



Introduction to Couple Dynamics and Counseling

COU 6607|

Total Credit Hours: 3 hrs Lecture

Instructor

Course description

This course explores the dynamics of marital and couple relationships from a clinical research perspective. The student will explore psychodynamic and systems perspectives, as well as other models of couple counseling, concerning normal or healthy functioning and symptomatic behavior. Counseling strategies and interventions will be explored.

Rationale for Course

Marriage and the family represent major contextual factors for understanding and resolving problems and concerns in professional counseling. Individual functioning is affected substantially by the dynamics of the pair-bonded couple. Changes in the institution of marriage and characteristics of the committed relationship influence child rearing and parenting, allocation of resources, caring for aging family members, and other issues in the family life cycle. The prevalence of divorce, single-parent families, and co-parenting/blended families call into question traditional family values. The contemporary clinician must be prepared to address couple dynamics and counseling concerns from an informed multicultural context

V. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

A. Explain the history of marital, couple, and family counseling/therapy including philosophical and etiological premises that define the practice of marital, couple, and family counseling/therapy;

B. Describe ethical and legal considerations specifically related to the practice of couple counseling/therapy (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA] and International Association of Marriage and Family Counseling [IAMFC] Code of Ethics);

C. Evaluate implications of professional issues unique to marital and couple counseling/therapy including recognition, reimbursement, and right to practice

D. Discover the role of marital and couple counselors in a variety of practices and settings in relation to other helping professionals

E. Assess the following factors in relational counseling practice: racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; nationality, socioeconomic status; family structure and development in a multicultural society; age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual beliefs, occupation, physical and mental status, equity issues

F. Recognize human sexuality issues and their impact on family and couple functioning, and strategies for their resolution

H. Identify societal trends and treatment issues related to working with diverse family systems (e.g., single-parent families, dual-career couples, and blended families);

To address these objectives, each week we will study major approaches in family therapy; looking at the following: history of family therapy, important concepts of schools of thoughts, current research and evaluation of family therapy. We will apply major approaches to real-life case scenarios and learn at least one counseling skill or technique associated with particular models. Finally, based on a study of these approaches, students will be asked to create their own theoretical map to guide their approach of family counseling.

STANDARDS

2016 CACREP MARRIAGE, COUPLE, AND FAMILY COUNSELING (MCAFC) 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. 3. a. assessment, evaluation, and case management for working with individuals, couples, and families from a systems perspective
- 5. F. 3. b. fostering family wellness

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

Assignment: Review videos, class discussions, assigned readings, personal practice papers, role-play

Purpose: To understand and appreciate historical roots of the profession and identify how views and perspectives have changed with the societal needs. Therapists must also be able to discern the various theories and models to conceptualize and communicate from a theoretical lens.

Assessment: participation in class discussion, tests, personal practice paper

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

Task: Become aware of family relational patterns; understand the purpose of a couple assessment

Assignment: class discussion, assigned readings, employment search, dyadic couple interview and presentation, Review ACA Code of Ethics, Review AAMFT Code of Ethics

Purpose: It is important that students understand the impact of his/her role within the counseling relationship and to also be able to identify appropriate settings and atmospheres that lead to optimal client progress. Students seeking to work with families will need to recognize the make-up of the relationships and the foundational aspects that create traditional and non-traditional bonds. Maintaining professional

memberships and affiliations are vital in maintaining the relevance of counseling with the society. It also promotes networking, additional educational opportunities, and advocacy concerns. Each therapist is responsible for understanding and making ethical decisions in each case/situation. Demonstrating legal practices protects both the therapist and the client. For therapists working independently or performing administrative duties, it is important to remain abreast of changes as it relates to the operational aspects of a practice.

Assessment: Participation in class discussion, tests, case studies

- 5. F. 2. a. roles and setting 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. 3. c. techniques and interventions of marriage, couple, and family counseling
- 5. F. 3. d. conceptualizing and implementing treatment, planning, and intervention strategies in marriage, couple, and family counseling

Task: Examine current multicultural issues that impact family functioning

Assignment: Class discussions, assigned readings, special topics presentation, clinical case study, role-play

Purpose: Because there exist multiple influences within the family system, a successful clinician must view all factors from a multicultural aspect and must also be comfortable addressing issues within the therapeutic process. Awareness and intentionality are key components when deciphering the appropriateness of a given technique or intervention towards the resolution of the presenting concern.

Assessment: Class discussion, tests

Prerequisites

Graduate Standing. The course can be used towards a Master's or Ed.S. degree. Passing grade in Helping Relationships.

Instructional Materials

Young, M. E., Barden, S. M., & Long, L. L. (2021). *Counseling and therapy for couples: An integrative model*. Pearson.

