I. COURSE PURPOSE

This course is designed to introduce students to the theory, philosophy, and methods of working with couples. The role of the clinician and strategies of intervention will be emphasized. During this course, students review the fundamentals of assessment and intervention with couples and how this differs from social work with individuals, groups, and families.

The course will be geared to the advanced (second year MSW) curriculum. Upon completion of the course the student should have the ability to practice social work with couples at a beginning professional level. This will include the ability to assess the couple relationship, which goes beyond the assessment of each individual partner. The student will also be able to work with the interactive dynamic of the relationship, which goes beyond working with the two individuals who comprise the couple. Object Relations theory will underlie the conceptualization of the couple relationship. In addition to Object Relations theory, the Solution-focused perspective and Cognitive Behavioral theory will be used in planning interventions with the couple. Students will have the opportunity to investigate the application of other models of practice (such as Imago Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy) with couples through assignments and recommended readings.

The course will be taught in lecture/seminar format, and will include case presentations and in-class exercises to practice clinical assessment and intervention techniques.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand social work intervention with couples.
2. To understand the interactive processes inherent in the coupled relationship.
3. To understand when couple intervention is appropriate along with or in place of individual or family intervention.

4. To demonstrate how couple assessment and intervention methods apply in the context of race, gender, ethnicity and same sex couples.

5. To acquire a sophisticated level of awareness of ways in which the worker’s self (e.g., his/her values and personal family history) are a part of his/her work as a social work practitioner with couples.

6. To assess one’s own biases regarding clients who are different from oneself, with respect to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, etc.

7. To build upon skills obtained in the foundation year in gathering information about a client and in organizing the information into a couple’s assessment and intervention plan.

8. To acquire a beginning level of specific skills in working with couples.

9. To refine skills in observing conscious and unconscious processes in clients and in using the affective self in the therapeutic process.

10. To hone case presentation skills.

11. To recognize and appreciate social, ethnic and cultural factors which contribute to dysfunction.

12. To integrate the knowledge of assessing and treating couples with differing theory bases and various fields of practice concentrations.

III. COURSE TEXTS

**Required Texts:**


**Recommended Texts:**


IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation (20% of final grade)

Students are expected to attend all classes, participate meaningfully in class discussion and call upon their fieldwork experiences for class contributions. If you cannot attend class, please notify the professor. CUA requires no more than two missed classes for a passing grade.

Class participation includes being able to speak and ask questions from the perspective of your chosen theory base. While some learn from listening and others from speaking, we will try to create an atmosphere where each person can feel comfortable speaking. You are not expected to be experts in your theory base, but rather informed learners. Class participation will be graded on quality rather than quantity.

Course Assignments (80% of final grade)

Assignment 1 (25% of final grade). Choose a specific theory base for working with couples. Select a theory from one of the required or recommended books. Prepare a paper/project of this theory. Include the main conceptual framework, ways of assessing a couple, and intervention strategies. The project may be in the format of talking points, a power point presentation, a spreadsheet with details following, or any format you choose. The intent is to summarize the theory. The paper/project should include a minimum of five references beyond those in the syllabus. This paper/project and the research for it will help prepare you to speak in class from the chosen theory base. The model papers/projects will be made available to the whole class. Clarity of content is more important than length.

Assignment 2 (Maximum length, eight pages. At least seven sources (not from course syllabus) must be referenced. 40% of final grade) Continuing with your chosen theory base, choose one of the following:

- Apply your chosen theory base to a specific population and write a scholarly paper. Include an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of using this theory in conceptualizing the population you choose. To choose this option, consult NCSSS guidelines for a scholarly paper.

- From your chosen theory base prepare a psychosocial assessment of and intervention plan for a couple you have seen in practice, or, for a couple in a movie or a novel. Beyond the psychosocial assessment use appropriate references which support your assessment and intervention plan.

Assignment 3 (Maximum length, five pages. 15% of final grade.) Respond to a series of reflective questions about clinical social work with couples.
Grading Policy:

Grades for this course will be based on the University grading system as described in the catalogue. The total grade will be comprised of the following:

Assignment 1: 25%
Assignment 2: 40%
Assignment 3: 15%
Class participation: 20%

Course and Instructor Evaluation:

NCSSS requires online evaluation of this course and the instructor. Instructions for the online evaluation will be distributed. Additional informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests.

