



meet the faculty  
Maryse Nazon, Ph.D.

# Keeping it real

By Lisa Singh  
Photography by Bruce Racine

Dr. Maryse Nazon believes one must show up for life. A psychologist with 27 years of experience in the field of mental health, she works with vulnerable populations in Chicago, Illinois. A faculty member with University of Phoenix's College of Social Sciences, Nazon empowers students interested in a career in social services to be self-aware—and to avoid the easy answers.

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## meet the faculty

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**Everyone loves a good story, especially when it's about overcoming the odds. But while University of Phoenix faculty member Maryse Nazon, Ph.D., has lived and beaten her share of them, she's not big on advertising the fact.**

It's not so much about being modest, says Nazon, it's about keeping it real in a field—social services—that demands taking a step back. Stepping back can be crucial for the sake of one's clients and, in Nazon's case, for the sake of her University of Phoenix students.

"Very often, we get proud of our own story ... of overcoming this and that," says Nazon. "We think, 'If it worked for me, it's going to work for this other person.' Well, not necessarily."

### Empowering people

Nazon brings this keen insight to her role as instructor for the College of Social Sciences at University of Phoenix. A faculty member since 2005, Nazon teaches courses ranging from psychology to criminology. She also utilizes her insight in private practice as a psychotherapist and certified substance abuse counselor treating vulnerable populations including wards of the state and addicts. Her private practice has been open since 1996. In both cases, Nazon's goal is the same: to empower. You hear that a lot in conversation with her. And she means it.

It's in that spirit that Nazon speaks of her own story. With that one caveat, though: never getting too proud.

### Show up for your own life

There comes a time when you have to "show up for your own life," says Nazon. Only then, she adds, do "amazing things happen." For Nazon, that critical moment



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came in her early thirties. Recently separated, with a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, she wondered how she'd be able to balance her busy life. She was a single parent with the demands of a full-time job as a mid-level manager with the Salvation Army Community Correctional program. She was also in pursuit of her doctoral degree.

Nazon's mother stepped in to take care of her young child temporarily, in Montreal, Canada. "That was a painful process to be separated from my daughter," says Nazon. "I had to make those hard decisions." But the investment paid off, and Nazon earned her Ph.D. from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology.

It's one of many personal accomplishments that Nazon credits her strong, education-focused parents with helping her achieve. Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when she was 11 the family immigrated to Montreal, Canada. Later, on her own, Nazon moved

to Chicago. Nazon, a Master of Divinity in pastor counseling, also credits her accomplishments to her strong faith.

### Self-aware students spell success

Today, Nazon helps University of Phoenix students blaze their own trails. A big part of her teaching is emphasizing their need to be self-aware—what Nazon calls acknowledging their own "brokenness"—lest they're ever tempted to offer clients easy solutions down the line.

