



**LEWIS & CLARK COLLEGE  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND  
COUNSELING**

**CPSY 590/MCFT 563: The animal-human bond and counseling  
Summer 2021**

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When: 08/06/2021-08/07/2021 Lecture Friday, Saturday 09:00AM - 05:30PM  
Where: York 107  
Instructor: Pilar Hernández-Wolfe, Ph.D.  
Office Hours: By appointment  
E-Mail: pilarhw@lclark.edu

### **CATALOG DESCRIPTION**

Contemporary scholarship provides evidence for the importance of the relationship between humans and animals, ranging from the significance of companion animals and the need for social support for the bereaved pet owners to the relationship between animal abuse and child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse. Research has documented the therapeutic benefits of animals, and pet-facilitated therapy is highly consistent with systemic approaches fostering resilience and ecopsychology. This two-day course addresses the counseling implications of the complex bond between humans and other animals. Topics covered include: 1) an overview of the relationship between humans and animals and why related knowledge, attitudes and skills are important for therapists; 2) animals as pets and their health and mental health benefits for over the life course; 3) pet-facilitated therapy and the use of service animals; 4) animal abuse and its relationship to domestic violence; 5) ethical issues and controversies, including animal rights, animals and research, vegetarianism and counseling.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The animal human bond is a well-documented phenomenon that has been around since humans began domesticating animals. Healing is complex and interfaces with numerous dimensions including diet, exercise, genetics and social and emotional processes. The literature suggests that caring relationships between humans and animals have a significant impact on our neuro-chemistry, enhancing our well-being. The following topics will be reviewed and discussed: a systemic perspective on our relationship with animals, family relationships and the role of pets in families, attachment and separation anxiety, vicarious and experiential learning and pet assisted therapies, domestic violence, and ethical issues relative to our relationships and use of animals. This course will combine experiential learning, lectures and seminar discussions.

### **COVID policies:**

<https://www.lclark.edu/news/covid-19-response/health-and-safety/>

<https://www.lclark.edu/news/covid-19-response/students/covid-19-communications/>

**As of today, July 9, 2021:**

[The Status of Campus COVID-19 Restrictions and a Vaccination Rate Update](#)

*July 6*

We are in the process of updating all of our COVID-related policies regarding events, travel, face coverings, testing, etc., and will share those policies, as well as an updated COVID webpage, in mid-July. In the meantime, the current requirement that unvaccinated persons wear face coverings when inside campus buildings remains in place.

**This might have changed when we meet for our class.**

**Program Objectives:**

SLO 1.2: Students recognize the interconnections among biological, psychological, social systems in people's lived experience.

SLO 1.3: Students apply systems/relational theories to clinical case conceptualization

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the meaning of the human animal bond at the level of larger ecological and social systems, family dynamics and attachment.
2. Examine contemporary neurobiological research involving pets and humans
3. Examine the use of pet assisted therapies
4. Understand the relationship between violence towards animals and domestic violence
5. Understand ethical issues relative to the human-animal relationship

**TEACHING METHODS**

A variety of teaching methods will be utilized during this course to achieve the above objectives. Among those methods will be assigned readings, class discussions, experiential activities, and lectures.

**READINGS:**

Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the ideas and concepts discussed in the readings. The textbook should be read in its entirety by the end of the course.

### **CPSY Departmental Attendance Policy**

Class attendance is expected and required. Any missed class time will be made up by completing extra assignments designed by the instructor. Missing more than ten percent of class time may result in failure to complete the class. This would be 4.5 hours of a 45 hour class (3 credits), 3.0 hours for a 30 hour class (2 credits) or 1.5 hours for a 15 hour class (1 credit.) In case of extreme hardship and also at the discretion of the instructor, a grade of incomplete may be given for an assignment or the entire course. In such cases, the work to be submitted in order to remove the incomplete must be documented appropriately and stated deadlines met. Students are expected to be on time to class and tardiness may be seen as an absence that requires make-up work.

