Topics in HDPS #351
MARRIAGE 101:
Building Loving and Lasting Relationships
Spring Quarter 2005

Instructors: Arthur Nielsen, MD, Course Coordinator, a-nielsen@northwestern.edu
William Pinsof, PhD w-pinsof@northwestern.edu
Cheryl Rampage, PhD, c-rampage@northwestern.edu
Alexandra Solomon, PhD, alexandrahs@comcast.net
Shayna Goldstein, MSMFT, s-goldstein2@northwestern.edu

Class times: Wednesdays 2:00-4:30 P.M.

Location: The Family Institute at Northwestern, 618 Library Place

Purpose: To familiarize students with the intricacies and problems of close, committed, interpersonal relationships, especially marriage. This course will increase each students’ formal knowledge about marriage and intimate relationships, while also improving their chances for success in such relationships. After taking the course, students should be better prepared to choose compatible partners, to face inevitable relationship challenges, and to experience greater marital/relationship satisfaction.

Format: Marriage 101 combines traditional academic methods (lectures, class discussions, readings) with experiential and self-discovery assignments coordinated with the subject matter. Each week’s experience consists of a lecture and class discussion, assigned readings, and an elaboration of the week’s topic through experiential tasks and discussion in small groups. Each week students will also respond to relevant self-inquiry questions in a private, ungraded journal. Equivalent to “labs” in other courses, students do three outside class experiential assignments and interview two real couples-- a married couple from the community and their own parents. These assignments are explained in more detail below.

Beginning with the second week, class time will be divided into the following segments:
2:00-2:15 quiz
2:15-3:15 lecture
3:15-3:30 break
3:30-4:30 group activities

Office hours: Professor Nielsen will be available each week before class from 1:30 to 2 PM, by appointment with Lisa Lackey (847-733-4300 x 206 or l-lackey@northwestern.edu). Other section leaders are also available by appointment via e-mail.
Grading: Written Assignments: Four written assignments will be required in addition to the quizzes. The written assignments are explained at the end of this syllabus.

Overall grades will be assigned on the following basis:
- Mentor couple interview report: 25%
- Parent interview report: 25%
- Research paper: 30%
- Self-Inquiry Journal (pass-fail): 5%
- Class participation: 15%

Readings:
There are extensive assignments from each of the following books, which will be available at the bookstore. You may want to share the expense and purchase these texts with your student partner.

The remainder of the readings are articles that are included in a packet which can be purchased from Lisa Lackey at the Family Institute (Room 205).


**SYLLABUS**

**Jan 7**

Introduction to Marriage 101, and “Everything you always wanted to know about marriage and marital happiness,” a Round-Table Question and Answer Session with Profs. Nielsen, Pinsof and Rampage.

Readings on current state of marriage: What science tells us (so far).

1. Wallerstein & Blakeslee:
   - Chapter 1: Happy Marriages: Do They Exist? pp. 3-18,
   - Chapter 2: Patterns in Marriage, pp. 19-29.


**Jan 14**  
**Getting to know yourself through intimate relationships:**  
**Capacities and Sensitivities.**  
Goldbart & Wallin:  
Introduction: The Inner Map, The Six Capacities and the Role of Defenses in Love, pp. 1-26,  
Chap. 2: The Capacity for Merging, pp. 66-115,  
Chap. 6: The Capacity for Self-Transcendence, pp. 239-265,  
Conclusion: Passionate Love as a Journey of Transformation, pp. 266-275.

**Jan 21**  
**Intimacy, friendship, and romantic love.**  

**OPTIONAL**  

**Jan 28**  
**Conscious and unconscious aspects of dating and partner selection.**  
**Difficulties of breaking up.**  
Pines, pp. 1-210 [Need to make this more selective].

**Feb 4**  
**Sexuality in long-term, committed relationships.**  
2. Goldbart & Wallin: Chap. 1: The Capacity for Erotic Involvement. pp. 27-65; also review “Self-Transcendence and Erotic Involvement”, pp. 244-245 which you read previously.

