



COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2025

PSYCHOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS 13:830:399:90

WELCOME TO THE CLASS!!

Class begins Thursday, September 4, 2025 and concludes with the end of the Fall term on December 10, 2025, with our last regular class on Thursday, December 4, 2025. We meet once per week, Thursdays from 10:20 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.

It is always a good idea to retain a copy of this syllabus in your personal files for use when applying for future degrees, certifications, or transfer of credit.

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor:	Karen Riggs Skean, Psy.D.
Email:	kskean@gsapp.rutgers.edu
Location:	Class Zoom Room: https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/92772979690?pwd=MEJBcStTd2NRdkVmcE9tZEFFb1YzUT09
Office Hours:	In-Person Office Hour Tuesdays, 11:45 to 1:00 Virtual Office Hours as Scheduled and Upon Request
Course Assistants:	The class will be supported by several graduate students from the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, who will help with grading, leading discussion groups, and being available to anyone of your who would like to talk with them about the class or about graduate school.

Communication:

Throughout the semester, I will communicate with you via either **Canvas Announcements** or your **Rutgers email account**. Please review the following link for [Accessing Rutgers Email](#):

<https://canvas.rutgers.edu/documentation/general/accessing-rutgers-email/>

GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Course Description:

Welcome to the Psychology of Intimate Relationships. This course will explore the psychology of close (romantic) human relationships. Examples of topics covered are the biological bases of our need for relationship and of attraction, how relationships form and how they come apart, the value of both awareness of the self and empathy for the other in maintaining high quality relationships, the impact of wider social and cultural factors, navigating difficulties in these relationships and learning about some contributions of couple research and psychotherapy.

Prerequisites: None

Course Modality:

This course is delivered fully online, with synchronous and asynchronous options. I am trying to have a class that respects the differing needs of students by offering a range of different ways to succeed in the class. See the Section "Synchronous and Asynchronous Options" below.

To access the companion Canvas course site, please visit Rutgers Canvas at <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/> and log in using your NetID. For more information about course access and support contact Canvas Help at <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/canvas-help/>, via email at help@canvas.rutgers.edu, or call 877-361-1134.

Purpose of the Course:

This course aims to engage you both academically and personally. We will explore what the research tells us about relationships, but will be actively applying what we are learning in experiential ways. There is no factor more central to life satisfaction than the nature and quality of our closest relationships, and we can apply the knowledge base available to us to do a better job. You are likely to find that the literature contains much that may influence the way you look at relationships and at yourself.

MATERIALS

Text:

Bradbury, T.N., & Karney, B.R. (2019). *Intimate relationships* (3rd ed.). New York: Norton.
ISBN-13: 978-0393640250

A note about the text: I am aware of how overpriced textbooks are, and this is no exception. However, it is sometimes possible to rent it or find used copies. See the bookstore or check on Amazon: https://smile.amazon.com/Intimate-Relationships-Third-Thomas-Bradbury/dp/0393640256/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=Intimate+relationships+karney&qid=1598166616&s=books&sr=1-2

I will also say that I make much of the information available in lectures, in summaries and in other readings that will be available on Canvas.

Additional Course Resources:

Digital content will be found within the **Canvas course site**. Your readings beyond the text and links to any multimedia will be on our site. There may be additional reading assignments as student interests dictate.

Technology Requirements:

This course needs you to be able to access online resources in the University's Canvas site. Please review the following link for [Canvas Student Resources](https://canvas.rutgers.edu/students/) for assistance on getting started in Canvas:

<https://canvas.rutgers.edu/students/>

Additional Technical Requirements:

Review Rutgers' [Tech Guides](https://it.rutgers.edu/technology-guide/) at: <https://it.rutgers.edu/technology-guide/>

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By fully participating in this course, you should be able to:

1. Describe key findings of the research on the psychology of relationships and their underlying theories.
2. State key research and clinical findings in areas such as our need for relationships, attraction, attachment, factors involved in partner choice, understanding both our own emotions and those of others, maintaining and enhancing the quality of relationships, common problems, relationship dissolution and serious problems such as infidelity and domestic violence.
3. Apply these content areas to your own life in order to deepen your understanding of the material and to potentially improve your relationships and enhance your capacities for reflective thinking.
4. Place our current understandings of intimate relationships in a historical and cultural framework.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

Even though we will be online, what I hope will remain the same is a focus on your learning and applying concepts from the class in ways that are helpful and relatable in your own life. My goal is a student-centered and active learning environment. We will use a combination of lectures, discussions and activities, both in and out of class.

