



Master Course Syllabus

Semester: Spring

Year: 2025

Course Prefix: FAMS

Course and Section #: 1150 - 002

Course Title: Marriage and Relationship Skills

Credits: 3

Course Description

Guides students in building a lasting intimate relationship of their own and in understanding and teaching relationship maintenance and improvement strategies based on large-scale scientifically derived marriage and relationship principles. Utilizes cutting edge research on factors and issues related to relationship success and outcome including whom and when to marry and how to build stable and happy relationships over time. Stresses increased understanding of desirable relationship outcomes and how to achieve them.

Course Attributes

This course has the following attributes:

- General Education Requirements
- Global/Intercultural Graduation Requirements
- Writing Enriched Graduation Requirements
- Discipline Core Requirements in Program
- Elective Core Requirements in Program
- Open Elective

Other: *Click here to enter text.*

Instructor Information

Instructor Name: Dr. Todd Spencer

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Analyze the empirical evidence and importance of becoming emotionally and psychologically healthy before and during romantic relationships.
2. Define ethical and moral issues that underpin the study and intervention of marriage and other relationships.
3. Identify the dynamics of family background, gender, singlehood, sex, friendship, attraction dating, and mate selection, and how they influence and relate to romantic relationships.
4. Articulate the roles of work and family as well as material resources.
5. Describe the influence of power, decision making, and communication.
6. Apply skills in conflict resolution within romantic relationships.
7. Examine the dynamics of divorce, remarriage, and step-parenting.

Course Materials and Texts

Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S.L. (2024). *Fighting for your marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Building a Lasting Love*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Van Epp, J. (2007). *How to avoid falling in love with a jerk*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Course Requirements

Course Assignments, Assessments, and Grading Policy

Weekly Discussions

During the course of the semester there will be 14 total weekly discussions. Discussions will be based off of lectures, readings, and other class activities. For full points you will need to post your initial response to the questions before 11:59PM on Thursdays. For full points you will need to comment on at least 2 students posts before 11:59PM on Sundays. Each discussion is worth 10 pts. Please note that you will be deducted 2 points for each missing comment.

Weekly Quizzes

During the course of the semester there will be 14 total weekly quizzes. Quizzes will be based off of lectures, readings, and other class activities. Quizzes will be due before 11:59PM on Sundays. Each quiz will be worth 10 pts. The purpose of the quizzes is to help prepare you for the midterm and final exams.

Assignments

1. *Personal Reflection Assignments (PRA)*: There will be two personal reflection assignments dispersed throughout the semester. All writing assignments should be typed in 12 point font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and in Times New Roman font. As you write your papers, please break them up into paragraphs and title each section. You do not need a title page.

a. **Dealbreakers or Expectations**: There are two separate assignment options for PRA #1 depending on your relationship status. Please be sure you do the correct assignment. In addition, although there are several steps for each assignment, this is one complete paper.

i. **PRA #1a (For single (i.e., unmarried or not in a long-term relationship) students)—Deal Breakers and Expectations (50 points)**:

1. **Deal Breakers** (20 pts.): Write 1-2 pages about your “deal breakers” for romantic relationships. Deal breakers are those elements, events, dynamics, or characteristics about the relationship (or person) that, if present, would “break the deal” or relationship for you. In other words, what must or must not be in the relationship for you to stay in it—any *one* of them is missing/present and the relationship is over. You must also explain *why* it is a deal breaker for you.

2. **What I'd Like** (10 pts.): Write at least one page about what you would “like” to have in a relationship but it’s not a “deal breaker” for you. For example, you might want someone who cooks well but if they cannot cook well you would still continue the relationship.
3. **What I Expect and What I offer** (20 pts.): Complete the “*What I Expect and What I Offer*” worksheet which can found “Files” on Canvas. You will complete this worksheet on your own outside of class. You are not required to submit this form. You will write at least one page about your observations and experience going through this worksheet.

ii. **PRA #1b (For Married/Long-term relationship students)-Expectations (50 points):**

1. **What I Expect and What I Offer** (20 pts.): complete the “*What I Expect and What I Offer*”

worksheet (this can be found on CANVAS). You will complete this worksheet on your own outside of class. You are not required to submit this form. You will write at least one page about your observations going through this worksheet.

