

Special Problems

PSYC 298

Spring 2026 Section 80 Fully Online 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/14/2026

Contact Information

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Office: DMH 321

Office Hours

Tuesday from 10am-11am and 1:30pm-2:30pm

or by appointment

Course Information

Demonstration of Learning in Second Year Comprehensive Exam

3 unit course: Please note, you are required to register for this class both Fall and Spring semester of your second year in the program, and you must register for 3 units each time (for a total of 6 units).

About PSYC 298

This yearlong two-semester course taken in your second year in the MS Clinical program is intended to provide structure and training during your master's project (also known as the Second Year Comprehensive Exam). The course requires you to develop a detailed single case design study of one client during each semester of supervised training. The culminating project, a 30-35 page paper, that you develop is based on an extensive case conceptualization paper and oral presentation and defense of a client you have treated during the course of your training. It is designed to demonstrate your competency as a therapist in multiple areas including case formulation, ethical treatment of clients, the inclusion of central contextual variables (including but not limited to culture, gender, and family issues), assessing and collecting data, utilizing supervision, and providing an accurate diagnosis.

To clarify, the purpose of the comp is to show your ability to conceptualize a case from within a theoretical perspective, to show how you employ evidence-based practice (including using the literature and tracking data), to demonstrate ethical practice, to show an understanding and appreciation of contextual features, and to show how you made use of supervision. In the oral portion of the exam, the purpose is also to

demonstrate how you can respond to questions about your case based on your presentation. This must be a case you have not written about or received graded feedback in another context. It is (of course) acceptable to have discussed such cases in supervision and fieldwork. The cases chosen and written up as comps must be different cases for the two semesters; you cannot use the same comp for Spring as used for Fall. Details of the paper are provided below.

The Role of your Faculty Consultant

Your faculty consultant for this course will evaluate and provide feedback on the practice second year comp in the Fall and the final second year comp in the Spring, including the oral exam. In the Fall, faculty may grade and give feedback on written sections of the second year comp exam as they are written and when the case is turned in at the end of the semester.

In the Spring, students are encouraged to bring questions about their comp case to discuss in consultation meetings. In cases where students have specific questions about a well-formed draft of the comp, faculty may invite students to share a limited portion of the written draft (i.e., 1-2 sections, depending on length) over email or by bringing a physical copy into the consultation meeting. The faculty consultant and student members of the consultation team then may provide verbal feedback on what is shared; no written feedback will be provided.

A student is given feedback about their writing and whether they passed the comp after the full write up has been evaluated. If the student successfully passed the written section, they are allowed to move to the oral portion of the exam. In order to receive course credit, the student must pass both the written and oral section of the final second year comp in the Spring semester.

When necessary, any changes will be communicated to students as soon as possible.

Course Description and Requisites

Advanced work in areas not covered in any regular course offering. Course is repeatable for a maximum of four units.

Prerequisite: Instructor consent.

CR/NC/RP Graduate

Classroom Protocols

Academic Integrity

Your commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University.

The University Academic Integrity Policy S07-2 (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S07-2.pdf>) requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The Student Conduct and Ethical

Development website is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the Accessible Education Center (AEC) to establish a record of their disability.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

AI can support learning, but it cannot replace your own thinking. Students are expected to attempt all assignments on their own first, using their own ideas, analysis, and reasoning, *before* turning to any AI tools for clarification, refinement, or feedback. AI should enhance your learning, not generate it for you.

Students are fully responsible for any AI-generated content they include in their work. This means:

- Ideas must be accurate and properly attributed.
- Facts must be verified.
- The final submission must reflect the student's own understanding and voice.

AI tools may be used to explore concepts, study, check understanding, or improve writing, but students must be transparent and document their use.

All writing assignments will include an evaluation component based on your documentation of AI use. By tracking and sharing your AI interactions, we build collective awareness, improve our judgment, and develop responsible practices in a rapidly evolving field.

**Of note, softwares, such as Grammarly, CoPilot for Word document, commonly gets flagged for AI use. I recommend disclosure if you use these softwares.

To summarize, if you use AI in any part of your work, you are responsible for:

- Ensuring ideas are accurate and properly attributed.
- Verifying facts independently.
- Submitting work that reflects your own understanding, voice, and reasoning.
- Transparently documenting any AI use.

