

Psych 410, Spring 2017: **Intimate relationships**

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Class Location and Time: 214 Fraser | Monday and Wednesday from 11:00 am – 12:15 pm

Overview and Course Objectives

The class will expose students to a particular theoretical approach to intimate relationships (e.g., parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, marriage, cases in which a middle-aged adult takes care of an aging parent). The approach is called **attachment theory**, and it was first proposed by a British psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist, John Bowlby, in lectures and books published between 1960 and 1990. The first volume deals with attachment or "emotional bonding," the second with separation-anxiety and anger, and the third with loss and grief. The social relationship that receives most attention in these books is the one, beginning in infancy, between a child and his or her parents. In the late 1980s, Phillip Shaver and Cindy Hazan extended the theory to the realm of romantic and marital relationships. Since then, attachment theory has become a leading theory in the research of adult intimate relationships.

We will use two resources in our class. First, we will use chapters from an up and coming new book about attachment. This book by Gillath, Karantzas, and Fraley will provide a common foundation for students in this class. We will supplement the main text with more recent articles and oral reports (carried out by students) on recent studies. In the second half of the semester we will use this theoretical basis and Miller's textbook: *Intimate relationships* (7th edition); to get a broader overview of the field, and explore other topics within close relationships, such as friendship, attraction, and communication. Students in the class will also be involved in a simple research project so they get a feel for psychological research, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of results. At the end of the class, students will have a better understanding of psychological research goals and methods, as well as valuable knowledge about how relationships work and how they leave lasting impressions on a person's emotional life and personality traits.

The class has several goals: (1) to involve students actively in learning about themselves and the field of psychology (especially its social, developmental, and clinical aspects); (2) to help students integrate their own experiences and observations with theories and research findings in scientific psychology (many of our hypotheses have been based partly on personal intuitions and experiences or observations, so we are very interested in students' own ideas); (3) to help students conduct a simple research project, for example interviewing friends or family members according to a simple questionnaire we construct, and/or by conducting a simple closed-ended, survey with which the results can be analyzed and discussed in class (with the respondents remaining anonymous, of course); (4) to help students learn to give oral reports about psychological theories and research studies; (5) to help students improve their understanding of their own relationships, something that research shows will serve them well throughout life.

Course Structure

The class will meet for 2.5 hours each week (two sessions of 75 minutes each). Before each week, students will be asked to complete fairly simple assigned readings. Each week, a few students (each one individually) will be asked to give oral presentations that get the discussion of the weekly assignment rolling. Furthermore, these students will be asked to bring in additional information from other resources (such as special assigned readings and the media). Those special assignments will often be fairly advanced and hence difficult, so careful preparation and perhaps communication with instructors will be needed. However, the reports can be very brief and simple. A template for the presentation is saved on BB. An example of a presentation will be delivered by the TA.

Grades

The final grade will be based on class participation, oral presentations, help with the research project, research paper, and two exams.

Research project: (25 pts) Papers are due at the beginning of the last class on the dates specified in the course schedule. **Late papers will not be accepted.** The research paper will be short [**minimum of 5** and maximum of **10** typed pages, doubled spaced, APA style, 12 font (times new roman)]. Research papers will be evaluated on: creativity, fit with APA style, spelling, grammar, clarity, extent to which you demonstrate understanding of the concept you are discussing, extent to which the research you have suggested is related to the class material, and the extent to which you have integrated your own thoughts and ideas.

Class Presentation (20 pts) – Each person will give one to two 5-7 minute in-class presentation. Students are encouraged to present their material using technology and interactive methods. Each person will provide a 1 page summary of their presentation (handout). See attached handout for a detailed description of the reports' requirements.

For each week, the first two speakers will present on Monday, and the remaining speakers on Wednesday.

Exams [Midterm: 20 points; Final: 25 points]:

There will be two exams in this class. The **Midterm Exam** will cover information discussed in class as well as assigned readings from the first half of the semester, and will be comprised of multiple choice questions. (Assigned readings include both chapters and articles students present in class).

Similarly, the **Final Exam** will cover information discussed in class as well as assigned readings from the second half of the semester.

In-class work (10 pts): Showing up to every class and taking an active role in discussions (clickers).

