SEMINAR: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN COUPLES AND FAMILY THERAPY
Hybrid Format

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Softas-Nall, Professor Counseling Psychology, Licensed Psychologist, AAMFT Clinical Member and Approved Supervisor, and Nationally Certified Counselor.

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PREREQUISITES: APCE 665, APCE majors only or by permission.

CREDIT HOURS: 3 semester hours.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Study of current issues and research in couples and family therapy.

REQUIRED READINGS FROM THE FOLLOWING VOLUMES-PROFESSOR WILL PROVIDE READINGS:

COURSE FORMAT:
This is a hybrid course format. Class will be face-to-face for Friday, May 20 (4-10), the morning of Saturday, May 21 (9-12), the afternoon of Saturday, June 4 (from 1-5), and all day Sunday, June 5 (9-4). The rest of the time will be an online format with different deadlines for assignments between the period of Sunday, May 22 through Saturday, June 4.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
1. To understand the major intervention strategies in couples and family therapy.
2. To understand related issues in couples and family therapy (i.e., ethical considerations, spouse abuse, divorce mediation, etc.)
3. Explore current literature and research to develop in-depth understanding of timely topics related to the practice of family and marital counseling.
4. Review the family life cycle (i.e., becoming a couple, becoming parents, transformation during adolescence).
5. Become familiar with evidence based interventions in family therapy and Specific models.
6. Incorporate gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, multiculturalism to the above objectives.
COURSE CONTENT:
1. Contemporary approaches and family interventions for eating disorders, alcohol use, ADHD, grief and loss, mental illness, etc.
2. Gender Issues (Women/Men and the Family Life Cycle)
3. Abuse/Domestic Violence
4. Legal and Ethical Issues AAMFT and IAMFC
5. Children and Divorce
6. Families and Major Illnesses (i.e., Families and AIDS, Cancer, etc.)
7. Extramarital Affairs
8. Aging, Families in Later Life
9. Gay and Lesbian Couples/Families
10. Multicultural Issues (i.e., The Latino Family Life Cycle, Migration, Families Living in Poverty)
11. Divorce Mediation, The Divorce Cycle
12. Becoming an adult, becoming a couple, becoming parents, etc.
13. Therapy process and outcome research/Evidence based interventions
14. Premarital Counseling or recent findings in couples therapy.
15. Licensing LMFT, and requirements
   List of all topics and readings attached at end of syllabus at the end of class.

This course was designed to meet the CACREP 2009 Standards for Marriage, Couples, and Family Counseling. The focus of this course is on major approaches, interventions, current issues, trends, and research in couples and family therapy. Other topics addressed in the course include the family life cycle, evidence-based interventions, and multicultural considerations for working with couples and families.
The course is also designed to cover family therapy methodology; family assessment; treatment and intervention methods; and an overview of major clinical theories of marital and family therapy.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL OUTCOMES: Upon successful completion of this course students will:

1. Know the roles and functions of marriage, couple, and family counselors in a variety of practice settings and in relation to other helping professionals (CACREP MCFC.A.3).
2. Know the professional organizations, preparation standards, and credentials relevant to the practice of marriage, couple, and family counseling (CACREP MCFC.A.4).
3. Understand family development and the life cycle, sociology of the family, family phenomenology, contemporary families, family wellness, families and culture, aging and family issues, family violence, and related family concerns (CACREP MCFC.A.6).
4. Understand current literature that outlines theories, approaches, strategies, and techniques shown to be effective in working with diverse family systems (CACREP MCFC.E.3).

5. Understand the effects of local, state, and national policies, programs, and services on diverse families (CACREP MCFC.E.5).

6. Know principles and models of assessment and case conceptualization from a systems perspective, including diagnostic interviews, mental diagnostic status examinations, symptom inventories, and psycho-educational and personality assessments (CACREP MCFC.G.1).

7. Understand how to critically evaluate research relevant to the practice of marriage, couple, and family counseling (CACREP MCFC.I.1).

8. Know models of program evaluation relevant for the practice of marriage, couple, and family counseling (CACREP MCFC.I.2).

9. Know evidence-based treatments and basic strategies for evaluating counseling outcomes in marriage, couple, and family counseling (CACREP MCFC.I.3).