Please use this format to document AI use when submitting any writing assignments:

AI use documentation

- AI tool used:
- Reason for using AI:
- Prompt(s) used:

Example:

AI use documentation

- *AI tool used:* ChatGPT
- *Reason of using AI:* To get feedback on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, helping me to improve my language skills.
- *Prompt(s) used:* "ChatGPT, please edit and proofread this paragraph that I have written to make sure the sentence flows well and have no grammatical errors. Also, please make sure that I have these points - 1. Child temperament can contribute to behavior change. 2. Family and community environment factor can influence risk of childhood psychopathology. and 3. Nutrition may also influence children's behavior."

Academic Integrity and AI Detection

To maintain fairness, transparency, and academic integrity, all writing assignments may be screened using Turnitin's AI-writing detection tool. Because AI detection is imperfect, no academic penalty will ever be based solely on the Turnitin percentage. Instead, the issue is not documenting AI use.

Important Notes:

- You will never be penalized for documented AI use that follows the policy.
- You will only be penalized for undisclosed or deceptive AI use.
- If you believe the AI detection score is inaccurate, you may request a review.

Note: The developments around generative AI are in flux and the rules that are expressed in this syllabus may need to change on short notice. This may affect the contents of assignments, as well as their evaluation.

Program Information

Licensure Learning Outcomes (LLOs) indicate how each course meets the educational requirements as detailed by the CA Board of Behavioral Sciences. [The MS Clinical LLOs are detailed on our program website. \(https://sjsu.edu/psych/graduate-programs/masters-clinical-psych/learning-objectives.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/psych/graduate-programs/masters-clinical-psych/learning-objectives.php)

Program learning outcomes (PLOs) are skills and knowledge that students will have achieved upon completion of the MS in Clinical Psychology degree. Each course in our curriculum contributes to one or more of these PLOs. The PLOs for the degree are:

1. Interventions and evidence-based applications

- 1.1 Students will be able to apply, compare, and contrast a variety of psychotherapy theories and implement at least one chosen theory or intervention with clinical case material
- 1.2 Students will be able to evaluate, select, and implement empirically supported clinical interventions for clinical case material and clients
2. Communication and Case presentation
 - 2.1 Students will be able to integrate and communicate clinical case material
 - 2.2 Students will be able to synthesize contextual and cultural variables into their understanding of and presentation of client materials
 - 2.3 Students will effectively respond to queries about clinical material and engage in discussions about their clients with supervisors and peers
 - 2.4 Students will be able to analyze cases other than those they are treating, applying theories, principles, and relevant empirical findings to those cases
3. Competent Assessment and Evaluation
 - 3.1 Students will be able to evaluate, select, and implement different assessment devices and strategies for assessing client outcomes and processes of change over the course of treatment including nomothetic and idiographic approaches
4. Professional clinical practice
 - 4.1 Students will demonstrate competency consistent with professional standards of practice in areas including, but not limited to, psychotherapy theory, service delivery, ethics, assessment, research methods, family/couples therapy, cultural diversity and humility, risk management and safety planning, psychopharmacology, and issues relevant to adult and child clinical populations.
5. Preparation and meeting professional licensing requirements
 - 5.1 Students will demonstrate fulfillment of coursework and other pre-degree licensing requirements outlined by the Board of Behavioral Sciences

Course Materials

Student Resources

SJSU Writing Center:

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. All Writing Specialists have gone through a rigorous hiring process, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment or to refer to the numerous online resources offered through the Writing Center, visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>

For additional resources and updated information, follow the Writing Center on Twitter and become a fan of the SJSU Writing Center on Facebook.

SJSU Counseling Services:

The SJSU Counseling Services is located at the Student Wellness Center, room 300B. Professional psychologists, social workers, and counselors are available to provide consultations on issues of student mental health, campus climate or psychological and academic issues on an individual, couple, or group basis. To schedule an appointment or learn more information, visit Counseling Services website at <http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling>

Course Requirements and Assignments

Course Requirements

You will write one practice of the second year comp in your consultation group in the Fall semester and the final comp in the Spring semester. You will discuss the comp and the progress you make in the consultation group you are assigned to, and you receive units for the product for the PSYC 298 course. The consultation group faculty member will discuss with each student in the development of the comp, but the writing will be entirely the responsibility of the student. These discussions are provided during meetings set with the faculty consultant and/or during consultation meetings.