There will be a total of 100 pts

In-class work: 10 points

Presentation(s): 20 points

Midterm: 20 points

Research Project: 25 pts

Final Exam: 25 pts

Clickers:

One opportunity for participation in lecture comes from the use of clicker technology. During each lecture, I will ask students to respond to questions using clickers. This technology automatically records information about student responses. I will use this information to award points for participation (not for accuracy). **For this reason, anyone who brings more than one transmitter to class may be charged with academic misconduct, along with the owner of the “extra” clicker. Such behavior is the equivalent of cheating on a test and will not be tolerated.** No need for a class key to register your clicker, just go to BlackBoard, Tools, CPS, and use your serial number.

Late Policy:

The general class policy is that NO MAKEUP EXAMS will be offered and NO LATE PAPERS will be accepted. However, in extremely unusual circumstances, some arrangements may be possible for making up missed work. If circumstances can be foreseen, you should talk to me before an exam or assignment date to discuss arrangements. If you have a problem on exam day that prevents you from showing up, contact me IMMEDIATELY by e-mail, phone, etc. THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR NOT GETTING IN TOUCH RIGHT AWAY ABOUT YOUR ABSENCE! Out of fairness to students who take exams as scheduled and turn in papers on time, any (rare) approved makeup assignment will face an automatic grade reduction.

Academic Misconduct:

As outlined in the University Senate Rules and Regulations: Academic misconduct by a student shall include, but not be limited to, disruptions of classes, giving or receiving unauthorized aid on examinations or in the preparation of reports or other assignments, or knowingly misrepresenting the source of any academic work, falsification of research results, plagiarizing of another's work, or otherwise acting dishonestly in class. Dr. Gillath and your TAs take cheating very seriously, as these practices diminish the integrity and standards of your education as well as the reputation of your university. Regular precautions will be taken to prevent cheating. If you are found guilty of any academic misconduct, you will receive a failing grade for this course, and you may face more severe treatment at the college level. Please don't put yourself or us in the position of dealing with such misconduct.

Students with Disabilities or Special Circumstances:

The Academic Achievement & Access Center (AAAC) coordinates accommodations and services for all KU students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted the AAAC, please do so as soon as possible. Their office is located in 22 Strong Hall; their phone number is 785-864-4064 (V/TTY). Information about their services can be found at <http://disability.ku.edu>. Please contact me privately in regard to your needs in this course.

Please also see me privately in regard to this course so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate the educational experience. More generally, if you have any problems or concerns regarding this course, please contact me as soon as possible. Your feedback (both positive and negative) is integral to how well this course works! We should strive to respect and value the diversity that exists in KU classrooms (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, national origin, disability, geographic backgrounds, political orientation, and sexual orientation). While we may sometimes disagree with each other on topics discussed in class, it's important that we remember that appreciating diversity in perspectives is an important part of the learning process. If you ever feel that you are not being given the respect you deserve in class, please let me know.

Intellectual Property Issues:

Course materials prepared by the instructor together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. On request, the instructor will usually grant permission for students to audio tape lectures, on the condition that these audio tapes are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

Writing Assistance:

Most colleges and universities have a writing center, a place for students to talk about their writing with trained peer consultants. At KU, we call our writing centers Writer's Roosts. When you visit, bring your work in progress and an idea of what you would like to work on; organization, support, documentation, editing, etc. The Roosts are open in several different locations across campus; please check the website at www.writing.ku.edu for current locations and hours. The Roosts welcome both drop-ins and appointments, and there is no charge for their services. For more information, please call 864-2399 or send an e-mail to writing@ku.edu.

Available on Blackboard:

Be sure to check the course website for announcements, reminders, lecture outlines, syllabus, schedule, response paper assignments, etc. Links to other websites of interest will also be found here, including links for extra required reading/exercises. The course documents section will also include brief lecture outlines, and study guides to guide you in the reading of each chapter. These study guides form the basis for all questions on the text that appear on tests (obviously other questions are based on lecture material). **BE SURE TO CHECK BLACKBOARD REGULARLY!**

Technology Use: Students should use Power Point for their presentations; computer and projector will be supplied upon request. The majority of communication will take place through campus email and Blackboard. Please check it regularly. You can access Blackboard by using the following link <https://courseware.ku.edu/>.

Week 1 (January 18th)**Introduction and orientation: The study of love and intimate relationships from an attachment point of view.**

Brief overview of the class and the related Blackboard website (PsycINFO and the scavenger hunt – PsycINFO task, Blackboard, and class reports).

