



**MIDWESTERN
STATE UNIVERSITY**

A Member of the Texas Tech University System

Course Syllabus: INTRODUCTION TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE (Online)

College of Health Sciences and Human Services

SOWK 4323x10 -Online

Fall 2026 | Classes: Aug. 24-Dec. 4, 2026 | Final Examinations: Dec. 5-10, 2026

Contact Information

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Office hours: By appointment via Zoom or in person. Virtual office hours are available Monday–Thursday by appointment. Email responses are typically provided within 24 hours on business days.

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Course Description

This course is intended for the distance education learner. An overview of drug use in society and as a social problem is provided. Preventing and treating substance abuse will be addressed. Laws regulating drugs will be reviewed. The way various drugs work in the body and affect mood, thought, and behavior will be covered.

Specific drugs addressed in detail include stimulants, depressants and inhalants, medications for mental disorders, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, over-the-counter drugs, opioids, hallucinogens, marijuana/cannabis, and performance-enhancing drugs.

Course Delivery

This is a fully online asynchronous course delivered through D2L Brightspace. There are no scheduled class meetings. Students may complete coursework at times that work best for their schedules; however, all discussions, quizzes, assignments, and examinations must be completed by the posted due dates.

The course is organized into weekly modules containing assigned textbook readings, instructional materials, discussions, quizzes, and other learning activities. Students are expected to log into D2L several times each week to review announcements, complete assignments, and remain current with course expectations.

D2L and MSU email are the primary methods of communication for this course. Students are responsible for checking both regularly.

Course Goals and Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and differentiate among addiction, substance misuse, substance use disorders, and other key concepts related to substance use.
2. Understand the pharmacology, tolerance, and effects of legal and illegal substances.
3. Recognize and respect cultural differences in attitudes toward and patterns of substance use.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with approaches to substance use prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

Describe the effects of drugs on behavior and explain how drug-use behaviors are influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors.

Identify and discuss major drug policies and regulations and their effects on individuals, communities, and social problems.

Explain how drugs interact with the brain and nervous system to influence behavior, thoughts, emotions, and physical functioning.

Differentiate among major drug classifications, including stimulants, depressants, inhalants, and medications used in the treatment of mental health disorders.

Describe the physiological and psychological effects of alcohol and analyze its potential impact on individuals, families, relationships, and society.

Identify and describe the effects and potential risks associated with tobacco, caffeine, dietary supplements, and over-the-counter drugs.

Describe the effects, risks, and patterns of use associated with opioids, psychedelics, cannabis, and performance-enhancing drugs.

Identify and evaluate approaches to substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, including resources available to individuals and families affected by substance use.

Apply knowledge of substance use, addiction, prevention, treatment, and recovery to situations relevant to professional social work practice.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Required:

Hart & Kasir. (2022). **Drugs, Society & Human Behavior** (18th Ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Tutoring and Academic Support Programs / Writing Assistance

Begin drafting papers as early as possible and take advantage of the [Tutoring & Academic Support Programs](#), located on the first floor of the Moffett Library. The MSU TASP Learning Center offers drop-in tutoring support for most general subject areas, including but not limited to Writing, Math, Science, Business, and Foreign Languages. Students check in to work one-on-one with a tutor, typically for an hour, regarding specific concepts.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

The [MSU Student Handbook](#) covers Academic Honesty under University Policies and Procedures. Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating, collusion, and plagiarism.

Cheating is (1) the use of any unauthorized assistance, (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor, or (3) acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material. Plagiarism is the use of another person's published or unpublished work without full and clear acknowledgment. Collusion is collaboration with another person in preparing work offered for credit if the faculty member in charge does not authorize that collaboration.

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services website](#).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support students' studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started at the [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources.

Emergency Aid Resources for Basic Needs

Unexpected life circumstances can affect anyone. If you are experiencing challenges meeting basic needs-such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, technology, textbooks, or other life necessities-resources may be available to help. Visit the [Student Emergency Support and Resources](#) webpage to learn more and explore emergency support opportunities through MSU Texas. For additional information, contact the Office of Student Affairs: Clark Student Center #108, (940) 397-7500, student.affairs@msutexas.edu.