**EVALUATION:** Letter grade based on the following:

1. **10%-Attendance and participation** is mandatory for the face-to-face portions of the class. Any unexcused absence will result in the loss of one letter grade. After one missed excused class session grade will drop by a letter grade. Points will be deducted for showing up late for class. Call or e mail instructor if there is an emergency. Lack of individual participation will affect your grade. Regular, active, meaningful and consistent participation is significant to this course. There will also be a discussion board for the online component. It is important that you participate on the discussion board.

2. **10% - 1 to 2-page outline of your presentation** in hard copy turned in to professor day of presentation. The outline needs to summarize the major points of the readings and questions and/or issues for class discussion. Make sure to include the references of your readings in APA style. Please e mail a draft of the outline of your presentation by May 27 by 5pm so that I can give you feedback. The final agreed upon outline of the presentation and references needs to be provided to the professor as a hard copy the day of the presentations. Power point presentation and references need to be e mailed to the professor by May 29 at 4pm. Evaluation form to be provided in class needs to be filled out beforehand and turned in to professor day of presentation.

3. **10%-Successful presentation** (Saturday & Sunday, June 4 & 5) during the second weekend of selected topic/s i.e., see course content, that is, a) readings are contemporary, preferably within last 5 years even though for classic work can be different, b) readings are from a systems perspective, c) readings are in couples and family therapy, d) presentation is clear, creative and time efficient, e) student makes eye contact with audience, reading is to
be avoided, f) short essay questions pertaining to the material to be distributed to class, e mail instructor a week in advance. Sometimes students have included an experiential exercise or a few minutes of a film to include as part of their presentation. Case studies on the topic and working in groups on the case highly recommended. Power point or overhead transparencies are required for a short overview of about 20 minutes-no more than 14 slides, however, discussion and evaluation of literature as a companion to practice is the major goal for the presentation. It is mandatory that you review and evaluate with class participation the literature on your topic. The day of your presentation student and professor will be co-leading the discussion. Depending on the number of students in the class, decisions will be made on the length of the presentations. A major goal of this class is to prepare students to evaluate literature and research and to prepare trainees to become consumers of literature and research in the practice of CFT. During the first Friday decisions on topics will be made. Be prepared to commit to a topic. You can also email me the topic of your choice before class via email and including in the subject “APCE 695 Denver”. Please use your UNC email account.

4. 10% - Each student making a presentation needs to turn in an electronic copy of their paper by Saturday at 1 on June 4th on the chosen topic with references (APA style, 6th ed). For MA students the page limit is min 10 pages max of 20 pages not including title page and references. For doctoral students the page limit is 25 not including title page and references. Paper needs to include an intro to the topic, an integration of at least 5 references, a section on implications for practice and a personal conclusion/closure statement. Paper needs to reflect an understanding of the topic in depth, and show an advanced level of integrating the literature. Paper ought to be double-spaced, 12 point font and 1" margins. Title page needs to include name, instructor’s name, class name and number, date and title. Accurate spelling, syntax and grammar expected. This is a formal paper, not a self-reflection one. If papers are late points will be subtracted. Grading will be based on thoroughness, significance, accuracy, relatedness to course content and expectations, adherence of paper requirements and style. Papers receiving an A will be exceptional. Turn in two copies of paper and also e mail your paper to me before the end of the second weekend.

5. 10% x 2 weekends=20% - Write two reflection papers one at the end of the first half of class and one at the end of the second half of class. Outline and deadlines will be provided in class.

6. 20% x 2 weekends = 40% - Approx. 5 Assignments for the online component based on streamed films from the Library or articles or book chapters
The following are recommended readings for class.


Softas-Nall, B., Baldo, T., and Jackson, S. (1997). Facilitating the transition from individual sessions to systemic family sessions: Issues of supervision and

**GRADING SCALE:**

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<td>D-</td>
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**ACADEMIC CONDUCT:**
Cheating on examinations, submitting work of other students as your own, or plagiarism in any form will result in penalties ranging from an “F” on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Please review UNC policy on plagiarism.

Papers from other classes are not to be used for this class, only original work will be accepted.

**PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT:**
Students are expected to adhere to the appropriate code of ethics for their particular program. Any behavior which is deemed unethical will be grounds for dismissal from the program.