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016). Prologue

Week 2 (Jan. 23rd and Jan. 25th) – PsycINFO scavenger task due the 25th Attachment in infancy and early childhood.

Discussion on what is attachment theory? And attachment relationship.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 1 & 2.

Week 3 (Jan. 30th and Feb 1st) Abstract Summary task due date is the 1st

Working models, self-representation, and attachment styles.

Discussion of the internalization of attachment figures and the notion of “working models” in adulthood.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 3 & 4.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Fraley, R. C., & Roisman, G. I. (2015). Do early caregiving experiences leave an enduring or transient mark on developmental adaptation?. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 1, 101-106.

Mikulincer, M., Gillath, O., & Shaver, P. R. (2002). Activation of the attachment system in adulthood: Threat-related primes increase the accessibility of mental representations of attachment figures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 881-895.

Week 4 (Feb 6th and 8th) - Abstracts Integration task due date is the 8th

Measurement.

Discussion of the measurement of attachment style.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 5.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). Ch. 15: An interpretation of individual differences. In *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation* (pp. 310-322). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

George, C., & West, M. (2001). The development and preliminary validation of a new measure of adult attachment: The Adult Attachment Projective. *Attachment and Human Development*, 3, 30-61.

Week 5 (Feb. 13th and 15th) Attachment stability and change.

We'll address the question of how stable individual differences in attachment are across time and what is known about factors that may promote stability and change including priming.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 6 & 7.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Carnelley, K. B., Otway, L. J., & Rowe, A. C. (2015). The effects of attachment priming on depressed and anxious mood. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 2167702615594998.

Gillath, O., Selcuk, E., & Shaver, P. R. (2008). Moving toward a secure attachment style: Can repeated security priming help?. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2, 1651-1666.

Week 6 (Feb. 20th and 22nd)

Attachment and other behavioral systems.

Discussion of the interplay between different behavioral systems and especially the influence of attachment security on compassionate caregiving and sexuality.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 8.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2013). Attachment and caregiving in adult close relationships: Normative processes and individual differences. *Attachment & human development*, 15, 241-245.

Dewitte, M. (2012). Different perspectives on the sex-attachment link: Towards an emotion-motivational account. *Journal of sex research*, 49(2-3), 105-124.

Week 7 (Feb 27th and March 1st)

The micro and macro levels of attachment.

Discussion of the effects of context on attachment and the neural and physiological correlates of attachment.

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 9 & 10.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Cassibba, R., Sette, G., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2013). Attachment the Italian Way. *European Psychologist*, 18, 47-58.

DeWall, C. N., Masten, C. L., Powell, C., Combs, D., Schurtz, D. R., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2012). Do neural responses to rejection depend on attachment style? An fMRI study. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 7, 184-192.

Week 8 (March 6th and 8th)

Implications and future directions.

Presentation of research project and Midterm

Readings for this week:

Gillath et al. (2016): Ch. 11 and Epilogue.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Johnson, S. M. (2004). Attachment theory: A guide for healing couple relationships. In W. S. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 367-387). New York: Guilford Press.

Levy, K. N., Johnson, B. N., Clouthier, T. L., Scala, J., & Temes, C. M. (2015). An attachment theoretical framework for personality disorders. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 56, 197-207.

Week 9 (March 13th and 15th)-Sending research questions to Xian due March 15th

Research methods.

How do we choose a research question and how do we test it?

Readings for this week:

Miller (2015), Ch. 2: Research methods.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Zablotsky, D. (2001). Why do I have to learn this if I'm not going to graduate school? Teaching research methods in a social psychology of aging course. *Educational Gerontology*, 27, 609-622.

Sani & Todman (2006). Experimental design and statistics for psychology: A first course, Ch. 2: The Nature of Psychology Experiments (I): Variables and Conditions.

Gravetter, F. J., & Forzano, L. A. B. (2011). Introduction, acquiring knowledge, and the scientific method. In F. J., Gravetter & L. A. B., Forzano (Eds.), *Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences*. (pp. 1-39 4th ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Think about interesting research questions, interview friends and relatives about what they find interesting in close relationships and send three questions to Xian by March 15th at 5pm.

