

Proposal for Approval of the Certificate of Open Studies in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (COS MHPSS)

Department of Psychology | March 2026

Background and context

The Certificate of Open Studies in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (COS MHPSS) is developed and financed as part of the Global University Academy (GUA), an international consortium of universities committed to creating accredited educational pathways for learners in displacement and conflict-affected contexts. GUA builds on the model pioneered by the University of Geneva's InZone certificate and extends it to new thematic areas and geographic settings.

The COS MHPSS addresses a well-documented gap in humanitarian response capacity: the absence of structured, ECTS-accredited training in mental health and psychosocial support for community members and frontline workers in refugee settings. It is designed to function both as a professional qualification recognised by NGOs and as a potential pathway into university degree programmes. The COS MHPSS is developed as a bilingual program, starting with Arabic-English, and adapted to other local languages as the program scales to other countries.

The Department of Psychology at UiO is the academic lead for the COS MHPSS within the GUA consortium. The course description attached to this proposal has been developed by the department and is ready for Program Council review and approval.

Pilot implementation

The COS MHPSS will be piloted in Jordan in the autumn of 2026, with learners based in Azraq refugee camp. More specifically, our teaching starts in September. The pilot will admit an initial cohort of approximately 20 learners and will serve as the basis for evaluation, curriculum refinement, and preparation for scaling to additional sites.

The pilot is led by UiO and coordinated through the GUA Jordan partnership, which includes established relationships with Save the Children Jordan as the implementing partner operating in Azraq Camp in Jordan. Connected Learning Hubs (a physical and a digital platform) by Save the Children, will provide on-ground infrastructure. This will ensure a high-quality face-to-face peer learning and skills practice alongside online instruction from PSI and our partner faculty.

Teaching team and institutional partners

The COS MHPSS will be hosted and credited by UiO but it is a genuinely international certificate, with teaching and academic contributions from faculty across four institutions:

- University of Oslo (UiO)
- German Jordanian University, Amman (GJU)
- Yale University
- University of Hamburg (UHH)

Each partner institution contributes to the curriculum according to its areas of expertise. Coordination across the teaching team is managed through the GUA MHPSS academic committee.

For synchronous sessions, GUA MHPSS plans to explore the involvement of emeriti and retired faculty, whose clinical and applied experience would be a valuable resource and whose potential in-kind contributions could help keep staffing costs low.

Resources and cost-neutrality for PSI

GUA MHPSS is committed to ensuring that participation in the COS MHPSS is cost-neutral for PSI. All costs associated with PSI's contribution, including faculty time for course development, teaching, and course coordination, will be covered by GUA consortium funds or externally sourced project funding, in addition to volunteer contributions by academics, not by departmental or faculty budgets. The main course development in Spring 2026 is funded by an internal grant from Global University Academy at GLOBE Center for Sustainability.

The Grieg Foundation is a strong candidate for initial certificate funding, and a proposal has been submitted. Additional applications to Norwegian and European funding bodies are planned, and the project group intends to maintain a continuous funding strategy to ensure the certificate's sustainability beyond the pilot phase. The program is built to be financially robust: funding is spread across GUA, philanthropic partners, and competitive grants, while the course design shows that an innovative hybrid model can deliver excellent outcomes for students at a fraction of the cost of a conventional university course.

Moreover, the Amjad and Suha Bseisu Foundation, a UK-based foundation dedicated to higher education and empowerment of young people from the Levant and refugee communities, has expressed interest in supporting the initiative. EDU-SYRIA, the EU-funded higher education scholarship programme managed by GJU that supports Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians, has also indicated potential alignment with the COS MHPSS, creating a promising avenue for learner funding and institutional coordination through our existing GJU partnership.

The operational infrastructure for the pilot is already secured through an existing UNHCR grant, which covers the GUA central coordination office, local staff in Jordan, and the in-camp infrastructure provided by Save the Children at Azraq. This means that UiO's contribution is focused purely on academic delivery. Several additional partners have signalled interest in contributing to the course.

Request to the Program Council

The GUA MHPSS project group requests Program Council approval for the Certificate of Open Studies in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (COS MHPSS), as described in the attached course description. The program is planned for pilot delivery in Jordan in autumn 2026, with subsequent scaling subject to successful evaluation and available funding.

Certificate of Open Studies in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

COS MHPSS | 12 ECTS | Bilingual (Local language / English) | Department of Psychology, UiO

Course content

The Certificate of Open Studies in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (COS MHPSS) equips refugee learners in displacement and conflict-affected settings with the knowledge and practical skills to provide evidence-informed psychosocial support at the individual, family, and community levels. The certificate is grounded in the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, the WHO EQUIP competency framework, and Mental Health First Aid principles. It is delivered as a bilingual certificate combining local-language instruction and skills practice with English-language academic framing and final assessment.

