COURSE OBJECTIVES

The focus of this course is on building and preserving successful, strong, healthy, and resilient families and secure, stable, warm, and open home environments to house and sustain them. We live in a culture that accentuates the bizarre, negative, and dysfunctional. In contrast, considerable research has documented the kinds of things that characterize strong and healthy marriages and families, such as respectful, appreciative, and supportive family relationships, processes, interactions, activities, communication, listening, problem solving, conflict resolution, and coping strategies. A major objective of the course is to study these characteristics with the intent of learning how to recognize and apply them in our own lives, marriages, and families as an antidote to the negative images, messages, and emphases in our cultural. The course will emphasize the things couples and families do to provide for individual and family well-being amidst the many challenges facing families in contemporary society. This requires that we acquire an awareness and understanding of the workings of marriages and family systems that are strong, healthy, and resilient. Among other things already mentioned, we will study the importance to strong families of family history, traditions, and rituals; kinship bonds; intimacy; ethical, spiritual, and religious orientations; family stress; parental supervision and monitoring; and ways of reducing delinquency, youth violence, drug abuse.

Two other major objectives of the course is to help you discover, understand, and appreciate the importance and meaning of the physical and material environments of your home and the processes through which personal and family meaning is made and shared. As you come to understand the importance of the home’s physical and material environments, you will be prepared to integrate into your understanding of them the things we will have studied about strong and healthy families. This course is also a study of “meaning” — what “meaning” is and what experiences, relationships, things, places, people, and your home and family environment “mean” to you. Finally, in the background of our study of strong homes and families is a concern for the kinds of communities in which our homes and families are embedded and how we need to plan for them in the present so we can strengthen our homes and families in the future.
SAMPLING OF TOPICS

* Strengthening homes and families; importance of family history and sense of roots in people and place
* Strengthening homes: Psychological meaning of house and home
* Psychological, symbolic relationships between the self and material objects
* Significance of family processes and context: patterns, traditions, and rituals
* Strengthening families by “meaning” making through rituals
* Characteristics of successful, strong, and happy families
* Myths and realities about successful, happy marriages
* Why marriages falter

REQUIRED READINGS

1. Many of the course readings are on “Electronic Reserve” at the Marriott Library General Reserve. The required readings on reserve are all those that are not in Gottman’s book (listed below). These readings are also available in printed form at the General Reserve Desk in the Marriott Library.


RECOMMENDED BOOKS


COURSE LEARNING DEMONSTRATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

EXAMS (80% of total course grade). There are three in-class exams. The highest two of three exam grades are counted for the final grade and the lowest of the three exams is dropped. If you know that you will miss two of the three exams, please realize it will be difficult to get a grade higher than a D. This also means that if you are satisfied with your first two exam grades, you do not have to take the third exam. The exams contain approximately 55 to 65 items that are primarily multiple-choice items with some matching, true/false, and short fill-in items. Exams cover both topics and content discussed in class and in the readings. THERE ARE NO MAKE-UP EXAMS. THE FIRST TWO EXAMS ARE TYPICALLY GIVEN DURING THE FIFTH AND TENTH WEEKS OF THE TERM. THE THIRD EXAM IS DURING THE REGULARLY SCHEDULED FINAL EXAM PERIOD FOR THIS CLASS AND IT IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE EXAM.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES (20% of grade). During most class meetings we engage in activities, as individuals and/or in small groups, that build on your class preparation, readings, and other class activities. A few activities may require work outside of class but most are completed in class. For these activities, you receive credit if you are present, participate, and turn your work in at the end of the particular class meeting with your name on it. Since these activities take place and have their intended meaning within the context of a particular class meeting, you have to be in class to participate and receive credit. Parts of activities missed because you were late in coming to class or activities missed because you were not in class at all, cannot be made up. These exercises are intended to provide experiences with additional forms of learning in addition to reading and listening to lectures. Your grade for these activities will be determined by the percentage of the total number of these activities that you complete in class. There will be at least ten of these activities. One of your first assignments is to send me an email message (at the address listed above) by 5:00 p.m., Friday of Week 2, that includes your email address so that I can send course-related materials to you by email as they become available.