

**PSYC 326-003, Therapeutic Communication Skills**  
**Fall 2006**  
**Thursdays, 7:20-10PM**

<b>Instructor:</b>	Amanda M. Rahimi
<b>Class Location:</b>	Robinson Hall A, Room A123
<b>Office:</b>	David King Hall, Room 1001 (subject to change)
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	Tuesdays 1-3 PM, or by appointment
<b>Mailbox:</b>	Graduate Student Mailboxes, David King Hall 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor

**Course Objectives**

The major goal of this course will be to provide students with an opportunity to develop basic verbal and nonverbal listening skills that enhance constructive interpersonal communication. A special emphasis will be placed on the use of these skills in therapeutic situations. We will additionally briefly explore various modalities of psychotherapy as a way to understand how these basic skills are used.

**Required Texts**

Young, M.E. (2005). *Learning the Art of Helping: Building Blocks and Techniques* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Greenberg, L. S., Watson, J. C., & Elliot, R. Empathy (2001). *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 38(4), 380-384. [found online through GMU e-Journals]

**Course Expectations**

There are certain basic skills that are essential for a counselor or a therapist. In this course, you will learn the fundamentals of being an effective “helper.” In addition to the lecture component, this course involves extensive class participation, including four videotaped role-plays. Rather than learning only theory, you will get hands-on practice in refining your skills. During class time set aside called “Workshop,” students will be broken up into feedback groups made up of three or four students and practice their counseling skills.

I expect and hope that many students will have experience in therapeutic communication prior to taking this class. In order to succeed in this course, you must expect to be learning skills that are different from what you already know, and challenging yourself to sharpen skills you may consider well-developed. Sometimes these skills will seem like second nature to you and incorporate a lot of common sense. Other times the skills will feel awkward and artificial until you have practiced them and gotten a solid grasp of them. It is important to have an open mind to the different skills.

**Use of Technology**

- All students will be expected to check their GMU email account and WebCT page (<https://webct41.gmu.edu/webct/public/home.pl>) on a regular basis, as email and WebCT will be used to communicate announcements and distribute some course materials.
- Students will be expected to videotape therapy sessions outside of class time (JC 229, 3-8990, <http://media.gmu.edu/star/whatsat.html>). More information about how to borrow video equipment will be provided in class.

**Important Note:** Please keep in mind that the following is a tentative syllabus and topics and assignments can be changed, added, or deleted at any time at the discretion of the instructor to improve the quality of the course. I will do my best to announce such changes ahead of time in class.

Class	Topic and Workshop Schedule	Readings	Assignments
8/31	Syllabus, Introduction to Helping	Ch. 1	
9/7	Basic Foundations of Helping Skills and the Therapeutic Relationship	Ch. 2 & 3	<b>Writing Assignment #1 Due</b>
9/13	Introduction to Client-Helper Differences	Ch. 4 & Greenberg article	
9/21	Nonverbal and Invitational Skills; <i>Workshop #1</i>	Ch. 5	
9/28	Reflecting Skills—Paraphrasing, <i>Workshop #2</i>	Ch. 6	
10/5	Reflecting Skills—Reflecting Feelings, <i>Workshop #3</i>	Ch. 7	<b>Video Role Play #1 Due</b>
10/12	Reflecting Skills—Reflecting Meaning and Summarizing	Ch. 8	<b>Writing Assignment #2 Due</b>
10/19	Challenging Skills: Giving Feedback and Confronting the Client; <i>Workshop #4</i>	Ch. 9	
10/26	Goal Setting Skills—Where to Go with the Client; <i>Workshop #5</i>	Ch. 11	<b>Video Role Play #2 Due</b>
11/2	Solution Skills: Helping the Client Find Solutions	Ch. 12	
11/9	Evaluating Client's Progress and Termination of Therapy; <i>Workshop #6</i>	Ch. 13	<b>Video Role Play #3 Due</b>
11/16	Assessment of Clients and Making a Diagnosis	Ch. 10	<b>Writing Assignment #3 Due</b>
11/23	<b>NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)</b>		
11/30	Curative Factors and Advanced Skills: Part I; <i>Workshop #7</i>	Ch. 14	<b>Video Role Play #4 Due</b>
12/7	Curative Factors and Advanced Skills: Part II	Ch. 15	<b>Writing Assignment #4 Due</b>

**Important Dates**

- Last day to add: September 12
- Last day to drop: September 29

**Course Requirements and Grading Procedures**

**1. Class Attendance and Participation**

Because class discussions and exercises are an essential part of your learning experience in this course, as well as your grade, class attendance is critically important. Active participation in class is **strongly encouraged**, including asking questions and offering topics for discussion. Your presence in class is essential in order to complete all the requirements. If you miss class, you are responsible for all notes and exercises completed in class. At times during class discussion or Workshop, sensitive topics of a personal nature are likely to be discussed among the students in our class. We will discuss a confidentiality policy during our first class in order for everyone to feel comfortable fully participating in class.