Teaching Philosophy:

I believe that we all learn best when we have a direct, personal and active experience with the material we are studying. Learning is an active process of fitting new information and experiences into the framework of the knowledge, values and life experience we already have.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Options:

We have been living through unsettled times for some time now. Your lives have been disrupted; some of you will have had major losses and hardships. We have also learned a lot, by necessity, about different modes of learning and engaging in coursework. In view of that, I offer a good deal of flexibility in this course so that you can tailor it to your unique situations as well as your learning styles. Consider carefully what will be best for you.

I am offering both synchronous and asynchronous pathways. I strongly encourage you to engage in real time (even though it is virtually and on Zoom) when you can, because one of the losses we have experienced during the pandemic is our human connection, and we haven't yet fully healed from this time of disconnection. This class has a history of prioritizing small discussion and working groups and

providing an opportunity for students to get to know each other. I think coming to class synchronously can help you stay on track and engaged, but it does mean that you have to be available and online at specific times, and that may not be possible for everyone. I also encourage you to participate in the real-time discussion groups that will be offered. This has been in past semesters a very important part of the class for many students, and also a chance to virtually “be in class” with others, a sadly missing element in the pandemic time, and in a school as large as Rutgers, this is an opportunity you don’t always have, even in in-person classes.

It is also possible to do all the elements of the class asynchronously, if necessary. Be careful in selecting this option, as it does take more self-discipline to stay on track and complete tasks in a timely way. So that you don’t leave things till way late in the semester, there will be due dates to help things stay on track, usually a one-week window for completion of an asynchronous lecture.

Synchronous Route: *We strongly recommend this option.*

- Come to the lecture portion class on Zoom, 10:20 to about 11:40 on Thursdays.
- Immediately after the lecture, participate in a discussion group with a graduate student leader where the concepts of the class are both talked about and related to your own lives, for about an hour.
- Being on camera is not required for lecture (though I always really appreciate those who do show their lovely faces), but *is* required for the discussion groups. We’ve found that discussion just doesn’t work with black boxes! If you really want to be in a group but have reasons for not being able to have your camera on, you can discuss alternatives with the professor or your group leader.

Asynchronous Route

- Watch the recording of the synchronous class or other material placed online for the lecture part of the class. For Attendance/Participation, there will be a quiz to demonstrate your having viewed the lecture online.
- In lieu of a discussion group, complete a “lab” assignment, where you apply the concepts of the class in an individual, but still personally experienced way

Common Requirements for Both Pathways:

- Participation in the online discussion board’s “Question of the Week”
- Individual Project (choose your option)
- Exams

COURSE COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

Your success in this course depends on the following:

- Keeping up with the different course units in a timely way.
- Actively engaging with the concepts of the class and your professors, TA’s and your fellow students, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

Attendance Requirements:

The amount of credit you earn from coming to class or completing the online equivalent shows the importance we place on it. Each week, you need to *either*:

- Come to class in our Zoom room and participate in a discussion group following the lecture

- Watch the lecture on video and complete a quiz to show you have viewed and understood it, and then complete the “application lab” that takes the place of the discussion group.
- Both of these options earn you 20 points per week.

Discussion Forum Post Requirements:

Because this class deals with concepts that need to be related to one’s own life in experiential and thoughtful ways, we are using on-line posting as a way of promoting some engagement in the ideas of the class where we get to hear from you and you get to hear from one another about what you are thinking and experiencing. There will be a Question (or choice of Questions) of the Week located in the “Discussion” section on Canvas. You will be asked to reflect on the readings or lecture that week or to engage in a brief task or experience and to write your reflections in a paragraph of two. You are asked to complete a total of 11 posts during the term, each worth 5 points, and are encouraged to have at least some of your posts respond to a fellow classmate. Questions will be made available on the evening after our Thursday class and posts are due by the time of the following class. One thoughtful paragraph will earn full credit, as will a thoughtful response to a classmate’s post.

