COURSE NUMBER: SOWO 852.001

COURSE TITLE: Social Work Practice with Couples, Fall Semester 2012

INSTRUCTOR: Anne Jones, MSW, PhD
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OFFICE HOURS: Monday 1:00 – 1:50 pm or
By appointment

CLASS WEBSITE: Accessible through - https://sakai.unc.edu/. This will contain the syllabus, assignment descriptions and grading criteria; lecture notes, cases, and external links. Please check it periodically for announcements and make sure that you are listed for the class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is a clinical seminar, which analyzes the operations and character of couple therapy as a human service approach.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To develop an understanding of the dynamics of the couple/marital relationship.

2. To understand the professional social work roles, values, and ethics associated with social work intervention specifically to couples and their families.

3. To become aware of your own values, feelings and attitudes about marriage/couple conflict and dissolution.

4. To develop and deepen skills for diagnosis of and implementation of social intervention strategies for marital or relationship difficulties or dysfunction.

5. To understand marital/relationship therapy from a variety of explanatory and practice theoretical perspectives and to develop practice skills consistent with these perspectives.

6. To understand the implications and importance of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation on practice with couples.

7. To understand the importance and relevance of the ecological environment and community setting on assessment and intervention with couples.
**REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:**


**RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOK:**


(Very inexpensive as it has been in print for some time)

These books are available at the UNC Bookstore or can be ordered on the web (e.g., www.bestbookbuys.com, or www.textbooks.com)

**OTHER TEXTS THAT MAY BE USEFUL:**


**Other recommended books:**


**Recommended websites:**

http://www.nameonline.net (National Association of Marriage Enhancement)

http://www.smartmarriages.com (Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couple Education)

www.healthymarriageinfo.org (Clearinghouse for resources and information on healthy marriage)

Please note: There are many other links related to course material under external links on class website

**Expanded description:** This class will examine the theory, practice and utilization of effective therapeutic interventions with couple relationships across the developmental life cycle of dyads. A number of theoretical approaches will be presented. The course will involve lecture, discussion, role-playing and student presentations. It is expected that students will be involved in the course through discussion, role-plays and class presentations. The course builds on knowledge and skills gained in the Foundation classes (including SOWO 500, 540, 501, 520, 521) and Social Work 802 (Family Stress, Coping, and Social Support).

**Classroom environment:**

The development of a supportive learning environment, reflecting the values of the social work profession, is essential for the success of this class. A supportive learning environment is fostered by listening to the ideas and views of others, being able to understand and appreciate a point of view which is different from your own, articulating clearly your point of view, and linking experience to readings and assignments. I will appreciate your contributions to making this a safe and respectful class for learning and growth.
**ASSIGNMENTS:**
There are two written assignments and two experiential assignments. The first written assignment involves journaling three times during the semester. The journal is 2-3 pages and involves relating course material to professional/personal experiences. Due dates are on the syllabus. The second written assignment is a final paper in which you apply one of the theoretical frameworks covered in the course to a written case that I will give you. The paper is due 9:00 AM on 12/10/12.

The first experiential assignment is a role-play demonstration that is done in groups of 3 or four and which is planned out ahead of time. The other assignment is a 30 minute team presentation in which you research and present on the “best practices” for working with a particular couple’s issue or problem. A more detailed assignment description is in the handout entitled, “Assignment Description”.

**BASIS FOR EVALUATION:**
Attendance & participation 10%
Role-Play and handout 25%
Journal 15%
Team Presentation 25%
Final Paper 25%

**GRADING SYSTEM:**
H = 94 and above
P = 80 to 93
L = 70 to 79
F = 69 and below

**POLICY ON INCOMPLETES & LATE ASSIGNMENTS**
I prefer not to give an incomplete grade and will give incompletes only in compliance with University policy. If an assignment is late (not handed in class on the due date), **without prior approval** the grade will be reduced 10 points. The grade will continue to be reduced for each day it continues to be late.

**ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Attendance and participation is worth 10 points. Attendance and participation is required and the class will rely heavily on discussion. It is expected that students will read the material and apply and discuss readings and field experiences in class. Active listening, respect and tolerance for the views of others and a stance of curiosity will all contribute to a safe and stimulating learning environment.

**POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Please refer to the APA Style Guide, The SSW Manual, and the SSW Writing Guide for information on attribution of quotes, plagiarism and appropriate use of assistance in preparing assignments. All written assignments should contain a signed pledge from you stating that, “I have not given or received unauthorized aid in preparing this written work.”
In keeping with the UNC Honor Code, if reason exists to believe that academic dishonesty has occurred, a referral will be made to the Office of the Student Attorney General for investigation and further action as required.

**Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities which affect their participation in the course may notify the instructor if they wish to have special accommodations in instructional format, examination format, etc., considered.
CLASS SCHEDULE
SOWO 852.01 PRACTICE WITH COUPLES

Class 1: 8/21 Overview of Course and Course Requirements
- Introductions
- Brief historical perspective of marital and couple therapy
- The landscape of couples and families today
- Rationale for couple therapy

Class 2: 8/28 The Role of Culture, Beliefs, Values and Gender in Relationship Programs and Practice
- Gender issues in couple relationships and practice
- The changing beliefs and expectations on marriage
- Practitioner held values and impact on practice
  © Gender Differences in Depression: A Marital Therapy Approach - Peggy Papp, MSW

Required Readings for Class 2:


  Chapter 1

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What is your perspective on the ways in which cultural expectation about marriage have changed? How might this change in paradigms effect relationships?
- Why, according to Amato, has marriage/couple relationships become a public issue?
- In your view, does the high rate of divorce, cohabitation, and non-marital births constitute a social problem that should be of concern to social workers?
- What gendered expectations and beliefs might you bring to the case illustration of Dave and Sonja (in Knudson-Martin article)?
- What are some common therapist mistakes and how can we avoid them?

Class 3: 9/4 Partner Formation, Developmental Transitions, and Factors Associated with Successful Relationships – What the Research Shows
- Factors associated with partner formation across the life span
• Life course changes for couples with children and those without
• Predictors for marital success and risk factors for dissolution in heterosexual and same-sex relationships

**Required Readings for Class 3:**


Pages 37- top of 56) and (pgs. 87 – 96 top)


**Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:**
- What are some of the differences in partnering issues and reasons for cohabitation between younger adults and older adults?
- What are some of the most important factors identified in the last three articles associated with marital duration and quality?
- What if anything surprised you?

**Optional Readings:**


Class 4: 9/11  Assessing the Couple System

- The transition to working systemically
- Guidelines on what to ask and how to ask it
- Standardized assessments

Guest Couple

Required Readings for Class 4:
   - Chapter 2 – The Basics: Clinical Goals and Tasks
   - Chapter 3 – Presentations, Assessments, and Goals
   - Chapter 4 – Beginnings in Action


Please note: pages are only for part of the chapter

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- How does working with a couple differ from working with an individual?
- What are some of the beginning tasks for a practitioner working with a couple?
- What are some important first questions?
- What are some important steps for wrapping up at a first session?

Optional Readings:


Class 5: 9/18  Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy (CBCT)

- Theoretical assumptions
- Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
- Therapeutic goals
- Applications to communication issues

Required Readings for Class 5:

Chapter 11 Communication Techniques (pgs. 136-48)  
Chapter 13 Cognitive Techniques (pgs. 175 -192).

**Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:**

- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- How do therapists that use CBCT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from a cognitive-behavioral lens?

**Optional Readings:**


**Class 6: 9/25  Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy (CBCT) Continued**

- Team Role-play
- Common interventions
- Applications to problems of alcohol dependency and depression
- Strengths and limitations

**Required Readings for Class 6:**


. Chapter 5, Clearing the Clutter: Improving Communication, (pgs. 77 -95).


Choose one:


**Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:**

- What are the main interventions used by a CBCT couple therapist?
- What is the role of the therapist?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of CBCT?
- What are the specific mechanisms of CBT that make it so effective in work with couples with problems of alcohol and depression?
Class 7: 10/2  Emotionally Focused Therapy

- Theoretical Assumptions
- Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
- Application to trauma and illness

*Emotionally focused therapy with Susan M. Johnson*

**Required Readings for Class 7:**


**Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:**

- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- How do therapists that use EFT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from an EFT lens?
- How is a history of trauma associated with couple distress?
- In what ways can illness affect a relationship?

