

**FALL TERM 2014**  
**SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING**  
**HDCN 6392 FIELD STUDIES REQUIREMENTS**

**Mailing:** Department of Counseling  
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**Web Page:** <http://smu.edu/education/counseling/>

**Credit hour:** Three graduate semester hours per course

**Supervision Appointments:** Set on an individual basis with each student according to their schedule with clients.

**Instructor:** Ron Stone, PhD, LPC, FABPS-ACFE; Forensic Custody Evaluator; Certified Anger Resolution Therapist; Mediator; Parent Coordinator; Parent Facilitator; Consultant, Expert Witness.

**Enrollment Restriction For This Course:** Successful completion of 40 hour classroom instruction in how to conduct custody evaluations HDCN 6392 Social Studies.

**Language:** Students will complete all assignments in English. The instructor will teach and demonstrate custody evaluation techniques in English. At times, specific court assignments require a student who is bilingual. In those cases, the student will work with clients in their language of preference.

**Purpose of Course:** This course is intended to provide practical experience in a Court-ordered appointment to conduct a Social Study. A University instructor provides supervision of each office session between graduate student and clients. The instructor will also provide supervision of each home visit conducted by the student in the homes of the clients. The instructor will also personally supervise the graduate student's interview with children of the parties involved in the custody case. In some instances graduate students will be called upon to testify either in a deposition or in a courtroom trial. The instructor will also supervise this activity and may be called upon to offer testimony in support of the graduate student's recommendations and quality of work in the matter. In the event testimony is required, the instructor will also provide supervision of a graduate student in the preparation of a trial notebook. This is typically an 8 to 16 hour project.

**Required text:** Rohrbaugh, Joanna Bunker (2008). A Comprehensive Guide to Child Custody Evaluations. New York: Springer Science & Business Media, LLC.

### **Recommended Text for Additional Reading or Reference:**

Gould Jonathan W. and Martindale, David A. (2007). The Art and Science of Child Custody Evaluations. The Guilford Press: New York/London.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. To complete a written report in response to a court ordered appointment to conduct a social study in a suit affecting parent-child relationship. The report must meet all of the requirements pertaining to Elements of a Social Study as defined by § 107.051 of the Texas Family Code.
2. To develop skills as a forensic custody evaluator including but not limited to, interviews of clients, communication with the Court and counsel, a basic understanding of the Texas Family Code as it relates to the parent-child relationship, report writing skills, testimony skills, research skills as related to parent-child relationships, age-appropriate interviews of children whose parents are involved in divorce, written and verbal communication techniques with clients who are involved in the litigation process, and ethics.
3. To refine personal theory related to child development and the impact of divorce on children.

**Course Format:** The course is a mixture of individual and/or group clinical supervision, group discussions, production of professional documents for a District Court, and possible testimony.

**Plagiarism Policy:** plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in an “F.” grade for the class. Plagiarism is defined as the following: to represent ideas or interpretations taken from another source as one’s own is plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious offense. The academic work of students must be their own. Students must give the author(s) credit for any source material used. To lift content directly from a source without giving credit is a flagrant act. To present a borrowed passage after having changed a few words, even if the source is cited, is also plagiarism.

**Display of Professionalism:** Performing a custody evaluation (Social Study) by Court-appointment is a serious responsibility. Social studies require the Evaluator to offer a recommendation concerning the best interest of the child or children involved in the suit affecting parent-child relationship. Developing rapport with mothers and fathers who are going through the emotionally traumatic experience of divorce requires empathy, respect, compassion, competency and a high level of professionalism. Interfacing with court personnel, counsel for clients, other professionals in the community including, Child Protective Services, Law enforcement, psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed therapists, etc., requires professionalism, and a high ethical standard. Graduate students are appraised based on these qualities displayed during interviews with clients, children, agencies, other professionals, the Court, etc. Students need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accept and integrate feedback, be aware of their impact on

others, accept personal responsibility, and be able to express feelings appropriately. Attention to a work ethic exhibited by timely arrivals and an ability to be flexible to accommodate the schedules of others, especially clients and their children, must be demonstrated.

**Disability Accommodations Statement:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or [www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

**Supervision:** In this course you will work with one supervisor. Your on-site supervisor is a licensed clinician and is recognized by the Court as qualified to conduct Social Studies and to serve as an Expert Witness.

