Course Objectives
This course will focus on introductory exposure to theory, research and clinical application of couple systems therapy. Focus will include the development of skills in the clinical practice of couple therapy from a systemic perspective. By the end of the course, students will have accomplished the following learning objectives:

1. Introduction to a spectrum of theoretical and clinical approaches to systemic couple therapy.

2. Examine and critically evaluate the theory and practice of systemic couple therapy in light of current research findings regarding couple interactions and treatment efficacy.

3. Acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of your own unique relational experience and how this impacts your work with couples.

4. Enhance your sensitivity to issues of gender, sexuality and cultural diversity while working with couples.

5. Review historical and current trends in the field of couple therapy.

6. Focus on special issues involving couples in therapy, such as child-rearing, sexuality, domestic violence, infidelity, substance abuse and depression that will aid in assessment and intervention.

7. Increase your understanding of assessment and treatment issues for couples within the developmental context of life cycle stages.

Marriage & Family Therapy Clinical Core Competencies
In December 2004, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy developed MFT core competencies that represent the minimum demonstrated competence level for a licensed marriage and family therapist. MFT core competencies specifically addressed in this course include:
**Domain 1: Admission to Treatment**

1.1.2 Understand theories and techniques of couple psychotherapy

1.1.4 Understand the risks and benefits of marital/couple psychotherapy

1.3.2 Determine who should attend therapy and in what configuration

**Domain 2: Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis**

2.1.1 Understand principles of couple processes

2.1.4 Comprehend marital and couple assessment instruments appropriate to presenting problem, practice setting, and cultural context

2.1.5 Understand the current models for assessment and diagnosis of relational functioning

2.2.1 Assess each client’s engagement in the change process

2.3.1 Diagnose and assess client behavioral and relational health problems systemically and relationally

2.3.3 Apply effective and systemic interviewing techniques and strategies

2.3.8 Identify clients’ strengths, resilience, and resources

**Domain 4: Therapeutic Interventions**

4.5.3 Articulate rationales for interventions related to treatment goals and plan, assessment information, and systemic understanding of clients’ context and dynamics

**Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to conceptualize, assess, and demonstrate competency in systemic approaches for clinical practice in keeping with current best practice in Marriage and Family Therapy

2. Students will be able to critically reflect upon personal and professional development of self in a multicultural context

3. Students will be able to critically reflect upon personal and professional development of self from theological/spiritual perspectives

4. Students will complete course requirements for graduation, graduate within the required time frame, and pass the MFT licensure exam
Course Requirements

**Required Texts**


**Recommended Text:**


**Description of Assignments**

**Course Reading Worksheets:** 2 points each week for total of 20 points

Students will complete a reading worksheet on each assigned reading for class that week for a total of 10 classes (there are 14 classes in the course). The format involves listing chapter citation, and then listing 3 ideas from this reading that caught your attention and a brief explanation of why (so for example, if there are 4 required readings for a particular class, you cite each reading & then list 3 points under each along with a brief explanation of why this caught your attention…which in this example would then include 12 bullet points in total)

* (Late reading worksheets will receive credit up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in more than 2 weeks late.)
Class Attendance and Participation 15 points
Students can earn up to 15 points based on regular class attendance and participation in class discussion, experiential exercises and role plays. Since much of the learning for this course takes place through experiential practice, it is essential that you consistently attend class and fully participate each week during course sessions. An additional note regarding class attendance is warranted:

In order to realistically meet course objectives, class attendance is required. Seminary policy is very specific regarding expectations for class attendance. According to Seminary policy, students are required to notify the course instructor in advance of any absences. No student may receive credit for a course if they miss more than ¼ of the class sessions. (that means that if you miss more than three classes, you will automatically fail this course) For every absence exceeding one, five points will be subtracted from your final grade. Therefore, if you miss two classes this semester, 5 points will automatically be deducted from your final grade, and if you miss three classes, 10 points will be deducted from your final grade (e.g., if you had 97 points total but missed 2 classes, you will now have 92 points...which is the difference between an A and an A-!...and if you missed 3 classes, you will now have 87 points which is the difference between an A and a B+!)