**Feb 11**

**Cohabitation and Commitment**

**Same-sex relationships**


**Feb 18**

**Conflict Part I: The art of fighting fair in marriage.**

2. Christensen & Jacobson
3. Markman et al.: 
   a. Chapter 2: Destructive Patterns: Signs of Danger Ahead, pp. 43-66,
   b. Chapter 3: Changing Roles, Changing Rules: Men and Women in Conflict, pp. 67-88,

**Feb 25**

**Conflict Part II: Problem solving and acceptance.**

1. Christensen & Jacobson 
   Part II: From Argument to Acceptance, pp. 123-190,

**March 3**

**Unanticipated challenges of marriage: Addiction, Infidelity, & Violence**


March 10

**Ordinary challenges of early marriage:**

Establishing rules, roles and routines; Incorporating children; Managing “I-ness” and “we-ness.”

**Review of couple interviews.**

Wrapping up.


4. Wallerstein & Blakeslee,
   a. Chap. 4: The First Task: Separating from Family of Origin, pp. 51-59,
   b. Chap. 6: The Third Task: Becoming Parents, pp. 70-82.

**Additional References (useful for term papers)**


Birtchnell, J. (1986). The imperfect attainment of intimacy: A key concept in marital therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy,* 8, 153-172. Also the critique and commentary which follow this article: Carpenter, J: And so they lived happily ever after: Intimacy and the idealization of marriage. A comment on Birtchnell. pp. 173-177.


THE FIVE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Graded written assignments are a term paper and two interview reports. The “Self-Inquiry Journal” is pass/fail, confidential, and should be turned in on the last day of class. A before and after “course evaluation packet” is optional—optional because the University understandably prohibits making course research count towards student grades. However, please fill these out, since they really help us know how we are doing and will help other students in future. Due dates for each assignment are listed and are spaced out to help you pace your work and to allow us time to give your papers careful reading. Extensions on these assignments will be granted only for circumstances outside the student’s control. Late papers will be penalized 5 points (5%) for each day they are late. The first couple interview will be done with your partner on a volunteer, “mentor couple” who will be assigned to you. This can be written up either singly or jointly. The second couple interview will be with your own parents. We will give your parents a heads up on this interview by writing them an explanatory letter. To allow us to do this, please e-mail their names and address(es) to our course secretary, Lisa Lackey (l-lackey@northwestern.edu). Guidelines and suggestions for conducting the parental and mentor couple interviews are posted on our Blackboard site. Guidelines for writing your reports of the interviews are given next and should be followed carefully. In past years, the quality of student writing has varied tremendously. Since an important part of a college education is learning to express ideas clearly, and since we wish to encourage efforts in this direction, some of your grade will depend on writing proficiency. Students at all levels of writing skill may want to make use of Northwestern’s writing resources at: http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/links.html Students in this course are expected to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be sent as email attachments as well as delivered in printed form. Your written work may be electronically tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern, visit: http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/. If you need a copy of the brochure visit the SESP Student Affairs Office.

1. MENTOR COUPLE INTERVIEW.
Write a summary description and analysis of the interview. Ideally, these will be somewhat intertwined in your report.
Do not use the couples’ real names.
Make sure that you include all of the following (see also the separate recommendations about this interview and write-up on the class Blackboard site):

- A brief description of the process of arranging the interview, the couple’s appearance, the physical setting in which the interview took place (including who sat where), and thoughts about what might be inferred from these observations.
- A detailed summary of the couple’s answers to your questions about their relationship and marriage;
- A description of the process of the interview--their level of comfort, their willingness to be candid about various topics, observations about their interactional style, and your interpretations of this process;
- Conclusions about the couple’s relationship strengths and weaknesses (if any) being systematic about the areas you evaluate by covering dimensions stressed in the course;
- A description of what it felt like to be in this interview and what this might say about the couple, and about yourself;
- Comments on what the interview added to your knowledge concerning marriage and issues specific to yourself. **If you write up your interview as a team, you should write this section separately.**

Your report should be five to ten pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12 point font).

