

## Social Studies

### *(Child Custody Evaluations & Other Models of Forensic Psychotherapy)*

HDCN 6392-775

Instructor: Ron Stone, PhD, LPC-S, FABPS-ACFE, CART, Mediator, Parent Coordinator, Parent Facilitator, and Consultant

Summer Term 2014: August 4 - October 10, 2014 - Thursday eve: 6:00 PM to 10:15 PM

Office hours: Twenty-five minutes before class or by appointment

Phone: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

E-mail: [rstone@smu.edu](mailto:rstone@smu.edu) [REDACTED] (preferred)

(Retain this syllabus for your personal files for future reference if needed)

#### **Course Description:**

This course is designed as an overview of the field of custody evaluations with the specific focus of forensic evaluations performed for the courts to assist the trier of fact, the jury, etc., to determine what is in the best interest of a child or children of parents who are in disagreement about conservatorship, access, and rights regarding their children. However, it is understood that the greater majority of students taking this course are not likely to ultimately pursue the forensic field as his or her primary vocation. Therefore, the course has to be practical for every student. It is safe to assume that every licensed counselor, marriage and family therapist, etc., will be dealing with individuals experiencing the trauma of divorce. This course will help to identify what contemporary research has to offer regarding the impact of divorce on children. It will also have practical application for counselors and therapists who have contact with forensic evaluators, attorneys, or the courts in the process of his or her practice. This information should be useful to anyone in the field of marriage and family therapy or school counseling. It will also explore what opportunities may exist for working within the Court system providing what may be considered Forensic Psychotherapy as Parent Coordinators or Parenting Facilitators.

**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 Requirements:**

Research paper: 10% - Each student will select an article of his or her choice on the subject of Best Interest of Children. He or she will write a paper summarizing the article and be prepared to share his or her findings with the class as an oral presentation.

Class participation: 25% of grade - Classroom contribution of a quality that reflects knowledge of readings, texts, reference materials, and classroom videos of custody case. Students are

expected to be able to answer questions posed by the professor or respond to those posed by visiting speakers. Class participation includes attendance, which is mandatory given the compressed nature of the course; final grade **will be** affected if an absence occurs or student is late for class/es.

**Skill Development: 65% of grade** - a final paper of a minimum thirty page length and maximum eighty page length reflecting mastery of writing a report that offers a recommendation regarding the final placement of a child or children who are the subject of a suit affecting parent-child relationship. The recommendation must be supported by the facts in the report. The report must reflect an understanding of those principles regarding report writing taught in the class. Project due by final class September 4, 2014.

Remember that at SMU grades are recorded as A, A-, B+, B-, C+, C, C-. (A= 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83 - 86, B- = 80-82 and any C grade or lower grade is 79 or below. In the Counseling Department, any grade below a B- is considered unacceptable and repeating that particular course would be necessary.

Grade	Performance Description	Range	GPA	Points
A	Exceptional	93 – 100	4.0	12.0
A-	High Pass	90 – 92	3.7	11.1
B+		87 – 89	3.3	9.9
B	Pass	83 – 86	3.0	9.0
B-		80 – 82	2.7	8.1
C+	Failure, any C or below	77 – 79	2.3	6.9
C		73 – 76	2.0	6.0
C-		70 – 72	1.7	5.1
D+		67 – 69	1.3	3.9
D		63 – 66	1.0	3.0
D-		60 – 62	0.7	2.1
F		59 <sub>≥</sub>	0.0	0.0

