



**MISSISSIPPI  
COLLEGE**  
A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

## **Family Dynamics & Counseling**

COU6808 |

Total Credit Hours: 3

Classroom:

### **Instructor**

### **Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce students to the dynamics of the family unit. Students will examine shifting roles, boundaries, and relationships from a systemic view. Students will be exposed to the classic schools of therapy and recent developments in the field. Interactional patterns, communication, and behavioral approaches to family therapy will be examined, as well as ethical and legal issues.

### **Rationale for Course**

The concept of family can have multiple meanings. Emotions, thoughts and behaviors are a direct reflection of the contact one has or does not have within a family. Experiences from the relationships of these connections will impact each individual differently. From a systemic perspective, the differences constitute the uniqueness of each family unit. It is critical that therapists working with a family unit can identify how their own family dynamics can impact the interactions with clients while being able to recognize in others how patterns of relating both create conflicts and heal wounds. This course is designed to provide the novice therapist with a greater understanding of the interconnected aspects of the family system under the influence of external social systems.

### **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to:

- A. Analyze family functioning using various theoretical perspectives;
- B. Articulate the role of society in shaping family norms and interrelations between the family and other social institutions;
- C. Evaluate how personal experiences, values and biases impact conceptualization of family relationships;
- D. Demonstrate an understanding of assessments and interventions based on strengths, limitations, and culture and historical impact of these assessments;
- E. Apply a systemic perspective to clinical situations and develop appropriate treatment planning based on client context and/or structure;

F. Explore the multicultural experience and diversity of families as it relates to contemporary issues that influence family functioning and family stress;

G. Demonstrate knowledge of ethical responsibilities in working with families.

- CACREP (2016) standards associated with this course can be found in Appendix A of this syllabus

## **Prerequisites**

Graduate Standing; Cou 6503 Helping Relationships (Methods and Techniques in Counseling). The course is required in the Marriage and Family Counseling Program.

## **Instructional Materials**

Required textbook: Olson, D. H., DeFrain, J., & Skogrand, L. (2022). *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths (10th ed.)*. New York: NY: McGraw-Hill.

## **Methods of Instruction**

Instruction methods for this course may include:

- A. Interactive lecture
- B. Discussion
- C. Case study
- D. Demonstration
- E. Audio-visual recording and presentation
- F. Group work
- G. Dyadic work and role play
- H. Student presentation
- I. Computer application
- J. Research and analysis
- K. Written assignments
- L. In-class exercise
- M. Personal reflection

## **Methods of Evaluation**

Objectives will be assessed through multiple means: verification of class attendance and participation, satisfactory completion and timely submission of assignments, and satisfactory performance on examinations/tests.

## **MC Syllabus Statement**

The MC Syllabus contains all policies and procedures that are applicable to every course offered by Mississippi College, both on campus and online. The policies in the MC Syllabus describe the official policies of the University as they relate to instruction and will take precedence over those found elsewhere. It is the student's responsibility to read and be familiar with every policy. The MC Syllabus may be accessed at any time on the MC website at the following: <https://www.mc.edu/provost/mcsyllabus>.

## **Grading Policy**

My goals are to (1) meet the course objectives and (2) ensure fairness. Accordingly,

please do not contact the instructor at the end of the course to request an extra assignment, bonus opportunity, or grade change for any reason except an error in the calculation of the final grade. Grade appeals should follow the process outlined in MC Policy 4.20.

Grades will be determined in the following manner:	
Class participation and attendance	20
Successful Marriage/Partnership Interview and Paper	20
Conflict Resolution Exercise and Paper	20
Parenting Paper	20
Cultural Diversity in Families presentation	20
Communication in media presentation	50
Quizzes/Exams	200
Total Points	350

#### Grading scale

100 - 94	A
93 - 87	B+
86 - 80	B
79 - 73	C+
72 - 66	C
65 - 59	D
58 and below	F

### **ASSIGNMENTS & REQUIRED PRACTICES**

**Attend class and participate in class discussion.** Because each class meeting is the equivalent of almost three hour-long meetings, and because there are experiential dimensions to this course, absences greatly affect potential student gains. The student is therefore expected to attend all class meetings. In case of illness or emergency, please notify the instructor prior to class. Alternative assignments may be in case of an approved absence.

**Complete all reading assignments.** Readings should be completed prior to their due date since they will form the basis of classroom discussions.

**Complete week assignments and bring them to class.** Important learning experiences are self-guided and involve out-of-class exercises and activities. By bringing the materials to class, the student is prepared to share information and insight.

**Demonstrate mastery of course content through satisfactory scoring on examinations/in-class quizzes.** Examinations will be scheduled for particular dates. Make-up examinations may be arranged at the discretion of the instructor. In-class quizzes will be given at the beginning of the class and will be based on the reading assignment coordinating with the date of class. In-class quizzes do not qualify for make-up if student misses the quiz.