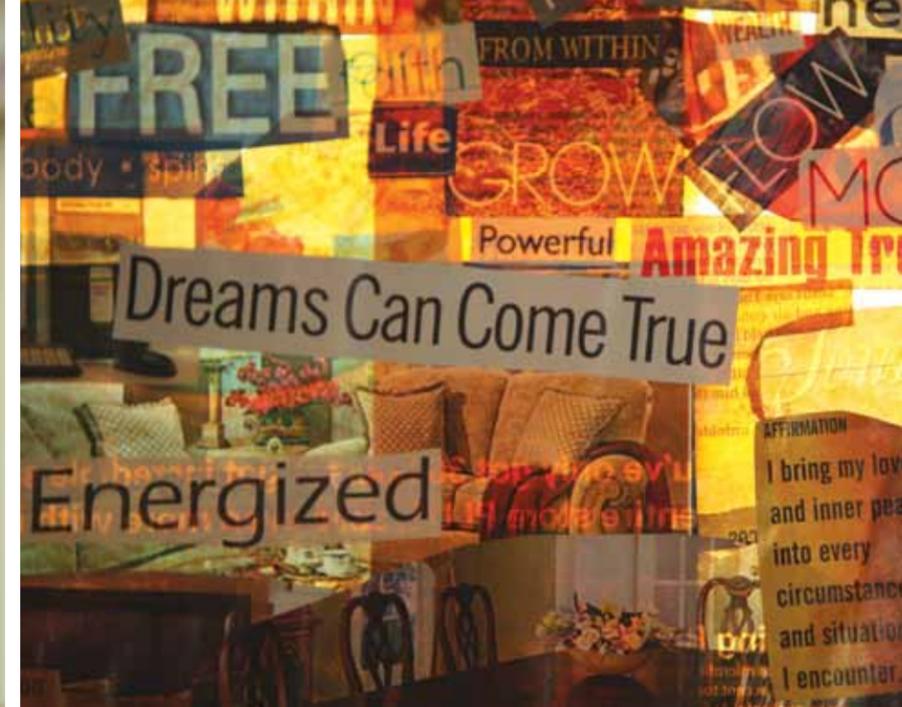
"It's not unusual, because of the nature of the classes that I teach, to have students [with] trauma they may not have dealt with," says Nazon. "As they're going to work with populations that have experienced trauma ... they need to deal with [their own issues] before they can be effective in working with vulnerable populations." Anything less, adds Nazon, can open the door to dangerous "projections."

Another key element in Nazon's teaching style: bringing in guest speakers with plenty of in-the-field experience. A recent class guest, a United Way director, helped one student crystallize in her mind the area she wanted to get into. "She now knows exactly what she wants to do," says Nazon, "[She wants] to be an investigator with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services."

### Resilience and inspiration

Nazon has dealt with plenty of tough cases over the years, many of which she encountered during her time employed by the state's Department of Children and Family Services. "What adults do to children, sometimes it's pretty bad," says Nazon. "But to see the resilience of those children—not giving up on humanity—it's something really incredible."

That inspiration guides Nazon in and out of the classroom. This past fall Nazon spearheaded a self-empowerment workshop for young, disadvantaged women, many of whom have previously been wards of the state. "Their identity is based on that story," says Nazon, who plans to reach 250 women over the coming year. "We help them rewrite it. Literally."



Nazon and her workshop co-facilitators have the women focus on writing goals in six areas: emotional, social, financial, physical, environmental and values clarification. "It's not my goal to quote-unquote evangelize," says Nazon. "[But] to use their own sets of beliefs and to see how it addresses what they're dealing with now."

### Cutting-edge best practices

Real-time experience earned via her more than 27 years working in the field of mental health translates into valuable best practices that she shares with her University of Phoenix students. Among those tips is the use of "motivational interviewing." A non-judgemental approach, motivational interviewing involves open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening and providing summary statements.

"It's being recognized as a best practice in the field—we teach that to our students as an intervention to use with individuals who are addicted," says Nazon. She is currently working on a case management book with a colleague to unpack therapy insights like this.

Nazon's guiding mission is simple: to help students and clients "show up for their lives" so they can help themselves and help others. "If I can make a difference in my students, in the way they act with other individuals ... if I can change, even stop, someone from hurting one child ... then I have accomplished my goal." ●

### FACULTY FACTS

**MARYSE NAZON**  
Faculty since 2005

**FACILITATES FOR**  
College of Social Sciences

**HIGHEST DEGREE**  
Ph.D., Illinois School of Professional Psychology

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**  
Spearheaded self-empowerment workshop for young, disadvantaged women.

Currently writing a textbook on case management with addicted populations.

**BEST PRACTICES**  
Utilize speakers with in-the-field experience.

Read, read, read—and read some more!

**ADVICE**  
Put in place strategies to take care of yourself. For Nazon, this includes daily meditation and "vegetative days."

**ONLINE EXTRAS** Visit FacultyMatters.com to see a slideshow of images taken of Dr. Maryse Nazon at our January photoshoot in Illinois.