I. COURSE PURPOSE

This advanced elective provides an overview of the research and conceptual framework of attachment theory as it pertains to new directions in clinical practice and to social work policy. It describes the evolution of attachment theory from the original works of Bowlby and Ainsworth to the expansion of contemporary theory based on neurobiological research. The course emphasizes the importance of attachment and right brain affect regulatory functioning as basic to healthy development across the lifespan. Findings from a wealth of clinical and longitudinal research studies document the importance of attachment security in the prevention of relational and behavioral disorders in individuals, couples, families, and groups. Attention is placed on appreciating the role of secure parenting and the development of attachment relationships within the context of diverse cultures. Special emphasis is given to the implications of attachment research for policy formulation, analysis, and implementation, particularly to child welfare policy and the prevention and sequelae of child maltreatment. This course introduces students to attachment-based treatment models for child and adult disorders and examines the evidence for an attachment-based social work practice. Prerequisite: SSS 571-572.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the historical roots of attachment theory as an evolutionary, universal, continuous, and motivational system.
2. Articulate the linkage between the infant’s emotional experience, caregiver-child reciprocity, brain development, and ongoing affective regulation.

3. Demonstrate knowledge of the longitudinal studies documenting the influence of attachment on the neurobiological, behavioral, cognitive, relational, and physiological development of individuals across the lifespan.

4. Critically evaluate the cultural differences of attachment patterns validated through empirical cross-cultural research.

5. Analyze the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect, separation and loss, foster care, and adoption on child development.

6. Evaluate the ethical dilemmas inherent in child welfare placement decisions due to disruption of attachment relationships between children and caregivers.

7. Demonstrate understanding of the role of adult attachment in caregiving, friendship, and adult romantic relationships.


9. Develop understanding of attachment-based models of clinical intervention for children, adults, couples, and families, including adoptive and foster parents.

10. Critically analyze the widespread policy implications of attachment and neurobiological research and the need for early intervention and prevention.

11. Identify and formulate recommendations for policy and social work practice based on knowledge and evaluation of research on attachment and neurobiology.

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required and recommended readings **not** from the required textbooks will be posted on the course Blackboard. All required and recommended texts will be on the library’s reserve shelf.

**A. Required Texts**


Revised 12/13/2011
B. Recommended Texts (for recommended readings)


C. Other Strongly Recommended Resources

**Books:**

**Journals:**
*Attachment and Human Behavior*
*Infant Mental Health Journal*
*Clinical Social Work Journal, Special Edition on Attachment*

**Websites:**  
http://www.education.umn.edu/icd/parent-child/default.html  
http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/  
http://www.zerotothree.org/vol20-2.html  
http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcfraley/lab.htm

D. Course Assignments

Assignment 1 is a 45-minute quiz that examines student knowledge of the terms, concepts, and foundational theory of attachment. Assignments 2 and 3 are designed to familiarize the student with the breadth of writing about attachment theory and research and to stimulate critical thinking about attachment’s influence on human development, behavior, and social work practice. Assignment 4 pertains to participation in class and blackboard discussions, as well as class attendance. Written assignments are to be submitted to instructor on the date due, and 5 points will be deducted for each day the assignment is submitted late. See end of syllabus for details of the four assignments.

E. Grading Policy

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 3</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 4</td>
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Revised 12/13/2011
F. **Attendance and Participation**

Students are required to attend classes, come prepared, and participate actively and meaningfully in class discussions. Contributions from field placement experiences are expected and welcomed. The grade for attendance and participation will be lowered unless the student notifies the instructor and requests an excused absence before the class. More than three unexcused absences will result in a grade of F for participation.

G. **Course and Instructor Evaluation**

NCSSS requires electronic evaluation of this course and the instructor. At the end of the semester, the evaluation form may be accessed at [http://evaluations.cua.edu/evalutions](http://evaluations.cua.edu/evalutions) using your CUA username and password. Additional, informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests.

IV. **CLASS EXPECTATIONS**

A. **Scholastic Expectations**

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements or appropriate Program Handbook for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, adhere to APA format, and should be carefully proof read by the student before submission to the instructor for grading.

B. **Academic Honesty**

Joining the community of scholars at CUA entails accepting the standards, living by those standards, and upholding them. Please refer to University Policy and appropriate Program Handbooks.

