UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

University Council

February 27, 2026

UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE – 2025-2026
Susan Sanchez, Chair
Agricultural and Environmental Sciences – Julie Campbell
Arts and Sciences – Casie LeGette (Arts)
Paula Lemons (Sciences)
Business – Andrew Miller
Ecology – Amanda Rugenski
Education – Amy Murphy
Engineering – David Stooksbury
Environment and Design – Katherine Melcher
Family and Consumer Sciences – Melissa Landers-Potts
Forestry and Natural Resources – Richard Chandler
Journalism and Mass Communication – Yan Jin
Law – Joe Miller
Medicine – Erica Brownfield
Pharmacy – Duc Do
Public and International Affairs – Ryan Powers
Public Health – Heather Padilla
Social Work – Jennifer Elkins
Veterinary Medicine – Paul Eubig
Graduate School – Rodney Mauricio
Ex-Officio – Provost Benjamin Ayers
Undergraduate Student Representative – Ella Colker
Graduate Student Representative – Yaw Buabeng

Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the College of Family and Consumer Sciences for a Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice will be an agenda item for the March 6, 2026, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

Susan Sanchez, Chair

cc: Provost Benjamin Ayers
Dr. Marisa Anne Pagnattaro

PROPOSAL FOR A CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Date: September 1, 2025

School/College/Unit: College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Department/Division: Human Development and Family Science

Certificate Title: Relational Therapy Practice

CIP: 51159900

Effective Term: Fall 2026

Which campus(es) will offer this certificate? Athens

Level (Undergraduate, Graduate, or Post-Baccalaureate): Graduate

Program Abstract:
The proposed Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice is designed to provide introductory systemic assessment and intervention skills to graduate students who plan to work with couple and family systems in applied community settings. Certificate coursework focuses on interdisciplinary collaboration, theoretically-grounded systemic case conceptualization, and evidence-based practice with couples and families.

Although some courses may transfer to a clinical program, the proposed certificate does not prepare students for licensure or certification in any mental health profession, nor does completion of the certificate signify endorsement for certification or licensure. However, when in combination with either an undergraduate degree in Financial Planning or the Behavioral Financial Planning/Financial Therapy certificate, students who complete the proposed graduate certificate will meet the educational criteria to become a Certified Financial Therapist through the Financial Therapy Association.

1. **Purpose and Educational Objectives**

State the purpose and educational objectives of the program. How does this program complement the mission of the institution?

The proposed Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice will provide foundational relational assessment and intervention skills to either supplement graduate students' training in other clinical disciplines or provide appropriate relational training for those conducting other types of interventions (e.g., Behavioral Financial Planning and Financial Therapy, Communication Sciences and Disorders, etc.). The purpose of this certificate is to provide an evidence-based foundation for interdisciplinary prevention and intervention services with couples and families. The certificate is **not** intended to take the place of graduate work in a clinical field or to prepare students for licensure in any clinical discipline.

The proposed certificate complements the mission of the institution by contributing to national recognition through supporting and mentoring students, generating innovative publications and presentations of interdisciplinary clinical practice, and supplying additional providers at the Love and Money Center to support research on evidence-based practices at the intersection of relationship and financial well-being. Additionally, the certificate will support collaboration with other academic programs and community service providers to disseminate interdisciplinary research and practice as well as expand the relationship between training facilities and community providers to increase instructional effectiveness.

2. **Need for the Program**

Explain why this program is necessary. In addition, provide the following information:

a. **Semester/Year of Program Initiation:** Fall 2026
b. **Semester/Year of Full Implementation of Program:** Fall 2027
c. **Semester/Year First Certificates will be awarded:** Spring 2028
d. **Annual Number of Graduates expected (once the program is established):** Estimates for the annual number of graduates once the certificate is established are based on the growing number of Certified Financial Therapists (financialtherapyassociation.org), enrollment trends in the graduate certificate in behavioral financial planning and financial therapy (online and campus-based programs), the historical level of interest in the Graduate Certificate in Marriage and Family Therapy (an average of 30 applications per year), and the level of interest indicated by students inquiring about a Double Dawgs clinical track. These numbers would suggest that, once established, a conservative estimate of expected annual graduates is projected to be approximately 12 based on the 28% increase in membership in the Financial Therapy Association (2024-2025), a 60% increase in students completing the certificate in behavioral financial therapy, and the number of behavioral financial planning certificate students expressing interest in further relational training (via email inquiries).
e. **Projected Future Trends for number of students enrolled in the program:** The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024) projects the field of Financial Advisors to increase by 17% by 2029. Therefore, it is likely that the demand for the type of intervention training offered through this certificate will similarly increase in demand within the first five years. Conservative estimates would suggest future trends of students enrolled in the proposed certificate to be 30-36 students (15-18 graduates per year) within the first five years of having been established.