You are expected to complete a professionally written practice comp for the Fall semester. In the Spring semester, you must complete a passing comp using the criteria listed below and in the Student Handbook to earn credit for the PSYC 298 units.

In your practice comp, you will provide evidence for your writing (using accurate and appropriate references), as you would for the final comp. Although it is sometimes difficult to have a full case to write up in the Fall, all students will turn in a practice comp write-up. The following represent the minimum expectations for the Fall semester comp write-up.

If a therapist has seen a client from more than 5 or 6 sessions, all sections would be expected in the Fall semester practice comp. In the event that the therapist has seen a client for only a few sessions, then minimal expectations are as follows:

Sections required included Background, Context & Presenting Problem and Diagnosis.

The Initial Assessment Data section should include any and all data gathered to the time of writing. That section may include discussion of what data may be essential to gather in the future.

The Theoretical Formulation/Conceptualization section should be as thorough and complete as possible but may include hypotheses about how to best intervene with the client. In the development of the conceptualization, the student should indicate what is known about the client, what the writer needs to know, and hypotheses about the case.

The Treatment section may be written as a hypothetical plan for the Fall practice comp, as decided by the faculty consultant. In either case, all sections MUST include academic references to support assertions and hypotheses as developed in the paper. The paper should maintain high levels of professionalism and evidence effective and appropriate use of grammar, syntax, and spelling.

In the Spring semester your comp will be officially evaluated as part of your culminating experience. You must earn credit for this course to graduate from the clinical program and earn your master's degree.

The following details the Written and Oral portions of the comp exam. The Written portion provides the structure you will follow in writing your comp exam.

Comps Written Portion

The written portion of the second year comp evidences your conceptualization, treatment development, and how you conducted professional and ethical therapy for a specific client you have seen in your training as a student in the MS program on your fieldwork placement. To clarify, the purpose of the comp is to show your ability to conceptualize a case from within a theoretical perspective, to show how you employ evidence based practice (including using the literature and tracking data), to demonstrate ethical practice, to show an understanding and appreciation of contextual features including gender, ethnicity, and family variables, and to show how you made use of supervision. In the oral portion of the exam, the purpose is to show how you can respond to questions about your case based on your presentation including issues related to crisis management, ethical dilemmas, the use of supervision, and so on. This must be a case you have not written about or received graded feedback in another context. It is (of course) acceptable to have discussed such cases in supervision and fieldwork. You cannot self-plagiarize from work done for other classes. You must thoroughly reference all of your work from resources in the literature. Remember that plagiarism is only plagiarism (read as unethical) when you have turned in a paper and are claiming the content as yours. If you are not sure what is acceptable and not acceptable, just ask before you turn in the assignment.

General guidelines

Formatting:

No more than 35 double spaced pages in length (excluding title page, figures, appendices, and references), and must be written in APA style, using a 12 pt font. Successful papers will not be less than 30 pages. Be certain to use the most current version of the APA Publication Manual. Include a cover sheet with title, name, student identification number, and date. Your student identification number should be on the top right corner of each page as a header. Your consultation group leader will let you know how to submit the final copy. Papers with more than 2-3 typographical (spelling) errors will be returned for rewriting. Having a paper returned is grounds for failing the first attempt of the comp, so please make use of grammar and spelling check programs and proofreaders.

Case selection

The comp will be on a client you have seen for a reasonable period in a clinical setting. The case used cannot be one used in any other write-up. The case you choose for the final spring semester comp write-up cannot be the case you use for the practice comp write up in the Fall semester. The case should be an individual client whether in the context of individual therapy or a child or adolescent seen as part of family treatment. The case should not be an individual seen in group therapy.

You can choose a couple for the comp, but be certain to discuss this with your consultation group leader before beginning to write the comp. You should have seen the client for at least 6 to 8 sessions for this task.

Content quality

The general purpose of this culminating experience project is to demonstrate your ability to write and defend a concise, yet comprehensive case study of a therapy client from a theoretical and professional perspective. Extensive reading, particularly in the theoretical orientation and discussion of contextual variables you choose to incorporate into diagnosis and treatment, will be necessary.

You are encouraged to discuss general theoretical issues with faculty to enhance your level of understanding and to clarify your thinking process; however, specifics of your comprehensive exam write up will always be your own. You are encouraged to show your work to other students, solicit feedback, and discuss the case with them. Again, all writing must be yours. Faculty may choose to give feedback on sections on the first semester write up as the student works on those sections.