College Policies

Obligation to Report Sex Discrimination under State and Federal Law

Midwestern State University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. State and federal law require University employees to report sex discrimination and sexual misconduct to the University's Office of Title IX. As a faculty member, I am required to report to the Title IX Coordinator any allegations, personally observed behavior, or other direct or indirect knowledge of conduct that reasonably may constitute sex discrimination or sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, or stalking, involving a student or employee. After a report is made, the office of Title IX will reach out to the affected student or employee in an effort to connect such person(s) with resources and options in addressing the allegations made in the report. You are also encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Title IX. You may do so by contacting:

Laura Hetrick, Title IX Coordinator
Sunwatcher Village Clubhouse
940-397-4213
laura.hetrick@msutexas.edu

You may also file an [online report 24/7](#). Should you wish to visit with someone about your experience in confidence, you may contact the MSU Counseling Center at 940-397-4618. For more information on the University's policy on Title IX or sexual misconduct, please visit the [MSU Title IX website](#).

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, refer to [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by the MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [Safety / Emergency Procedures](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [Run. Hide. Fight.](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

Midwestern State University seeks to provide a safe, healthy, and pleasant environment for faculty, staff, students, vendors, guests, and visitors. The use of tobacco products, including smoking and smokeless tobacco, is prohibited in indoor and outdoor University facilities and in University vehicles in accordance with University policy.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place that prohibit the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state, and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Pregnant and Parenting Students

To support the academic success of pregnant and parenting students and students with pregnancy-related conditions, the University offers reasonable modifications based on the student’s particular needs. Any student who is pregnant or parenting a child up to age 18 or has conditions related to pregnancy may contact MSU’s designated [Pregnancy and Parenting Liaison](#) to discuss support available through the University.

Online Course Accessibility

Because this course is delivered fully online, course materials should be used in accessible formats whenever possible. Students who encounter an accessibility barrier in D2L or in a course document should contact the instructor promptly and may also contact Disability Support Services. MSU Texas provides additional guidance through [Online Accessibility](#).

Online Computer Requirements

Because this is a fully online course, students must have reliable access to a computer and internet connection capable of accessing D2L, viewing course materials, completing quizzes, and uploading assignments. Students should not wait until a deadline to begin or submit coursework. If a technical problem occurs, contact the instructor as soon as possible and use another available computer or internet connection when feasible. Campus computer resources are available to students. Technical difficulties do not automatically extend a deadline; documented, significant D2L or university-system outages will be addressed as appropriate. For D2L technical assistance, use the support resources available through D2L and MSU Texas.

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

D2L Brightspace is the primary learning-management system for this course. Course announcements, weekly modules, instructional materials, discussions, quizzes, assignments, grades, and other course information will be provided through D2L. Students are responsible for accessing D2L regularly and keeping up with posted course requirements. Access [D2L Brightspace](#) using your MSU Texas credentials. If you experience difficulties, use the D2L support resources available through MSU Texas or contact the instructor.

Attendance

Students are responsible for checking emails and logging onto D2L regularly to ensure that messages from the instructor and fellow students are received in a timely manner. Because this is an online course, regular participation in D2L, completion of assigned readings and activities, and timely submission of coursework are essential components of successful course participation.

Grading

Table 1: The student's achievement will be evaluated based on 14 discussion activities, 13 quizzes, the 12-Step Meeting Observation & Reflection Paper, and the final examination.

Assignments	Due	Weight
Discussion Board Assignments & Discussion Thread Participation	Weekly as assigned	30%
Quizzes	Weekly as assigned	30%
12-Step Meeting Observation & Reflection Paper	As assigned	20%
Final Exam	Finals Week	20%
Total		100%

Table 2: Final Grade Scale

The weighted average will be used to calculate the final course grade.

Grade	Range
A	90–100%
B	80–89%
C	70–79%
D	60–69%
F	Below 60%

Social Work Program Grade Policy

A course grade below a C or an average below 70% will be considered a failing grade. Students enrolled in the Social Work Program must repeat social work courses in which they receive a grade of D or F.

Discussion Thread/Board Participation — 30%

Students will participate in online discussions designed to reinforce and apply concepts from the assigned chapters. Discussion activities are intended to promote critical thinking, professional communication, and thoughtful engagement with topics related to substance use, addiction, prevention, treatment, recovery, and professional social work practice.