#### **Successful Marriage/Partnership Interview and Paper (20 points)**

Students will interview one couple (married or partnered) who have been together at least 7 years (or two different individuals if you can't get a married couple together) about their

transition to marriage. Questions and a rubric will be provided. You will write a summary on the couple's background, their specific challenges with the transition to and maintenance of marriage utilizing concepts from the text. Summaries will be discussed in class.

#### **Conflict Resolution Exercise and Paper (20 points)**

Students will choose a real-life person (spouse, family member, roommate, employer, employee, ward member, etc.) he/she currently is in some kind of conflict. The student will sit down with them and actually walk through the steps/suggestions of conflict resolution from the PowerPoint. It is understood that the student will need to explain some of the information to the other person(s) as the process is occurring. The student will write a 1-2 page reflection discussing the experience and how he/she used the steps of conflict resolution with this person.

#### **Parenting Paper ( 20 points)**

Using the principles of parenting discussed in the text, you will pick two positive incidents in which your parent(s) exemplified one or more of these parenting principles in their parenting. Then pick one situation where you feel he/she missed an opportunity to apply these principles. Describe the backgrounds of the situations and what your parent(s) did. Integrate these incidents with concepts of the parenting text. Students will write a 1-2 page paper summarizing the incidents and how these relate to the concepts of parenting explained in the text.

#### **Cultural Diversity in Families (20 points)**

Students will utilize "racism is a public health issue" to research and discuss current issues that present during session. Students will identify current research, interventions, and education. Students will be evaluated by peers. The instructor will provide direct information regarding the focus.

#### **Communication-in Media Presentation (50 points)**

Students will present a case presentation of a chosen visual media clip (movie, television show, etc.) to show during class that demonstrates one communication dynamic in a relationship (see chapters 4-15 of the textbook). Students will provide an overview of the media (including family roles, presenting problem, etc.). Based on the communication dynamic selected, the student will develop a treatment plan identifying the hypothesis, goal(s), and intervention(s). The students will include a hands-on activity connecting the goal and intervention. The presentation will be peer-reviewed. The student will submit a treatment plan to instructor. A rubric will be provided.

## **Additional Course Policies**

### **ATTENDANCE**

Class attendance is an essential part of college education and students are expected to attend regularly and punctually. Individuals learn through active participation and involvement. There will be experiential components of this course. Cumulative absences will result in a lowered grade or loss of credit.

The university policy will be followed concerning absences. "A student receives an F in any course immediately upon accumulating the following number of absences in

that class...4 in classes meeting one time per week”. If the student misses more than the number of class periods specific in the university policy and believes there are reasonable explanations for the absences, he/she may appeal the absences to the Dean of the School in which the course is being taught. Students may obtain a Student Absence Appeal Form from the Dean’s office. Tardiness will not be excused. If a student is late to the class and is marked absent during roll call, that student will be considered absent for the class.

**MAKE-UP TESTS**

Making up tests is strongly discouraged. Make-up tests will only be given if a student has an excused absence. Make-up tests will be given on the last class period before the final and may be in an essay format.

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS (not including tests/quizzes)**

Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless instructed otherwise. I will accept late work with the understanding that a 5-point deduction is applied for each day after the deadline.

**CELL PHONES and OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Cell phones must be turned off/silenced during class. Laptops and tablets must be used for classroom purposes during class periods. Disregarding this request may affect your grade.

**Best Practices**

Below is a list of campus resources to assist you in successfully completing this course.

MC Counseling Center

<https://www.mc.edu/offices/mental-health-services/>

MC Student Success Center

<https://www.mc.edu/success/>

MC Accessibility Services

<https://www.mc.edu/offices/accessibility-services/>

Leland Speed Library

<https://library.mc.edu/>

**Course Outline / Schedule**

DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Week 1	Introduction Cultural Diversity and Diversity in Family Structure	Ch. 1 -2 Quiz
Week 2	Understanding Marriage and Family Dynamics	Ch. 3 Quiz
Week 3	Communication and Intimacy	Ch. 4 Quiz

		Diversity Presentation
Week 4	Conflict and Resolution	Ch. 5 Quiz
Week 5	Sexual Intimacy	Ch. 6 Quiz
Week 6	Gender Roles and Power in the Family Managing Economic Resources	Ch. 7 - 8 Quiz
Week 7	Friendship, Love, Intimacy, and Singlehood	Ch. 9 Quiz Conflict Resolution Paper
Week 8	Dating, Mate Selection, and Living Together Marriage: Building a Strong Foundation	Ch. 10 - 11 Quiz
Week 9	Parenthood: Joys and Challenges Midlife and Older Couples	Ch. 12 - 13 Quiz
Week 10	Stress, Abuse, and Family	Ch. 14 Quiz Successful Marriage/Partnership Interview and Paper
Week 11	Divorce, Single-Parent Families, and Stepfamilies	Ch. 15 Quiz
Week 12	Strengthening Marriages and Families Worldwide	Ch. 16 Quiz Parenting Paper
Week 13	Student Presentations	Communication in Media
Week 14	Student Presentations	Communication in Media
Week 15	Individual Meetings w/ Faculty	
Week 16	Individual Meetings w/ Faculty	

## Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule proposed in the syllabus as necessary. Modifications will be provided in writing.