2. **Where I am Now** (20 pts.): Write at least one page about how those above expectations have influenced your current relationship. It should be at least one page. (10 points)
3. **Advice for Engaged and Newlywed Couples** (10 pts): Write at least one page about advice you would give to couples who are dating and/or engaged and newlywed.

b. **PRA #2—Healthy Me Assessment (50 points):** Before we can know another person intimately, we must first

know ourselves. In addition, people who are truly emotionally and mentally healthy are also open to view their areas of improvement and accept failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.

For this PRA, you will be asked to do some self-exploration via interviews, assessments, reflection, and writing. This writing assignment will entail several steps. Please write this paper in paragraph form and title each section/step. The paper should be at least 3-4 pages in length. To receive full credit for the assignment, you must complete all of the steps as follows:

- i. **My Strengths and Challenges:** Begin the paper by writing at least one page about your personal and relationship strengths. Identify at least three specific strengths that you have when it comes to relationships with others. Then identify at least two areas of challenge that you noticed about yourself that may negatively affect a romantic relationship.
- ii. **Family and Friend Interviews:** You will interview (in person or on the phone) three friends or family members (one can be a spouse or committed partner) who know you *very* well. Make sure that you interview people you feel emotionally safe with who will not intentionally tear you down. It is important that you take their feedback as constructive and do your best not to be offended or hurt. Do not argue with them or try to explain yourself; rather thank them for their honest feedback. You will ask them the following questions:
 1. What are three aspects of my *personality* or *character* that you like about me and see as strengths?
 2. What is it like to be friends (or in a relationship) with me?
 3. What areas of my personality do you see as challenging, perhaps some “blind spots” (i.e., areas of my personality or behavior areas that I can’t “see” that are difficult to deal with or toxic to others) that need improvement?
- iii. After reflecting on their answer, write *at least 1-2 pages* about what you learned from the interviews. You could also write about how it compared to what you wrote about in Step 1.

- iv. **Becoming Self-Aware**, you will complete the *Self-Knowledge Inventory*, which can be found on Canvas. Please fill this out as best you can. You will *not* turn this in to me or on Canvas. However you will discuss specifically (2 – 3 paragraphs) what you learned about yourself from completing this inventory.
- v. **My Family of Origin**, for this part of the assignment you will be asked to look at your family-of- origin* (FoO) and beyond (aunts, great uncles, grandparents) and how it has shaped you. We learn a lot from our family either explicitly (they tell us directly) or implicitly (it is just implied from behavior or nonverbal messages). For this part of the assignment, you do not need to list the questions and answer them but rather think about them and answer them honestly. This section should be *at least 1 to 2 pages*. Questions to consider in looking at your family background might be:
 1. What did I learn from my primary caregivers (whether they are married, divorced, or never married) about marriage?
 2. What relationship skills (e.g., conflict and communication) did I learn from my FoO?
 3. Are there experiences from my family of origin that I have not yet dealt with? If so, what will I do to deal with or overcome them?

**Thinking, writing, or talking about one's family of origin has the potential to bring up painful experiences and memories. If this is the case for you, please let me know and together we will come up with an alternative part for this assignment that is of comparable workload.*

2. Marriage and Relationship Interview Assignment (MRIA) (100 points):

a. **Step #1:** One of the best ways to learn about relationships is to learn from those who are currently in

relationships or are seeking to have one. Therefore, you will be asked to conduct several interviews. These interviews should last 10-20 minutes but not last more than 30 minutes. You may interview either family or friends. You may do them in person (which I would prefer) or over the phone or video chat. You may *not* do them via email or text. Please note, when interviewing married (or highly committed) couples, I strongly suggest that you interview those in happy and stable relationships. Before interviewing an individual or couple, make sure they understand that they do *not* have to answer any of the questions. You will not be docked points for questions that they do not answer. However, it is to your advantage to find individuals and couples who are open to answering the questions. I will supply the questions you are to ask. You will notice that some of the questions are the same across relationship statuses. There is a reason for this. It is important for you to see how people answer similar questions depending on their current relationship duration and status.

b. **Step #2:** You will then write a summary of what was stated in the interviews. I do *not* want a word-for-word transcript. However, you may include a few quotes here and there. Also, please refrain from using your friends and family members' real names. What I will be looking for when I grade these assignments is that you *specifically integrate it with course material*. For example, if they talk about commitment, you can go to one of the chapters or lectures on commitment and discuss what was said in the interview and how it relates to what was said in class or your textbook. You should be sure to integrate at **least 5 specific concepts** from the texts and/or lecture for each MRIA. A separate rubric will be provided.