For each discussion, students are required to submit one original discussion post of at least 300 words per assigned discussion question that demonstrates thoughtful analysis of the discussion prompt. Original posts must reflect the student's own ideas, integrate concepts and terminology from the assigned readings, and include at least one reference to the course textbook. Students are encouraged to incorporate additional scholarly or professional sources when appropriate to support their ideas and enhance the discussion.

In addition to the original discussion post, students must submit meaningful responses of at least 150 words each to a minimum of two classmates.

Peer responses should extend the discussion rather than simply agree or disagree with the original post. Responses may ask thoughtful questions, provide additional information or insight, respectfully present an alternative perspective, connect the student's comments to concepts from the course, or discuss implications for professional social work practice.

Responses such as “I agree,” “Good post,” “I had the same thoughts,” or other statements that do not meaningfully contribute to the discussion will not receive full credit.

Students are expected to write formally and professionally. Shorthand and text-message abbreviations should not be used. Sources must be appropriately cited and referenced using APA 7th edition format.

Discussion assignments are intended to foster meaningful academic dialogue while strengthening students' ability to communicate professionally, think critically, and apply course concepts to social work practice. Students are expected to engage respectfully with differing viewpoints and support their ideas using course materials and other appropriate sources.

Discussion grades are based on the quality and depth of analysis, integration of course concepts, use of supporting evidence, engagement with classmates, completion of all required components, and adherence to professional communication standards—not on agreement with the instructor or any particular viewpoint.

NOTE: If a classmate asks you a question in response to your discussion post, you are expected to respond to the question as part of professional and courteous participation in the discussion.

All original discussion posts and required peer responses are due Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Students are responsible for managing their participation throughout the week to ensure that both the original post and two required peer responses are completed by the deadline. Waiting until the deadline to submit an original post does not excuse the requirement to complete peer responses.

Additional discussion instructions and prompts will be provided in D2L.

Quizzes

Students will complete 13 quizzes by 11:59 p.m. on Sundays on the required book chapters and unit notes identified in the course schedule. Quizzes are open book and open notes, but students will have 30 minutes to complete each quiz. Unless an exception is required by University policy or an approved accommodation, missed quizzes cannot be made up and a grade of zero (0) will be recorded.

12-Step Meeting Observation and Reflection Paper — 20%

The purpose of this assignment is to provide students with direct exposure to the 12-Step recovery model and an opportunity to better understand the experiences of individuals participating in recovery.

Students will attend and document what occurs at one open AA, NA, Al-Anon, CODA, or ACOA meeting during the current semester. The meeting may be attended online or in person. **The meeting must be a 12-Step program. Celebrate Recovery and other faith-based programs do not count for this assignment.**

Students should only attend open meetings. As a visitor, you should introduce yourself as a student when asked if there are any visitors.

Students will prepare a 3–4-page paper using APA 7th edition format addressing the following areas:

Group Characteristics: Describe only broad, non-identifying characteristics of the group that are relevant to your observation, such as approximate age ranges, group size, and other general characteristics. Do not provide information that could identify individual participants.

Culture/Atmosphere: Describe the culture and atmosphere of the meeting. Was it friendly, formal, rigid, welcoming, supportive, uncomfortable, structured, informal, or something else?

Structure/Format: Describe the structure of the meeting. How was the meeting conducted? What occurred from the beginning of the meeting through the end?

Effective Components: Identify and describe aspects of the meeting that you thought were effective, supportive, or healing. Explain why you believe these components may contribute to recovery.

Room for Improvement: Identify and describe aspects of the meeting that you thought might be ineffective, challenging, or counterproductive for some individuals.

Personal Reflection: Describe how it felt to attend the meeting. Were you nervous, intimidated, welcomed, uncomfortable, surprised, or affected in another way? Examine your own attitudes and assumptions about addiction, individuals with substance use disorders, 12-Step programs, and recovery. Discuss whether anything about the experience challenged or changed your previous perceptions.

Professional Social Work Reflection: Discuss what you learned from attending the meeting that may influence your future social work practice. Consider the potential benefits and limitations of 12-Step programs, barriers that might affect a client's willingness or ability to participate, and how social workers can appropriately incorporate mutual-help recovery resources into work with individuals and families affected by substance use.

