

**HDFS 674: CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS IN ADULTHOOD**  
**Fall 2008**

**Prerequisites:** HDFS 641 or permission of instructor; It is best if you have completed at least 6 hours of graduate work prior to taking this course.

**Instructor:** Dr. Heather Helms  
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256-0129  
Office Hours: By appointment  
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**Course Meeting Time:** Tuesdays 1:00 – 3:50pm, Stone 246

**Credit Hours:** This is a 3 credit course and you are expected to spend, on average, about 9 hours outside of class each week in order to prepare and show mastery. This is approximate and will depend on your level of preparation upon entering the course.

**Catalog Description:** Interdisciplinary introduction to close relationships in adulthood, including the major theoretical perspectives scholars use to examine close relationships, the methods researchers employ, and the substantive foci that characterize the field.

**Blackboard Course Web Page:** A web page for the course can be accessed through Blackboard, <http://blackboard.uncg.edu>. The website contains a variety of information, including a copy of the syllabus, course schedule, student grades, handouts, and several links to other sites relevant to this class.

**Course Description:**

This course is designed to provide an interdisciplinary introduction to issues pertaining to close relationships in adulthood, including some of the major theoretical lenses through which scholars have examined close relationships, the various methods researchers have employed, and the substantive foci that have held scholars' attention in recent years. I have designed the course to begin with a historical look at the science of close relationships, as well as some thoughts on the importance of studying close relationships in particular. The next section of the course presents a critical analysis of and scholarly dialogue about the field of close relationships, replete with suggestions for future research. We then spend the next several weeks focusing on contemporary scholars whose work addresses gaps in our knowledge of close relationships. The final set of readings focuses on the analytic skills required for the contemporary scholar of close relationships. The remaining class session is reserved for student presentations featuring substantive topics of interest. Throughout the course, I hope to encourage you to think critically about close relationship theory, research, and methodology through writing, integrating readings and lively discussion.

## **Readings:**

A collection of course readings are available on Blackboard. Alternatively, many of the readings can be accessed via journal finder on the library web page, <http://library.uncg.edu/>. The plan is for you to access these readings electronically and print them out yourselves.

- Optional Text: Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.

## **Teaching Strategies:**

We have the luxury of being a very small group, so I will run the class as a seminar. That means that we will do a lot of reading and discussing. Although I will assist in leading discussion (assuming the role of integrator and facilitator), I expect that you will come to class having read the assigned materials and very prepared to engage in discussion. Class participation will be part of how you are evaluated (both quantity and quality are important), so it's important that you keep up with the readings, ask good questions, think critically about the readings, and contribute your thoughts to class discussion.

## **Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Synthesize, critically analyze, and apply major theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues and substantive findings in the study of close relationships.
2. Identify, critically analyze, and apply the contributions of at least five major close relationships scholars.
3. Identify, critically analyze, and synthesize the major interdisciplinary contributions to the study of close relationships.
4. Provide a comprehensive integrative review and critical analysis of a significant substantive topic and/or researcher related to the study of close relationships.

These goals will be evidenced through both your written work and oral contributions in class.

## Evaluation Methods and Guidelines for Assignments:

(1) The first assignment involves **preparation for class and class participation**. A graduate course is successful only in so far as participants take the opportunity to read assigned readings carefully and critically and come prepared to discuss the readings and their own ideas, reactions and questions about the readings. Reaction papers are often assigned to assist students with integration, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Because you are all advanced graduate students who have demonstrated these skills repeatedly, I am not requiring reaction papers this term. I do, however, expect that you have read carefully and have listed a series of potential discussion questions that you should be prepared to address upon completion of your readings. Not all of these questions will pertain to all of the readings; instead they serve as a guiding template for you as you read and integrate across the articles.

### Potential Points of Discussion:

How does the author(s) define close relationships?

What is the function of close relationships? What basic assumptions does the author(s) make about why people form close relationships or what needs are fulfilled by close relationships?