### Course Requirements

**Attendance:** Students are expected to be in attendance at all sessions they have set for interviewing their client/s. If a student is unable to keep an appointment, the student is responsible for contacting the supervisor, and the clients to reset the appointment. In the event of a last-minute emergency and the clients cannot be contacted in time to reschedule an appointment, the supervisor will meet with the client for the student. However, the meeting will be limited to explaining the circumstances and resetting or advising that the appointment will be reset. Failure to keep appointments with clients, counsel, the Court, or supervisors without prior advisement to the supervisor is unacceptable and can result in a failing grade.

**Written work:** Graduate level work is expected in every aspect of the report that will be submitted to the Court. The style should be formal, without use of contractions, slang, abbreviations, or first-person. The guide for the style is the ***Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (Sixth Edition)***. Be sure to carefully proofread all work before submitting it to the supervisor for preliminary evaluation. The student must submit a rough draft of his/her report at the midway point to the supervisor for editing and review. The student is responsible for providing five copies of the final report. A copy will be delivered to the office of the Clerk of the Court to be file marked and scanned into the Court's computer system. That copy should not be stapled. The student will also deliver to the Clerk of the Court 4 additional copies to be file marked. These copies are to be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. The student is responsible for mailing one copy to each attorney and providing one file marked copy to the supervisor. The student will keep one file marked copy for their own records. There is no other written work required in this course. The final court-ordered social study will likely be 50 to 100 pages in length. It must contain **every** required element of a Social Study to receive a passing grade.

**Hours:** Practica students should be prepared to spend considerably more hours completing the supervised field assignment than the 42 hours associated with course requirements. Time involved in meeting with the supervisor, clients, counsel, etc., as well as writing the final report typically run 75 hours or more. Some students have invested between 150 to 200 hours to complete this assignment. It is the student's responsibility to track hours of individual supervision, client contact, child interviews, interaction with counsel, travel time for office appointments and home visits, review of materials received from clients, the Court, counsel, references, collateral sources, etc. Maintaining a log of hours as well as contacts is an important aspect of the forensic process.

**Grades:** Final 6392 grade will be reflected as a letter grade based on the acceptable completion of a court-ordered social study. The social study must meet all the requirements of a social study as outlined in the Texas Family Code § 107.051.

**Failure to meet all the criteria outlined in this section of the Family Code will result in failure of the course.**

**Sec. 107.0513. GENERAL PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO CONDUCT OF SOCIAL STUDY AND PREPARATION OF REPORT.**

- a) Unless otherwise directed by a court or prescribed by a provision of this title, a social study evaluator's actions in conducting a social study shall be in conformance with the professional standard of care applicable to the evaluator's licensure and any administrative rules, ethical standards, or guidelines adopted by the state agency that licenses the evaluator.
- b) In addition to the requirements prescribed by this subchapter, a court may impose requirements or adopt local rules applicable to a social study or a social study evaluator.
- c) A social study evaluator shall follow evidence-based practice methods and make use of current best evidence in making assessments and recommendations.
- d) A social study evaluator shall disclose to each attorney of record any communication regarding a substantive issue between the evaluator and an attorney of record representing a party in a disputed suit. This subsection does not apply to a communication between a social study evaluator and an attorney ad litem or amicus attorney.
- e) To the extent possible, a social study evaluator shall verify each statement of fact pertinent to a social study and shall note the sources of verification and information in the report.
- f) A social study evaluator shall state the basis for the evaluator's conclusions or recommendations in the report. A social study evaluator who has evaluated only one side of a disputed case shall refrain from making a recommendation regarding conservatorship of a child or possession of or access to a child, but may state whether the party evaluated appears to be suitable for conservatorship.

- g) Each social study subject to this subchapter must be conducted in compliance with this subchapter, regardless of whether the study is conducted:
  - 1. by a single social study evaluator or multiple evaluators working separately or together; or
  - 2. within a county served by the court with continuing jurisdiction or at a geographically distant location
  - 3. social study report must include the name, license number, and basis for qualification under Section 107.0511 of each social study evaluator who conducted any portion of the social study.

Added by Acts 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., Ch. [832](#), Sec. 3, eff. September 1, 2007.