Week 10 [SPRING BREAK (20th – 26th)]

Week 11 (March 27th and March 29th).

Building blocks of relationships: What constitutes an intimate relationship?

Moving into the broader context: Discussing the concept of close/intimate relationships? And what does attachment theory have to say about them.

Readings for this week:

Miller (2015), Ch. 1: The Building Blocks of Relationships.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

Aron, A., & Aron, E. N. (2006). Romantic relationships from the perspective of the self-expansion model and attachment theory. In M. Mikulincer & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Dynamics of romantic love: Attachment, caregiving, and sex*. (pp. 359-382). New York: Guilford Press.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychology Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.

Reis, H. T. (2006). Implications of Attachment Theory for Research on Intimacy. In M.

- Mikulincer & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Dynamics of romantic love: Attachment, caregiving, and sex*. (pp. 383-403). New York: Guilford Press.
- Bahns, A. J., Pickett, K. M., & Crandall, C. S. (2012). Social ecology of similarity Big schools, small schools and social relationships. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 15, 119-131.

Week 12 (April 3rd and 5th) - Research project proposals due April 3rd

Theories of love.

Discussing a few representatives of the many theories about love.

Readings for this week:

Miller (2015), Ch. 8: Love.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

- Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *American Psychologist*, 54, 260-266.
- Sternberg, Robert J. (2004). A Triangular Theory of Love. In H. T. Reis, & C. E. Rusbult (Eds). *Close relationships: Key readings*. (pp. 213-227). Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Hendrick, S. S., & Hendrick, C. (2000). Romantic love. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook*. (pp. 203-215). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Week 13 (April 10th and 12th)

The fundamental basis of attraction.

A discussion on the reasons for being attracted – why are we attracted to certain people?

Readings for this week:

Miller (2015), Ch. 3: Attraction.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

- Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1979). Interpersonal attraction in exchange and communal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 12-24. [Interdependence theory, communal and exchange orientations].
- Buss, D. M. (1995). Evolutionary psychology: A new paradigm for psychological science. *Psychological Inquiry*, 6, 1-30.
- Van-Horn, K. R., Arnone, A., Nesbitt, K., Desilets, L., Sears, T., Giffin, M., & Brudi, R. (1997). Physical distance and interpersonal characteristics in college students' romantic relationships. *Personal relationships*, 4, 25-34.

Week 14 (April 17th and 19th)

Power and communication in close relationships.

Discussion on the role of power and communication in intimate relationships.

Readings for this week:

- Miller (2015), Ch. 5: Communication.
- Miller (2015), Ch. 12: Power and Violence.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

- Neff, K. D., & Suizzo, M. A. (2006). Culture, power, authenticity, and psychological well-being within romantic relationships: A comparison of European American and Mexican Americans. *Cognitive Development, 21*, 441-457.
- Felmlee, D. H. (1994). Who's on top? Power in romantic relationships. *Sex Roles, 31*, 275-295.
- Parks, M. R., & Adelman, M. B. (1983). Communication networks and the development of romantic relationships: An expansion of uncertainty reduction theory. *Human Communication Research, 10*, 55-79.
- Jang, S. A., Smith, S. W., & Levine, T. R. (2002). To stay or to leave? The role of attachment styles in communication patterns and potential termination of romantic relationships following discovery of deception. *Communication Monographs, 69*, 236-252.

Week 15 (April 24th and 26th)**Bad things happen – conflict, stress, strains and relationship dissolution.**

Discussion on the dark side of intimate relationships, what might happen in a relationship?

Readings for this week:

- Miller (2015), Ch. 10: Stresses and strains
- Miller (2015), Ch. 11: Conflict
- Miller (2015), Ch. 13: The Dissolution and Loss of Relationships

Reports for this week:

- Pietromonaco, P. R., Greenwood, D., & Barrett, L. F. (2004). Conflict in Adult Close Relationships: An Attachment Perspective. In W. S. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 267-299). New York: Guilford Press.
- Gurung, R.A.R., Sarason, B.R., & Sarason, I.G. (2001). Predicting Relationship Quality and Emotional Reactions to Stress from Significant-Other-Concept Clarity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 1267-1276.
- Collins, T. J., & Gillath, O. (2012). Attachment, breakup strategies, and associated outcomes: The effects of security enhancement on the selection of breakup strategies. *Journal of Research in Personality, 46*, 210-222.