What relationship outcomes does the author(s) consider to be important and why?

What relationship outcomes are omitted and why might the author(s) have omitted them?

What mediating or moderating factors are addressed and why are they important? What mediating or moderating factors appear to be overlooked and why do you think we should study them?

Compare the relative theoretical strengths and weaknesses (generalizability, practical usefulness, etc.) of the readings for this topic.

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According to the author(s), what benefits do close relationships offer?

According to the author(s), are there any costs to being in a close relationship?

Based on his or her theory and findings, what predictions can the author(s) make about how a relationship might progress over time?

According to the author(s), how much control do people have over their close relationships?

A high level of class participation (attendance plus good comments, questions, etc.) is important. Attendance in class is required. Although the work needs to be made up, I don't see that missing one class is a serious problem. However, missing two class periods can be reason to fail the course. Missing six hours of a graduate-level course is too difficult to make up.

(2) In addition to preparing very well for each class period, I will ask individual students to be responsible for **introducing the topic for the day and leading discussion** (with my assistance).

In this role, you will be responsible for giving a 10-15 minute **topic introduction**. There are several options for topic. As you decide what direction to pursue, please don't hesitate to contact me for guidance or input.

- a. The field of close relationships spans multiple disciplines, theoretical perspectives and topics making it impossible to cover adequately in one semester. Topic introductions can serve as a mechanism for us to become acquainted with some areas

- that we won't explore in depth in our readings. You may use your topic introduction *to discuss a theoretical perspective that has been used in close relationships' research* (e.g., attachment, interdependence theory, cognitive approaches), *to address a substantive topic of interest* (e.g., forgiveness, jealousy, sexuality, attraction, friendship, relationships and health), or *to summarize the professional development of a key researcher in the field* (e.g., Art Aron, Ellen Berscheid, Rosemary Blieszner, Andrew Collins, Steve Duck, Karen Fingerman, Tom Bradbury, John Gottman, Cindy Hazon, Clyde and Susan Hendrick, Ted Huston, Mike Johnson, Larry Kurdek, Bob Milardo, Dan Perlman, Harry Reis, Caryl Rusbult, Phil Shaver, Cathy Surra, Pepper Schwartz, Alexis Walker)
- b. The field of close relationships is rife with findings applicable to everyday life. Unfortunately, one criticism of the field is that researchers often fail to make their findings accessible to the general public in useful ways. Conduct a search on a popular press topic (e.g., infidelity, domestic violence, trust and commitment) to see if any topics are informed by close relationships' research or information learned from interviews with close relationships' researchers. Critique the available information (both strengths and weaknesses) and see if you can find (via googling) any better information provided by leading scholars in the field.

In short, I ask that this introduction in no way be a summary of the reading...which we all will have read. Rather, it should be a provocative, substantive, stimulating "kick-off" session to our discussion in which we learn something new. Following this, I will give a brief introduction to the readings, providing my take on what the main points are. You will be in charge (with my help) of leading discussion.

**Leading discussion** means thinking in advance about where you want the conversation to go and making sure it goes there. I suggest you start by having students: 1) reflect on the major contributions of the readings to our understanding of close relationships in adulthood 2) discuss the most exciting, surprising, or interesting aspects of the readings, and 3) if the empirical articles include sophisticated research methodology or statistics, spend some time clarifying these details. For this part of the discussion, I'd like us to focus on the positive elements of the articles—eliminate criticism. However, after we've nailed down the contributions of the readings, the discussion may indeed turn critical. To further facilitate discussion you may want to come in with a list of questions or provocative comments to use if the conversation lags or gets off track. (Feel free to use some of the questions listed above.) Be sure that your plan is clearly relevant to the topic and readings at hand. I especially want us to be putting together ideas across readings and from various parts of the course, so your questions should be designed in part to encourage that. I would like to meet with each student to get a sense of your plans in person or via email by the Friday before your class. **You must turn in an outline of your plan for facilitation and copies of any visual aids at the end of the class session you facilitate.**

(3) **Paper and Presentation Project:** Throughout the semester, each of you will work on a project comprised of two parts.

