

**Department:** Human Development and Family Studies

**Course No:** 1060 [180]

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Close Relationships Across the Lifespan

**Contact:** Jane Goldman

**Content Area:** CA2-Social Sciences

**Catalog Copy:** 180. Close Relationships Across the Lifespan. Either semester. Three credits.

Theory and research on topics in the close relationship literature including attraction, relationship development and maintenance, friendship and social support, love, sexuality, intimacy, power, communication, conflict, dissolution and divorce, and bereavement.

**Course Information:** DEFINITION OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS For the purposes of this course, close relationships is a phrase used to describe "relationships in which the participants' lives are tightly interwoven, with each partner both affecting and being affected by the other in important ways. Such closeness often characterizes the relationships of parents and their children, siblings, romantic partners, husbands and wives, and friends" (Huston & Robins, 1982, p. 901).

Huston, T. & Robins, E. (1982). Conceptual and methodological issues in studying close relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 44(4), 901-925.

#### Course Description

Theory and research on topics in the close relationship literature including attraction, relationship development and maintenance, friendship and social support, love, sexuality, intimacy, power, communication, conflict, dissolution and divorce, and bereavement.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** 3. Acquire Critical Judgment – In this course students will be required to identify and analyze relationship processes/experiences as well as apply different theoretical perspectives in exploring issues. Lectures, exams, and class assignments are specifically designed to encourage and assess critical thought. Further, students will be examining and critiquing the methods used in researching close relationships and discussing possible solutions to such challenges.

5. Acquire awareness of their era and society – In the United States, we are constantly bombarded by information and images of close relationships in the popular media. Although these images reflect and do shape relational perceptions and experiences of young adults, students in this course have likely not been asked to critically analyze such messages or to consider the extent to which they do not present accurate pictures of close relationships in our current society. In this course students will be exploring close relationships of their era and society from a research and theoretical perspective.

6. Acquire a consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience As mentioned above, students will be exploring the wide variety of close relationships present in our society. Course material that is present in the readings and lectures includes discussion of the diversity of relationship structures, experiences, and processes. Further, the course incorporates a life-span perspective in that these relationships are presented in a way that describes the variety of experiences encountered over time. Lastly, issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture are also incorporated into the course to mirror the diversity present in our current society.

7. Acquire a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge – In this course students will become familiar with many of the research approaches, methods, and measures commonly used in close relationship research. They will also be required to make critical judgments regarding the ethical dilemmas encountered in such research, the challenges of attempting to measure and assess relational perceptions and experiences, and the limitations of our current knowledge about close relationships.

**CA2 Criteria:** 1. Introduce students to theories and concepts of the social sciences – Information in text and lecture will introduce a variety of concepts and theories that have been used to describe and explain close relationships. These include conceptual frameworks such as Symbolic Interactionism, Social Exchange Theory, and Attachment theory as well as mid-range theories of mate selection and attraction (for instance Reiss' Wheel theory of love, and Murstein's Stimulus-Value-Role theory of Relationship Development. In class assignments and exams students will be asked to critically assess concepts/theories.

2. Introduce students to methods used in the social sciences, including consideration of the ethical problems social scientists face – Students will be exploring and analyzing various measures of close relationship concepts. For example, students will be critiquing various measures of relationships satisfaction. The readings and lectures also include discussions of ethical issues encountered in close relationship research. These include how many of the topics of interest in close relationship research are often value laden as well as the various dilemmas encountered in how to ask participants to respond about personal topics, the strategies used to maintain informant confidentiality, and the potential influence of social desirability on participant responses.

3. Introduce students to ways in which individuals, groups, institutions, or societies behave and influence one another and the natural environment – The focus of the class includes how close relationships are shaped by the context in which they occur. This includes an examination of the bidirectional influences between individuals, relationships, and society. Students will be exploring how relationships are shaped by social influences, as well as how social institutions reflect and are shaped by such relationships.

4. Provide students with tools to analyze social, political, or economic groups/organizations and to examine social issues and problems at the individual, cultural, national or international level – In this

class students will be provided with a variety of tools to analyze close relationships, including those within families, with romantic partners, and with friends. For instance, class information includes a focus upon how gender influences and is reconstructed in close relationships. Students will also analyze relational processes through examining power structures.

**Role of Grad Students:** The role of graduate students for this course will mainly reside in a supportive function. They will be responsible for meeting with students to answer questions about text/lecture information, assist with location of resources for lecture material, assist with dissemination, collection, and grading of assignments and exams, and manage paperwork associated with the course.

### **Supplemental Information:**

#### Course Objectives

After completing this course students will:

Possess a basic understanding of research and theory in the area of close relationships.

Understand the research methods and procedures used in studying such relationships.

Be able to apply theories and concepts to analyze relationships and relational processes.

Understand the interaction of personal choice and societal influence in decisions about personal relationships.

Recognize the diverse processes and structures of close relationships in contemporary society.

#### Text:

Hendrick, S. (2004). *Understanding close relationships*. Allyn & Bacon.

Other required readings on WebCT.

#### Course Requirements

##### 1. Exams (300 points total)

There will be three in-class exams worth 100 points each. Exams may consist of multiple choice, matching, and short answer questions. To do well on exams, class attendance and note taking are very important as well as reading the assigned material. Exam material will include the readings, lecture, guest lectures, class discussions, and films.

2. Application Activities (100 points total) There will be twelve activities during the course. Students will be asked to participate in discussion, write responses to questions, and complete activities during class time or on WebCT. Twelve of these will be collected, however, only ten will be counted in the final grade. Therefore, two of these can be missed without penalty or the two lowest scores dropped. For that reason, in-class assignments cannot be made up or substituted for any reason. The goal with these activities is for you to demonstrate application of the concepts from the text and lecture.

#### Tentative Course Topic Outline

The following is a tentative list of topics to be discussed during the semester. All topics will be addressed from a life-span perspective.

Class Introduction – Overview of the importance of close relationships across the life span

Laying the Foundation

Theoretical Perspectives Applicable to Close Relationships Miscellaneous theories of attraction and mate selection Symbolic Interactionism and Role theory Social Exchange Communication theories Conflict theory Feminist theory

Methods of Studying Close Relationships

Survey

Observation

Interviews

Frequently used scales and measures

Gender, Identity, and Close Relationships Attraction and relationship formation Theories of attraction and mate selection Compatibility and proximity Social allergens

Communication

Verbal

Nonverbal

Conflict

Importance

Affect on relationships

Resolution strategies and patterns

Power and control issues in close relationships

Dependence and commitment

Social support and caregiving

Importance of Emotions

Love and liking

Attachment

Jealousy

Trust, betrayal, and fidelity

Dislike, disdain, and hate

Relationship maintenance and relational repair

Violence and abuse – the dark side of close relationships Emotional abuse

Exploration of Specific Close Relationships Diversity of close relationships

Conceptualizing close relationships

Parent child relationships

Peer Relationships

Friendship

Sibling

Internet mediated relationships

Couple Relationships

Dating and courtship

Cohabitation

Marriage and domestic partnerships

Sexuality and sexual issues in close relationships Separation, Divorce, and Relationship dissolution

Bereavement

Repartnering and remarriage