Couples Counseling

I. STANDARDIZED COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is designed as a seminar for students in the clinical concentration and will cover intervention approaches used in couples therapy. It will be taught from a systems perspective and will include an overview of models and methods drawn from evidence-based research. The primary focus of this course will be to blend theory and application. This course will require the student to participate in both theory-based and experiential learning and will incorporate simulations and case presentations to elucidate the approaches discussed.

II. STANDARDIZED COURSE OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this course the student will be able to:
1. Demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast theory-based interventions which incorporate intrapsychic and interpersonal theory including an understanding of emotions, physiology and communication.
2. Demonstrate the ability to explore and resolve social work values and ethical dilemmas in selecting and implementing interventions for couples.
3. Understand the importance of awareness of self as a parallel process to the application of interventions with couples.
4. Identify the implications of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, substance abuse and domestic violence on assessment and intervention with couples.
5. Understand and integrate theory using empirical, evidence-based best practice research.
6. Demonstrate the ability to review the elements of a treatment approach, assess the effectiveness and elicit clinical input that heightens awareness and examines interventions in light of cultural perspective and desired outcome.

III. TEACHING METHODS
This course will include a variety of teaching methodologies designed to achieve the beginning mastery of theoretically-grounded advanced practice skill competencies with couples. Learning activities will include reading, writing, discussion, lectures, videos, simulations and experiential exercises. Students will video-tape simulations as a tool for learning assessment and intervention skills. Students will present a case and solicit feedback in order to identify strategies to improve their effectiveness in intervening with couples. Students will also be encouraged to develop insights into “the use of self” through observations and self-reflection. Simulations will be monitored to facilitate the assessment of skill competencies.
The first half of the course will be asynchronous. You must leave the 2:30-5:20 time slot open, for easy coordination with group members, though many weeks you’ll have the option of completing the asynchronous portion at another time. Class will meet on zoom from 3:45-5:20 each week.

IV. REQUIRED TEXT AND MATERIALS

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS
The grade for the course will be based on the student’s ability to demonstrate: (a) knowledge and methods from major models of couples counseling, and (b) effective interventions for resolving couples issues. Grading will be based primarily on total points earned from each of the major assignments. Factors to be considered for final grade will also include class attendance, punctuality, participation, promptness in completing assignments, and clear and concise writing skills.

Written assignments should be typed and double spaced. Single space and/or fonts under 12 pt. will incur a penalty as will extra pages.
All assignments are to be submitted via Canvas.
APA (6th ed) writing and citation style must be used for referenced information. Upload of texts will only be accepted via Canvas.
Students will be divided into groups of three (with an added group of four depending on the class size) and will create a a “simulation couple” they will play this semester.

1. History and Assessment Report --Submit via Canvas (3 pages maximum)
Write a letter to another therapist (for coordination of care) in which you give relevant history and an evaluation of a couple. You may use either the “simulation couple” you create in your group, or friends of yours (i.e. a couple you know). To prepare for these simulations, students will construct an assessment report of the simulation couple.
The narrative may include the following:
- A description of the presenting problem,
- The strengths and challenges of the relationship,
- One or two issues over which the couple is gridlocked (Gottman, Chapter 4)
- A relationship history using the Oral History Interview (Gottman, 398-99).
- Gottman’s Seven Questions as they relate to your couple. NOTE: You are not required to address all seven questions. Select the ones that are most relevant to your simulation couple (Gottman Chapter 4)
  Section C
- Brief summary of the Meta-Emotion Interview (Gottman, 402).
- Brief summary of Meanings interview (Gottman, 403)
The report needs to be written as a summary (without questions or dialogue). The goal of the paper is to efficiently convey relevant information that would help with treatment and not to ramble.
Assessment Report due on October 11th, 15 points maximum.

2. Couple Therapy Simulations
Students will work in their groups to practice couples’ therapy skills, and will be given class time to do so. The instructor will rotate between the groups (in breakout rooms) providing feedback. Each student will practice being the therapist and giving an initial assessment according to Gottman’s model. This simulation (role play) will consist of two sections.

Section 1 (spend about 15 minutes). Exploration of the presenting problem and seven questions according to Gottman’s assessment model (each group will decide specific areas of exploration).