- a. First, a **10-15 page integrative review paper** is required. This paper provides an opportunity for you to thoughtfully examine and critique current research that addresses a particular area of close relationships in adulthood that you find intriguing. You are

encouraged to use this paper as an opportunity to focus your thesis, dissertation, or upcoming publication or presentation, or simply to further explore a substantive area about which you are curious. Alternatively, you may choose to focus on one of the key figures in the field close relationships research, comprehensively review what he or she has written (critically, of course), get in touch with the person (if possible) and interview them about how they got interested in the area, where his or her work is going in the future, etc. Your paper and presentation would put this information together into an intellectual biography. In short, I'm quite flexible about topic choices as long as they have a close relationships' focus (broadly conceived). The integrative review paper should succinctly cover the literature on the topic you have chosen to address and should include an integrative summary/critique of at least 15 journal articles, 10 of which must be empirical articles. (Intellectual biography reference lists are likely to be longer and should include all first-authored articles written by the scholar.) The final paper should be 10 to 15 pages of text and be in APA format (typed, 12 pt font, 1 inch margins, appropriate title page, headings, and references). The paper should be a polished piece of work (i.e., correct grammar and spelling, logical, easy to read) that resembles the introduction of an empirical article.

b. The second part of your assignment is to complete an **oral presentation**. The focus of this presentation should stem from your review paper and highlight theoretical underpinnings, key findings and critiques of the research on your topic.

**Presentations will take place during the December 2<sup>nd</sup> class period. Your paper is due on December 9th.**

In order to facilitate your work on the project, you will be required to **hand in a one page topic prospectus and rationale on September 30th, followed by a *detailed* outline and references list on November 4th**. Taken together, these assignments account for slightly over 80% of your final grade. You will be expected to follow APA formatting for your paper and create a PowerPoint presentation for your oral presentation.

Assignments handed in any time after the due date and time will be automatically docked 5 percentage points for each day (including weekend days). Late is defined as work that is turned in anytime after class on the day it is due.

### **Grading Summary**

Class Preparation and Participation	15 points
Introducing and Leading Discussion	20 points
Topic Prospectus/Justification	5 points
Detailed Outline & References	10 points
Paper	100 points
Presentation	<u>50 points</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200 points</b>

### **Assigning Grades**

Grades will be determined by the following criteria:

C level work :

1. Demonstrated comprehension and clearly written and verbally articulated understanding of important substantive, theoretical, and methodological concepts, but a failure to critically and accurately apply these concepts.

C-: C level work but one of the following: 2 or more instances of inaccuracy; poorly written material such that the key points cannot be ascertained.

C+: C level work but the material is particularly well-written or excellent examples are given.

B level work:

1. Demonstrated comprehension and clearly written and verbally articulated understanding of important substantive, theoretical, and methodological concepts.
2. Ability to compare and contrast the characteristics of substantive, theoretical, and methodological concepts as well as to understand them and represent them clearly in writing and speaking.
3. Demonstrate the ability to select the most salient content (based on theory and research) and to critically integrate and discuss it.

B-: B level work but 2 or more instances of inaccuracy or some unclear articulation within the body of describing key points.

B+: B level work but the material is particularly well-written or excellent examples are given. Also might show a particularly strong justification for the selection of content for critical analysis and discussion.

A level work:

1. Demonstrated comprehension and clearly written and verbally articulated understanding of important substantive, theoretical, and methodological concepts.
2. Ability to compare and contrast the characteristics of substantive, theoretical, and methodological concepts as well as to understand them and represent them clearly in writing and speaking.
3. Demonstrate the ability to select the most salient content (based on theory and research) and to critically and integrate and discuss it.
4. The ability to synthesize and apply contemporary concept knowledge in ways that enable the student to propose new theoretical relationships, potential areas for substantive focus and application to a given context, applied setting, or research methodology.

