

Faculty Fellowship Project

“From Theory to Practice: Simulated Family Life as Innovative Assessment in Online Psychology”

The PSYC 3460: *Families and Larger Systems* Online Course Redesign Project focuses on transforming online learning through experiential, scenario-based assignments that encourage students to apply developmental and family systems concepts to real-world situations. Moving beyond traditional discussion boards and reflection papers, the project immerses students in the perspective of a family member navigating developmental challenges, requiring them to make informed decisions using course knowledge and personal values. Through authentic assessment, unstructured problem-solving, and reflective practice, the project aims to increase student engagement, strengthen critical thinking, and improve the application of psychological concepts beyond the classroom. The redesigned approach supports Valdosta State University's commitment to innovative online pedagogy, high-quality assessment, and student-centered learning while providing a scalable model that can be adapted across disciplines.

About Dr. Haley Sherman:

As an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Valdosta State University, Dr. Sherman utilizes a systems-based, ecological framework to understand individual wellbeing with a focus on factors that promote wellbeing, especially in the context of stress. Her goal is to understand predictors of mental health and personal wellbeing with a focus on intrapersonal factors (e.g., religious coping), interpersonal (e.g., family functioning, social support), and context (e.g., deployment experiences, religious engagement). As a family life educator, her goal is to conduct research that is practical and applicable; the work looks for actionable intervention points (e.g., promoting positive religious coping among those who value faith, encouraging self-forgiveness, teaching relationship warmth to couples) to promote mental health and wellbeing. Importantly, Dr. Sherman has a dual methodological focus on the research agenda concentrating on measurement and investigations into the psychometric properties of the scales. Her research career generally focuses on identifying factors that promote or thwart wellbeing, especially in the context of stress. Stressful contexts are broad, but to date, her work has examined mental health and wellbeing in the context of military deployments, combat exposure, and family life. Additionally, her research has focused on measurement and the psychometric assessment of scales. The creation and validation of scales is a building block to larger models and the examination of associations between variables of interest in research. Yet sometimes little attention is paid to psychometric assessment, samples that scales have been validated with, and considerations for whether the construct has changed over time with societal or historical events.