Section 2 (spend about 15 minutes). Exploration of anger and sadness with both members of the couple according to Gottman’s meta-emotion interview, and/or relevant relationship background. You are free to choose the focus of this segment of the interview (i.e., emotions and/or background/history). This is on page 402 of your Gottman Marriage Clinic Book.

Each student will alternate playing members of the couple and the therapist (so that each student has an opportunity to play the therapist role).

Group members will be asked to reflect (and provide feedback) on the experience of engaging in the couple therapy simulation, challenges experienced, lessons learned, etc.

This will be completed in class on 10 points maximum (per group)

3. Video Presentation. The video project will consist of a 15-minute video corresponding to the implementation of skills of a central intervention phase of the team’s preferred model of couple therapy (e.g., Gottman, EFT). A handful of these videos will be presented in class (you may volunteer for this and it’s a great way to get feedback). Students will be free to choose the definitions of roles (i.e., therapist/rotating therapist vs couple), but all students must participate in the video. The role plays will help you prepare for this assignment, as will the discussion of various techniques corresponding to assigned readings.

Video presentations should not last more than 15 minutes (total video presentation time). In addition to evaluating skills, the videos will be used to discuss the experience of engaging in couple therapy, challenges experienced, lessons learned, etc.

Video Case Consult. For the video’s presented in class, each team will receive feedback after showing the video. Each team should be prepared to ask the class specific questions to elicit feedback. The entire presentation (showing video and case consult) should last 30 minutes.

15 points maximum (per group)

4. Video Responses to Couples Prompts

Each student will respond to two couples’ prompts (a brief video of a scenario that could come up in couples therapy). You will record a brief response to the couple. You will then respond to several questions about your performance, and should rerecord until you’re satisfied that you addressed all dimensions adequately.

20 points total maximum
This paper is due on December 7th. This manuscript will be an integration of knowledge and a description of your conceptualization of the process of couple therapy. In contrast to the reflection paper, this paper should be supported by a minimum of 5 scholarly references (i.e., journals or book chapters).

Please consider a single topic of particular interest to you that you’d like to explore in more depth. If nothing on the list below appeals to you, feel free to send me an email and get approval for an alternative topic.

1. What motivates couples to come to couple therapy? If you explore motivation, you may want to explore cultural variability.
2. What should be the objectives of couple therapy? How do therapist and client values and cultural or religious contexts factor into this?
3. How do you think gender issues factor into couple problems and the therapy that addresses them?
4. What is your stance with regards to power and control issues in relationships and therapy?
5. What are your assumptions about health in relationships? If you do not ascribe to notions of health/normality, what are the parameters that you consider should inform couple therapy? Remember to justify your responses with scholarly sources.
6. What issues associated with cultural diversity are you comfortable addressing in therapy? Please explain and reflect on these issues as they refer to your experience in this course.
7. What issues associated with cultural diversity will be difficult for you to address in therapy? Please explain and reflect on these issues as they refer to your experience in this course.

25 points maximum

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Modality of Grading (Individual vs Group)</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Simulation case consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>History and assessment report Submit via Canvas</td>
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<td>October 15th</td>
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<td>October 25th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video responses to couples’ prompts</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>November 15th</td>
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<td>Integration paper Submit via Canvas</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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VI. GRADES

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<td>87.0 to 89.999</td>
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<td>84.0 to 86.999</td>
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VII. CLASS POLICIES

Assignments:
Late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. The penalty will be assessed by subtracting 2 points per day. Exceptions will be made only in the case of an extreme emergency and with the permission of the instructor, to be elicited 24 hours prior to the due date.

Attendance:
Regular and punctual class attendance, as well as class participation are expected. Missing classes or regularly leaving without notifying the instructor are causes for reduction in the final grade. If you have any problem with connectivity, you’ll need to call in and send the instructor an email explaining the problem.

Cell phones, text messaging
Making/receiving calls and text messaging for non-urgent issues during class is prohibited.

