**PSYC 644: Psychology of Intimate Relationships**

**Spring 2019**

**Instructor:** Melissa Stiksma **Office Hours:** by appointment

**Class Schedule:** online **Location:** Blackboard

**Email:** mstiksma@gmu.edu

**Course Description**

This course is an advanced survey of theories and research related to intimate relationships, including romantic relations and those among family members and friends in diverse cultural and relationship contexts. **This class places an emphasis on how the social context shapes intimate relationships.** We will branch out into special topics beyond the purview of the assigned textbook.

This course aims to engage you both academically and personally. We will explore what the research tells us about relationships but will also actively apply what we learn by creating opportunities to do so inside and outside of the classroom. Thus, classes will includes some reflecive discussion. We may also involve experiential learning through homework that involves practice within and reflections upon our own relationships.

**Class Organization**

* Weekly online group participation (based on readings)
* Reflection assignments
* Mid-term exam
* Final exam

**Course Objectives**

Our goals in this class are to:

* Develop an understanding of a range of topics related to the psychology of romantic relationships, family relationships, and close friendships using empirical research along with underlying theories.
* Apply some of the course content to our own lives to deepen our understanding of the material, potentially improve our own relationships, and enhance our capacity for reflective thinking.
* Acknowledge and examine diverse versions of the human experience of intimacy in terms of culture, gender, sexual orientation, and family/ relationship structure.

**Required Textbook / Readings**

Miller, Rowland. Intimate Relationships. 8th Edition - McGraw-Hill Education (November 16, 2017) ISBN-10: 1259870510.

*\*\*You may also purchase the 6th or 7th edition of this textbook (the more recent the better), but understand that there may be some content covered in class that is not reflected in that book.\*\**

**Course Requirements**

**Here is how I imagine you ideally handle this class:**

Monday- Tuesday:

* Read the assigned chapter and readings, go through the slides

Wednesday:

* Make your original post to the group thread and pose any questions you may have
* Complete any reflection journal due for that week

Thursday/Friday:

* Read your groups’ posts and make your responding comment to your group

**Class Participation (100 points).** To overcome the online nature of this socially-oriented course, I have set up small groups within the course so that you all can discuss some of the main concepts with one another. You will have about 5 people in your group. There will be NO GROUP PROJECT. You simply will be communicating with one another specifically rather than as one large group. I will be monitoring these class discussions and periodically moderating some of the discussion – asking questions to encourage further thinking. It’s in your best interest to remain engaged in these conversations.

* 5 points for posting original thread (See course content for example) **by Wednesday of each week**
* 2 points for engaging in another group member’s post **by Friday of each week**

Each week you will be asked to both respond to a prompt I provide you with on Monday of each week and bring up an idea/comment/thought of your own and introduce it to your group.

I have created the first thread for you in each of your groups, for each following week I will email out your prompt on the Monday and whomever posts first can create the thread for each group.

*In course content, please find an example of what I am expecting for your original online posts.*

**Reflection assignments (50 points total, 25 each).** These writing assignments will ask for more in-depth exploration of both the readings and lean on some of your experiences in intimate relationships. You will receive the writing prompt at least a week before the due dates and will be 2 pages (double-spaced) in length.

**Midterm exam (60 points of multiple choice, 15 points of short answer).** Multiple choice will be from your book, short answer will be from the additional readings.

**Final exam (non-cumulative, 60 points multiple choice, 15 points of short answer).** Multiple choice from book, short answer from additional readings.

Please reach out to me in advance if you are having trouble meeting the course requirements or if unforeseen circumstances arise that impact your ability to participate in class.

**Policies**

**Late work policy:** Late assignments will be marked down by 15% each day and will not be accepted after **three days.** These terms are negotiable only in the case of documented emergencies and, if possible, with **advance notice.** Work with me, the more I know, the more I can help you.

**Academic integrity/Honor Code:** The Honor Code of George Mason University deals specifically with cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

**Accommodations:** If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance, please 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; http://ds.gmu.edu) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) discuss your needs with me.

**Self-Disclosures:** The course objectives aim to engage you on multiple levels, building emotional as well as intellectual intelligence. At times, this class may be made especially rewarding by sharing information from your own close relationship histories and experience through class activities, reflection journals, and some other projects. Some assignments in the course may be emotionally demanding even when they simply require introspection and no self-disclosure. This class will be most valuable if you stay within the boundaries of what feels right for you. With that in mind, know that you will not be pressured to share personal information beyond your comfort zone. When assignments allow/encourage a personal exploration, there will also be alternatives that allow the same requirements to be filled in a more academic way. Please let me know if you feel this is a better option for you.

If course content or discussion brings up emotional discomfort for you, I encourage you to prioritize your self-care. If you become upset in response to assignments, discuss this with me. **Let me know if you need help.** If you need to debrief an assignment, make some adjustments in it, or would like my help in recommending resources please let me know. Additionally, as a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report disclosures of ongoing, current, or recent sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412.

I encourage students who believe or suspect that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/) speaks to the specifics of Mason’s process, the resources, and the options available to students. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434), Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380), Student Health Services, or Mason’s Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; [cde@gmu.edu](mailto:cde@gmu.edu)). You can also let me know and we can reach out to those resources together.

The last day to add classes is as per university guidelines for contract courses, found in the Center for Global Education Handbook. This course schedule is tentative and may change, in which case the instructor will inform students via email and lecture.

**Grading**

Grades will be calculated using the points described in the course requirements section above. The total number of points you earn will be divided by 200 and converted into a percentage. They will be assigned as follows: 97-100% = A+; 93-96% = A; 90-92% = A-; 87-89% = B+; 83-86% = B; 80-82% = B-; 77-79% = C+; 73-76% = C; 70-72%=C-; 65-69% = D; below 65% = F.

The chapter of the book will always be the backbone of content each week but I am also supplementing you with peer-reviewed journals and slides each week so as to enrich and diversify your understanding of the material. Always feel free to ask me additional questions or for clarification.

**Course Schedule**

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| **Week/Approximate Date** | **Topic** | **Reading** | **What’s due?** |
| One – 1/25 | Building blocks & Research Methods | Chp 1 & skim Chapter 2 (Miller) | Introduction post |
| Two – 2/1 | Attraction | Chapter 3 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 3 post |
| Three – 2/8 | Social Cognition | Chapter 4 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 4 post |
| Four – 2/15 | Communication | Chapter 5 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 5 post AND Reflection Assignment #1 Due |
| Five – 2/22 | Interdependency | Chapter 6 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 6 post |
| Six – 3/1 | Friendship | Chapter 7 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 7 post |
| Seven – 3/8 | MIDTERM EXAM |  | Study!! Must take test within this week |
| Spring break! (3/15) |  |  |  |
| Eight – 3/22 | Love | Chapter 8 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 8 post |
| Nine – 3/29 | Sexuality | Chapter 9 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 9 post |
| Ten – 4/5 | Stresses & strains | Chapter 10 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 10 post |
| Eleven – 4/12 | Conflict | Chapter 11 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 11 post AND Reflection Assignment #2 Due |
| Twelve – 4/19 | Power & Violence | Chapter 12 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 12 post |
| Thirteen – 4/26 | Dissolution/Loss of Relationships | Chapter 13 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 13 post |
| Fourteen – 5/3 | Maintaining/Repairing Relationships | Chapter 14 plus any additional reading on blackboard | Chapter 14 post |
| Fifteen – 5/10 | FINAL EXAM |  |  |

*I reserve the right to make adjustments to course schedule but will only do so if necessary.*