Grading Procedures:

Each written comprehensive will be read by your consultation group leader who helped develop the case. The same faculty member will serve as the student's oral examiner. A passing score of 80% on the case study is required to move to the oral exam (grading criteria are below). The student will typically be notified whether they received a passing score within two weeks after receipt of their paper. If the student receives a failing score, typically a second faculty reader will read the written exam. This is not required for the first failure and rewrite (second attempt) of the exam. If the student fails the rewrite (second attempt) of the exam, a second reader will be assigned to confirm the failure of the written portion. If the second reader determines that the second attempt written portion is failed, the student will receive a no credit grade for PSYC 298, will be disqualified from the program, and cannot graduate from the program.

Due dates

The written comprehensives will typically be due on the Friday immediately following Spring Break. The Oral Examination will follow approximately 1-3 weeks after receipt of the written exam.

The oral portion

There is no oral exam for Fall semester comps. You are welcome to discuss the criteria for orals with your consultation team faculty member in both Fall and Spring semesters. If and when students pass the minimum criteria for the written portion of the second year comp, then they will have an oral portion of the comp scheduled.

The oral portion provides time for students to briefly present the same case that was described in the written portion, to interact with other students about each other's cases, and to field questions about their cases from faculty member examiners. Examiners will ask students questions about each case, initially about their own, then about other students who are also being examined that day. These questions may be to clarify what was written, to amplify specific features of the case, or to pose questions about hypothetical scenarios. The following are general guidelines for oral portion of the second year comp.

1. The oral examinations will typically be conducted in group format. Typically two to three hours will be allotted for the oral examination, including time for feedback. Students will be notified of their pass/fail status prior to leaving the oral exam and will be given feedback on their performance.
2. Two faculty will serve as oral examiners. One will be your Consultation Team leader and the other will be a different faculty member. The identity of the second faculty member will not be known until after the written exam has been turned in. You should write the comp as if the entire faculty were reading it.
3. The faculty oral examiners will have read and evaluated the written portion.
4. The second examiner will not typically pass or fail the written portion, your Consultation Team leader will primarily perform that task. Again, under some circumstances a second reader may be brought in to grade the written portion.
5. A passing evaluation is needed on the oral examination by both faculty members to qualify for graduation.
6. It is important to remember that you are writing to more than one audience when you complete the written portion of your comp exam. Certainly, your consultation group leader is one audience, but your second faculty oral examiner will also be an audience member. You will not know who this person is in advance, so your writing needs to address program goals and objective and should not be tailored to one specific faculty reader.
7. The format of the oral exam will be similar to that of a case conference or case presentation to colleagues. Students will be expected to show depth of coverage, breadth of knowledge, professionalism, understanding of ethical issues, no obvious omissions, errors, or gross dysfluencies.
8. Questions will be asked of students' own cases and other students' cases. Therefore, each student will be required to read each other's case papers before coming

to the oral presentation meeting. The evaluation will be based on each students' answers about their own case write ups as well as about others' cases.

9. The Oral Exam will take place approximately 1-3 weeks after submission of the written portion of the second year comps.

10. If the oral portion is evaluated as not passing (a fail), a second faculty evaluator may be called in to sit in the oral exam second administration with the original oral examiner.

11. If the student fails the second oral administration, they will be disqualified from the program, will receive a no credit grade for PSYC 298, and will not graduate from the program.

✓ Grading Information

Criteria

Grading policy

This class is taken as credit/no credit. Credit for Fall semester is given to the student for satisfactory completion of the practice comp, and in the Spring semester for the satisfactory completion of the final written comp and oral exam.

The course is attached to the second-year comprehensive project. To receive credit for the course in Fall, you will need to satisfactorily complete a practice comprehensive exam write-up by the end of the semester. To receive credit for the course in Spring, you will need to satisfactorily complete your final comprehensive write-up and oral exam.

All sections above must be scored at 70% or better.

Overall score must meet or exceed 80%

The Oral Portion

Criteria/Areas of Feedback:

1. Organization and coherence

2. Demonstration of maturity and non-defensiveness in case presentation including an ability to see strengths and weaknesses of how the case was conceptualized, an ability to generate alternative approaches and the strengths and weaknesses of doing so.