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
To understand the purpose of a Custody Evaluation.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse
To understand the differences between a Psychotherapist and a Custody Evaluator	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To understand Texas State Requirements to Conduct a Custody Evaluation	Students will demonstrate their understanding by obtaining this information from The Texas Statutes Family Code and discussing in class and by incorporating these in final report.
To Understand Texas State Requirements Regarding Elements of a Social Study	Students will demonstrate their understanding by obtaining this information from The Texas Statutes Family Code and discussing in class
To Understand the Nature of a Forensic Model for Conducting a Custody Evaluation	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To be familiar with frequent criticisms of custody evaluations.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To be familiar with the Texas State Requirements for acting as a Parenting Coordinator	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To be familiar with the Texas State Requirements for acting as a Parenting Facilitator	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know what conflicts of interest exist for custody evaluators.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To have an understanding of and appreciation for the non-confidential nature of custody evaluations.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know how communications are accomplished with attorneys and the Courts.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To have some basic understanding of the developmental needs of children.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know what areas of assessment are critical for a social study.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse and in their final report.
To know the importance and requirements for maintaining records.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know what an age appropriate interview with a child consists of.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know the purpose of and how to conduct a home visit.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know how to conduct interviews of parents, references, collaterals, etc.	Students will demonstrate understanding through class discussion following viewings of taped interviews with parents.
To know how to obtain and prepare personal forms for use in conducting a social study.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse.
To know how to identify parental strengths and weaknesses.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse and in their final paper.
To know how to formulate and write a final recommendation regarding Best Interest of children.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse and in their final paper.
Articulate conceptual framework regarding Best Interest of Children principle.	Students will demonstrate understanding through prepared paper and classroom presentations.
Articulate a command of contemporary research regarding the impact of divorce on children.	Students will use a graduate level textbook and assigned chapter to outline and present current research findings for class discussion.
Articulate a personal philosophy of positive childhood development from birth through young adulthood.	Students will demonstrate their understanding through oral discourse and through the final paper.
Demonstrate skills and proper use of research tools and Texas Family Code as well as AFCC model for the final preparation of a custody evaluation/social study.	Students will exhibit this ability through the production of the final multipage custody evaluation report.

**Course outline:\***

July 17, 2014: **First Class** -

Viewing of taped Intro session with Father and Stepmother. <sup>1</sup>

Overview of course, syllabus, class activities, Foundations of Custody Evaluations/Social Studies.

Assignment for 2nd class: Read chapters 1 (The Search For Truth ...) and 2 (Roles & Ethical Issues in Custody Disputes) of required text. Choose an article of interest from the "References" section in the required text. <sup>2</sup> Be prepared **to discuss** Chpts. 1 & 2

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July 24, 2014: **Second Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chapters 1 & 2

Viewing of taped introductory session with Mother

Assignment for 3rd class: Read chapters Chpt. 3 "Models & Guidelines for CC Evals" and Chpt. 4. "Standards for Resolution of Custody Disputes" Be prepared **to discuss** Chpts 3 & 4.

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July. 31, 2014: **Third Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chpt. 3 "Models & Guidelines for CC Evals" and Chpt. 4. "Standards for Resolution of Custody Disputes"

Viewing of taped second session with Father and Stepmother

Assignment for 4th class: Read Chpt. 5 "General Legal and Professional Issues" and Chpt. 6 "Communication Among Professionals" Be prepared to discuss Chpts. 5 & 6 in next class.

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Aug. 7, 2014: **Fourth Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chpt. 5 "General Legal and Professional Issues" and Chpt. 6 "Communication Among Professionals"

Viewing of taped second session with Mother

Assignment for 5th class: read Chpt. 7 "The Ultimate Issue - Recommendations" and Chpt. 8 "Developmental Needs of Children and Families" Be prepared to discuss chapters 7 & 8 in the next class.

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Aug. 14, 2014: **Fifth Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chpt. 7 "The Ultimate Issue - Recommendations" and Chpt. 8 "Developmental Needs of Children and Families"

Assignment for 6th class: read Chpt. 9 "Managing Parent Child Contact in High-Conflict and Abusive Families" and Chpt. 10 "Parenting Plans & Interventions" Be prepared to discuss Chpts. 9 & 10 in 6th class.

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<sup>1</sup> Taped sessions with the parties may be viewed on different dates than indicated depending on availability and classroom circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> You are expected to turn in a 2 page paper on the day or evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> class regarding the Reference Article you chose.

Aug 21, 2014: **Sixth Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chpt. 9 “Managing Parent Child Contact in High-Conflict and Abusive Families” and Chpt. 10 “Parenting Plans & Interventions”

Viewing of taped interview of boys; (Father brought them in)

Assignment for 7th class. Read Chpt. 12 “Starting the Evaluation” & Chpt 13 “Collecting Information” Be prepared to discuss Chpts. 12 & 13 in next class.

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Aug 28, 2014: **Seventh Class** -

Classroom discussion of Chpt. 12 “Starting the Evaluation” & Chpt 13 “Collecting Information”

**Special Speaker: TBA**

Viewing of taped interview children; (Mother brought them in)

Assignment for 8th class: Have First half of social study completed and ready to discuss in class.

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Sept 4, 2014: **Eighth Class** -

Class review and discussion of first half of students’ social study.

Assignment for 9th class: Have second half of social study completed and ready to discuss in class.