C. **Accommodations**

Students with physical, learning, psychological or other disabilities wishing to request accommodations must identify with the Disability Support Services (DSS) and submit documentation of a disability. If you have documented such a disability to DSS that requires accommodations or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.
# Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topics and Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART I:</strong> ATTACHMENT THEORY AND NEUROBIOLOGICAL RESEARCH: OVERVIEW OF BASIC CONCEPTS</td>
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</table>

## 1 Introduction to course; Historical context of attachment theory
**Bowlby and the Secure Base of attachment**

**Themes**
- Significance of neurobiology for understanding affect regulation and attachment
- Historical context of attachment theory and Bowlby’s earliest influences
- Exploration of Bowlby’s secure base concept
- Relationship of the child’s attachment system to the exploratory system
- The universality and continuity of attachment

**Required Readings**

**Recommended Readings**

## 2 Mary Ainsworth and the Strange Situation (SS)
**Internal Working Models (IWM) of attachment**

**Themes**
- Bowlby’s theories regarding the child’s adjustment to separation and loss
- Ainsworth’s empirical contribution, developed from studies of mothers and babies in Uganda and Baltimore
- Home visitation and the SS observational measure
- Exploration of IWM of attachment: secure, insecure avoidant, and insecure resistant attachment
- Mental representations of attachment
Required Readings


Recommended Readings

3 Mary Main and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

Themes
- The theory and concepts underpinning Main’s AAI
- States of mind with respect to attachment
- Meta-analysis and validity of AAI as predictive of child attachment
- The impact of unresolved trauma and loss on adult attachment security
- Solomon’s and Main’s conceptualization of disorganized attachment

Required Readings


Recommended Readings
4  
Fonagy and the concept of mentalization

Adult Attachment Styles as viewed through social psychology

Cultural context and attachment

Themes

• Fonagy’s view of reflective functioning and mentalization in adults
• Self-report research on adult attachment styles
• The correlation between SS and AAI in cross-cultural studies
• Cross-cultural studies of IWM in European and non-Western cultures

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


5  
The neurobiology of attachment and affect regulation

Themes

• Understanding the brain’s organization and function
• The neurobiology of short and long-term memory
• Early affect regulation as part of attachment and relational experiences
• Psychobiology of affective attunement and brain development
• The neurobiology of the development of the self

Required Readings


PART II: ATTACHMENT IN INFANCY, CHILDOOD, AND ADOLESCENCE

6 Secure parenting
Influences of age, class, and culture on caregiving and parenting

Themes
- Understanding the internal world of the child
- The role of caregiver-infant mirroring
- Viewing attachment and exploration as a “Circle of Security”
- Behavioral indicators of infant cues for exploration or safe haven
- Parenting in different cultures and with multiple caregivers
- Individual differences among infant-caregiver dyads

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

7 Abuse, neglect, and trauma leading to childhood disorganization
Longitudinal studies regarding attachment in childhood and adolescence

Themes
- The neurobiology of childhood stress and deprivation
- Assessment of childhood disorganization from trauma, abuse, and neglect
- Assessment of childhood disorganization from parent disorganization
- Resilience and attachment of at-risk children

Revised 12/13/2011
• Viewing attachment in context across the lifespan: The Minnesota Longitudinal Study
• Understanding childhood Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) in comparison to disorganized attachment

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

8 Foster care, adoption, and daycare
Implications of child welfare policies

Themes
• Attachment influenced by daycare and multiple caregivers
• The neurobiology of disrupted attachment
• Permanency planning and its effect on child attachment
• Challenges in establishing new child-caregiver attachments
• Coaching at-risk children and caregivers in the child welfare system
• Organizational challenges in child welfare agencies
• Ethical dilemmas in child welfare placement decisions

Required Readings

Revised 12/13/2011
Recommended Readings

9 Treatment of high-risk children, adolescents, and families

Themes
- The importance of enhancing parental reflective functioning
- The challenges of parenting children with attachment disorders
- Attachment-based intervention with foster children and their caregivers
- Attachment-based intervention with adoptive children and their parents
- Outcome studies and implications of attachment intervention research

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

PART III: ATTACHMENT IN ADULTHOOD

10 Overview of adult attachment in individuals, couples, and families
Attachments in later adulthood and in caregiving relationships