Special Note Regarding Anonymity

These meetings are anonymous. As a visitor, you should only attend open meetings and introduce yourself as a student when asked if there are any visitors. What you hear and who you see must remain anonymous. Names or identifying information about meeting participants may not be included in your paper or shared with classmates.

Assignment Requirements

- **Attend one open AA, NA, Al-Anon, CODA, or ACOA meeting during the current semester.**
- The meeting may be attended in person or online.
- 3–4 pages, excluding the title and reference pages.
- APA 7th edition format.
- Title page and reference page required.

- Abstract is not required.
- Use the required section headings.
- Include the course textbook and at least one additional scholarly or professional source.
- Maintain complete anonymity of all meeting participants.
- Submit the completed paper through the D2L Dropbox by the posted deadline.

Discussion Post

In addition to submitting the completed paper to the D2L Assignment Dropbox, students will post the text and reference portions of the paper to the designated discussion board for peer review and class discussion. Do not post your title page.

Students must respond meaningfully to at least two classmates' papers. Each peer response must be at least 150 words and should address what you learned from your classmate's experience, similarities or differences between the meetings attended, and/or how the experience contributes to your understanding of 12-Step recovery and professional social work practice.

Before posting your paper, carefully review it to ensure that it contains no names or identifying information about meeting participants. The anonymity requirements of the 12-Step meeting apply to both the submitted paper and the discussion board.

Final Exam

The cumulative final examination will be administered through D2L during the University final examination period, December 5–10. The final examination is worth 20% of the final course grade. Specific availability and submission deadlines will be posted in D2L.

Late Work

Coursework is due by the dates and times posted in D2L and in the course schedule. Late work may receive a reduced grade as specified in the applicable assignment instructions or rubric. Work that is not submitted will receive a grade of zero (0). Exceptions required by University policy or an approved accommodation will be honored.

Makeup Work/Tests

Missed assignments, quizzes, and examinations generally cannot be made up unless an exception is required by University policy, an approved accommodation, or the instructor has authorized an exception. Otherwise, a grade of zero (0) will be recorded.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity

All students registered for courses in the Social Work Department are expected to adhere to the responsibilities and standards of behavior articulated in both the [MSU Student Handbook](#)

and the [NASW Code of Ethics](#). An essential component of these standards is a commitment to intellectual integrity, academic honesty, and professional conduct.

All work submitted for academic credit must represent the student's own original work. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, having another person or entity complete any portion of a graded assignment; using another student's work as a template; purchasing or obtaining completed coursework from another source; hiring another person or company to complete an assignment or examination; plagiarism; and the unauthorized use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

The use of generative AI tools, including but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, QuillBot, GrammarlyGO, Grammarly Premium generative features, or similar technologies, to generate, rewrite, paraphrase, summarize, or substantially edit coursework is prohibited unless specifically authorized by the instructor as part of an assignment. Students may not submit AI-generated content as their own work.

Turnitin and other available methods may be used to evaluate originality and identify potential plagiarism or unauthorized AI-generated content. A Turnitin similarity score does not automatically establish academic misconduct; however, an AI score of 35% or higher will require the student to meet with the instructor to review the similarity report and discuss the submitted work. The instructor may also request a meeting or additional information when concerns regarding originality or academic integrity exist regardless of the similarity score.

I have a zero-tolerance policy for cheating and plagiarism. Violations may result in substantial academic penalties, including a grade of zero on the assignment with no opportunity to make up the work and/or referral to the appropriate university office in accordance with university policy. Repeated accidental or intentional use of another person's words, ideas, evidence, or work without appropriate attribution may result in a failing grade in the course and referral for further academic disciplinary action.

If you have questions about whether a particular resource, technology, citation practice, or form of assistance is permitted, contact the instructor before submitting the assignment.

Students are also expected to demonstrate professional decorum in all course activities and communications. This includes treating classmates and the instructor respectfully, communicating professionally, engaging constructively with differing viewpoints, maintaining appropriate confidentiality, and demonstrating behavior consistent with the expectations of the social work profession.