**Optional Readings:**


Class 8: 10/9  Emotionally Focused Therapy Continued

- Team Role-play
- Stages and associated interventions
- Application to post-partum depression
- Strengths and limitations

**Required Readings for Class 8:**


Chapter 6 - Drilling Down: Core Issues (pp. 96-119).
Chapter 9 – The Early Years (pp. 160-174)

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:

- What are the three stages of EFT and the interventions associated with each phase?
- What does Taibbi mean when he talks about “core dynamics” and how might these fit with the EFT approach?
- How are the “early years” relevant to attachment issues and formation of relational patterns?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

Optional Readings:


Class 9: 10/16  Gottman Method Couple Therapy (The Sound Relationship House)

- Theoretical Assumptions
- Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
- Therapeutic goals

Live Sessions with Julie Gottman

Required Readings for Class 9

Chapter 4, The Assessment of Marriage
Chapter 5, The Disasters and Masters of Marriage

Optional Readings:
www.gottman.com
http://www.psychpage.com/family/library/gottman.html

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:

- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- What are the components of the Sound Relationship House?
- How does GMCT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from a GMCT lens?
Class 10: 10/23  Gottman Method Couple Therapy (The Sound Relationship House) Cont’d

- Team Role-play
- Key interventions
- Strengths and limitations
- Applications to male arousal and violence

Required Readings for Class 10:
Chapter 6 – Assumptions and Intervention Overview
Chapter 8 – Solving What is Solvable
Chapter 10 – Life Dreams and Shared Meaning *(Only 3 pages!)*

Chapter 10 – Re-creating the vision

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are some Gottman key interventions and which ones might you use in your practice?
- How does Taibbi’s chapter on re-creating the vision reflect Gottman’s focus on life dreams?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

Optional Readings:

Chapter 11 – Resistance to change

Class 11: 10/30  Relationship Education (RE)

- What is relationship education and how does it differ from therapy?
- Rationale and research findings on effectiveness
- Structure and examples of programs
- Pathways to getting trained as a program leader

Required Readings for Class 11:

Research your own program and briefly present in class – A handout and a list of programs will be provided.

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What is relationship education and how does it differ from therapy?
- How do Markham & Rhoades categorize RE programs?
- What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages?
- Where might couple/family education fit into your practice or area of interest?

Optional readings:


Class 12: 11/6  Working with Issues of Ambivalence, Separation, and Divorce
- Considering our own values/beliefs on divorce and influence on clients
- Therapeutic and ethical issues with separating/and divorcing couples
- Working with couples considering divorce - William Doherty

Required Reading:

Chapter 11, Battle and Loss: Managing the Teenage Years (pp. 209-222)


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are your thoughts about Lebow’s statement that, “the shadow of personal values of the therapist is very powerful?”
- How might a therapist exert influence on a couple’s decision on whether or not to divorce?
- What are your experiences, beliefs about divorce and how might they come into play for you?
- What are some of the most effective strategies for helping couples through the divorce process?
Optional Readings:


No Class: 11/13 Enjoy the day!

Class 13: 11/20 Working with Remarried Couples and Stepfamilies
- Stepfamily life cycle and structural characteristics
- Common stepfamily dilemmas
- Best Practices

Required Readings:

Chapter 12, One Big Happy Family: Working with Stepfamilies.


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- How do stepfamilies differ developmentally from the biological nuclear family?
- What are some of the most common challenges that repartnered parents face?
- What are the best practices for therapists?
- What comes to your mind when you think about stepfamilies and stepparents?

Optional Readings:

Class 14: 11/27 Working with LGBT and racial minority couples
- Common stressors and unique strengths
- Therapeutic interventions
- Reflections on our own culture
- Talking about culture and race with our clients
Required Readings:


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:

- Both couples of color and same-sex couples experience oppression and discrimination. How are these external stressors similar and different?
- Why is it important for therapists to recognize and be able to externalize about these stressors?
- What was the mistake that the therapist made in the Markowitz article?

Optional Readings:


Class 15: 12/4 Infidelity, Ethical Issues & Wrap-up

- Kinds and patterns of infidelity
- Practice recommendations
- Components of ethical practice
- Reflections and Wrap-up

Required Readings:


Reading prompts - Please consider as you reflect on ending this course

- How do you think you would be most comfortable handling secrets?
- What do you see as the most important components of ethical practice with couples?
- What did you like best or least about the course?