Syllabus

PSYC GU4695: Psychology of Close Relationships

Fall 2019

Course Information

Instructor: Usha Barahmand
Class Hours: TBD
Class Location: TBD
Credit Hours: 4
Office Hours: By appointment
E-mail: usha@barahmand.com

I will respond to any student email within 48 hours during the work week. Please do not wait until the evening before an assignment is due to contact me; I will likely not respond to questions or concerns until the next day.

Course Description

This course is an exploration of the psychology of close human relationships. Our main purpose will be on learning about the life cycle of adult intimate (i.e., romantic) relationships, ranging from stages of initial attraction and relationship initiation to growth and maintenance of the relationship, and in some cases, dissolution. Although other close relationships such as close friendships, family, and work relationships will also be addressed and integrated into the course, they will be of secondary importance. Class meetings will consist mainly of facilitated discussions and student-led presentations on topics such as the biological bases of attraction and love, commitment and interdependence, relationship cognition, attachment, communication, sexuality, relational interaction patterns, relationship satisfaction, and the social context of relationships (e.g., the influence of others) conflict, relationship dissolution, and relationship maintenance. Students are expected to read and comment on papers, participate actively in class discussions and presentations, and complete written assignments. We will examine current theories and research in the social psychological study of close
relationships to gain a better understanding of the basic processes involved in intimate relationships.

The value of a seminar is a function of the quality of individual contributions to each meeting. I’ll provide a basic structure for our meetings, but beyond that, the seminar will succeed on the strengths of our joint individual efforts. We’re all responsible for the quality of this seminar experience. Accordingly, active participation by everyone is strongly encouraged.

**Course Objectives**

There are two overarching goals of the course. First, to develop a comprehensive overview of the research in relationship psychology and of its underlying theories. Second, given a realistic relationship scenario, to effectively apply, both theoretically and practically, the knowledge that you acquire in this course. Our weekly discussions and the short assignments that you will complete are intended to facilitate this process.

After completing the course, the student will be able to:

1) develop an understanding of theories and concepts associated with adult romantic relationships
2) become familiar with current scientific literature on close relationships
3) be able to critically evaluate research conducted on close relationships
4) have the opportunity to apply course material to realistic relationship scenarios

**Seminar Evaluation**

Seminar grades are based on the following five components, weighted as noted.

(I) *Reading and Discussion (20%):*

Each week, all students are responsible for reading the assigned material and are expected to actively participate in discussion. Your level of involvement will be assessed by me and constitute this component of your seminar grade.

(II) *Discussion Leader (20%):*

For every topic, one student will serve as lead discussant. Seminar enrollment will determine the number of times each student will serve as lead discussant. Students serving as lead discussants are responsible for leading the discussion of the assigned readings each week. The function of the discussant leader is to prepare, in advance, 8 to 10 discussion questions
pertaining to the theories, hypotheses, methods, results, broader meanings of the readings, etc. These questions should be typed and copies should be provided to all seminar participants as they will be used to direct our group discussion. Lead discussants are free to structure their questions as they wish (perhaps questioning theories, hypotheses, methods, results, broader meanings of the readings, etc.). Assignment to topics will be determined during our first meeting.

(III) Article Presentation (10%):
Each student will prepare and make a presentation of one of the empirical articles relevant to close relationships listed below for each class topic. These presentations serve two functions. First, they are a means of exposing the class to research beyond the articles that all of us read. Second, they are a means of learning an important skill -- how to present an empirical paper in a limited amount of time. *In 15 minutes*, you will summarize the (a) theory and hypotheses, (b) method, (c) results, and (d) broader relevance of an article. Making appropriate use of visual media, covering only what absolutely needs to be covered, and presenting clearly what you have to say in no more than 15 minutes (the typical time allotted at a conference) are essential components of an effective academic presentation.

(IV) Hypothesis Testing (20%):
Empirical testing of both established and new ideas advances our understanding of close relationships. Because all seminar topics are active areas of research, each is amenable to hypothesis testing. To that end, each seminar participant will bring a hypothesis to each class meeting (only one hypothesis; typed; keep it brief, no more than a few sentences -- one sentence is fine), inspired by the week’s readings. We will then clarify and work out ways to test your hypotheses together at our meetings. Please bring two copies of your hypothesis to class. You will keep the first copy, noting any ideas generated by the group for referral in considering possible research proposal topics (described below). The second copy is the one you will hand in to me at the conclusion of each class. One of your hypotheses will serve as the subject of your research proposal and proposal presentation (described below).

(V) Research Proposal and Proposal Presentation (30%)
To strengthen your ability to link research hypotheses with specific operational definitions, empirical procedures, and analyses, you will prepare a research proposal based upon one of your hypotheses (described above). Proposals should include: (a) a title page; (b) an abstract page; (c) an introduction, including a discussion of relevant theory and research and development/justification of one or more testable hypotheses; (d) a method section that thoroughly describes how you plan to test your hypotheses (a description of your sample, data
collection procedure, possible scale items, etc.); (e) a discussion of how your data will be
analyzed (e.g., establishing the reliability and validity of your measures; if experimental,
conducting any necessary manipulation checks; specification of what sort of statistical analyses
would be employed to test each of your hypotheses); (f) consideration of limitations of your
proposed research; and (g) references. The proposal should be written in APA style
(6th edition), and it should not exceed 15 double-spaced pages (excluding title page, abstract
page, and reference pages). Proposals are due by the last day of class (December 6). You will
also make an oral presentation of your proposal to the class at one of our two final class
meeting (on either November 29 or December 6). Use of PowerPoint or other visual media is
encouraged. Time allocated for each presentation will be determined by seminar enrollment
(generally 15 to 20 minutes per presentation).

