GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE PROPOSAL
WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
**SOCIAL SCIENCE**

Area: **SOCIAL SCIENCE**

Date: **10/12/2011**

College: **Social and Behavioral Science**

Department: **Psychology**

Catalog Abbreviation: **PSY**

Catalog Title: **Interpersonal Relationships**

Course Number: **2000**
Credit Hours: **3**

Substantive:
New:
Revised:
Renewal: **x**
Effective Date: **7/1/2012**

Current Catalog Description

**The systematic analysis of interpersonal relationships is used to teach the skills and attitudes necessary for relationship development, maintenance, and repair. The acquisition of effective relationship skills and the communications styles that support them throughout various types of developmental stages and situations in modern life, will be emphasized.**

## SOCIAL SCIENCE GENERAL EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the Social Science general education area is twofold: 1. to provide students with a basic understanding of humans and their behavior within their environments; and 2. to assist students in their efforts to contribute to society in their particular professions and as responsible citizens of their various communities.*

## SOCIAL SCIENCE LEARNING OUTCOMES

All courses proposed for inclusion in the social science breadth category must address at least **two** of the skill criteria listed below. (Mark all that apply.)

____Written, oral, or graphic communication
__x_ Abstract logic or reasoning
____ Use of information technology
____Use of library or other research sources
____Critical thinking, cognitive learning, and individual or group problem solving
__x_Collaborative group problem solving

Justification: The challenge for students in any psychology class is that they must learn about the discipline despite holding misconceptions about both its contents and methods. Helping students overcome these misconceptions is one of the central challenges of General Education psychology courses.

A central goal of Interpersonal Relationships is for students to learn to think as scientists about various forms of human relationships, which is the overarching topic of the course. To think as scientists about human relationships means that students' personal intuitions, unique experiences, and self-reflection for understanding human relations are at least augmented by an **abstract logic or reasoning process**. In the first two weeks of classes students learn the *hypothetico-deductive* model of scientific reasoning (Braithwaite, 1953), which requires hypothesizing effects based on theories of human nature and assessing those hypotheses against results of studies designed to test them. Students learn the component skills in hypothetico-deductive reasoning about human nature in lectures and chapters which involves processes of *generating hypotheses* (e.g., deduction from theories), *designing research studies* (e.g., distinguishing case, correlational, and experimental studies), and *interpreting the results of the studies* (learning to make descriptive and inferential statistical inferences). Skills for critically *evaluating the limits* of any given study (e.g., concepts of internal and external validity) are also reviewed so that students appreciate the process of science as a process of puzzling over patterns of results from multiple studies.

In each chapter of an Interpersonal Relationships textbook, students learn how hypothetical-deductive model of scientific reasoning is used to test claims about different aspects of human interpersonal relationships. For example, various chapters highlight the scientific evidence of the power of evolutionary factors, social factors, and psychological factors on relationship development

and maintenance. Students are required in homework assignments and group discussions to consider personal beliefs and values about these processes and compare and contrast them with theoretical models and empirical evidence. Examples are found in popular statements such as "opposites attract" and "birds of a feather flock together", which students are surprised to discover that only the latter is confirmed by empirical evidence. Student assignments and discussions correct and/or clarify misconceptions and commonly held beliefs about such statements.

The Interpersonal Relations class is also a laboratory for students to learn how to apply the research and theory they are learning about to real world situation. This process includes frequent use of **Collaborative group problem solving**. The collaborative group problem solving may occur a) among members of the entire class through directed discussions, b) relatively permanent small group of students who work together on a sustained project, and or c) a temporarily created group of students in which students work through a variety of problems. Student discussions, projects, and projects include a) responding to specific questions or completing a particular assignment, b) analyzing and evaluating controversial research findings or case studies, or c) processing conflicting intuitions and experiences. This feature of the class is so essential that the room in which the class is held has been physically designed with not just individual desks in the center of the room but also group tables with partitions on the side of the classroom. An example of group problem solving is found in assigned classroom group discussions and assignments. Two examples are provided below.

1. According to social exchange theory, whatever our feelings may be, however pure and admirable our motives may seem, however genuine our devotion may appear, we pursue relationships with others only so long as they are satisfying in terms of the (overall) rewards and costs.

    A. As a group, discuss social exchange theory and how it can be applied to each of the following relationships: Friendships, Dating, Marriage

    B. As a group, choose one of the relationships noted above and critique the theory's utility in accounting for individual behavior in these relationships.

    C. Do you agree or disagree with this theory? Does it accurately reflect human kind?

2. As a group discuss the formation of relationships using social penetration theory.

    A. Does this theory accurately describe your experiences with relationship formation?

    B. List relationship failures and successes that can be attributed to this theory.

    C. What characteristics of reciprocity are important to healthy relationship formation?

A student completing a social science general education course should be able to accomplish **three** of the following five outcomes. (Mark all that apply.)

__x__ Describe a social science approach to studying and understanding human behavior.
_____ Describe basic assumptions about humans and their behaviors from a social science perspective.
_____ Explain the basic elements and operation of a sociocultural system.
__x__ Explain the interactions between individuals and their sociocultural and/or natural environments.
__x__ Apply a social science perspective to a particular issue and identify factors impacting change (past or present).