Relational Timeline: (Part of the Class Participation Grade)
Identify significant relational events throughout the course of your life, beginning with birth through the present (e.g., parental separations, divorce, beginning of new relationships, loss of significant relationships through break-ups or death). Draw a timeline on a piece of paper or poster board. Locate each event in a corresponding position on the timeline. Place a dot above the line to the degree that you consider the event/experience primarily positive, and below the timeline to the corresponding negative valence. Connect the dots using a different color ink from the timeline sketch. This assignment is the first step in completing the relational reaction paper. Its purpose is to help you begin to reflect on your own life from a relational viewpoint. Timelines will be returned with your relational awareness papers (so make a copy for your use in that subsequent assignment). (assignment due at the start of Session #3: 1/31/12) (Late assignments will receive half-credit up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in more than 2 weeks late.)

Relational Awareness Paper 10 points
As therapists training in a mental health profession, we have an ethical and moral obligation to stay in touch with our own processes (particularly when entering into unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable areas). During this course, you are asked to write a reaction paper focusing on your own relational history and ways in which this may impact your work with couples. Use your relational timeline to reflect on significant relational events throughout the course of your life. Weeks & Treat (2001) identify a series of relational questions that are helpful to address when considering the impact of family-of-origin influences on intimate relationships in adulthood. These questions can also help the therapist in increasing awareness of ways in which personal experiences can impact clinical work with couples. The more conscious therapists are regarding their own processes, the less likely it is that “self-of-the-therapist” issues will negatively affect clinical sessions. Please address the following questions in writing your reaction paper:
What were the roles you observed in your parents’ (or primary caretakers’) relationship?
What did they appear to expect from each other?
What did you learn about being a husband? What did you learn about being a wife?
How much closeness/distance did you see in their marriage/relationship?
How did they handle their anger and conflict?
How did they show intimacy and affection?
How did they order their priorities among self, marriage, children, and work?
What emotions were encouraged, allowed, not allowed, denied, or considered “bad”?
Did your family members experience any traumas such as affairs, incest, unresolved grief, or psychological or medical problems?
What did you learn about intimacy from your parents and primary role-models?

In what ways have these family-of-origin issues impacted your adult relationships?
In reflecting on these questions, what do you suspect may be challenges for you in working with couples? What may be potential “blind spots” for you? (ask your partner, close friends or family members to help you identify potential difficulties/blind spots)
What strengths do you bring to working with couples?

Papers are due by the beginning of the specified class meeting. In order to earn full points for this assignment, all parts of the questions must be answered in full. You may also use this format to provide class feedback, discuss ways you are integrating course material into your professional work or personal life, or anything else you feel is important that you would like to share. The content of your reaction papers will only be viewed by the instructor (unless your permission is given for any additional use), and returned to you with comments, questions, feedback & musings. Recommended page length: 5-6 double-spaced, typed pages.

(Assignment due at the start of Session #5: 2/14/12)

Grading Rubric:

☐ Does this paper demonstrate an ability to be self-reflective?
☐ Does the paper integrate clinical practice and person/profession of the therapist?

(Late papers will receive half-credit up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in more than 2 weeks late.)

Group Presentations: 15 points
You will have one session (45 minutes total) in which to make a group presentation on one of the course topical areas (e.g., domestic violence, remarriage and the blended family, assessing and treating substance abuse in couples therapy). You will be paired with other class members who are also interested in your first or second choice of special topics. Your group will first need to determine a specific presentation format for that topic (corresponding chapter from Gurman (2008) Clinical Handbook to get ideas), then assign tasks within the group such as research, power point presentation creation, leading discussion, etc.

The ideal presentation will include the following: 1) A reading chosen at least one week in advance of 20 pages or less that will provide background information for your chosen topic, 2) a bibliography with at least 12 entries including books, articles and not more than 3 informative web sites relevant for your topic, 3) a power point presentation outlining key elements of your
topic, 4) questions for class discussion that will be moderated by the presenters. Feel free to
discuss possible topics with the instructor as needed.

At the end of your presentation time everyone - including the presenters - will be asked to
fill out brief evaluations. Class responses will be considered in assigning presentation grades

The “Healthy Couple” Interview: 10 points
This assignment is designed to give you experience interviewing a couple in a non-threatening,
non-crisis, and non-clinical situation. You will not be conducting therapy with this couple, and
it will be your responsibility to clearly identify your role to the couple as that of an interested
“interviewer” wanting to learn about their experience of being a couple and their “culture” (e.g.,
relational rules, roles, interactional dynamics). You can choose friends, acquaintances or
classmates to participate in this interview. (Be sure to secure written informed consent from the
couple you interview, ensuring that they understand the purpose and use of interview
material).