**2. Workshops**

Students will participate in in-class Workshop groups of 3-4 people. In each group, one student will play a counselor role, one student will play a “client” role, and one or two students will provide feedback to the counselor. Students will rotate among the roles.

Feedback-providers will fill out feedback forms for their “counselor” classmates. These feedback forms will be handed in for a grade as well as to show that you were there to participate in the workshop that week. Workshop time is extremely important to help students practice their helping skills. *Workshop assignments absolutely cannot be made up should you miss a Workshop class.*

### 3. **Videotaped Role Plays**

You will be required to create four videotaped role plays with another member of the class. Students will choose the same partner for all four videos. These four videos will be used to evaluate your mastery of class, book, and lecture material. There will be NO paper-and-pencil exams in this course. Prior to the due date of each video, I will distribute a more detailed grading sheet so that you know what specific skills you will need to demonstrate in that video.

In these role plays, each student will act as the counselor and demonstrate the skills discussed in class. First, one student will serve as the counselor while one acts as the client. Then, the students will reverse roles so that each person has a videotape of herself/himself as counselor. In order to preserve continuity among the tapes and to best simulate true therapy sessions, students are to role play using the same ongoing therapy topic for all four tapes. In other words, when each student plays the client, he/she should discuss the same ongoing issue in all four tapes.

Tapes may be shown to the class to demonstrate a variety of points (but never to showcase a student’s mistakes). Videotapes will be graded based on the skills the student exhibits in the tape, and all students will be given written feedback on their skills. In addition, for all videotapes the student should make a written transcript of the tape (a transcript is a verbatim script of what each person said in the session, like the script of a play). Points will be taken off a student’s grade if the written transcripts are not turned in at the time the videos are due. The following is a brief description of each role play video:

**Role Play #1 – 10 min**

**Due: 10/5**

Nonverbal/Invitational Skills  
Reflecting Content

**Role Play #3 – 15 min**

**Due: 11/9**

Challenging Skills  
Goal Setting Skills

**Role Play #2 – 10 min**

**Due: 10/26**

Reflecting Feeling  
Reflecting Meaning & Summarizing

**Role Play #4 – 15 min**

**Due: 11/30**

Solution Skills  
All previous skills practiced

### 4. **Written assignments**

In order to facilitate the processing of your thoughts and experiences while learning helping and communication techniques, four short reaction papers will be due during the semester. These papers should focus on your thoughts and experiences about the material learned so far in the semester. Topics will be provided at a later date. Each paper should be typed in double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt. font. The papers should be 2-3 pages in length.

### 5. (optional) **Extra Credit (up to 10 points)**

You may earn extra credit points for participating in research. You can locate studies through the Experimentrix webpage ([www.experimentrix.com/gmu](http://www.experimentrix.com/gmu)). Additionally, you may earn extra credit points for attending relevant psychology-related seminars. You will be able to earn a maximum of 10 extra credit points—1 point for each hour of research participation or seminar attended.

### Helpful Hints

- **Late assignments will be docked 10% for each class day that they are late.**  
If an emergency situation arises that prevents you from completing your work on time, this will be dealt with on an individual basis; however, keep in mind that each student **MUST** provide documentation of all emergencies (car accidents, illness, funerals, etc.) in order to be excused from the late penalty. The most important steps a student can take in such a situation are to alert the instructor as soon as the situation that will interfere with your ability to complete the classwork arises (or before, if possible).
- Oftentimes students are juggling many responsibilities in addition to taking classes. Please note that this class requires you to be able to attend consistently in order to gain the most benefit from the course. If your current situation does not allow you to attend class regularly, I would encourage you to carefully consider whether or not this course is appropriate for you at this time.

### Grade Calculation\*

Video Role Play 1	100 points
Video Role Play 2	100 points
Video Role Play 3	100 points
Video Role Play 4	100 points
Workshop	140 points (20 points each)
Reaction Papers	60 points (15 points each)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600 points [+ Extra Credit]</b>

A+ (97%+); A (93-96%); A- (90-92%); B+ (87-89%); B (83-86%); B- (80-82%); C+ (77-79%); C (70-76%); D (60-69%); F (59% & below)

\* Note: Grades will be assigned according to these percentage values. All decimal points will be “rounded down,” meaning if your final grade for the course is 79.8%, you will receive a C+.

### GMU Honor Code

Students are expected to abide by the GMU Honor Code: “Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” Violations of the GMU Honor Code can result in failure of an assignment, depending on the severity of violation. All violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. Please review the honor code: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>

### Accommodation of Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Note that this provision includes the range of disabilities, including physical, psychiatric, and learning disabilities.

### Student Support Services

GMU offers services to support students’ academic and emotional development. The Learning Center, located in SUB I (room 364, see <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/csdc/lc.htm>), offers workshops in academic skills and a tutor referral program. The Counseling Center, located in SUB I (room 364, see <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/csdc/>) offers stress management training, as well as individual and group counseling for students who would like some help with social, emotional, or educational concerns—or who have concerns about their friends. Consider taking advantage of these free resources.