

# **PSY 481: Close Relationships**

## **Fall, 2009**

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Office: 360 Flipse Building  
Office Hours: Monday 9:00-10:30  
Wednesday 2:30-4:00

**Class Location & Times:** Flipse 535; Monday & Wednesday 1:00-2:15pm

### **Course Description & Objectives:**

The purpose of this course is to provide you with an introduction to how social scientists think about, study, and treat intimate relationships. There is good reason to believe that poor communication and mismanaged conflict can be harmful to relationships and to the emotional and physical well-being of the people involved. But how can we best conceptualize and study communication? How is communication linked to our gender, our personalities, and other features of our relationships? How can we distinguish among different forms of communication, and different forms of conflict? What is the broader context in which communication occurs? How can an understanding of communication lead to effective interventions for improving relationships? This course will address these and many other questions about the role of communication in human intimacy.

The material for this course will come from lectures, an e-book, and some additional assigned articles. The lectures will cover research and theory in clinical psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, family studies, sociology, communication studies, psychiatry, and related disciplines. Familiarity with general psychology, statistics, and on-line library searching will be advantageous in this course. You are expected to attend all classes and read all of the assigned material.

### **Required reading and resources for the course:**

Your e-book for this course is an almost-final draft of a textbook entitled *Intimate Relationships* by Drs. Thomas Bradbury and Benjamin Karney at UCLA – both are internationally-recognized experts on close relationships. The textbook will be published in 2010; until then, the authors have kindly granted us permission to use an almost-final draft of the book. This permission comes with one important advantage and one important disadvantage. You've probably already recognized the advantage – the e-book is free; all we're being asked to do by the publisher is fill out a short questionnaire about the text at the end of the semester. However, the disadvantage is that, although you can highlight/underline and save chapters of the e-book, if you want a hard copy to read, you'll have to print it out. I will post PDF chapters to Blackboard. I WILL ALSO POST COPIES OF MY LECTURE NOTES TO BLACKBOARD 24 HOURS BEFORE CLASS.

In addition to the e-book, there are some topics for which you will find additional articles available to you on Blackboard.

## Schedule of Course Topics:

Below is a tentative schedule of topics to be covered in class and what reading you should do *before* each class. It is possible that some modifications will need to be made to the schedule as we go on (especially since I haven't taught this course before); however; *so you can plan ahead*, THE DATES OF THE TESTS AND PAPER DUE DATES WILL NOT BE CHANGED.

Instead, the content of the tests/papers will be modified to tap the materials we have covered.

I've organized the course content roughly into the following six themes:

- 1) Foundation knowledge: Introduction, research methods, and theories
- 2) Relationship formation: Relationship formation and Premarital cohabitation
- 3) Individual influences on relationships: Sex/gender, personality, interpersonal history
- 4) Components of relationships: Intimacy, beliefs/values, and cognitive processes
- 5) Changes and external influences: Transitions, children, external stress
- 6) Relationships in distress: conflict/aggression, prevention, and treatment

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Topic:</u>	<u>Reading due by beginning of class:</u>
Aug 26	Introduction	None
Aug 31	Intro; physical and mental health	Chapter 1
Sept 2	Research methods	Chapter 2
Sept 7	NO CLASS – LABOR DAY	
Sept 9	Theories of relationships	Chapter 3 (pp. 93-126 only)
Sept 14	Theories of relationships cont.	Chapter 3 (pp. 127-147 only)
Sept 16	Attraction	Chapter 5 (pp 201-230 only)
Sept 21	Mate selection / cohabitation	Chapter 5 (pp 230-245); Articles
Sept 23	Friendship / Discussion of papers	<b>None – Paper #1 due</b>
Sept 28	Sex & gender in relationships	Chapter 4
Sept 30	Individual personality	Chapter 6
Oct 5	Individual history	Chapter 6
Oct 7	Development of intimacy	Chapter 7
Oct 12	Maintaining intimacy	Chapter 7
Oct 14	Beliefs & Values	Chapter TBA
Oct 19	Cognitive processes	Chapter TBA
Oct 21	Discussion of papers / review	<b>None – Paper #2 due</b>
Oct 26	<b>MIDTERM</b>	None
Oct 28	Developmental changes	Chapter 13
Nov 2	External influences / Stress	Chapter TBA
Nov 4	Conflict	Chapter 8
Nov 9	Aggression	Chapter 8
Nov 11	Break-up and divorce	Articles – Blackboard
Nov 16	Prevention of problems	Chapter TBA
Nov 18	Prevention examples	Articles – Blackboard
Nov 23	Treatment of problems	Chapter TBA
Nov 25	NO CLASS	
Nov 30	Treatment examples	Articles – Blackboard
Dec 2	Discussion of papers / review	<b>None – Paper #3 due</b>
Dec 7	READING DAY – NO CLASS	
Dec 9	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> (2-4:30pm)	

## Course Grading:

In broad strokes, I'm hoping to assess two types of abilities in your course grade: your ability to understand the concepts presented in reading/lecture and your ability to apply those concepts. The first is tapped by the midterm and final exams while the latter ability is tapped by your written papers.