Week 16 (May 1st and May 3rd) – Research project due date May 1st in class**Friendship and goodbyes.**

Discussion on friendship and no-ship, and goodbyes.

Readings for this week:

- Miller (2015), Ch. 7: Friendship.
- Miller (2015), Ch. 14: Maintaining and Repairing Relationships.

Reports for this week (volunteers needed):

- Fehr, B. (2004). Intimacy Expectations in Same-Sex Friendships: A Prototype Interaction-Pattern Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 265-284.
- Ueno, K. & Adams, R. (2006). Adult Friendship: A Decade Review. In P. Noller, & J. A. Feeney

(Eds), *Close relationships: Functions, forms and processes*. (pp. 151-169). Hove, England: Taylor & Francis.

DePaulo, B. M., Morris, W. L. (2006). The unrecognized stereotyping and discrimination against singles. *Current directions in psychological science*, 15, 251-254.

Final discussion of research findings, wrap-up, and good-byes.

Reminder: Please make sure to refer to the specific instructions on blackboard for all class assignments and projects. Here is the tentative timetable for each of these tasks. These assignments will be turned in as a hard-copy in class.

- 1) **PsycINFO scavenger task is due January 25th.**
- 2) **Abstract Summary task is due February 1st.**
- 3) **Abstracts Integration task is due February 8th.**
- 4) **Email possible research questions for your research questions to Xian by March 15th.**
- 5) **Research project proposals are due April 3rd.**
- 6) **Research projects are due May 1st in class.**
- 7) **Midterm is March 8th**

The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus.

Class Report Template

Each week 3-4 students will give 5-7 minute long presentation in class. Each student will give 1-2 presentations during the term. Students will be asked to present a report including one of the assigned readings, an article they find using PsycINFO search (book chapter or journal article from 2011 and on), and a relevant current events piece (e.g., newspaper, news website, TV from 2016-17). Below is a list of concepts we would like you to concentrate on when giving your report.

1. Background

Briefly describe the general conceptual issues that motivated the research/ideas you were assigned to read about. Are there competing theories that were discussed? What makes these ideas special or important to the issues at hand? This discussion should be targeted at the readings (report readings, PsycINFO search, and media excerpt) but should also pave the way for discussion of the assigned readings the entire class was required to read. You may choose to present it in any order that you like (i.e., each article/informative piece separately, or combine the ideas and concepts or a little of both—as long as you address ALL the articles/information).

2. Goals

Describe the goal of the research/theories/ideas you read about. What are the competing hypotheses that were tested or addressed? In other words, how does this research go beyond what has been done before? The authors will make sure to make a special point about this. How are the readings you brought to class different from the assigned readings? Review the various

predictions form these hypotheses that are laid out to be discussed and tested. What are the authors trying to find out? What do they think their theory would predict? While there is a lot of stuff to discuss here, pick out the MOST important concepts. Narrow it down to a few sentences about each of articles/informative piece. You should not just re-read the article to the class but instead discuss what the question was of each article and what the authors subsequently predicted given their theoretical orientation. This is NOT just a summary.

3. Evidence

What is the evidence that is presented that argues for the author's point of view? In the case of an empirical study describe the results of the study and in the case of a theoretical piece explain what the authors presented as evidence.

4. Conclusions/Unresolved Issues

Do the authors' conclusions follow from the data presented? Describe any alternative explanations that could be made of the data. How else would YOU explain the data? Are these alternative accounts addressed convincingly by the authors? What is your own take home message based on your critical evaluation?

GUIDELINES OF THE PRESENTATION

* PowerPoint presentations are preferred, also please bring handouts for your friends – 1 page will be sufficient. Do whatever you need to make your concepts clear to the class.

***7 minutes top.** Everyone should have read the assigned readings so your audience should have some grasp of the concepts you will be talking about. This is a brief report.

GUIDELINES OF YOUR SELECTION

* PyscINFO article should be recent (2013-2016) and from a peer-reviewed journal. *Please bring a copy of the article with you.* (It shouldn't be an article listed on the class's syllabus). Try to choose an article that provides an answer to a question raised by the assigned reading, or that approach the same research question from a different perspective or using a different methodology.

* The current events should be a newspaper article of a recent topic (within the month of your presentation) and it must be a somewhat respectable newspaper. This can also be a newscast off the TV or off a website.