Financial Advisors and Planners receive training in individuals' relationship to money and finances, whereas the proposed Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice offers training in the psychological and emotional aspects of a couple's interactions and conflict. The existing graduate certificate in behavioral financial planning and financial therapy (FHCE) and other clinical disciplines (counseling, social work, etc.) include minimal training in assessing relationship interactions, theories of systemic functioning, or couple interventions. Yet 73% of couples report finances as a source of tension (American Institute of CPAs, 2021) and financial conflict as being more pervasive and recurring than other areas of conflict (Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2011). The proposed certificate is intended to supplement existing degrees and certificates noted previously to provide training in evidence-based relational prevention and intervention to better prepare professionals in these areas (relational assessment, couple intervention, and systemic theories) who work with couple/family systems and finances. For example, financial planners, financial advisors, social workers, counselors, those working with community non-profits, and advocacy groups would benefit from additional training in assisting couples regarding financial decision making and financial stress. Further evidence of projected future trends in demand for relational intervention training is based on the historical interest in the Graduate Certificate in Marriage and Family Therapy. The proposed certificate and existing Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Planning and Financial Therapy will be stackable as the department intends to create a master's degree in Financial Therapy in the future.

For context, currently, no licenses or certifications are *required* to practice financial therapy. The Financial Therapy Association (FTA) has created a professional certification program in financial therapy (e.g., the Certified Financial Therapist designation; financialtherapyassociation.org). This certification was an important step in professionalizing financial therapy and establishing standards and ethics to which a financial therapist should adhere. Holders of FTA's certification primarily come from either a financial professional or mental health professional background. The proposed certificate will provide the foundational clinical training to ensure that certified financial therapists have the necessary relational intervention skills as well as assessment skills to be able to refer clients who may be outside their scope of practice.

As noted above, the intention is to develop an M.S. in Financial Therapy in FACS in the near future; such a degree would be the first master's program in the U.S. that would provide an interdisciplinary degree in financial therapy. Such a degree will further access to relational intervention education and foster the continued growth of interdisciplinary collaboration toward the evolution of the financial therapy field.

3. Student Demand

a. Provide documentation of evidence of student demand for this program, including a student survey.

b. Provide evidence that demand will be sufficient to sustain reasonable enrollment.

The now terminated Graduate Certificate in Marriage and Family Therapy accepted between 20 and 40 students from the School of Social Work and counseling programs annually, indicating student interest in a certificate geared toward training clinicians from a relational perspective. Of note, lack of interest was not the reason the previous certificate was terminated. Rather, disciplinary changes to marriage and family therapy licensure requirements and their definitions according to the Secretary of State made the previous

curriculum less relevant than at its inception. There is significant interest in relational intervention programs. For context, The M.S. in Couple and Family Therapy received 40 applications for the Fall 2026 cohort despite its recent addition as a degree program and having not yet received program accreditation. Additionally, "marriage and family therapist" became a protected term reserved for those who are licensed as such. The proposed certificate in relational therapy practice does not involve protected terms or titles; there is not an associated license, therefore the proposed certificate avoids confusion or inadvertent misrepresentation of qualifications.

Students enrolled in the proposed certificate will take some of the same courses as those required by the M.S. in Couple and Family Therapy (MSCFT), therefore the courses required for the Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice will always have sufficient enrollment. Enrollment in the certificate is likely to grow based on growth trends noted in 2d and 2e previously. In addition, historically, the recognition of a new discipline is a lengthy process, suggesting the proposed certificate will be relevant for the foreseeable future. For example, the Financial Therapy Association recently established the gold standard for certification (2021-2024) though no license exists. Clinical fields such as counseling and marriage and family therapy historically took 40-50 years to achieve licensure once formalized. Therefore, provided the certificate curriculum remains abreast of developments within the field, the certificate will remain sustainable. The projected cohort size for the MSCFT program is 10 students annually, therefore projected enrollment in certificate courses is conservatively estimated to be between 10-15 with the addition of the relational therapy practice students, even if projected numbers referenced in 2d above are lower than the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates for Certified Financial Therapists.

4. Program of Study

Provide a detailed program of study for the certificate program, including:

a. Specific course prefixes, numbers, and titles

b. Identify any new courses created for this program

The proposed program of study for the Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice is listed below. No new courses are needed because all courses for the proposed certificate are already required in the M.S. in Couple and Family Therapy or the Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Financial Planning and Financial Therapy.

Required Courses (15 hours)

HDFS 6001, Pre-Practicum and Interdisciplinary Practice (3 hours)
HDFS 6040, Psychopathology and Relational Assessment Throughout the Lifespan (3 hours)
HDFS 6070, Couple Therapy (3 hours)
HDFS 7100, Systems Theory and Couple and Family Therapy Theory (3 hours)
HDFS 7110, Contemporary Family Therapy (3 hours)

5. Model Program and Accreditation

a. Identify any model programs, accepted disciplinary standards, and accepted curricular practices against which the proposed program could be judged. Evaluate the extent to which the proposed curriculum is consistent with these external points of reference and provide a rationale for significant inconsistencies and differences that may exist.

b. If program accreditation is available, provide an analysis of the ability of the program to satisfy the curricular standards of such specialized accreditation.