Students examine who needs what kind of help through a human rights and MHPSS lens, exploring cultural understandings of mental ill-health, referral pathways, and solution-focused conversation skills. They study Mental Health First Aid for individuals and families, including recognition of acute distress, self-care, and the prevention of secondary traumatization. Family-level content covers parenting under stress, caregiver support, and the developmental needs of children and adolescents in displacement. At the community level, students engage with social identity, intergroup conflict and mediation, and the design and facilitation of collective psychosocial activities and structured support programs. They learn the fundamental principles governing group-based MHPSS work, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, psychological safety, inclusive facilitation, and do-no-harm. The program concludes with an examination of how structural, political, and environmental conditions shape mental health across displacement trajectories, and an introduction to community-based participatory research, culminating in a small-scale community inquiry conducted and presented by students.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

You will be able to:

- explain the IASC MHPSS intervention pyramid and situate community-level psychosocial support within the broader continuum of care from basic services to specialized mental health treatment
- describe common stressors in displacement and conflict contexts and explain normal bodily and psychological responses to acute and chronic stress
- explain the fundamental ethical and practical principles for facilitating group-based psychosocial activities in humanitarian settings, including informed consent, confidentiality within groups, voluntary participation, psychological safety, inclusive facilitation, and do-no-harm
- account for cultural variation in understandings of mental ill-health and help-seeking behaviour, and explain how a human rights perspective shapes MHPSS practice
- identify risk factors and responses relevant to children and adolescents in displacement and describe protective family and attachment dynamics

- explain how individuals and communities in displacement settings build resilience and maintain a sense of agency, hope, and belonging, and identify the cultural, social, and creative resources that support recovery and coping under conditions of structural adversity
- describe the principles of community-based participatory research and explain how it can be used to investigate stressors and coping resources in a community setting and to document intervention needs

Skills

After completing this certificate, you will know how to:

- apply Mental Health Response to recognize and respond to individuals and families in acute or ongoing distress, and practice appropriate self-care to manage secondary traumatization
- identify when someone needs specialist support and carry out safe, dignified referrals using local service pathways
- use solution-focused conversation skills to support peers and community members in identifying their own coping strategies and next steps
- design, facilitate, and document group activities for adults, families, and community groups in humanitarian settings
- apply mediation and de-escalation principles in response to interpersonal or intergroup conflict in displacement settings
- apply basic data collection and analysis skills
- adapt psychosocial activities and communication to the linguistic, cultural, and literacy context of the target group
- critically reflect on your own role, boundaries of competence, and cultural assumptions in MHPSS practice

General competence

In terms of general competence, you can:

- work ethically and in accordance with a do-no-harm orientation across all levels of MHPSS practice, from individual conversations to community programs
- recognize and affirm the value of local cultural knowledge, healing traditions, and community practices as legitimate resources in MHPSS work, and integrate these with evidence-based approaches
- collaborate effectively with NGOs, community organizations, and health and protection services in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral teams
- communicate MHPSS knowledge and findings in plain language to community members, caregivers, and organizational partners
- use participatory research skills to contribute to ongoing assessment of community needs and the quality of psychosocial support activities
- support and advocate for the mental health and dignity of displaced and conflict-affected populations, including the most marginalized
- demonstrate awareness of your own positionality, including the limits of your training, when engaging with individuals and communities affected by displacement.

Admission to the course

Learners applying to the COS MHPSS must have a completed secondary education (videregående skole/ upper secondary leaving certificate or equivalent).

To standardize admissions, applicants are required to submit a short motivational statement outlining their interest in MHPSS, their prior experience and training, and their community engagement. They will submit their CV in a standardized format along with their highschool certificate and any additional- relevant certificates.

The certificate is specifically designed for learners in displacement contexts and does not require prior academic knowledge of psychology or mental health. Admission decisions are made by an admissions committee that considers applicants' motivation, language level, community engagement, and potential to contribute to MHPSS services in their setting. Recruitment of learners in the respective settings, such as refugee camps in the Global South, is coordinated by the local implementing partner. For the pilot, this is Save the Children Jordan.

Language requirements

Learners must have functional literacy in the local language of the course sufficient for completing in-program quizzes, practical exercises, and skills submissions. The final examination is in English; learners are therefore expected to have sufficient reading comprehension and writing skills in English to engage with the examination text and to submit their responses in English.

Teaching

The program uses a hybrid pedagogy combining synchronous online instruction from UiO and GUA partner faculty with self-directed study and face-to-face practice sessions at Connected Learning Hubs.

A typical week of instruction includes a live online lecture or Q&A session delivered by faculty (90 minutes), structured self-study using subtitled videos and local-language materials (approximately 4 hours), and face-to-face practice sessions facilitated by trained peer tutors at learning hubs (approximately 2 hours). Learners participate in weekly peer exercises (ca. 90 minutes). The field workshop in week 13 is a 20-hour intensive mini-internship with external NGO coaches.

The curriculum applies a competency-based learning model. Each module integrates theoretical input with case-based discussion, role-play, and reflective writing. Learning materials and in-program activities are primarily in the local language; the academic framing and final examination are in English. The course is designed with the possibility to be adapted to new geographic settings without loss of its core competency framework.

Compulsory activities

Attendance and participation in face-to-face hub sessions must be at least 80%. Completion of the supervised fieldwork portfolio is mandatory for progression through each level.

Examination

The course uses portfolio assessment consisting of three individual hand-in papers.

Examination support material

All support material is allowed. When using AI, you must explain and be transparent about its use: read more about the guidelines for AI and exams at [How to use AI as a student - University of Oslo](#)

Language of examination

You write your examination paper in English.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a pass/fail scale. Read more about [the grading system](#).

Resit an examination

If you are sick or have another valid reason for not attending the regular exam, we offer a [postponed exam](#) later in the same semester.

See also our information about [resitting an exam](#).

More about examinations at UiO

- [Use of sources and citations](#)
- [How to use AI as a student](#)
- [Special exam arrangements due to individual needs](#)
- [Withdrawal from an exam](#)
- [Illness at exams / postponed exams](#)
- [Explanation of grades and appeals](#)
- [Resitting an exam](#)
- [Cheating/attempted cheating](#)

You will find further guides and resources at [the web page on examinations at UiO](#).