critical reading and discussion of readings. The course is a seminar, which means active participation by everyone is needed. The optimum interaction is a conversation among the group rather than a conversation structured like spokes in a wheel, with the instructor the center. Ask questions of yourselves and of one another, not just of me. Challenge yourselves, one another, and me.

It is important for all of us to be aware of differences in interactional styles. Some people are comfortable talking in a group; others are not. Those who are comfortable are invited to be mindful of leaving, indeed making, space for those who are not. Those who are not are invited to contribute to the discussion, not only to practice speaking in a group, but also to share questions and views. We all learn more when we join together to articulate, interrogate, explore, challenge, and support our understandings.

Classroom time is limited and we have lots to cover, so I invite all of us to consider when a conversation is best continued in class and when it might be moved elsewhere. Possible places to continue a conversation are the LATTE discussion board, a one-on-one conversation with me if an issue is central to one student but not others or, for topics of broad interest, a conversation outside class, for example, over coffee.
Academic Integrity: In accordance with Section 4 of the University’s Rights and Responsibilities student code, “Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student’s own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University, or other sanctions (see section 20.). A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Students may not drop or withdraw from a course while an allegation of academic dishonesty is pending. Instructors may require students to submit work to turnitin.com (plagiarism detection software)” (p. 19). (See https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/index.html for more information and to access a PDF of the Rights and Responsibilities student code.) If you have any questions about the instructions for any assignments in this course, ask me.

Accommodation: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please see me as soon as possible.

Readings: On this syllabus, assigned readings are listed under the date on which they will be discussed. Those that are articles or book chapters are available electronically on LATTE. The assigned book, Kai T. Erikson’s Everything in Its Path: Destruction of community in the Buffalo Creek Flood (1976, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.), is available at the Brandeis Bookstore and on reserve in the Brandeis Library.

Requirements: You are expected to read assigned materials thoroughly and thoughtfully in advance of the class in which they will be discussed. Evidence of critical reading, relevant comparison across readings, and cumulative learning from readings and classroom conversations should be apparent in class participation and written work. In our discussions, students should also bring to bear their concentration’s (or discipline’s) substantive and theoretical resources and their own scholarly work.

Three assessed/graded elements, described below, are each worth a percentage of the final course assessment/grade.

1. Class participation (50%): This element encompasses class attendance and engagement in and contributions to weekly discussions of assigned readings and the issues they raise or fail to raise.

2. Mid-Module Essay (25%): Each student will write a mid-term essay of 8-10 pages (plus bibliography) that explores an issue within topics considered in weeks 1-4. The aim is to deepen your knowledge of trauma in ways relevant to your central research interests and dissertation plans. Potential foci include researching a particular type of trauma, e.g., slavery trauma; considering the historical development and/or critiques of a key concept, e.g., resilience or posttraumatic stress disorder; assessing available trauma measures; and examining cultural dimensions of trauma experiences in a specific context. Each student must meet with me during Week 2 or 3 to discuss their topic. A sign-up sheet will be passed around in the first class session. The essay is due on November 16th electronically to kammerer@brandeis.edu.

3. Final Essay (25%): In the final essay, each student will reflect on how research on trauma or research that is trauma-informed fits in their dissertation project as currently conceived. Attention to anticipated challenges and how to address them is encouraged. This essay can take the form of a self-reflective qualitative memo. It need not be longer than 5 pages. Students are encouraged to meet with me (by appointment) to discuss their plans for this essay/memo before of after the Thanksgiving break. It is due electronically on December 11th (to kammerer@brandeis.edu).

Assessment: Participation in classroom discussion is expected, indeed required, in a seminar. The assessment/grade for participation will be based on content, contribution to the ongoing discussion,
responsiveness to the thoughts of others, and evidence of cumulative learning. The assessment/grade for the essays will be based on both content and effectiveness of communication. Spelling, grammar, organization, and clarity of expression are all elements in the effectiveness of communication.

**Learning Objectives:** Students who complete this course will have demonstrated some ability to:
- Evidence knowledge of the prevalence of trauma.
- Demonstrate familiarity with different types of trauma.
- Articulate an intersectional understanding of the social determinants of trauma and its individual and societal consequences.
- Assess the trauma-informedness of programs and institutions.
- Apply a trauma-informed lens to policy analysis and development.

**Course Outline (subject to revision)**

**REMINDER:** On this syllabus, assigned readings are listed on the day on which they are to be discussed.

**October 26**

**Week 1: What Is Trauma and Why Is It Relevant to Social Policy?**

**Readings:**

**Circulated:** Sign-up sheet for meeting to discuss mid-term essay topics.

**November 2**

**Week 2: Individual and Collective Trauma**

**Reading:**
November 9

Week 3: The Trauma, Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Sexual Health Nexus

Readings:
- Nina Kammerer and Ruta Mazelis, "Trauma and retraumatization," After the Crisis Initiative: Healing from Trauma After Disasters Expert Panel Meeting, sponsored by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Bethesda, MD, April 24-25, 2006.

November 16

Week 4: Trauma in Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective

Readings:

Due: Mid-Module Essay by electronic submission.

November 23 – NO CLASS – Happy Thanksgiving!

November 30

Week 5: Researching Trauma and Doing Trauma-informed Research

Readings:
- Bonita Veysey, et al., It’s My Time to Live: Journeys to Healing and Recovery, Bethesda, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, Center on Women, Violence & Trauma, n.d.
December 7

Week 6: Towards Trauma-Informed Practice, Organizations, and Policy

Readings:


December 11, Monday

*Due:* Final Essay/Memo by electronic submission.