* If there are any relevant talks at the University feel free to go to them and summarize what they said – For extra credit.

Basically, use any source that you think will bring intellectual and critical thought and discussion to the class.

In general your presentation should provide brief background on what the authors were interested in and what they argued or did. We also want you to explain how the materials you brought *extend* the information from the assigned reading. What does the article you found add to the research the class read about? You can talk about why you liked or did not like an article

you found based on the readings from this week. It is very important to show your ability to read critically— understanding the interests behind the scene.

Grading of your talk is based on the relevance of the pieces you found, the way you connected them, and your presentations. The grading goes from fail, to pass, and pass with distinction (excellent).



Relationships 101 classes spark student interest

MUNCIE, Indiana (AP) -- Scott Hall wants to spark a discussion, so he asks his students something bound to provoke a reaction: Do women want more out of marriage than men?

It's just the sort of conversation starter that's heard more often in college classrooms these days. Affairs of the heart -- love, relationships and marriage -- have gone from being an obsession outside class to the reason for class.

The students in Hall's course on marriage at Ball State University -- many of them women -- laugh and nod at his question. Most of them agree with research he cites stating that men are most interested in a partner who's attractive and good in bed.

But not Mike Toscano, a 21-year-old senior: "It's not 'Oh she looks cute and she cooked a pot pie,'" he says. "I want to be held once in a while, too, y'all."

The comment draws more laughter, as Toscano blushes and smiles.

"I'm glad he feels that way," Anitra Montgomery, a 22-year-old junior, responds to the class. "But he is rare!"

Over the last 30 years, academics have been developing the study of "close relationships," as they call it, forming the International Association for Relationship Research to share resources and data.

Such research is "not just about what makes people happy but how relationships can affect other things -- for instance, someone's health," says Lisa Baker, an assistant professor of psychology at Purchase College, part of the State University of New York.

In recent years, though, some professors have moved beyond theory, making the discussion more personal to students by teaching relationship skills they can use outside the classroom.

Some call it Relationships 101 -- a concept that has proven wildly popular on campuses across the country.

Toscano, the Ball State senior, says he and his girlfriend, Bethany Ringrose, decided to take the class together this term to see if they want to take their relationship to the next level.

"It helps me understand my actions and his, too," says Ringrose, a 20-year-old junior at the school in central Indiana.

With divorce as common as it is in this country, experts say young couples are wise to do their marriage homework.

"The thinking is, the earlier people learn those skills, the better off they'll be," says Dennis Lowe, psychology professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, who team teaches a freshman seminar called "Developing Healthy Relationships" with his wife, Emily Scott-Lowe.

Among other things, students in the Lowes' classes practice listening -- namely giving the other person a chance to speak his or her mind without interruption. And if students are considering long-term, committed relationships, they're asked to consider questions such as whose job it would be to buy a car, discipline a child or cook dinner.

Leslie Parrot, a professor at Seattle Pacific University, says surveys at her university and others regularly show that relationships are a priority for students.

"They're often more focussed on relationship quality than their careers," says Parrott, a marriage and family therapist who teaches relationships courses with her husband, Les Parrott.

Lecture topics include "Falling in Love Without Losing Your Mind" and "How to Break Up Without Falling Apart." The latter class includes discussion on how to end a relationship cleanly and taking time after a breakup to avoid a rebound relationship: Parrott says that session regularly draws students who aren't even enrolled in the class.

"Breaking up is a real rite of passage for people their age -- they're just dying and they have no real guidance," says Parrott, who's co-authored a textbook on relationships with her husband.

Parrott says that some academics question whether classes like these belong in a college setting. But others -- from economists to theologians -- say there's no reason love should be ignored.

"The longer I live, the more I realize that the hardest thing is just relationships," says Robert Brancatelli, an assistant professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University in California's Silicon Valley. "It's hard enough to figure out yourself, let alone another person."

His course, "The Theology of Marriage," challenges students to go beyond notions of romantic fantasy to ultimately view love as "a mature self, capable of offering oneself to another person freely."

"And in doing so, you become more of your true self," says Brancatelli, who requires students to spend time with married couples to see what a life of commitment is really all about.

"I tell them to try to get invited over for dinner," Brancatelli says, "to see what the couples are like after a couple glasses of wine."

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