You are asked to complete a 2-3 page, double-spaced report summarizing your experience of
meeting with the couple. The report should include the following:

- a brief description of the couple
- a brief overview of the interview
- a brief summary of the strengths of the couple
- any interesting impressions
- include discussion of relevant course and class material to include proper citation
  formatting as it relates (or does not relate) to your interview experience.

Grading Rubric:

☐ Does the paper reflect an ability to integrate course material?
☐ Does this paper demonstrate an ability to be self-reflective?
☐ Does the paper integrate clinical practice and person/profession of the
  therapist?

Assignment due at the start of Session #7: 3/6/12 (Late assignments will receive half-credit
up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in
more than 2 weeks late.)

Clinical Case Conceptualization Assignment: 15 points
In keeping with efforts to measure student learning outcomes as listed in the beginning of this
syllabus, you are asked to complete a “Case Conceptualization” form that can be electronically
downloaded from the Inside CTS website. A sample case conceptualization form is provided as
an example write-up. Practicum students will select a couple case (past or present) to present
clinically from one of the therapeutic models discussed in this course. Pre-practicum students
will select a couple from a film such as “Lars and the Real Girl,” “On Golden Pond,” “Soul
Food,” “Tortilla Soup,” or the “Joy Luck Club”.

In order to mark clinical training progress within your course of study, you will be scored
according to the corresponding grading rubric developed by Diane Gehart. A copy of this
assignment and grading rubric will be included in your program portfolio as a way in which we
are attempting to track clinical training outcome measures. These scores, however, will not
count towards your grade for this assignment in class. Instead, you can earn up to a possible 20 points for this assignment based on the following grading rubric:

**GRADING RUBRIC:**

- Does the case conceptualization illustrate mastery of the therapeutic model selected for case presentation?
- Does the case conceptualization illustrate a basic grasp of systemic concepts as applied to clinical practice as commensurate with clinical developmental level of the student?

**Assignment due at the start of Session #12: 4/17/12** (Late assignments will receive half-credit up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in more than 2 weeks late.)

**Clinical Treatment Plan Assignment:**

In keeping with efforts to measure student learning outcomes as listed in the beginning of this syllabus, you are asked to complete a “Clinical Treatment Plan” form that can be electronically downloaded from the Inside CTS website. A sample clinical treatment plan is provided as an example write-up. Students will refer to the same couple they utilized in the clinical case conceptualization assignment. You are encouraged to utilize Gehart’s theory-based treatment planning book listed in the recommended reading section of this syllabus as an additional resource in completing this assignment. In order to mark clinical training progress within your course of study, you will be scored according to the corresponding grading rubric developed by Diane Gehart. A copy of this assignment and grading rubric will be included in your program portfolio as a way in which we are attempting to track clinical training outcome measures. These scores, however, will not count towards your grade for this assignment in class. Instead, you can earn up to a possible 20 points for this assignment based on the following grading rubric:

**GRADING RUBRIC:**

- Does the clinical treatment plan illustrate mastery of the therapeutic model selected for case presentation?
- Does the clinical treatment plan illustrate a basic grasp of systemic concepts as applied to clinical practice as commensurate with clinical developmental level of the student?

**Assignment due at the start of Session #13: 4/24/12** (Late assignments will receive half-credit up to 2 classes beyond the due date, and then no credit will be given for an assignment turned in more than 2 weeks late.)

**Extra Credit Assignment Selection:**

Choose from one of the following options:

1. **Observation of Couples Therapy**

   Since several members of class are currently seeing clients in practicum, discuss with one of them the opportunity to observe a session of couples therapy with that practicum student. You will receive points for either observing or being observed. (If
you are not a counseling degree program student and would like an opportunity to observe a couple therapy session, discuss this with course instructor so other arrangements can possibly be made).

If you are being observed, write a 3-page, double-spaced summary of the theoretical approach(s) and interventions used. If you are the observer, write a 3-page, double-spaced summary of what you observed (including theoretical approach(s) and techniques you observed). Turn in an additional copy that will be shared with your partner in this assignment. (assignment due at the start of Session #14: 5/1/12) (Extra credit turned in after this date will not receive any credit.)