VIII. UNIVERSITY POLICIES

COVID-19 RELATED INFORMATION. The University’s policies and practices related to the pandemic may be accessed at: https://protect.utexas.edu/

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE. The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471- 6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). A student should present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed and followed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit: http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/.
PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND CIVILITY IN THE CLASSROOM. The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another’s opinions. A course brings together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, physical abilities, religious and political beliefs, national origins, and sexual orientations, among others. We expect to learn from each other in an atmosphere of positive engagement and mutual respect. This atmosphere includes working intentionally to recognize and dismantle racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism in the classroom. Social Work also deals with complex and controversial issues. These issues may be challenging and uncomfortable, and it would be impossible to offer a substantive classroom experience that did not include potentially difficult conversations relating to challenging issues. In this environment, we will be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. Nevertheless, the professor requires that students engage one another with civility, respect, and professionalism.

UNANTICIPATED DISTRESS. Students may experience unexpected and/or distressing reactions to course readings, videos, conversations, and assignments. If so, students are encouraged to inform the professor. The professor can be responsive and supportive regarding students’ participation in course assignments and activities, but students are responsible for communicating clearly what kind of support is desired. If counseling is needed, students may contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling Center at 512-471-3515 or online at https://cmhc.utexas.edu/.

POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION. Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other forms of electronic communication (e.g. blogs) must be mindful of how their communication may be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image.

Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students’ social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including any information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in any way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.
Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

**POLICY ON SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY.** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/).

**USE OF COURSE MATERIALS.** The materials used in this course, including, but not limited to exams, quizzes, and homework assignments, are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized duplication of the course materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of course materials without the specific, express approval of the professor may be a violation of the University’s Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This sharing includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of distributing those materials to other current or future students.

**CLASSROOM CONFIDENTIALITY.** Information shared in class about agencies, clients, and personal matters is considered confidential per the NASW Code of Ethics on educational supervision and is protected by regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well. As such, sharing this information with individuals outside of the educational context is not permitted. Violations of confidentiality could result in actions taken according to the policies and procedure for review of academic performance located in sections 3.0, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Standards for Social Work Education.

**USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS.** Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible for keeping the university informed about a change of e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-sensitive. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at [http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php](http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php).

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS.** By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, examination, work assignment, or project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**TITLE IX REPORTING.** In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the University of Texas at Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct on the basis of sex [https://titleix.utexas.edu/](https://titleix.utexas.edu/). Faculty, field instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking, dating violence, or
any other forms of sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at https://titleix.utexas.edu/.

**CAMPUS CARRY POLICY.** The University’s policy on campus carry may be found here: https://campuscarry.utexas.edu.

**SAFETY.** As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

**BEHAVIOR CONCERNS and COVID-19 ADVICE LINE (BCCAL).** If students have concerns about their behavioral health, or if they are concerned about the behavioral health of someone else, students may use the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns. This service is provided through a partnership between the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line. The Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line has been expanded to support The University of Texas at Austin community during the COVID-19 pandemic. By calling 512-232-5050 - Option 2 for COVID-19, students, faculty and staff can be assisted in English and Spanish with COVID-19 support.

**EMERGENCY EVACUATION POLICY.** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors in the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor’s instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

**IX. COURSE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Asynchronous/Assignment Due</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading Material</td>
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<td>Sept 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 20</td>
<td>The Gottman Model</td>
<td>Couples Therapy Simulation (graded, in class) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBPMsV4ecRA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBPMsV4ecRA</a></td>
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<td>Sept 27</td>
<td>The Gottman Model Cont.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUVAIesIgdE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUVAIesIgdE</a> (22)</td>
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<td>Oct  4</td>
<td>The Gottman Model Cont.</td>
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<td>EFT</td>
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Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic*, Chapters 4, 6, 7

Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic*, Chapters 8-10

Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic*, Chapters 11-13

Johnson, *Practice of Emotionally Focused*, Chapters 1-3

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Reading Material</th>
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<td>EFT</td>
<td>EFT demo video</td>
<td>Johnson, <em>Practice of Emotionally Focused</em>, Chapters 4-6</td>
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<td>Video Simulation Due</td>
<td>Johnson, <em>Practice of Emotionally Focused</em>, Chapters 7-9</td>
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<td>Nov. 22</td>
<td>Affairs/ Infidelity</td>
<td>Video online</td>
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<td>Nov. 29</td>
<td>Conflict, Divorce, and Values</td>
<td>Angry couple video online</td>
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X. BIBLIOGRAPHY