Grading Scale:

97-100= A+
94-96= A
90-93= A-
87-89= B+
84-86= B
80-83= B-
77-79= C+
74-76= C
70-73= C-
60-69= D

Class Policies:

Academic Integrity:

As members of this academic community, we are expected to maintain the highest level of
personal and academic integrity. Consider this excerpt from the Columbia University Faculty
Statement on Academic Integrity: “[E]ach one of us bears the responsibility to participate in
scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and
scholarly integrity.... The exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions,
facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means
that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your
research papers and projects... [and] you must always submit your own work and not that of
another student, scholar, or internet agent.” More information about Columbia University

Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity can be found
here:https://www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/stat
ement

Plagiarism
Plagiarism — whether intentional or inadvertent — is a serious violation of academic integrity, and will thus not be tolerated. You are required to submit exclusively original work that you wrote, composed, or ideated on your own. If you are uncertain or have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, I encourage you to read the information provided on Columbia’s website about the various forms of plagiarism and ways to avoid it. Here is the link to a relevant webpage on plagiarism: https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/dishonestyplagiarism

I am obligated to report any incident of plagiarism to the appropriate channels at the university, which may result in significant penalties that may impact your academic career at Columbia. If you feel overwhelmed, confused, or that you are likely to resort to plagiarism, please talk to me. It is better to inform me beforehand so we can try and remediate the issue, whatever it might be, than to deal with such a serious offense after the fact.

Attendance:

Given the seminar style of this course, class participation, and thus attendance, is mandatory. At times, unplanned absences may occur. Such absences will be excused and not affect your final grade as long as they are documented (e.g., a dean’s note). Regardless, you will be responsible for the work due in that class, including reading responses and other requirements. Please inform me of any absences as early as possible so I can plan in advance if any changes might be needed.

Late Assignments:

In general, late assignments will not be accepted and graded. Under very certain circumstances, you will be allowed to submit your assignment within 24 hours of the due date. Such circumstances may include a sudden or unplanned event that significantly impacts your ability to submit your assignment on time.

Class Etiquette:

If you typically use your laptop for note taking, accessing the assigned readings or response papers, you are welcome to use your laptop for these purposes. In general, as a show of respect to your fellow classmates and instructor, please refrain from using electronic devices during class, including cell phones and laptops for unrelated reasons.

Students with Disabilities/Exceptionalities:

Students with any disability or exceptionality that may require any accommodations are requested to contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Lerner Hall before the start of the course to register for these accommodations. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found at http://health.columbia.edu/services/ods or by calling (212) 854-2388. I also ask that you speak with me on the first class to inform me of any required accommodations, and I would be more than happy to be of service and assistance to address them.
**Typical Seminar Format:**

Introductory remarks ! 10 minutes  
Discussion of assigned readings ! 50 minutes  
Article presentation ! 15 minutes + 5 minutes for questions  
Hypothesis testing → 30 minutes

**Seminar Topic Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introductions / Overview / Assignments / Welcome to Relationship Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Evolutionary Approaches</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Attachment Approaches</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Interdependence Approaches</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Approaches</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Methodological and Data Analytic Issues in Relationship Research</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Relationship Initiation</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Relationship Commitment</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Relationship Maintenance</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Social Context and Dyadic Relationships</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Technology, Social Media and Dyadic Relationships</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Relationship Dissolution</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Research Proposal Presentations</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Research Proposal Presentations</td>
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**Seminar Readings**

*Session 1: Welcome to Relationship Science*

*Assigned Reading:*


**Session 2: Evolutionary Approaches**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Potential Presentations:**


**Session 3: Attachment Approaches**
Assigned Readings:

For a helpful overview of adult attachment theory and research by Chris Fraley of U of Illinois, please read the material located here: http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm


Potential Presentations:


Session 4: Interdependence Approaches

Assigned Readings:


*Potential Presentations:*


*Session 5: Social Cognitive Approaches*

*Assigned Readings:*


McNulty, J. K., Olson, M. A., Meltzer, A. L., & Shaffer, M. J. (2013). Though they may be unaware, newlyweds implicitly know whether their marriage will be satisfying. *Science, 342*, 1119-1120.


Potential Presentations:


Session 6: Methodological and Data Analytic Issues in Relationship Research

**Assigned Readings:**


Potential Presentations:


Session 7: Relationship Initiation

**Assigned Readings:**


**Potential Presentations:**


**Session 8: Relationship Commitment**

**Assigned Readings:**


Potential Presentations:


Session 9: Relationship Maintenance

Assigned Readings:


Potential Presentations:


**Session 10: Social Context and Dyadic Relationships**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Potential Presentations:**


**Session 11: Technology, Social Media and Dyadic Relationships**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Potential Presentations:**


**Session 12: Relationship Dissolution**

**Assigned Readings:**


Sbarra, D. A., & Beck, C. J. A. (2013). Divorce and close relationships: Findings, themes, and


**Potential Presentations:**