## APPENDIX A

### 2016 CACREP STANDARDS - Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling (MCAFC)

- 5. F. 1. a. history and development of marriage, couple, and family counseling
- 5. F. 1. b. theories and models of family systems and dynamics
- 5. F. 1. c. theories and models of marriage, couple, and family counseling
- 5. F. 1. d. sociology of the family, family phenomenology, and family of origin theories
- 5. F. 1. e. principles and models of assessment and case conceptualization from a systems perspective
- 5. F. 1. f. assessments relevant to marriage, couple, and family counseling
- 5. F. 2. b. structures of marriages, couples, and families

**Task:** Become familiar with major theorists/pioneers in the field and understand and communicate foundations and principals of theories as they apply to the life span.

**Assignment:** Video reviews, class discussions, assigned readings, role-play

**Purpose:** Although each client and his/her life experience is unique, having an understanding of theoretical foundations provides the therapist with a framework to integrate self-awareness with an established knowledge base for conceptualization of clients concerns and a general guide in how to address the intricacies of a family system in a consistent, efficient, and effective manner.

**Assessment:** Participation in class discussion, tests, online discussion boards

5. F. 3. b. fostering family wellness

5. F. 3. d. techniques and interventions of marriage, couple and family counseling

**Task:** Identify own important aspect of own family dynamics; Demonstrate understanding of current research as it relates to various issues that can impact family functioning

**Assignment:** Class discussion, assigned readings, conflict resolution exercise paper, parenting paper

**Purpose:** The family therapist will need to gather and interpret multiple forms of information to identify the needs of each family member. By investigating therapist's own family dynamics and patterns of relating within his/her own system, he/she can gain awareness and appreciation for differences other family systems.

**Assessment:** Participation in class discussion, tests, rubrics

5. F. 2. a. roles and settings of marriage, couple, and family counselors

5. F. 2. b. structures of marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. c. family assessments, including diagnostic interviews, genograms, family mapping, mental diagnostic status examinations, symptom inventories, and psychoeducational and personality assessments

5. F. 2. d. diagnostic process, including differential diagnosis and the use of current diagnostic classification systems, including the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD)

5. F. 2. e. human sexuality and its effect on couple and family functioning

5. F. 2. f. aging and intergenerational influences and related family concerns

5. F. 2. g. impact of crisis and trauma on marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. h. impact of addiction on marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. i. impact of interpersonal violence on marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. j. impact of unemployment, under-employment, and changes in socioeconomic standing on marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. k. interactions of career, life, and gender roles on marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. l. physical, mental health, and psychopharmacological factors affecting marriages, couples, and families

5. F. 2. m. cultural factors relevant to marriage, couple, and family functioning, including the impact of immigration

5. F. 2. n. professional organizations, preparation standards, and credentials relevant to the practice of marriage, couple, and family counseling

5. F. 2. o. ethical and legal considerations and family law issues unique to the practice of marriage, couple, and family counseling

5. F. 2. p. record keeping, third party reimbursement, and other practice and management considerations in marriage, couple, and family counseling

5. F. 3. a. assessment, evaluation, and case management for working with individuals, couples, and families from a systems perspective

5. F. 3. d. conceptualizing and implementing treatment, planning, and intervention strategies in marriage, couple, and family counseling

5. F. 3. e. strategies for interfacing with the legal system relevant to marriage, couple, and family counseling

**Task:** Articulate aspects of family dynamics, legal/ethics and advocacy issues, and treatment from a multicultural perspective

**Assignment:** Class discussion, assigned readings, successful marriage/partnership interview and paper, Cultural diversity presentation, media presentation, review American Counseling Association Code of Ethics

**Purpose:** Because multicultural awareness is a critical component for professional conduct and interaction with others, maintaining a curiosity for how societal norms and external systems impact the roles and structures of a family can strengthen the relationships with clients and assist families with developing coping skills for stressful life transitions. Additionally, practicing from a multicultural perspective can also provide the therapist clarity when evaluating viable interventions or assessments for the family, as well as understanding advocacy issues that may arise.

**Assessment:** Participation in class discussion, tests, rubrics