3. Demonstrate insight into any additional training that would be helpful.

4. Ability to answer specific questions about the case including ethical and professional questions.

Content and scoring of the Written Portion

The following outline is required to complete the comprehensive exam. While there is room for personal judgment as dictated by your specific case, keep in mind that a comp exam will, at the very least, cover each of the outlined areas. The sequencing of information should follow the format below. You should identify each section with a header, but you do not repeat the entire question as listed below.

Your instructor for your Consultation Team will be the primary grader of your comps. A second reader may be used for the comps under some circumstances.

Type	Weight	Topic	Notes
Background Context and Presenting problem	20 points		<p>Include the reason for referral, client demographics/identifying information, description and history of the presenting problem. Do NOT include any true or actual identifying information of client, place of employment, etc.</p> <p>Describe the main clinical issues (client presentation & clinical understanding)</p> <p>Client's place in the context of interpersonal and family dynamics, as well as the presenting problem.</p> <p>Role of gender, ethnicity, and culture for this client; socioeconomic factors.</p> <p>For each contextual feature and/or demographic variable, how does it inform your understanding of the clinical issue?</p>
Theoretical Formulation/Conceptualization	40 points		<p>Describe and discuss your theoretical formulation in terms of what it says about mental health in the context of this client and the identified problems the client has.</p> <p>How does the theory you chose inform your understanding of etiology, symptoms, presentation of symptoms and treatment.</p> <p>Identify the mechanism of the problem and the mechanism of change according to your selected theoretical model,</p> <p>Identify and interpret relevant literature, including treatment outcome studies that support your approach to this case.</p> <p>How would an alternative theoretical conceptualization of this client prove useful in your understanding or treatment? Briefly provide an example of a case formulation for this client using another theory.</p>

Type	Weight	Topic	Notes
Initial assessment data	20 points		<p>Include a selection of data taken at intake and assessment sessions. You do not need to include every assessment that is required at your agency.</p> <p>Describe standardized or nomothetic measures used to assess problem severity and track treatment progress; illustrate with graphs/tables in appendix.</p> <p>Be sure to identify the rationale behind the selection of your measures.</p>
Diagnosis	15 points		<p>Briefly describe the overarching symptoms happening for this client, whether or not they fit into a specific diagnostic category.</p> <p>Based on their background and context, describe the main clinical concerns, then make a diagnosis.</p> <p>Provide rule outs AND an explanation about how the diagnosis and differentials informed conceptualization and treatment.</p>
Treatment	30 points		<p>Based on your theoretical approach, discuss what you did in treatment and why. In other words, how does the theoretical formulation inform your selection of an evidence-based treatment?</p> <p>Discuss the "arc" of treatment (stages and phases of treatment, not session by session).</p> <p>Talk about how treatment worked as planned, and how it didn't.</p> <p>Discuss progress and mechanism monitoring during treatment, as well as clinical observations of change (did the client change and why?). Summarize the client's areas of change and include relevant graphs/figures.</p> <p>Figures/graphs do not count in the page limit.</p>
Legal/Ethical issues	15 points		What specific legal or ethical issues did you encounter or would you anticipate? Discuss solutions.
Supervision	15 points		<p>Address how supervision and/or consultation contributed to the development and treatment of this case.</p> <p>Discuss how you addressed gaps in your knowledge and sought out other resources you needed.</p>

Type	Weight	Topic	Notes
What I learned about doing therapy	15 points		How did this experience inform your understanding of the role of the importance of context, assessment, diagnosing, and conceptualization in providing therapy?
What I learned about myself	15 points		<p>How do you understand your role and your experiences as part of the treatment of this case?</p> <p>How was treatment impacted with this client by your life history, identities, values, biases, and perceptions (i.e., transference, countertransference) Discuss both: 1) how Your history, identities, etc. impacted how you engaged in the therapy process and 2) How the client's history, identities, etc. impacted how they engaged with you in the therapy process?</p> <p>How were you impacted by treating this case at a more personal level?</p>
Writing and references	15 points		<p>Writing style, grammar, spelling, and professionalism will be evaluated.</p> <p>Reference all materials used and be able to present this material if requested by a reader.</p> <p>APA style must be used for all in-text references as well as in the reference list.</p> <p>All references in the text must be cross-checked for being in the reference section and vice-versa.</p>

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.