

Degrees & Majors



A Critical Lens

By Kathryn Brackett

Children need to feel loved and safe in their own homes, but some aren't so fortunate. Some children are frightened, neglected, even beaten. But what causes the abuse? What factors lead up to the violence? These are among several questions that Dr. Monica McCoy explores in her

"Child Abuse and Neglect" class. No other schools in the area offer this course, but Converse students have the opportunity to explore the topic every winter term. "Child abuse is a common problem," Dr. McCoy says. "My main goal is to correct misconceptions, to teach students to know the difference between an accident and abuse."

In 1999-2000, 8,365 investigations of reported abuse or neglect took place in the Palmetto State. Evidence was found to support 7,065 of those cases. Dr. McCoy attempts to explain such statistics and to teach students how to critically examine the phenomenon of child maltreatment. She also explores parental factors, contextual influences, the developmental consequences of maltreatment, and spends time going over the legal system. She believes that students need to know what they are legally mandated to do if they meet a child in an abusive situation.

Converse students pursuing careers in education benefit from the course because they receive fundamental training in order to identify and question child abuse victims in the outside world, plus they learn who to report to if there is a problem. But the class isn't simply limited to education majors. Future counselors, doctors and nurses also find it helpful. "It's an applied course," Dr. McCoy says.

"Everyone needs to be aware of the risk factors."



Students apply what they learn through videos, pictures, reaction papers, and news coverage. In one reaction paper, students write a response to the movie *Bastard Out of Carolina*, a film based on Dorothy Allison's novel. They write from a personal opinion approach and support their views with current research and/or theory.

Over the course of six weeks, students explore a heartfelt yet important topic. They learn to approach child abuse with a meticulous eye and to make accurate and efficient conclusions based on factual information. In essence, and most importantly, students come away wearing a critical lens.