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **1. Participation (30 pts)**

- Full attendance to both days of class is required for a passing grade
- Giving attention to the instructor and/or other students when they are making a presentation.
- Demonstrating ability to recognize and use subtle non-verbal communication cues to assess your impact on your peers and participate in class.
- Demonstrating ability to be open about discussing the impact of your comments on your peers.
- Coming to class prepared (having read the assignment for the day)
- Contributing to in-class discussion based on the topics of discusses and the readings assigned. Contributions may include how you feel about the material but merely articulating your feelings is not sufficient. You are expected to put those feelings in context of your thoughts and analysis of the material.
- Engaging in group discussions with attention and energy.
- Asking questions of the instructor and/or other students regarding the material examined in that class.
- Providing examples to support or challenge the issues talked about in class.
- Making comments or giving observations about topics in the course, especially those that tie in the classroom material to "real world" problems or try to integrate the content of the course.
- Dealing with other students and/or the instructor in a respectful fashion.
- Active listening. Students will be asked questions related to the course's readings randomly in class by other students and by the instructor. Your participation in small group discussions is also required.

#### **2. Reflection paper – 30 pts – 5/6 pages due on August 4, 2021 (before class).**

Identify an experience of connection with an animal in your life. Explain the connection you had and the history of the relationship and use the following questions as a guide for reflection. You do not have to answer all the questions but you need to be as specific as possible.

If you have been in relationship with a traumatized animal, what challenges have you witnessed traumatized animals overcome during the rehabilitation process? (if you have not had the experience of rehabilitating an animal, describe a significant relationship with an animal; if you have no relationship with animals, interview someone who does)

Do you have any thoughts about how you may have been positively impacted by the animals that you have been in relationship with and/or that you may have saved and rehabilitated?

Looking back, did your relationship with the animals you've been in relationship with (and you may have rehabilitated) transform you?

- Did it influence how you work with other animals?
- Did it transform your personal life?
- Has it influenced how you interact with people?
- Has it transformed your values?
- Has it influenced how you make meaning of life/ the world around you?
- Has it influenced you in the ways of making meaning of tragedy?
- Has it influenced you when dealing with adversity in your own life?

What aspects of the Animal Human Bond can you better understand now as a result of this relationship?

3. **Clinical case conceptualization – 50 pts – (10 page, double space, due on August 24, 2021)** based on your reading of the Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy, the material presented in class and discussions with your peers.

Use the vignette at the end of this syllabus to illustrate your thinking relative to the following topics:

- a) Equity and voice in regards to gender, class and race: compare the families, their behavior toward each other and within each family.
- b) The role of the animal human bond in the families (Mexican and American).
- c) Define one or two clinical issues from a relational perspective
- d) How you would explain to the American family the meaning and role of companion animals for the two Mexican girls
- e) Describe how you understand attachment issues in the relationship between humans and animals using this vignette
- f) Describe how you would address the human animal bond in therapy to address the clinical issue identified in your vignette.

You may speculate on history and issues to illustrate your understanding of the case.

#### 4. APA format.

All papers should be typed APA style with all references appropriately cited, must be edited and checked for correct grammar.

#### TEXTBOOKS:

Fine, A. (2019). *Handbook on animal assisted therapy*. U.K: Elsevier

Required articles:

Hernandez-Wolfe, P. (2018). Ecoinformed couple and family therapy, systems thinking, and social Justice, *Ecopsychology*, 10(3), 151-157. <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2018.0009>

Hernandez-Wolfe, P. & Acevedo, V. (2021). Helping Injured Animals Helps the Helper, Too: Vicarious Resilience and the Animal-Human Bond, *Ecopsychology*, 13 (1), 19-26. <https://doi-org.library.lcproxy.org/10.1089/eco.2020.0038>

Recommended articles:

Walsh, F. (2009). Human-animal bonds I: The relational significance of companion animals. *Family Process*, [48\(4\)](#), 462–480.