**DISABILITY ACCESS CENTER:** Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact the Disability Access Center at 970-351-2289 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Print this syllabus and bring to class the first day.

Save syllabi for submission to licensure boards.
Schedule of meetings

1st weekend

Friday 4-10 face-to-face
Introduction and review of requirements
Topic presentation

Saturday
9-12 face-to-face Instructor presents
The rest of the day online

Sunday
Online

2nd weekend

Friday
Online

Saturday
9-12 Online
1-5 Presentations face-to-face

Sunday
Presentations and reflection face-to-face
Skills to develop in conducting literature searches: to be covered in class
Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Couples and Family Therapy
Dr. Softas-Nall

- **Skills to develop**: use of computers to access databases; read, understand and evaluate research; synthesize research with one’s counseling practice; foster curiosity and ‘fun’ for stimulating, interesting findings; and supplement services to clients by the use of research.

- **Short cuts**: electronic journal articles-supplement with *The Family Journal: Counseling and Psychotherapy for Couples and Families*, and *the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*; use of metanalyses or reviews of literature; read abstracts-may not include important details; peer-reviewed and prestigious journals may be of higher quality.

- **Conducting searches**:

  **Too few articles**: brainstorm alternative keywords, i.e. bicultural, multicultural, biracial couples, and effective couples’ therapy.
  **Too many articles**: conduct more selective searches, i.e. anorectic female adolescents, family therapy, and evidence based interventions.

**Criteria**: Family therapy journal, reputation of journal, contemporary (sometimes older, “classic” types of work accepted), availability either through the internet, UNC library or its electronic journals, my personal journals include *The Family Journal: Counseling and Psychotherapy for Couples and Families*, and *the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*.

Psychological research PsychINFO ([http://www.apa.org/psycinfo](http://www.apa.org/psycinfo))
Steps to do a search ([http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training/searchsteps.html](http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training/searchsteps.html))
Advanced tips ([http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training/tips.html](http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training/tips.html))

Free database-The Campbell Collaboration-social work, education, and criminal justice ([http://www.campbellcollaboration.org](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org))

Google Scholar ([http://www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com)) journal articles on the internet

Evidence Based Mental Health ([http://ebmh.bmjjournals.com](http://ebmh.bmjjournals.com))


Internet resources:
Centre for Evidence Based Mental Health website: ([http://cebmh.warne.ox.ac.uk/cebmh/education/appraisal/index.html](http://cebmh.warne.ox.ac.uk/cebmh/education/appraisal/index.html))
For experimental studies CONSORT (http://www.consort-statement.org/revisedstatement.htm)
First search for metanalyses or literature reviews. If not available, check for trends or patterns, careful not to overemphasize results of any one study.

- **Application:**
What are the implications for counseling? Is information useful clinically? How can information be applied to particular case? How do findings apply to the real world? If the setting is different do findings still apply?
More tentative if research does not address specific disorder. Does it address comorbid disorders?
Does research apply to family/clients one is working with or does it differ in a significant way? Does it address families from diverse ethnic or racial backgrounds? Is gender an issue?
Whether and how treatment needs to be adapted to fit the clients/family, especially to become more culturally friendly.
Requesting from the authors useful instruments and manuals included in the study and not published.


**INTEGRATING RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE IN MFT**

- **Long term benefits**
Demonstrate effective practice to insurance providers and insurance panels by being able to present their clinical skills and include data demonstrating the effectiveness of those skills. Be prepared to advocate for their clients with data, treatment plans, client progress, and if necessary additional therapy sessions. In other words, increase evaluation of one’s own practice. Important to respond to or at least know how to look for an answer to questions such as “If the family asked you how you know your model may be helpful with their presenting concern, what would you say?” (Hodgson et al, 2005).
  - Develop skills to question the counseling process; discuss advantages and disadvantages of empirically supported treatments (EST); and emphasize change.
  - Challenges include overemphasizing empirically based treatments at the expense of non evidence based therapy theory driven models; emphasis on common factors may diminish emphasis on specific models.
  - Goals: Familiarize with EST models; common factors vs. therapy models debate; learn how research and clinical skills complement each other and become educated consumers of research and how to integrate it into practice and make it part of one’s clinical philosophy.