Justification:

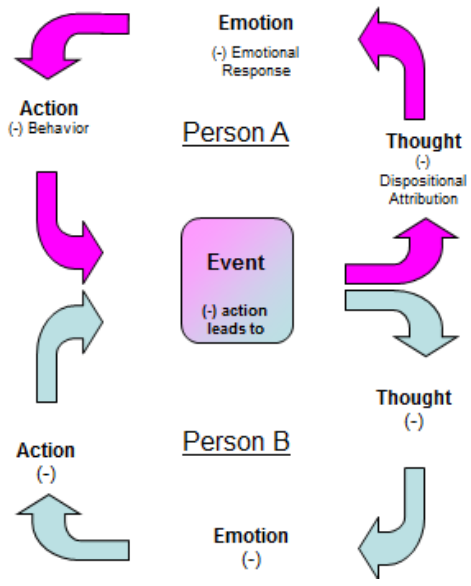
Overall, students in Interpersonal Relationships are trained in *scientific psychology* as a **social science approach to studying and understanding human behavior.** Scientific psychology is distinct from students' spontaneous ways of studying and understanding human behavior which is based on intuition, experience, and reflection. Students also learn that scientific psychology assumes that claims about interpersonal relationships must be empirically tested through a hypothetico-deductive process of scientific reasoning. For students to fully appreciate how to apply scientific theory and findings to their interpersonal relationships, the class strongly encourages discussions and disclosure on the part of the students. As students disclose their own beliefs and experiences with relationships they are invited to consider and discuss them as they relate to scientific psychology.

In addition to the being trained in *scientific psychology* students are exposed to the use of scientific theory in explaining human behavior. Theories from each of the major perspectives of psychology (psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, biological, and socio-cultural) are used to describe such human behaviors and concepts as personality development, self, attraction, love, conflict, jealousy, loss, sexuality, self-disclosure, cultural diversity. Not only do students come to understand the use of scientific theory in understanding human behavior, they also view human behavior as a complex interaction with multiple contributors.

The Interpersonal Relations class emphasizes the scientific psychology account of **interactions between individuals and their sociocultural and/or natural environments**. Generally, these interactions are explained in scientific psychology by complex relations between the biological, psychological, and social forces operating on individuals. The scientific psychological accounts of constructs such as attraction, love, conflict, and the nature and quality of attachment in infancy to adulthood are presented as complex interactions between evolutionary (innate biological responses), psycho-social (personality, emotional regulation) and socio-cultural (social norms and

roles) factors. These explanations tends to be more complex than students own intuitive theories of these concepts which, if they assume can be explained at all, are often explained by reference to a limited number of factors without assuming complex interaction effects. Through individual assignments, collaborative group work, and classroom discussions students become aware of and explain interactions between the individual and sociocultural influences (e.g. parents, siblings, peers, and community).

Finally, students in the class learn to **apply a social science perspective to particular issues and identify factors impacting change (past or present).** For example, as noted earlier conflict is explored as a product of complex interactions between biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors. The model below illustrates how conflict can be managed or changed via two or more of the major perspectives of psychology presented in the course. For example, the cognitive perspective focuses on changing conflict by challenging negative attributions/cognitions about events which alter biological/emotional processes and behavioral repertoires. In turn, these changes will impact the reciprocal nature of the relationship between individuals. Altering conflict patterns from a behavioral perspective punctuates the importance of changing either our own or other's behaviors through the use of reinforcement or punishment. An understanding of these and other perspectives taught in the course allow students to apply psychological theory and empirical evidence to several interpersonal relationship issues. Students are required to complete group presentations focused on a particular issue related to interpersonal relationships. Rather than presenting mainstream ideas from pop-psychology, these presentations must include both theoretical and empirical evidence from scientific psychology. Students are challenged to identify factors that have been empirically shown to impact change.



**COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING**

1. Has this proposal been discussed with and approved by the department?

Yes

2. List those general education courses in other departments with similar subject matter and explain how this course differs.

While other general education classes across the university may explore aspects of human relationships covered in Interpersonal Relationships (including COMM 2110 and CFS 1400) none has as its goal the training of students in the scientific psychology as an approach to the study of human relations.

3. If the proposed new general education course affects course requirements or enrollments in other departments, list the departments and programs involved and attach comments from each.

This is not a new course.

4. Attach a course syllabus. Include the number of contact hours per week and the format of these hours (e.g., lecture, lab, field trip, etc.).

The course consists of 150 minutes a week.

**New Courses Only:**

5. Discuss how you will assess student learning outcomes associated with this course

**Current General Education Courses and Existing Courses Seeking General Education Status:**

6. Discuss how you have assessed the applicable or identified student learning outcomes associated with this course.

The learning outcome goals of the class are assessed through the use of graded homework, exam performance, graded group projects, quality of discussions, and group interactions. The assessments focusing on students' interpersonal interactions (discussions, group work, etc.) in the course are seen as particularly relevant for assessing students learning outcomes in this class as they reflect a critical component of the class.

Future research on student learning outcomes is now underway. We are examining not only psychological knowledge and skills acquired, but also the impact of the class on the quality of student's interpersonal relationships.

7. How has this assessment information been used to improve student learning?

After some years of serving largely an experiential function, the course has been transformed in the past decade to become more integrative of the science and the experience. This is in keeping with the General Education requirements of the class.

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE APPROVAL PAGE

**Approval Sequence:**

_____
Department Chair/Date

_____
Dean of College/Date

_____
University Curriculum Committee/Date

Passed by Faculty Senate_____Date

Effective Date_____