Midterm / Final exams: The midterm and the final exam will each consist of 50 multiple-choice / true-false / matching type questions covering material from class (including videos!) and readings. The final exam will include concepts from the first half of class only as they pertain to material in the second half of class (e.g., the main theory of relationships exemplified by a certain therapy). Each exam will also include one short answer (i.e., a few sentences) extra credit question – the scoring of these questions is described in more detail below under “grade distribution”. Each exam will be with 60 points (excluding the extra credit question).

Papers: You will be responsible for writing three papers for this class, each a maximum of 5 pages in length. Papers should be written in APA style (e.g., citations/references, double spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman) but do *not* need to include an abstract or title page. PLEASE INCLUDE ONLY YOUR C-NUMBER (NOT YOUR NAME) ON YOUR PAPER (I like to grade papers without knowing your identity). Also, to save paper, do not put a page break between the text and reference section (if any). A grading rubric for each paper assignment will be distributed approximately 1 month before the paper is due. You'll notice that I haven't included a minimum page length because I'm grading you on content of the paper only – if you can write a great, concise paper that's a great skill to have. That said, to fit all of the content in, I'm generally assuming 4-5 pages will be necessary. However, YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT for any content that spills on to a 6<sup>th</sup> page – I'm going to stop reading at the end of 5 pages. Each paper will be worth 40 points. Papers are due at the BEGINNING of class, with 4 points (10%) deducted for each 24 hour period the paper is late (beginning at start of class). The general paper topics are:

Paper #1: How would you conceptualize this couple?

Paper #2: What are we missing in our study/conceptualization of relationships?

Paper #3: What policy, prevention, or treatment initiatives would you propose we undertake to improve relationships in this country?

If you need help with general writing style, I encourage you to consult with the Writing Center. If you need assistance with APA style and don't have easy access to an APA style guide, an online resource can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01>.

Grade distribution: Final grades will be determined based on the following university-approved distribution: *NOTE: The following numbers are total points earned in the class.*

### **Grades**

A+ = 235-240	B+ = 211-215	C+ = 187-191	D+ = 163-167
A = 220-234	B = 196-210	C = 172-186	D = 144-162
A- = 216-219	B- = 192-195	C- = 168-171	F = < 162

The only extra credit available for this course is the extra credit short-answer questions included on the exams (a total of two). These questions will be graded only in the event that your *final*

course grade is within two points of the next highest letter grade (e.g., 234 points, one point short of an A+) and will be used to determine whether you receive the higher letter grade.

### **Absences and Make-up Exams/Assignments:**

Attendance Policy: The material in the reading and lecture/discussion will differ, meaning that not attending class will likely negatively affect your performance on graded assignments and your overall enjoyment of this class. Thus, I will assume that you have a good reason for missing class when you're not in attendance. Please talk to me when you return to check in about how you can best learn the material you missed.

Make-up Exams/Assignments: Paper and exam due dates were selected to not conflict with major religious holidays as identified by the university. If you are very sick or have a last-minute emergency (i.e., you or an immediate family member is hospitalized; attending a funeral), contact me as soon as possible to set up alternative plans to make up the exam/assignment. In those situations, you will need to provide documentation that you were unable to take the exam as originally scheduled (i.e., copy of plane tickets, physician records, etc.)

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### **University of Miami Student Honor Code:**

All forms of scholastic dishonesty are prohibited, whether related to a written or oral examination, a thesis, term paper, mode of creative expression, computer-based work, or other academic undertaking. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and violating the professional ethics of research projects. Moreover, students are expected to warn fellow students who do not appear to be observing proper ethical standards and to report violations of this Code. In determining what constitutes academic dishonesty, a student should be guided by the purposes of the Student Honor Code, common sense, and information provided by the instructor. All undergraduate students are responsible for reading, understanding, and upholding this Code. For more information, please see [http://www6.miami.edu/dean-students/pdf/undergrad\\_honorcode.pdf](http://www6.miami.edu/dean-students/pdf/undergrad_honorcode.pdf). Because I'm asking you not to put your name on paper assignments, turning in a copy of your paper with your C-number on it indicates your agreement with the following statement: *"On my honor, I have neither given nor received any aid on this paper."*

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### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

The ADA is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Students who have questions or concerns about special needs or accommodations may speak with Dr. Doss or contact the Office of Disability Services at (305) 284-2374. Students must present Professor Letters (from ODS) a minimum of two weeks prior to the desired use of the accommodation.