Individual Project:

There are several different course project options, allowing you to choose from a range of topics. We encourage you to make a choice based on your own interests and goals. Topics are listed under the “Assignment” section of our Canvas site. Each topic has its own folder beginning with “Course Project Option.” **You only need to choose one project.** These will be due on November 20. A rubric used for grading projects will be available in most of the project folders, and you should check your paper against the rubric’s requirements to earn maximum points.

Exams:

There will be three multiple choice exams, on dates listed on the course schedule, and the lowest of the three scores will be dropped.

POTENTIAL EMOTIONAL DEMANDS OF THE COURSE

Some assignments in the course may be emotionally demanding. This is especially true of some of the project choices and some of the potential experiential exercises and discussions. We are aiming to engage you on multiple levels, to build emotional as well as intellectual intelligence. But such work is best done if you stay within the boundaries of what feels right for you. If you become upset in response to assignments, discuss this with your TA and/or with Professor Skean. **Let us know if you need help.** If you need to debrief an assignment, make some adjustments in it, pull back from participation in some elements of the course or would like our help in recommending resources for personal therapy or other ways of taking care of yourself, see us before or after class or make an appointment.

Even though the TA’s and the professor have training in psychology and in therapy, and we expect this to be an enriching factor in our teaching on this topic, the class is not therapy. A classroom setting cannot offer you the privacy and confidentiality and full focus on your welfare that therapy provides. With that in mind, know that you will not be pressured to share personal information beyond your comfort zone. When there are assignments that allow a personal exploration, there will also be alternatives that allow the same requirements to be filled in a more academic way.

GRADING

This course is based on points (rather than percentages), with points generated from the following activities (described in detail in Learning Activities and Assessment). Note that to give greater flexibility, there are more points available than you would need to get an A, so that there are multiple pathways to do well in the class. So if life gets in the way and you miss an assignment, or you don't typically do well on exams, there are other ways to demonstrate your learning.

Final Course Grade: Based on Points from a Range of Activities

Chart of Point-Generating Activities

Activity or Major Assignment	Due Date	Points	Description
Welcome Bonus	None	10	Just because we are glad to have you here!
Syllabus Quiz	9/25/25	10	Easy points for reviewing and being familiar with the syllabus and course requirements
Lecture	Immediately if present in online class: 1 Week after for video + worksheet option	10 per class (total of 130)	Being present or viewing video, plus worksheet to show comprehension and application
Discussion Group Or Lab	Immediately for group; 1 week for lab	10 per class (total of 130)	Participation in synchronous discussion group or solo asynchronous lab
Exams	1. 10/16/25 2. 12/5/25 3. In Final Exam Time	200 (100 each)	2 Exams, given online, with option of a third cumulative exam given in the final exam time if you think it will raise your grade. Third exam can replace your lowest score, if taken.
Individual Project	11/22/25	100	Choice Among 3 Options
Discussion Boards	1 Week after is post made available	5 per post (55 total)	Posting a response on Canvas to a choice of prompts or to a classmate's post
Total		635 Points	

Grading Scale:

Grade	Range
A	560 - 635
B+	530 - 559
B	500 - 529
C+	470 - 499

Grade	Range
C	440 - 469
D	380 - 439
F	379 and Below

Monitoring Your Grade

You will notice that there are multiple ways to earn points, and you don't have to do perfectly, or even outstandingly on every part to do well in the class. A great deal of your grade is in your hands because there are substantial points awarded for your active participation in the class, either synchronously or asynchronously. Points earned from all course activities can be monitored in the CANVAS gradebook.

- Your progress toward your Final Course Grade can be monitored by following these steps:
 1. Determine how many more potential points are available for work you haven't done.
 2. Add this to your current point total in the CANVAS grade book and compare your total with the minimum points for the different grades indicated in the chart above.
- To ensure you get an accurate reading on your overall grade in CANVAS, be sure you use only your total points. **Percentages are not accurate as there are more points available beyond what you need for a good grade.** Furthermore, be sure "Calculate based only on graded assignments" is not checked, as this will skew your sense of what your grade is.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Attendance Policy:

You can see from the distribution of points that we emphasize, likely more than most classes, your presence and participation. This is not a make or break on exams kind of class. So you need to be present, either synchronously or, if you can't be with us in real time, asynchronously, by keeping up with the week by week class or recorded class.