American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Supplemental peer-reviewed journal articles

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

REQUIRED PRACTICES

Required practices in this course include reading, research, writing, in-class and out of class assignments, case presentations, role-plays. The student will use the computer to address learning objectives, complete assignments, and demonstrate competency or mastery.

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.

Specific course requirements include the following.

Attend class and participate in class discussions. 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 before class. Alternative assignments may be in case of an approved absence.

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

Complete weekly assignments and bring them to class. Important learning experiences are self-guided and involve out-of-class exercises and activities. The student is prepared to share information and insight by completing the assignments before class.

Demonstrate mastery of course content through satisfactory scoring on examinations/in-class tests. Mid-term and final examinations are used to measure progress and identify learning needs. The examination will be scheduled for particular dates. Make-up examinations may be arranged at the discretion of the instructor.

In-class tests will be given at the beginning of the class and are based on the reading assignment coordinated with the scheduled date of class. In-class tests do not qualify for make-up if the student misses the tests.

Theory discussion and case conceptualization. Students present findings of theories specific to couples counseling. Students will randomly choose a theory to describe/teach (ex. developers/main influencers, basic tenets/assumptions (function vs. dysfunction), description of concepts, goals of therapy, roles of therapist, assessment/how progress measured, interventions, termination, benefits/disadvantages). All other students will use an outline of the above-listed areas to note their understanding of the concept. Students are assigned a case scenario to apply a theory using their notes to conceptualize the case and develop a treatment plan.

****Bonus 5 points opportunity****

“Show and Tell”. Students will coordinate with the instructor a class meeting date to present a resource (article, podcast, book, etc.) that highlights an educational tool for either the therapist or the client. Short presentations will be 5-10 mins. in length. Students may only use this opportunity once during the semester

Couple interviews and assessment presentation. Each student will identify a couple to interview. The couple cannot be closely associated with or related to either student. Students will utilize the Gottman Method interview questions. Students will present their findings to the class based on the structure of the couple and multicultural variables. Students will also identify an assessment that could apply to the couple if the couple were in therapy. Students will discuss the intention/purpose and description of the assessment. Students will upload a copy of the assessment to the Canvas page.

Special topics/psychoeducational presentation. Students will choose a special topic/presenting concern related to couples counseling. Students will discuss areas of concern, multicultural factors, therapist areas of awareness, and general treatment/approaches. Students will also provide psychoeducational materials related to their topic.

Personal practice paper. Students will submit a personal practice paper that includes their philosophy of couples counseling. A rubric will be provided of the expectations of the written plan.

Weekly role-play. During each class, students will be required to participate in role-play activities based on the stages of a couple counseling session. Two students will serve as the couple and one student will serve as the therapist (pending the number of student enrollment).

In addition to class participation and attendance, grades will be determined in the following manner:

Theory discussion and case study concept 200
Couple interview and assessment 150
Quizzes/Exams/discussion board/
Reflection papers est. 100
Special topic/psycho ed presentation
Personal practice paper 100
Final Exam 60
Possible points 610
Grading scale

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

Final score = Obtained points/Possible points

Point system is subject to change

Students are responsible for maintaining a record of their grades; individual grades will not be addressed in class

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.

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>.

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/>

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Date	Topic(s)	Reading Assignment/Exam Due
Week 1	Introduction/Expectations of Class Syllabus & Assignment Review	Syllabus; Bring or have access to ACA Code of Ethics to next class meeting ****all chapter exams close at 12noon the day of class; exams are posted on Canvas
Week 2	Ethics	Read Chp 1; Take Chp 1 exam before next class
Week 3	Unique systems	Read Chps 2; Take Chp 2 exam before next class
Week 4	Couples and culture	
Week 5	Theory presentations	Read Chp 5; Take Chp 5 exam before next class
Week 6	Assessment of couples	Read Chp 8; Take Chp 8 exam before next class Due: Case conceptualization due @ 11:59pm
Week 7	Communication	Read Chps 6; Take Chps 6 exam before next class
Week 8	Techniques and skills	
Week 9		Read Chp 3-4; Take Chps 3-4 exams before next class Due: Couples interview reflection and assessment due @ 11:59pm

Week 10	Model Part 1 Model Part 2	Read Chp 7,9; Take Chp 7 & 9 exams before next class
Week 11	LGBTQ+ Sex & Intimacy	Read Chps 10 11, & 12; Take Chps 10, 11, & 12 exams before next class
Week 12	Infidelity Violence Addiction	

Week 13	Special Topics/psychoed. presentation	
Week 14	Thanksgiving break	**FALL ONLY
Week 15		Due: Personal practice paper due @ 11:59pm
Week 16	Final Exam	