

Shepherd University

Psychology 306 (sec 03) Special Topic: Interpersonal Relationships (3 credits)
Spring 2006

General Course Information

Meeting time and place: M-W-F, 9:10-10:00 a.m. White Hall, Room 111
First class: January 9, 2006

Instructor Information

Instructor—Dr. Bob Masson

E-mail address: rmasson@frontiernet.net (**Please feel free to email me with questions, concerns, problems, etc. Whenever possible, I'll get back to you within the day.**)

Office Hours: Before class or by appointment. Please set up a time by email or in class.

Teaching Philosophy: This class is especially designed to help you explore your own personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to learn new tools in order to live a more effective life and improve your interpersonal relationships. I expect students to treat coming to class as you would a job; please be on time, be prepared, having done the readings BEFORE class, and have an open and positive attitude. In return, I'll be prepared and do my very best to make class interesting and a positive experience for you. If you are ever bored or unclear about what we are doing or why, please contact me.

This is my second semester teaching at Shepherd University. I have taught counseling courses for many years at several universities, including Penn State, West Virginia University, and Florida Gulf Coast University in Ft. Myers, Florida. I have also worked as a counseling psychologist for the Veterans Administration and in private practice.

Course Description and Format

This course provides a unique opportunity for you to explore your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to learn new skills in terms of both improving your effectiveness as a human being and your effectiveness in relating to others. We'll use a variety of readings, large and small group discussions, and activities to explore such topics as overcoming fears, improving self-esteem, expanding your "comfort zone", family influences, personal emotions, love relationships and sexuality, dealing with stress and conflict, handling life changes, and developing a positive lifestyle. You'll learn several psychological theories and strategies, such as transactional analysis and rational emotive behavior therapy to help you better understand your own thought development and how that affects how you feel and act. These models also help you better understand others.

In order to better understand and improve your interpersonal relationships, our readings and activities will help you focus both within yourself and outward. You'll be encouraged to share whatever personal thoughts you are comfortable revealing to others in our class. I'll make sure that there is no pressure to reveal anything you wish to keep to yourself. I'll also work toward developing an atmosphere in which we are comfortable talking to one another, whether sharing personal thoughts or discussing sensitive topics. If you are ever uncomfortable with any aspect of class, please see me.

Textbooks

The textbooks for the class are: Human Relations, Ford; Your Erroneous Zones, Dyer; Born to Win, James & Jornegward; Introduce Yourself to Transactional Analysis, Campos; and The Rational Counseling Primer (or The Rational Primer), Young. These books are all very readable and practical. I think you'll like them a lot and several you will likely keep and perhaps even share with others, such as friends or family members.

Readings: Reading assignments will be made weekly. Please keep up with the readings. Otherwise you won't understand what is discussed in class. We'll discuss questions you have about the readings at the beginning of each class and may work from our books, so please bring the book(s) we're working out of to class.

Grading, Attendance, and Other Policies

Class attendance: Much of the classroom format will involve discussion and activities. Please make every effort to attend class. Everyone is entitled to one absence without penalty. Please contact a fellow student to find out about that class. If you miss three or more classes, your final grade may be lowered by an entire letter grade.

To be considered present and prepared, you must be in class from the beginning to the end on each day we meet.

Weather-related Cancellations: Please contact the university's information telephone if you suspect class might be cancelled because of weather. Also check the radio/tv news and on-line. I will always follow the university's policy on weather cancellations.