Submission Policy:

All work is to be submitted on our Canvas site.

Late Work:

One of the difficulties of online work is the human tendency to put things off. This can catch up with you, especially when you aren't coming to a physical class. There will be due dates, clearly specified on Canvas, and work needs to be on time to earn the points for the activity. For lectures, it is a good idea to keep up week to week, but there will generally be a 1-week window in which to complete the companion worksheet showing your asynchronous attendance. Synchronous attendance will of course be entered the day of class.

Coursework Difficulties:

Please discuss any issues that you are having in completing the coursework on time with me. I am available to talk this over with you by email or by appointment.

Incomplete Policy:

If you are unable to complete the coursework during the semester due to some major issue, contact me immediately to discuss your alternatives.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Date	Class	Topic
September 4	1	Introduction to the course The importance of our relationships to our health and wellbeing
September 11	2	Influential Theories: The lenses through which we view and research relationships
September 18	3	Gender and Sexual Orientation
September 25	4	Personality and Personal History
October 2	5	Developing Emotional Strength: Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation
October 9	6	Attraction and Mate Selection CLASS WILL BE ASYNCHRONOUS FOR EVERYONE TODAY
October 16	7	Communication Exam #1: On Material from Weeks #1 -- #6
October 23	8	Sexual Intimacy
October 31	9	Conflict in Relationships
November 6	10	Breaking Up Is Hard To Do: How Relationships Come Apart and How To Survive a Break-Up
November 13	11	Serious Dilemmas in Intimate Relationships: Domestic Violence, Infidelity
November 20	12	Improving Relationships: Couples Therapy Individual Paper/Project Due
November 27		THANKSGIVING DAY – NO CLASS

December 4	13	Hook-Up Culture Long-Distance Relationships
December 5 through December 7	14	Exam #2: On Material from Weeks #7 - #13
Final Exam Period		Exam #3: Covering the full range of the class; can be taken any time during the Final Exam period. It is NOT, however, a regular final exam. It counts for no more than the first two exams. The lowest of the three exams is dropped, so students happy with their grade may opt not to take this test.

READINGS BY WEEK (MAY BE ALTERED OR ADJUSTED)

Week 1

Introduction to the Class

September 4, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 1

Gross-Loh, C. (2014). The first lesson of Marriage 101: There are no soul mates. *The Atlantic*, February 12.

Week 2

Influential Theories

September 11, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 2

Week 3

Gender and Sexual Orientation

September 18, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapters 4 & 5

Week 4

Personality and Personal History

September 25, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 6

Week 5

Developing Emotional Strength:

October 3, 2025

Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation

Frederick, R.J. (2009). Living like you mean it: Use the wisdom and power of your emotions to get the life you really want. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 3-22.

Hanson, R.K. (2009). Buddha's brain: The practical neuroscience of happiness, love and wisdom. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Press, pp. 5-19.

Watch Ted Talk: Brene Brown – “The Power of Vulnerability”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

Week 6

Romantic Attraction

October 9, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 7

Fisher, H. (2009). Why him? Why her? *Psychotherapy Networker*, May/June

Week 7

Communication

October 16, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 8

Catron, M.L. (2015). “To fall in love with anyone, do this.” *New York Times*, January 9.
The 36 Questions (handout related to above article)

Exam #1 On material from weeks #1-- #6

Week 8

Sexual Intimacy

October 23, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 9

Week 9

Conflict in Relationships

October 30, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 10

Watch YouTube Video: Gottman's “Four Negative Patterns that Predict Divorce”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJDN3PKZ1KE> (Part 1)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5OdpPodpNY> (Part 2)

Week 10

Breaking Up is Hard To Do

November 6, 2025

Vaughn, D. (1990). *Uncoupling: Turning points in intimate relationships*. New York: Vintage, pp. 3-27.

Week 11

Serious Dilemmas in Intimate Relationships:

November 13, 2025

Domestic Violence, Infidelity

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 11

Jacobson, N., & Gottman, J. (2007). *When men batter women*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp.15-57.