**Sec. 107.0514. ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL STUDY.**

- a) The basic elements of a social study under this subchapter consist of:
  - 1) a personal interview of each party to the suit;
  - 2) an interview, conducted in a developmentally appropriate manner, of each child at issue in the suit who is at least four years of age;
  - 3) observation of each child at issue in the suit, regardless of the age of the child;
  - 4) the obtaining of information from relevant collateral sources;
  - 5) evaluation of the home environment of each party seeking conservatorship of a child at issue in the suit or possession of or access to the child, unless the condition of the home environment is identified as not being in dispute in the court order requiring the social study;
  - 6) for each individual residing in a residence subject to the social study, consideration of any criminal history information and any contact with the Department of Family and Protective Services or a law enforcement agency regarding abuse or neglect; and
  - 7) assessment of the relationship between each child at issue in the suit and each party seeking possession of or access to the child.
- b) The additional elements of a social study under this subchapter consist of:
  - 1) balanced interviews and observation of each child at issue in the suit so that a child who is interviewed or observed while in the care of one party to the suit is also interviewed or observed while in the care of each other party to the suit;
  - 2) an interview of each individual residing in a residence subject to the social study; and
  - 3) evaluation of the home environment of each party seeking conservatorship of a child at issue in the suit or possession of or access to the child, regardless of whether the home environment is in dispute.
- c) A social study evaluator may not offer an opinion regarding conservatorship of a child at issue in a suit or possession of or access to the child unless each basic element of a social study under Subsection (a) has been completed. A social study evaluator shall identify in the report any additional element of a social study under Subsection (b) that was not completed and shall explain the reasons that the element was not completed.

A well written Social Study that meets all the criteria of the Family Code will receive a passing grade, i.e., 80 (8 Points). Other factors that can impact the grade, i.e., B- vs. A include:

- Professionalism displayed with clients, counsel, the Court, etc. 0.5 pt
- Being on time for meetings. 0.5 pt
- Technique in interviewing clients and children. 1 pt
- Depth of understanding of the TFC regarding possession and access rules. 1 pt
- Clarity of thought and presentation of the facts of the case. 0.5 pt
- Clarity of recommendations and support for the recommendations. 0.5 pt

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Performance Description</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Exceptional</b>	<b>930 - 1000</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>A-</b>	<b>High Pass</b>	<b>900 - 929</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>11.1</b>
<b>B+</b>		<b>870 - 899</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>9.9</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>830 - 869</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>
<b>B-</b>		<b>800 - 829</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Session #</b>	<b>Requirements &amp; Points</b>	<b>Sub-</b>	<b>Total Points</b>
	1 Ofc. Date	Establish rapport..... Demonstrate respect..... Reducing anxiety..... Explaining SS process..... Obtain all rqrd signatures Waiver..... Statement of Understanding..... Session outline ..... Answer questions..... Getting contact info..... Get nxt session arranged.....		

Grade	Session #	Requirements & Points	Sub-	Total Points
	2 Ofc. Date _____	Establish rapport..... Demonstrate respect..... Reducing anxiety..... Review Client questionnaire..... Answer questions..... Get nxt session arranged..... Development of hypotheses .....		
	3 Home Date _____	Timely arrival..... Respect for client's home..... Interaction w/ client/child..... Maintaining boundaries .....		
	4 Ofc Date _____	Rapport..... Respect..... Effective questioning..... Note taking..... Maintaining boundaries..... Arrange next session .....		
	5 Child/ Ofc. Date _____	Rapport..... Respect..... Effective questioning..... Effective listening..... Note taking..... Maintaining boundaries..... Provide closure & reduce anxiety .....		
	6	Get final draft to supervisor w/in 1 week		
		40 items (0.5 points each)		

**INCOMPLETE GRADE:**

Neither SMU or the Supervisor can dictate to the Courts when to order a social study for our graduate students. Therefore, there is the possibility a student may experience some delay in getting a court ordered study to perform. The behavior of parties involved in litigation affecting the parent-child relationship is also unpredictable. Either situation could require a student to need more than the standard 10 week semester to fulfill this obligation. In such cases the student will receive an (I) Incomplete grade. The Supervisor will continue to provide supervision, office space, etc., to aid the graduate in completing the study as quickly as possible.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have received and understand the  
Print your name

syllabus, requirements, and grading for this field supervised practica.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date