Your paper should be at *5 – 6 pages in length*, 10 – 12 point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins in Times New Roman font. The paper is to be turned in via Canvas.

The following is an outline of who you will interview and suggested questions to ask:

1. **MRIA #1—Single, male and female friend (at least 18 years old or older):**
 - i. What is the *best* part about being single?
 - ii. What is the most *difficult* part about being single?
 - iii. What are some of your expectations of marriage (or a long-term committed relationship) and how it will be?

- iv. What does it mean to you to be emotionally healthy?
 - v. Why do some marriages fail and others succeed?
 - vi. What do you find most attractive in partners you pursue (e.g., physical, characteristic, personality trait)?
 - vii. What attributes, characteristic traits, and/or virtues do believe are most helpful in committed relationships?
2. **MRIA #3—Newlywed Couples** (a couple who have been married at least 6 months but no more than 5 years):
- i. What is the best aspect of being married?
 - ii. What has been the most difficult part in the transition to marriage?
 - iii. What were some of the expectations you had about marriage? Have they been met? Why or why not?
 - iv. Why do some marriages fail and others succeed?
 - v. (If the couple has a child/children) How has marriage changed with the addition of children?
 - vi. What advice would you give single individuals and dating/engaged couples?
 - vii. What attributes, characteristic traits, and/or virtues have you found to be most important for yourself and your partner?
 - viii. If you could go back and tell yourself something on your wedding day that would have been helpful, what would you say?
3. **MRIA #5: Long-term Married/Partners Couples** (a couple who have been married/together at least 20 years)
- i. What is the best aspect about being married?
 - ii. What are some of the challenges you face now that you didn't a few years ago?
 - iii. Why do some marriages fail and others succeed?
 - iv. What advice would you give a couple at any stage?
 - v. What advice would you give single individuals, dating couples, and newlyweds?
 - vi. How has your marriage changed over the years?
 - vii. What attributes, characteristic traits, and/or virtues have you found to be most important for yourself and your partner?
 - viii. If you could go back and tell yourself something on your wedding day that would have been helpful, what would you say?

Exams

- 4. There will be two exams worth 50 points each. The final exam will be comprehensive and will cover what you have learned throughout the semester.

Grading Scale:

UVU's standard grading scale will be used in this class:

Grading Scale				
Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent	Gr

A	94-100	B-	80-82	D+
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-
B	83-86	C-	70-72	E

Required or Recommended Reading Assignments

How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 1
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 2
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 3
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 4
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 5
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 6
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 7
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 8
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 9
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 10
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 11
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 12
How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk Chapter 13

Fighting for Your Marriage

Part 1 Understanding the Risks on the Road to Lasting Love 9

1. The Three Keys for a Great Relationship 11
2. Destructive Patterns: Signs of Danger Ahead 19
3. Changing the Dance: Counteracting Communication Danger Signs 39

Part 2 Teaming Up to Handle Conflict 55

4. When What You Heard Isn't What I Said: Understanding Filters in Communication 57
5. What's Love Got to Do with It? 71
6. Talking Without Fighting: The Speaker Listener Technique 83
7. Controlling the Home Fires: Handling Issues and Events 101
8. New Perspectives on Problems and Problem-Solving 119
9. Ground Rules for a Great Relationship 137

Part 3 Enjoying Each Other 147

10. Staying Friends and Having Fun 149
11. Being There: Supporting One Another in Life 167
12. Sensuality and Sex: The Magical Art of Touch 183
13. Why You Can't Always Get What You Want: Unraveling the Mysteries of Expectations 199
14. Beliefs, Values, and Life Experiences: Navigating Differences and Cultivating Connection 217

Part 4 Staying the Course 235

- 15. Forgiveness: Restoring Hope 237
 - 16. Commitment in an Ever-Changing World: Staying on the Wonderful, Winding Path 257
 - 17. Moving Forward 275
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General Description of the Subject Matter of Each Lecture or Discussion