Walsh, F. (2009). Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family therapy. *Family Process*, [48\(4\)](#), 481–499.

#### FINAL GRADING

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 88-89

B = 83-87

B- = 80-82

C+ = 78-79

C = 73-77

C- = 70-72

#### NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY/SPECIAL ASSISTANCE

Lewis & Clark College adheres to a nondiscriminatory policy with respect to employment, enrollment, and program. The College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap or disability, sexual orientation, or marital status and has a firm commitment to promote the letter and spirit of all equal opportunity and civil rights laws.

#### SPECIAL NEEDS/ ACCOMMODATIONS

Please see me individually at the beginning of the semester if you require any special accommodations as a result of a documented disability.

## DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) requires the program to have “established policies for informing applicants and students regarding disclosure of their personal information” (COAMFTE Standard 140.02, 2003). Each student should decide for him/herself what information to disclose. Students are advised to be prudent when making self-disclosures. The program cannot guarantee confidentiality of student disclosures given the group environment, although personal comments should be considered private and confidential – and remain only in the classroom – unless an exception to confidentiality applies.

## CELL PHONES

Cell phones must be silenced and text messaging is not allowed during class time. If there is an emergency you may exit the class to use your cell.

Course Objective	MCFT Student Learning Outcomes	AAMFT Core Competencies	Evaluated by
Demonstrate knowledge of the biological, psychological, and sociological theories of human development.	SLO1.2	1.1.1; 2.1.1; 4.1.1	Class participation. Reflection paper
Apply systems/relational theories to clinical case conceptualization	SLO 1.3	1.2.1; 4.1.1	Class participation and case study final paper

### Vignette for final assignment: Case conceptualization

When Berenice and her sister Laura migrated to the U.S. at ages 9 and 10 they did not know that their relationship with all their companion animals, the plants and the creek near the family’s Mexican farm was going to be severed for good. The daughters were brought to the Northwest of the U.S. where their father and older brother worked as seasonal farmers. Their mother stayed in México with the three youngest children. The parents, who were agricultural workers living in poverty, planned to help migrate their children to the U.S. since the oldest sons were already settled. The oldest son, who at the time was a 19-year-old working and married adult, found a convenient situation for the family. The family would bring his two young sisters to live with a white American family for a couple of years, in exchange they would receive a small monthly payment. In the family’s eyes, this arrangement would allow them to migrate and transition into life in the U.S.

The girls were abruptly moved from a rural farm like home to a suburban home where a white U.S. couple had adopted a Central American girl and wanted her to have friends from a similar culture who would also speak Spanish. Berenice and Laura were left at

this home after their brother told them they were going to have breakfast with family friends. While their material and academic needs were attended to and the home was welcoming and friendly, the girls lost their mother, siblings and all their chickens, dogs, cats, pigs, birds, and other little animals who inhabited the farm environment. They lost a home where they played outside and got dirty, where they could go to the creek and feel the water touching their skins. Their mother was not only warmth and nurturing, she was also whom they associated with the plants in their humble home; she taught them about feeding the animals and cooking for the family. In this new home, everything had an order, a different order, everything had to be kept in a certain way and the family had no animals with them. Gardening was the job of a stranger, a Mexican man whose exclusive responsibility was to make it look “pretty.” They attended school, learned a new language and acculturated to life in Oregon (think Oregon city not Portland). They appreciated their new “family” who they described as kind. However, they never felt very close to the parents and feared disappointing them and their own family. They cried in silence and longed for their own mother.

Berenice and Laura, now ages 18 and 19, came to therapy to address family conflicts with their oldest brother who at the time refused to speak to them. They lived with him, his wife and baby nephew since the ages of 11 and 13. They moved out at ages 17 and 18 because they could not tolerate their brother’s controlling behavior any longer and they knew that they could live on their own. They both work and attend community college.