A-: A level work but 2 or more instances of unclear articulation within the body of describing key points.

Students can earn an F through chronic late work, poor attendance, or poorly written work that shows almost no comprehension of the course material.

#### Grading Scale (Percentage Based)

93-100	A
90-92.99	A-
87-89.99	B+
83-86.99	B
80-82.99	B-
77-79.99	C+
73-76.99	C
70-72.99	C-
less than 70	F

#### Course Policies

1. *Academic Integrity* is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an educational objective of this institution. Violating academic integrity is considered a serious offense by the university and is treated accordingly. Professional guidelines will be followed in instances of academic dishonesty. These include the assignment of the professorial penalty of “F” for the course and the report of the offense to Student Affairs. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on exams, having unauthorized possession of exams, fabricating information or citations, facilitating the academic dishonesty of others, submitting work that was previously submitted in another class (i.e., identical papers, etc.), and plagiarism. Plagiarism includes using someone’s work as your own and using published material without adequate referencing. See me if you are concerned about the definition of plagiarism. Students are expected to read, sign and hand in the “Academic Integrity Statement” found in the policies section of the web page.

2. *Disability Accommodations:* Disabilities that require special accommodation will be addressed after I receive verification from the Office of Disability Services. After seeing this office, please let me know what I can do to facilitate your comfort and learning.
3. *Emergencies:* If you have any emergency that interferes with your ability to complete the work in this course, please see me immediately. If you cannot come for a scheduled appointment, please contact me ahead of time. My office phone number and email address is listed on the front page of the syllabus.
4. *Extra credit:* Given the extensive opportunity to be graded in a variety of formats in this course, extra credit is not an option. If you attend class regularly and come prepared to discuss the readings you will have ample opportunity to earn points that will contribute significantly to your overall grade.

**HDFS 674: CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS IN ADULTHOOD  
AGENDA AND READINGS**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND PARTICIPANTS**

**WEEK 1, AUGUST 26**

**THE SCIENCE OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

**WEEKS 2 & 3, SEPTEMBER 2 & 9 Student Facilitator for 9/9 only: \_\_\_\_\_**

**HOW SHOULD WE STUDY CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS?**

**READINGS FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE  
JOURNAL OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, 1995**

**WEEK 4, SEPTEMBER 16 Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**RESEARCH DESIGNS AND THE STUDY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

**WEEK 5, SEPTEMBER 23 Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER**

**\*\*TOPIC PROSPECTUS/RATIONALE DUE\*\***

**WEEK 6, SEPTEMBER 30**

**A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS:  
EXAMPLES FROM THE MINNESOTA LONGITUDINAL STUDY  
OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN**

**(<http://cehd.umn.edu/ICD/Parent%2DChild/default.html>)**

**WEEK 7, OCTOBER 7 Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**“CONTEXTUALIZING” THE STUDY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

**WEEK 8, OCTOBER 14 Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**FALL BREAK  
NO CLASS SESSION**

**WEEK 9, OCTOBER 21**

**APPLIED RESEARCH IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

**WEEK 10, OCTOBER 28 Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**APPLIED RESEARCH IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: HOW ARE WE DOING?  
\*\*OUTLINE AND REFERENCE LIST DUE\*\***

**WEEK 11, NOVEMBER 4**

**PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

**WEEK 12, NOVEMBER 11**

**Student Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_**

**ANALYTIC STRATEGIES FOR THE STUDY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS:  
NECESSARY SKILLS FOR EMERGING SCHOLARS**

**WEEK 13, NOVEMBER 18**

**PAPER PREPARATION  
NO CLASS SESSION**

**WEEK 14, NOVEMBER 25**

**\*\*STUDENT PRESENTATIONS\*\***

**WEEK 15, DECEMBER 2**

**FINALS WEEK  
NO CLASS SESSION**

**PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 9TH**

Papers are due to me via email attachment on or before Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> by 5pm.

