PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS OF TOPICS FOR WSP 214:

ALLYING WITH YOUR INNER CRITIC:
STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Note from the instructor:
The course is designed to help participants devise and practice strategies to change a destructive inner critic into a wise discerning ally in both professional and personal arenas. Whatever your next career threshold, you will cross it more effectively if your inner voices encourage you and bring out what only you can deliver. Whatever your personal or relationship goals, you will be more likely to achieve them with your inner critic as an ally and guide.

The course has three objectives:

• To identify the roots of harsh self-criticism and reclaim your own authority
• To use positive psychology and neuroscience techniques to change distorted thinking
• To harness the discerning faculties of the inner critic for problem-solving success

First Saturday Content

The day will be divided into 5 periods with an hour for lunch and short breaks. In each period, I’ll do some talking on an aspect of our topic, I’ll give out a handout for reflection and writing, and we’ll debrief in small groups or the whole group. The first Saturday’s topics are:

• The inner critic’s voice forcefully diverts our attention, so the first task is to separate out a mental observer who can notice and receive the critic’s transmitted messages without being affected by them. We will discover how to create a strong observing self.

• Once we are less captured by the critic’s pronouncements, we can explore how it came to dominate our inner dialogue and create anxiety and shame. We will examine the influences of parents, other childhood authorities, and culture and historical moment so we can begin to neutralize messages that are not life-giving.

• Resilience research points to the thinking traps and iceberg beliefs that keep us in survival mode. In learning to untwist our thinking and challenge deep fears, we can flourish rather than just getting by.

• It’s not enough simply to neutralize harsh self-judgments. We need the balance of images and stories that heal, inspire, and direct us toward our deep dreams. We all have an inner muse as well as an inner critic, and we can learn to engage them as allies.

• The growing body of research on self-compassion suggests that understanding how a sense of personal worth develops can strengthen our psychological immune system. We’ll close the day with techniques to boost self-respect and well-being.

The second Saturday will be custom-designed for the particular needs of the group, using the results of a brief survey I’ll hand out right before the end of class on the first Saturday.