Class Expectations:

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements, or MSW Program Handbook for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. It is expected that students will demonstrate communications skills consistent with the NCSSS graduate education standards. All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, and adhere to APA format.

V. CLASS SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>August 30</td>
<td>Clinical social work with couples: Overview and history</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 6</td>
<td>Theories and models of couples therapy – Object Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>September 13</td>
<td>Theories and models of couples therapy – Cognitive Behavioral and Solution Focused</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>September 20</td>
<td>Clinical assessment, initial interview, intervention plan</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>September 27</td>
<td>Transference, countertransference, projective identification</td>
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<td>Week</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>October 4</td>
<td>Couples intervention from a multiracial, multicultural and spiritual perspective</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>October 11</td>
<td>The effects of trauma in couples treatment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October 11</td>
<td>Assignment 1 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>October 18</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral therapy with couples</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>Sexual dysfunction</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>Becoming parents and obstacles to family building</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>November 8</td>
<td>Working with the issue of affairs</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>November 15</td>
<td>Working with options to divorce</td>
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<td>November 22</td>
<td>Thanksgiving – no class</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>November 29</td>
<td>Collaboration with other professionals/legal and ethical considerations in working with couples</td>
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<td></td>
<td>November 29</td>
<td>Assignment 2 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>December 6</td>
<td>Working through and termination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December 6</td>
<td>Assignment 3 due</td>
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VI. WEEKLY TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Class 1, August 30, 2012: Clinical social work with couples: Overview and history

**Required Readings:**

Gurman, Chapter 1

Long & Young, Chapter 1


**Recommended Readings:**


Class 2, September 6, 2012: Theories and models of couples therapy – object relations

**Required Readings:**

Gurman, Chapters 6

**Recommended Readings:**


Class 3, September 13, 2012: Theories and models of couples therapy – cognitive behavioral and solution focused

**Required Readings:**

Gurman, Chapters 2 & 9
Class 4, September 20, 2012: Clinical assessment, initial interview, intervention plan

**Required Readings:**

Long and Young, Chapters 5 - 8

**Recommended Readings:**


Class 5, September 29, 2012: Transference, countertransference and projective identification

**Required Readings:**


Gurman, Chapter 6 (review)

**Recommended Readings:**


Weeks, Chapters 7,10

Class 6, October 6, 2012: Couples intervention from a multiracial, multicultural and
**Required Readings:**
Bobes & Bobes, Chapters 4-6.
Gurman, Chapters 24 & 25

**Recommended Readings:**

Weeks, Chapter 12

**Class 7, October 11, 2012: The effects of trauma in couples treatment**
**Assignment 1 due**

**Required Readings:**
Gurman, Chapters 16 & 20

**Recommended Readings:**

**Class 8, October 18, 2012: Cognitive behavioral therapy with couples**
**Guest speaker: Rachel Wernicke, Ph. D.**
**Required Readings:**
Epstein & Baucom, Chapters 7 & 8

**Class 9, October 25, 2012: Intimacy and Sexuality**

**Required Readings:**
Gurman, Chapter 21
Long & Young, Chapter 9


**Recommended Readings:**
TBA

**Class 10, November 1, 2012: Becoming parents and obstacles to family building**

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Class 11, November 8, 2012: Working with the issue of affairs**

**Required Readings:**
Gurman, Chapter 14
Recommended Readings:


Class 12, November 15, 2012: Working with options to divorce

Required Readings:


Gurman, Chapter 15

Long & Young, Chapter 11

Recommended Readings:


THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – November 22

Class 13, November 29, 2012: Collaboration with other professionals/legal and ethical considerations in working with couples

Assignment 2 due

Required Readings:


Gurman, Chapter 26

**Class 14, December 6, 2012:  Working through and termination**

**Assignment 3 due**

**Required Readings:**

TBA


**Recommended Readings:**