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Sept 11, 2014: **Ninth Class** -

Class review and discussion of second half of students’ social study/custody evaluation.

Assignment for next class. Bring your completed custody evaluation to class for assessment by peer review.

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September 18, 2014: **Tenth & Final Class:**

Classroom discussion regarding each person’s recommendations and basis for the recommendations.

\*If you are absent is your responsibility to contact a classmate or your instructor in case we have adjustments in our schedule.

### **Anticipated speakers:**

Family Law - Attorney ; Family Court Judge of a District Court - Collin County, Texas. Former students who have taken both courses and completed Court Ordered Social Studies and have testified in Court. It is also likely we will replace one Thursday evening class with a four hour visit to a District Court to observe actual Family Law cases being litigated. This will depend on all members being able to work out this schedule change. Typically this leads to meeting at least one District Judge in person.

### **Statement on Confidentiality and Emotional Safety:**

To provide a safe learning environment for students in the class and to protect the confidentiality of practice clients and class members, students will discuss case material and others' personal information, reactions, etc., only while in class or privately with other current class members. It is the responsibility of each class member to treat classmates with respect and integrity, thus providing emotional safety for each other during class activities. All students in the Counseling Department will demonstrate behaviors consistent with the Ethical Standards forward by the APA and ACA in their code of ethics. Failure to do so can result in termination from the Department.

### **Statement on Academic Integrity:**

Students are reminded of the SMU Honor Code as referenced in the Student Handbook. Intellectual integrity and academic honesty are both the foundation and the goals for this program. Please reference and review the University policies on the responsibilities, policies, and penalties regarding academic honesty found at:

[http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL\\_05\\_HC.asp](http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_05_HC.asp)

### **Statement on Class Decorum:**

Please turn off (or set on vibrate) all cell phones or pagers. Please do not read newspapers, books for other classes, or other outside reading material during class, or use laptops for non-class related activities during class. Walking into class late is disruptive, as is leaving early, so please avoid this whenever possible. If you have to leave early, make arrangements before class begins, and when you do leave, do so quietly. Professional respect and courtesy for your fellow students is expected always.

### **Statement on Attendance:**

- Instructors should be given 24 hours' notice of any absence whenever possible
- If a student must miss one class, it is the student's responsibility to contact a classmate to get all material and assignments covered during their absence.
- A student's final grade will be impacted if two absences occur.
- A student missing more than two classes may, at the instructor's discretion:
  - receive a grade of Incomplete if the requirements to do so have been met (see the policy on Grades of Incomplete contained in this syllabus)
  - receive a failing grade for the course
  - drop or withdraw from the course. (This option may have a financial and/or financial aid impact. Student should refer to the Add/Drop Policy and the Withdrawal Policy for the Counseling program which can be found at <http://www.smu.edu/Simmons/AreasOfStudy/DRC/C/Counseling/AcademicCalendar14-15> then consult with the Assistant Director if they believe this option is a possibility.)

## Grade of Incomplete

A student may receive a grade of I (Incomplete) if at least 50 percent of the course requirements have been completed with passing grades, but for some justifiable reason, acceptable to the instructor, the student has been unable to complete the full requirements of the course. At the time a grade of I is given, the instructor must stipulate in writing to the student and to the University registrar the requirements and completion date that are to be met and the grade that will be given if the requirements are not met by the completion date. The maximum period of time allowed to clear the Incomplete grade normally is 12 months. If the Incomplete grade is not cleared by the date set by the instructor or by the end of the 12-month Policies and Procedures 25 deadline, the grade of I will be changed to the grade provided by the instructor at the time the Incomplete grade was assigned or to a grade of F if no alternate grade was provided. The grade of I is not given in lieu of a grade of F or W, or other grade, each of which is prescribed for other specific circumstances.

If the student's work is incomplete, poor quality and not acceptable, a grade of F will be given. The grade of I does not authorize a student to attend the course during a later term. Graduation candidates must clear all Incomplete grades prior to the deadline in the Official University Calendar, which may allow less time than 12 months. Failure to do so can result in removal from the degree candidacy list and/or conversion of the grade of I to the grade indicated by the instructor at the time the grade of I was given.

For graduate students, a maximum of two (six hours) concurrently held grades of Incomplete in courses other than thesis is allowed. If this maximum is reached, the student will be allowed to take only one three-hour course per term until the Incomplete total is reduced. Students who accumulate a total of three grades of Incomplete in courses other than thesis will be put on probation and not allowed to enroll further until the total is reduced.