- Module 1: Theoretical Foundation of Love and Relationships
 - Module 2: Relationship Attachment Model
 - Module 3: Becoming Emotionally Healthy
 - Module 4: Mate Selection
 - Module 5: Violence in Relationships
 - Module 6: Relationship Patterns
 - Modules 7: Dissolution of Relationships
 - Module 8: Mid-term Exam
 - Module 9 Introduction to Prep
 - Modules 10: Transition to Marriage
 - Module 11: Transition to Parenthood
 - Module 12: Nurturing Friendship
 - Module 13: Communication
 - Module 14: Conflict Resolution
 - Module 15: Sexuality with Relationships
 - Module 16: Wrapping things up
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Required Course Syllabus Statements

Generative AI

I acknowledge that AI programs can be one of the many tools students utilize to facilitate learning, but they may also be used to generate plagiarized responses to assignments. I expect that all work students submit for this course will be their own. You may use AI programs (such as ChatGPT) to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic (such as being plagiarized from innumerable sources). Use of AI programs may also stifle your own independent and critical thinking skills and creativity. You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). Any plagiarism or other form of cheating will be dealt with according to academic integrity policies discussed below.

Using Remote Testing Software

This course does not use remote testing software.

This course uses remote testing software. Remote test-takers may choose their remote testing locations. Please note, however, that the testing software used for this may conduct a brief scan of

remote test-takers' immediate surroundings, may require use of a webcam while taking an exam, may require the microphone be on while taking an exam, or may require other practices to confirm academic honesty. Test-takers therefore shall have no expectation of privacy in their test-taking location during, or immediately preceding, remote testing. If a student strongly objects to using test-taking software, the student should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to determine whether alternative testing arrangements are feasible. Alternatives are not guaranteed.

Required University Syllabus Statements

Accommodations/Students with Disabilities

Students needing accommodations due to a permanent or temporary disability, pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions may contact UVU Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu or 801-863-8747.

Accessibility Services is located on the Orem Campus in BA 110.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing students requesting ASL interpreters or transcribers can contact Accessibility Services to set up accommodations. Deaf/Hard of Hearing services can be contacted at DHHservices@uvu.edu

DHH is located on the Orem Campus in BA 112

Academic Integrity

At Utah Valley University, faculty and students operate in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Maintaining an atmosphere of academic integrity allows for free exchange of ideas and enables all members of the community to achieve their highest potential. Our goal is to foster an intellectual atmosphere that produces scholars of integrity and imaginative thought. In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and UVU students are expected to produce their own original academic work.

Faculty and students share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment at UVU. Students have a responsibility to promote academic integrity at the university by not participating in or facilitating others' participation in any act of academic dishonesty. As members of the academic community, students must become familiar with their rights and responsibilities. In each course, they are responsible for knowing the requirements and restrictions regarding research and writing, assessments, collaborative work, the use of study aids, the appropriateness of assistance, and other issues. Likewise, instructors are responsible to clearly state expectations and model best practices.

Further information on what constitutes academic dishonesty is detailed in UVU Policy 541: Student Code of Conduct.

Equity and Title IX

Utah Valley University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age (40 and over), disability, veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth, or pregnancy-related conditions, citizenship, genetic information, or other basis protected by applicable law, including Title IX and 34 C.F.R. Part 106, in employment, treatment, admission, access to educational programs and activities, or other University benefits or services.

Inquiries about nondiscrimination at UVU may be directed to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights or UVU's Title IX Coordinator at 801-863-7999 – TitleIX@uvu.edu – 800 W University Pkwy, Orem, 84058, Suite BA 203.

Religious Accommodation

UVU values and acknowledges the array of worldviews, faiths, and religions represented in our student body, and as such provides supportive accommodations for students. Religious belief or conscience broadly includes religious, non-religious, theistic, or non-theistic moral or ethical beliefs as well as participation in religious holidays, observances, or activities. Accommodations may include scheduling or due-date modifications or make-up assignments for missed class work.

To seek a religious accommodation, a student must provide written notice to the instructor and the Director of Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu. If the accommodation relates to a scheduling conflict, the notice should include the date, time, and brief description of the difficulty posed by the conflict. Such requests should be made as soon as the student is aware of the prospective scheduling conflict.

While religious expression is welcome throughout campus, UVU also has a specially dedicated space for meditation, prayer, reflection, or other forms of religious expression.