Currently, there are no certificates in relational therapy practice available for current clinical graduate students or graduate students in a different discipline. The closest certificate for comparison is the Graduate Certificate in Systemic Couple and Family Therapy offered by Capella University. (https://www.capella.edu/degrees-programs/certificate-degree-programs/counseling-cert/counseling-certificate-programs/certificate-systemic-couple-family-therapy/). This online certificate requires 20 credits with similar content regarding foundational and contemporary theories and a focus on couple intervention.

For both the Capella University certificate and proposed Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice at the University of Georgia, coursework can be applied to a master's degree in marriage/couple and family therapy should the student decide to pursue a clinical master's degree.

There are several certificates in relational-focused psychodynamic or marriage/couple and family therapy nationwide, mostly offered online, although some are offered face-to-face. However, such programs are designed to serve individuals who already hold a terminal degree in a clinical field, such as marriage/couple and family therapy, mental health counseling, social work, or psychology, allowing these practitioners to develop their skills in a specific area or expand their education without committing to a Ph.D. program.

Programs outside of universities also offer similarly titled certificates to established professionals; however, these institutions are not accredited institutions of higher education and only marginally cover similar content.

As noted in the description of the program purpose above, the certificate is **not** intended to take the place of graduate work in a clinical field or to prepare students for licensure in any clinical discipline. Therefore, program accreditation is not available for this certificate. However, all of the courses required by the proposed Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice are also required by the M.S. in Couple and Family Therapy. The MSCFT began in Fall 2025 and was developed according to the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) Standards Version 12.5 (https://www.coamfte.org/Common/Uploaded%20files/COAMFTE/Accreditation%20Resources/COAMFTE%20Standards%20Version%2012.5%20-%20Published%20August%202021%20-%208.26.21%20(with%20links).pdf). Data will be gathered in the first two years of the MSCFT in order to apply for accreditation through COAMFTE and will be reviewed every five to seven years thereafter as part of re-accreditation. Therefore, though COAMFTE does not accredit certificates, the coursework for the proposed certificate will be reviewed as a part of the MSCFT accreditation process.

6. Student Learning Outcomes

Describe the proposed learning outcomes for the certificate program.

1. *Students will apply knowledge of family systems theory to case conceptualization.* Students will demonstrate their understanding of the interconnectedness of individuals, family system, and the intersecting contexts in which families exist. They will apply their understanding of family systems and family systems theories by creating written and oral descriptions of relevant contexts and factors that influence family system functioning and coping.

2. *Students will demonstrate assessment skills for common mental health diagnosis and relational functioning*. Students will demonstrate their ability to use criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – V (DSM-V) for common mental health diagnoses. In addition, they will demonstrate their ability to assess relational and systemic functioning using the language of major family and systemic theories.

3. *Students will demonstrate relational clinical skills based on systemic intervention theories.* Students will demonstrate their ability to select appropriate relational intervention techniques from systemic theories based on the relevant contextual factors and presenting issues.

7. Assessment and Admissions

Describe how the learning outcomes for the program will be assessed. Describe the process and criteria for how students will be admitted to and retained in the program.

Student Learning Outcomes will be assessed annually using specific assignments in the required courses according to the curriculum map included below.

Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice Curriculum Map

Course:	**SLO 1**	**SLO 2**	**SLO 3**
HDFS 6001	Treatment Plan development; Progress notes; Intake; Informed Consent		
HDFS 6040		Final Exam Diagnostic Case studies	
HDFS 6070	Paper		Paper
HDFS 7100	Philosophy of Change paper: Draft 1		Philosophy of Change paper: Draft 1
HDFS 7110	Philosophy of Change paper Draft 2		Philosophy of Change paper Draft 2

Application and Admission process: Students seeking admission to the Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice will apply via online form to the Certificate Program Director. Students will provide a resume, a statement of how the certificate fits with their graduate education and future career goals (Statement of Fit), and an unofficial transcript. Acceptance into the certificate will be based on the following:

- Applicants should have a 3.0 or higher undergraduate GPA, or a 3.5 GPA for graduate coursework.
- Quality of the writing in their Statement of Fit.

In the first two years of the certificate, no more than 12 students will be admitted to the certificate annually to appropriately evaluate capacity and progression of the planned curriculum.

The certificate will be advertised to students in the following units and programs: Financial Planning, Housing and Consumer Economics, specifically to Double Dawgs students and students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Behavioral Financial Planning and Financial Therapy; the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) program; the Mental Health Counseling and Counseling Psychology tracks of the graduate programs in Counseling and Human Development Services; and graduate programs in Communication Sciences and Special Education.

Documentation of Approval and Notification

Proposal: Graduate Certificate in Relational Therapy Practice

College: College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Department: Human Development and Family Science

Proposed Effective Term: Fall 2026

School/College:

- Head of the Department of Human Development and Family Science, Dr. April Few-Demo, 11/4/2026
- College of Family and Consumer Sciences Associate Dean, Dr. Melissa Landers-Potts, 2/4/2026
- Graduate School Associate Dean, Dr. Anne Shaffer, 2/6/2026