Grading: This class has two components: 1. The information and skills you will develop; and, 2. The personal experiences you will have, exploring your thoughts and feelings and applying all of this to your everyday life. Ideally, it would be great if we could have an "S" and "U" grading system, simply indicating that you attended, participated in all the readings, discussions, and activities, and completed the course "Satisfactorily". However, we've got to do A, B, and C for grades. So here is the plan. Grading in this class is based on a one hundred point total. (90-100=A; 75-89=B; 60-74C; 50-59D; 49 or less-F). Half of your grade, (50 points) will be graded on what you learn in the way of information and skills. We'll have a mid-semester and an end-semester exam, each worth twenty-five (25)

points. The other half of your grade (50 pts.) is based on your personal experiences. Since your personal experiences can't be graded on any basis other than that you explored certain topics for yourself as a part of the class and experienced whatever changes you choose to make, you'll receive credit for that. Therefore, the second half of your grade (50 points) will be based on a series of papers reflecting those experiences. For example, we may talk about anger management and assertiveness. You will then be asked to write a paper on these topics, reflecting how you deal with these issues and what changes you make in your thoughts and/or behavior as a result of the readings and our class discussions. You'll receive five (5) points for doing this paper. We'll have a total of eight (8) papers on various topics, equaling a total of 40 points. That's ninety (90) points. The last ten (10) points will be given for a personal growth/change project you'll set for yourself. About the second or third week of class, I'll ask you to write out a goal for yourself, place a copy in a sealed envelop, and give it to me. You'll then work on that project during the semester. At the end of the semester, you'll open the envelop, then write a paper describing how successful you were in achieving your goal. You'll be encouraged to share your goal and the degree to which you achieved it with the class, but you don't have to if you're not comfortable. Of course, anything you share with me is confidential.

Example? Suppose you want to become more assertive? Or you have an issue with a family member you'd like to resolve? You may procrastinate on finishing a project, such as your resume for job hunting...or have a fear about meeting new people...or have a fear about going to your health care provider for an examination. You may want to let go of guilt about something you once did or about something that happened to you. You get the idea. What matters is the importance of the goal to you.

If you have any questions about grades, please ask.

Exams: (50 pts. total) There will be a mid-semester and an end-semester exam, each worth 25 points. The questions will be made up of multiple choice, true/false, and short answers.

Papers: I'll give you the topics and suggested lengths as we go along.

Confidentiality: In this class, we will discuss many personal issues. Please treat any comments that others make with respect, just as you would comments made by a client in a counseling situation. Never feel pressure to reveal any personal information you wish not to reveal. While confidentiality about personal issues and information shared is expected, it can't be guaranteed. If you ever have concerns about this, please contact me.

Additional Information:

1. Please be on time!
2. Please don't eat or snack during class.
3. PLEASE **DON'T** TALK while others are talking in class.
4. Please email me a comment about class before next week.

Academic Dishonesty/Cheating Policy:

From the 2005-2007 College Catalog, page 58:

Cheating in all its forms, including plagiarism and cheating on visual work, is considered an academic matter to be controlled and acted upon by the individual faculty member. Students guilty of academic dishonesty on examinations in any course shall receive, as minimum penalty, a grade of F in that course. Such action shall be taken by the instructor, with written notification to the appropriate College administrators. Repeated offenses shall subject the student to suspension or dismissal from the college. Students involved in facilitating the academic dishonesty among others, such as the unauthorized dissemination of examination materials, will be subject to disciplinary action beyond that called for by their own cheating in the course.

Disability Accommodations:

I will be very pleased to provide classroom and academic accommodations to students with documented disabilities. If you need to request an accommodation in this class due to a disability, or you suspect that your academic performance is adversely affected by a disability, please see me or your advisor to make appropriate arrangements. Please do this within the first two weeks of the semester. No special accommodations will be made for test-taking or meeting other assignments unless you have established a documented disability within the first two weeks of class.

In summary, I'm very excited about this class and think we'll have a great semester!

(P.S. I'd like to explore the possibility of changing our schedule so we can meet for a block of time (2 hours and 45 minutes) once a week [eg: Tuesday afternoon from 2 to 4:45, or Tuesday or Thursday night from 6 to 8:45] rather than the current schedule. The main reason for this is that the concentrated block of time allows us to explore topics in greater depth without having to break and pick it up the next class. Think about this and we'll see if we can work out something over the next week or two. It must work for everyone. If we can't work it out, no problem; we'll stick to this schedule.)