**Due date: February 4.**

2. PARENT INTERVIEW.

Write a summary and analysis of the interview(s) with your parents, following the format described above for the mentor couple interview.

As with the mentor couple write-up, refer to the additional guidelines for parent interviews on Blackboard.

In addition to the topics covered for the mentor couple interview, include also:

- Your impressions on how their marriage(s) may influence you and your marriage;
- Any awareness you have of intergenerational marital patterns in your family
- Thoughts on how you plan to attempt to break any problematic marital patterns;
- Describe the difference for you in doing the interviews with the mentor couple and with your parents. Were there any interesting contrasts or similarities in the marriages you examined?

Your report should be five to ten pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12 point font).

**Due date: February 18**

**Grades for both interview reports will be based on the following criteria:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completeness of topics covered:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of the description of the couple and the interview:</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall insightfulness and psychological depth:</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description of personal learning (Don’t forget this!):</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing quality</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
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3. RESEARCH TERM PAPER.
You have two choices for this assignment:
1. Research and discuss a topic about marriage that holds a particular interest for you, say as a potential challenge to your own marital happiness.
2. Discuss and analyze a marriage, fictional or real, from film, biography, or fiction. Your in depth discussion of this marriage must include references to concepts we have studied, and appropriate references from class readings.
Examples of possible couples to analyze and of topics to research are provided on Blackboard.
Before you get into things too deeply, submit a “Research Term Paper Proposal” to your section leader. This proposal should be about half a page long and include your basic plan, central concern, and at least four references. Be sure to have your section leader sign off on the proposal before proceeding.
If you choose a traditional research paper, research your topic looking both for empirical studies and clinical/theoretical sources that address your topic or couple. You may also include illustrative material from film, literature or your own life if it helps illustrate the topic and your interests.
N.B.: Which ever choice you make, in addition to your conclusions/analysis, be sure to discuss the personal relevance of the issues you choose to focus on, and any pragmatic steps you would take to manage this issue if it surfaces in your future.
Your paper should be approximately eight to ten pages long, conform to APA format requirements, and include at least ten references, at least four of which must be empirical.
You may choose to use web-based sources, but be careful, as much of what is published on the web is garbage.
Again use double spacing and 12 point fonts.
Due dates: Proposal, no later than February 25; Completed paper, March 10.

Grades for the term paper will be based on the following criteria:
Convincing argument: 30%
Overall insightfulness and psychological depth: 20%
Quality of proposed practical steps to manage issue in your own life 20%
(Do not forget a section on this topic!)
Appropriate use of relevant secondary sources 20%
Writing quality: 10%

4. SELF-INQUIRY JOURNAL. All students in the course are required to keep a journal for recording responses to self-inquiry questions that will be distributed in class. Students will submit these journals to their small group leader at the conclusion of the course. The journals will be scanned for completeness, but not read, and will be assigned points on that basis. The journal must be typed.
Due date (via e-mail to your section leader): March 10.

5. COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND VIGNETTES. These materials help us evaluate and modify the Marriage 101 course. Your responses
will not be graded, and will be used only for aggregate research (i.e. answers become anonymous.) The pre- and post-course materials are available on Blackboard. Beyond helping us assess our teaching, these materials should help you assess your own learning. The pre-course evaluation set is due before the second week of the course.

**Due dates (via e-mail to Prof. Nielsen): January 14 (first set) and March 17 (second set).**

**The Three Outside Class Exercises**
These are fun and ungraded. They are designed to give you experiences relevant to intimate relationships/marriage. They are described in detail in your Self-Inquiry Journal, at the times when you should do them—just before the class when you will discuss them in your small groups. After you’ve done them, write your experiences briefly (one or two paragraphs max) in your journal.

Exercise #1: Interview a friend about what you are like in relationships and with them.

Exercise #2: “24 Hours”: Track a friend for 24 hours, thinking of where they are, what they are feeling, and how they are doing. Try to make contact several times during the day, including at the end, when you should ask how their day went. Don’t tell them what you are doing.

Exercise #3: Observe a family in a public place.