Watch Ted Talk: Leslie Morgan Steiner – “Why Domestic Violence Victims Don’t Leave”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1yW5lsnSjo>

Watch Ted Talk: Esther Perel – “Rethinking Infidelity”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kgAxoSaLyg>

Week 12

Improving Relationships: Couple Therapy

November 20, 2025

Bradbury and Karney text, Chapter 15

Week 13

Hook-Up Culture and Long-Distance Relationships

December 4, 2025

Prior, S., Golden, L., Huizenga, E. *et al.* College Students’ Perceptions of Hookup Culture Through a Social Ecological Lens. *Sexuality & Culture* **29**, 2593–2616 (2025).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-025-10383-8>

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

This is a class about love, about relationships, about our most fundamental attachments. Perhaps in no other sphere do we bring in more aspects of the totality of who we are, all our different intersectional identities. And we cannot explore who we are in relationship without feeling safe to bring those in. So an atmosphere of respect for differences and the richness of each other’s complexities is vital.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Our purpose in the classroom is to seek the truth; this work requires trust and honesty between teacher and student. If we are not honest about what we know and do not know, our learning will always be impaired. Because our teaching and learning depends on this honest communication, we expect all students to understand what plagiarism is and why it is unacceptable.

Any student considering plagiarism should recognize the consequences and consider alternatives. Students uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism may request help from faculty or from appropriate University services. For information on using sources in writing, see the Identifying and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty section of the [Rutgers Academic Integrity](#) web site.

A WORD ABOUT CHATGPT AND OTHER AI MODELS

With the arrival of ChatGPT and other Large Language Models, we are in a new and still evolving situation, and the university's position on the use of these as you complete your academic work is not yet settled. Some of your professors may ban it entirely; others may encourage its use in specific ways. I am not against using these new technologies as a help and an adjunct, but it is best used to integrate with your own thoughts and reflections. We will need to figure out how to use it to enhance our learning and creativity, but not replace it. Just plugging text into the bot and uncritically cutting and pasting into an assignment (and I've now seen multiple instances of this) largely bypasses the real work of the class, which invites you to integrate the material of the class into your own life, and like all college-level classes, to promote your learning, critical thinking and intellectual development.

Rutgers' code of conduct mandates "[that all work submitted in a course, academic research, or other activity is the student's own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations](#)." While I am not putting the use of this into the "impermissible technologies" category for the purposes of this class, like anything used in the creation of academic work, you will need to cite your use. How to do this is still being formulated, but for now, here is a link to an APA style article which demonstrates how to cite your use of AI: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Students are required to adhere to the [University Student Code of Conduct](#) delineated in the Rutgers Student Affairs website [Student Conduct](#) page:

<http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/student-conduct-processes/university-code-of-student-conduct/#1495568095620-2f5ce77d-17dd>

ACCOMMODATIONS

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the [Registration form](https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration) (<https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration>).

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The faculty and staff at Rutgers are committed to your success. Students who are successful tend to seek out resources that enable them to excel academically, maintain their health and wellness, prepare for future careers, navigate college life and finances, and connect with the RU community. Resources that can help you succeed and connect with the Rutgers community can be found at success.rutgers.edu, and nearly all services and resources that are typically provided in-person are now available remotely.

Academic Services:

- For academic support visit Rutgers Academics Student Support at <https://www.rutgers.edu/academics/student-support>
- Any student can obtain tutoring and other help at the Learning Centers on each campus. Check the website at <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>
- For coaching help with writing skills and assignments visit the Writing Coaching webpage at <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/student-services/writing-coaching>
- Many library resources are available online. Assistance is available through phone, email, and chat. For information, check the Rutgers Libraries website at <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers Student Health Services:

Rutgers Student Health Services is dedicated to health for the whole student body, mind and spirit. It accomplishes this through a staff of qualified clinicians and support staff. Services are available at several locations throughout the New Brunswick-Piscataway area. For more information visit: <http://health.rutgers.edu/>

Veteran Services:

Rutgers is proud to support veterans. If you are a veteran of the armed forces, please visit the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services website for more information: <https://veterans.rutgers.edu/>