Course Schedule

This course is delivered fully online and asynchronously through D2L, with student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction through discussions, assignments, announcements, and other course activities.

D2L will be used throughout the semester. Course materials, including the syllabus, weekly modules, discussion boards, quizzes, assignments, announcements, and instructional resources, will be posted in D2L. PowerPoint materials may include content from the textbook and other appropriate sources.

The instructor reserves the right to adjust the syllabus schedule as needed.

In a Nutshell:

- Read assigned chapters weekly
- Quizzes: submit by due date
- Discussion posts: follow prompt instructions
- Discussion posts: must respond to two peer posts
- Discussion posts: must have at least one citation
- Discussion posts: submit by the due date
- Discussion posts: post on the discussion board
- Discussion posts: upload in the assignment dropbox submission folder for AI/Plagiarism check

Week and Dates	Chapters/Readings	Assignments
Week 1 Aug. 24-30	Ch. 1: Drug Use: An Overview Ch. 2: Drug Use as a Social Problem	Discussion 1: Introductions and Ch. 1-2 Quiz 1 Due Sunday, Aug. 30, 11:59 p.m.
Week 2 Aug. 31-Sept. 6	Ch. 3: A History of Drug Policy in the U.S.	Discussion 2: Ch. 3 Quiz 2 Due Sunday, Sept. 6, 11:59 p.m.
Week 3 Sept. 7-13	Ch. 4: The Nervous System Ch. 5: The Actions of Drugs	Discussion 3: Ch. 4-5 Quiz 3 Due Sunday, Sept. 13, 11:59 p.m.
Week 4 Sept. 14-20	Ch. 6: Stimulants Ch. 7: Depressants and Inhalants	Discussion 4: Ch. 6-7 Quiz 4 Due Sunday, Sept. 20, 11:59 p.m.
Week 5 Sept. 21-27	Ch. 8: Medication for Mental Disorders	Discussion 5: Ch. 8 Quiz 5 Due Sunday, Sept. 27, 11:59 p.m.
Week 6 Sept. 28-Oct. 4	Ch. 9: Alcohol	Discussion 6: Ch. 9 Quiz 6 Due Sunday, Oct. 4, 11:59 p.m.
Week 7 Oct. 5-11	Ch. 10: Tobacco Ch. 11: Caffeine	Discussion 7: Ch. 10-11 Quiz 7 Due Sunday, Oct. 11, 11:59 p.m.
Week 8 Oct. 12-18	Ch. 12: Dietary Supplements and Over-the-Counter Drugs	Discussion 8: Ch. 12 Quiz 8 Due Sunday, Oct. 18, 11:59 p.m.

Week and Dates	Chapters/Readings	Assignments
Week 9 Oct. 19-25	Ch. 13: Opioids Ch. 14: Psychedelics	Discussion 9: Ch. 13-14 Quiz 9 Due Sunday, Oct. 25, 11:59 p.m.
Week 10 Oct. 26-Nov. 1	Ch. 15: Cannabis	Discussion 10: Ch. 15 Quiz 10 Due Sunday, Nov. 1, 11:59 p.m.
Week 11 Nov. 2-8	Ch. 16: Performance-Enhancing Drugs	Discussion 11: Ch. 16 Quiz 11 Due Sunday, Nov. 8, 11:59 p.m.
Week 12 Nov. 9-15	Ch. 17: Preventing Substance Abuse	Discussion 12: Ch. 17 Quiz 12 Due Sunday, Nov. 15, 11:59 p.m.
Week 13 Nov. 16-22	Ch. 18: Treating Substance Use Disorders and Drug Policy Alternatives	Discussion 13: Ch. 18 Quiz 13 Due Sunday, Nov. 22, 11:59 p.m.
Week 14 Nov. 23-29	Thanksgiving Holiday University holiday: Nov. 25-29	No discussion or quiz
Week 15 Nov. 30-Dec. 4	12-Step Recovery and Course Integration	12-Step Meeting Observation & Reflection Paper due Friday, Dec. 4, 11:59 p.m. Discussion 14: Post paper text/references and respond to two classmates by Friday, Dec. 4, 11:59 p.m.
Finals Dec. 5-10	Comprehensive Final Examination	Final Exam in D2L Specific availability and deadline posted in D2L