Themes
- What is adult attachment and what does it mean to be attached in adulthood?
- Predictors of stability and change of attachment security in adults
- A systems approach to viewing attachments in families
- Psychobiological perspectives on adult attachment and health
- Loss and bereavement and the nature of detachment in adulthood
- The caregiving behavioral system: Secure base and safe haven caregiving
- Attachment and caregiving within late adulthood

Revised 12/13/2011
Required Readings


Recommended Readings


11 Relational treatment with individual adults

Themes

- Attachment theory as a bridge between cognitive and psychoanalytic theory and practice
- Attachment-based dynamic relational treatment with individual adults
- The therapist as a “secure base” in clinical treatment
- Understanding attachment patterns within the transference relationship
- Using intersubjectivity in treatment

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


12 Attachment-based treatment of couples and families

Themes

- Links between family therapy and attachment research
• Treatment of stress, conflict, and violence in adult close relationships
• Repair of ruptures in partner attunement
• Reshaping early childhood and present-day attachment injuries in couples
• Enhancing the parenting of adolescent mothers

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Trauma and domestic violence**

**Adult psychopathology as an outgrowth of attachment disorders**

**Themes**

• Enhancement of reflective functioning and mentalization
• Attachment-related trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
• The relationship of attachment to the development of personality disorders
• The relationship of attachment to depressive, anxiety, and dissociative disorders
• Criminality and antisocial behavior viewed as attachment disorders

**Required Readings**


PART IV: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

14 Conclusion with focus on adult policy; social work education and research

Themes
- The need for policy changes
- Enhanced practice with an eye on prevention
- Application of theory to organizational and educational domains

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Assignments

1. Objective quiz (class 6) 30%
A brief, 45-minute objective quiz will examine the students’ knowledge of terms and concepts that underpin the theory of attachment, based on readings and lectures from classes 1-5.

2. Article review (classes 7-13) 15%
Review and critique one contemporary empirical research article on a subject covered in classes 7-13. The article must have been published between 2006-2012. Give the instructor and classmates a 1-2 page, single spaced typed summary of your review and critique and present the findings in a 5-minute oral presentation during the class related to the topic of the study. Propose 1 question for the class to discuss following your presentation. In addition, give the instructor a copy of the research article one week
prior to the presentation. Please consult with your fellow classmates who will be presenting the day you present so that you each present a different article.

3. **Scholarly paper (due class 14)**  
   Write a scholarly paper exploring a specific issue or area of concern as it pertains to attachment processes within a particular age group along the lifespan (e.g., infants, young children, adolescents, college students, adults, or elder adults). For example, one might examine resiliency among at-risk young children, eating disorders among adolescents, separation issues for college students, domestic violence among middle age adults, or caregiving of elder parents. **The topic selected must be different than the student’s topic for the article review.** The paper should examine and critique the contemporary theory and research on the topic, including neurobiological research, and the policy and/or clinical implications regarding this theory and research. Attention should be given to issues regarding diversity and social work values and ethics. **Conclude the paper with 2 pages of personal and original recommendations for addressing either: (1) suggestions for policy changes, or (2) suggestions for new treatment interventions.**

   The paper should be **12-14 pages in length, excluding references, and approximately 2 of these pages must be reserved for the student’s original recommendations.** A minimum of 12 references, other than assigned readings, should be used and cited within the paper. APA v. 6 style and theUniversity’s guidelines for scholarly papers should be followed. Grading for the paper will be based on (1) demonstration of understanding the material, (2) evidence of critical thinking about the topic and the material, (3) creativity and thoughtfulness of recommendations for change, (4) organization of paper and style of writing, including following correct APA v. 6 format. Students may submit scholarly papers sooner than class 13, if preferred, but this is not required.

4. **Discussion on blackboard and in class**  
   Students are expected to **make comments or ask questions a minimum of 6 times** on the discussion board. The blackboard discussion and class participation grade will be determined by the instructor’s perception of the student’s preparation for, and contribution to, class discussion, and by evidence that the student has completed the readings. The instructor will sometimes respond directly to the student’s comments on the blackboard, but at other times, the instructor will bring the blackboard comments into the class discussion for all to respond.