2. RELATE Assessment: 5 points
A well-known and widely used premarital inventory is now available on-line (www.relate.byu.edu). For this assignment, you are asked to complete the RELATE questionnaire online with your partner (versions for individuals without current partners are also available) and review the computer-generated couple profile (there is a nominal fee for this service). Write a brief 2-3 page double-spaced reaction paper describing your experience of completing the inventory online, insights you gained through this exercise, and your assessment of the value of this service for couples with whom you might be working. (assignment due at the start of Session #11: 4/10/12) (Extra credit turned in after this date will not receive any credit.)

3. Attend IAMFT Spring Conference featuring Ken Hardy 5 points
Receive course credit for attending the Indiana Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (IAMFT) annual spring conference featuring guest speaker, Ken Hardy. Briefly share your experience of the conference verbally with class members during the following course session. (IAMFT Spring Conference takes place Friday, 3/16/12 in Indianapolis Assignment due Class #9, 3/20/12)

Grading and Attendance
Grades will be determined by the number of points accumulated out of a total of 100 possible points.

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**Course Schedule**

17 January *(Session 1):* Course Orientation, Contextual Issues & Challenges
Facing Today’s Couples, Research in Couples Therapy: What Really Works?

24 January *(Session 2):* Common Factors Research, Readiness for Change
Readings:

Chapter 6: Getting clients fired up for a change: matching therapist behavior with client motivation (pp. 69-86) (On Reserve)

31 January *(Session 3):* Emotional Intelligence and Couples Therapy

**Relational Timeline due**
Readings:
  - Introduction: New answers to old questions (pp. 1-16)
  - Ch. 1: Affective neuroscience & the emotional revolution (pp. 17-40)
  - Ch. 2: Wired for love (pp. 41-66)
  - Ch. 3: The prerequisites for relationship success (pp. 67-90)
  - Ch. 4: The overview of PET-C (pp. 91-106)
  - Ch. 5: PET-C assessment (pp. 91-106)

7 February *(Session 4):* Common Mistakes in Couples Therapy
Readings:
  - Introduction: Mistakes?! What Mistakes? (pp. 1-21)
  - Chapter 1: The “Battle for Structure” (pp. 22-50)
  - Chapter 2: Confidentiality Traps (pp. 51-69)
  - Chapter 3: Alliances and Coalitions (pp. 70-85)
  - Chapter 7: Overlooking Process Considerations (126-144)
  - Chapter 8: The Pitfalls of Anger and Conflict (pp. 145-166)
14 February  (Session 5):  Working with “Couples on the Brink,”
                Special Topic:  Couples and Divorce

Relational Awareness Paper due

Group #1 Special Topic Presentation:  Couples and Divorce

Readings:
      Chapter 11:  Failing to Foster Commitment  (pp. 196-217)
      Chapter 12:  Overlooking or Inadvertently Imposing Spirituality (pp. 218-243)

21 February  (Session 6):  Gottman Method Couple Therapy Model
                      Special Topic:  Infidelity

Group #2 Special Topic Presentation:  Infidelity

Readings:

28 February  No Class!   (Reading Week)

6 March  (Session 7):  Solution-focused Couples Therapy
                      Special Topic:  Substance Abuse and Couples

Healthy Couple Interview due
Group #3 Special Topic Presentation: Substance Abuse & Couple Therapy

Readings:


13 March (Session 8): Emotionally Focused Therapy

Readings:


20 March (Session 9): Narrative Couples Therapy

Collaborative Couple Therapy

Extra Credit: IAMFT Conference Report due

Readings:


27 March (Session 10): IMAGO

Readings:


3 April No Class!!! (Easter Recess)

10 April (Session 11): Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy
Special Topic: Intimate Partner Violence

*Extra Credit: RELATE Assessment due*

**Group #4 Special Topic Presentation: Intimate Partner Violence**

**Readings:**


17 April (Session 12): Psychometric Support and Resources for the Couple Therapist
Special Topic: Remarriage and Blending Families

**Clinical Case Conceptualization due**

**Group #5 Special Topic Presentation: Remarriage & Blending Families**

**Readings:**

24 April (Session 13): Pre-marital Intervention & Couple Enrichment
Special Topic: Treating Same-Sex Couples

**Clinical Treatment Plan due**
Group #6 Special Topic Presentation: Treating Same Sex Couples

Readings:


1 May (Session 14): Feedback & Clinical Integration

Extra Credit: Couples Therapy Observation due

Class meets as no final exam is given in this course