**Disability Accommodations:** 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.)

**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

## Rubric for Class Participation & Readings Assessment

	4	5	6	7	Score
Preparation for class/class discussion/writing assignments	Does not ask questions or make comments that indicate familiarity with the topics for class; turns in most writing assignments	Rarely asks questions or makes comments that indicate familiarity with the topics prepared for class; turns in all writing assignments	Occasionally asks questions or makes observations that indicate reflections or some knowledge of readings for class; turns in all writing assignments	Regularly asks questions or makes observations that indicate reflection, knowledge or readings for class; turns in all writing assignments	
Small group participation	Does not participate in small groups in class	Does not actively participate in small groups in class	Participates actively in small groups in class	Participates actively and provides leadership in small groups in class.	
Interaction/participation in classroom discussions	Never a willing participant, never able to respond to questions; never volunteers point of view	Rarely a willing participant, rarely able to respond to questions; rarely volunteers point of view	Often a willing participant, responds occasionally to questions; occasionally volunteers point of view	Always a willing participant, responds frequently to questions; routinely volunteers point of view	
Interaction/participation in classroom learning activities	Never a willing participant, does not contribute during group activities; etc., never able to respond to direct questions; never volunteers point of view	Rarely a willing participant, occasionally fails to contribute during group activities; etc., rarely able to respond to direct questions; rarely volunteers point of view	Often a willing participant; contributes to group activities; etc., responds occasionally to questions; occasionally volunteers point of view	Always a willing participant; contributes during group activities etc., responds frequently to questions; routinely volunteers point of view	
Class Absence	Misses class often	Misses no more than 2 classes/ with prior arrangement	Misses 1 class or some portion of a class with prior arrangement	Attends class regularly (no missed classes)	
	20	25	30	35	



## Rubric for Final Social Study Written Report

	3	4	5	Score
Proper understanding of and inclusion of the Elements of a Social Study (SS) as outlined in § 107.0154 of Texas Family Code (TFC)	Student incorporated few elements of a social study or did not seem to understand the elements clearly.	Student incorporated most of the elements in the report. Student has clear understanding of elements included.	Student incorporated all elements of a social study in report. It is clear writer has proper understanding of these elements	
Proper placement of and reference to Qualifications of the Evaluator/Investigator as outlined in § 107.0511 of TFC	Student included few or no Qualifications of the Evaluator and/or does not appear to understand the Qualifications clearly.	Student included some of the Qualifications and appears to understand the ones used.	Student included Qualifications of Evaluator in appropriate place and seems to have clear understanding of the Qualifications	
Proper use of and inclusion of Rights & Duties of Parent as outlined in § 151.001 of TFC	Student failed to demonstrate proper understanding of or use of Rights and Duties of parents in the SS report.	Student covered some of Rights & Duties of parents & placed properly in SS. Appears to understand these Rights & Duties	Student covered the Rights & Duties of parents appropriately in appropriate section of SS. Appears to have clear understanding.	
Proper use of and understanding of Conservatorship options as outlined in § 153.002; 153.131; 153.252 of TFC	Student failed to make complete or appropriate recommendations regarding Conservatorship	Student made recommendations that covered the most important aspects of Conservatorship but failed to be thorough.	Student made complete & appropriate recommendations regarding conservatorship.	
Proper understanding of and clear presentation of Best Interest of Child (BIOC) & Presumptions of the Court as covered in class and outlined in §153.002; 153.131; 153.191; 153.252; 153.373 of the TFC.	Student does not appear to understand BIOC and/or failed to offer recommendations that were clear or supported by the rest of the report.	Student seems to understand BIOC and offered recommendations that were clear and mostly supported by the rest of his/her SS report.	Student demonstrated a clear understanding of BIOC and made clear recommendations thoroughly supported by the rest of his/her SS report.	
Clarity of Writing and Mechanics. How clear & concise is the report? Does it protect the author from severe criticism by attorneys or the Court?	It is hard to know what the writer is trying to express. Misspelled words, incorrect grammar, and improper punctuation are frequent. Several important segments of a thorough SS investigation are absent.	Writing is generally clear, but unnecessary words are occasionally used. Meaning is sometimes hidden. A few spelling, grammar or punctuation errors are made. Most of critical segments of SS are included in report.	Writing is crisp, clear, and succinct. appropriate. Very few or no spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors are made. All significant segments of a SS are included in the report.	
	18	24	30	