Promoting Student Learning About Premarital Predictors of Later Marital Success Through Formal Writing

G. Kevin Randall, Ph.D., CFLE

Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT. This paper focuses on a revision of a semester-long formal writing assignment based on the first family life education content area (see NCFR), *Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts*, particularly courtship and marital choice. Many students were not completing this assignment that addresses an important developmental process: dating, courting, and choosing a life partner. Incorporating known pedagogical principles from the writing-to-learn literature, the assignment's revision included developing four components required throughout the semester. The research-based principles behind the revision included interactive writing processes, meaning-making writing tasks, and clear writing expectations. Student completion rates of a majority of the four components, anonymous Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) qualitative comments, and anecdotal interactions with the instructor supported revision. The assignment, assessment, and grading rubrics are included for others to consider and to revise for their classroom use.

Keywords: Premarital predictors, marital success, writing-to-learn

Direct Correspondence to G. Kevin Randall, Ph.D, CFLE, College of Health Sciences, Sam Houston State University, 1901 Ave I, CHSS Suite 432, Box 2194, Huntsville, TX 77341-2194; Phone: 936-294-2732; E-mail: krandall@shsu.edu

**Promoting Student Learning About Premarital Predictors
of Later Marital Success Through Formal Writing**

The Family Life Education (FLE) Content Area, *Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts*, includes dating, courtship, and marital choice, among other concepts (National Council on Family Relations or NCFR, and Family Life Education Content Areas). This paper focuses on how upper-level (e.g., undergraduate juniors and seniors) students enrolled in a writing-enhanced family relations course engage with, complete, and are assessed on a semester-long writing assignment. The assignment addresses one aspect of Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts, particularly the extant literature on premarital predictors of later marital success. This paper also addresses why the redesign of the assignment was completed and includes important pedagogical principles behind writing-to-learn and the desires of those hiring recent college graduates. For example, executives and hiring managers ranked the association of writing-to-learn activities with college graduate proficiency skills and increasing student learning as high priorities. It is hoped that readers will use or adapt the assignment and assessment, which this paper discusses in detail and explicates in its Appendices.

Why Redesign the Assignment and Assessment?

Some years ago, the author noted that many students were not completing the assignment on premarital predictors of later marital success. Instead, these students were willing to take lower grades on the assignment and consequently in the course. However, the assignment addresses a significant relationship development step for most students (based on student feedback with the instructor/author in-person and in anonymous qualitative comments on the IDEA evaluation (Individual Development & Educational Assessment; www.ideaedu.org/). The assignment and assessment are critical components of the first FLE content area. Student completion rates (see Table 1) were compared between the "pre" aspect of the assignment, or when it was strictly one of many assignments in the course and due near the end of the academic semester, with the "post" aspect of this assignment, or after the one assignment on premarital predictors was redesigned into four components due roughly each month of an academic semester in the revised format (see the pedagogical principles explained in the next section). A substantial increase in completion rates for three of the four components was clearly noted, supporting redesign (Table 1). Detailed analysis of student completion rates of the four components revealed that of the students not completing all four components, one or more portions of the first component were not completed. This analysis was done by the author, who reviewed the gradebook in Blackboard. Each portion of the revised assignment received its own grade. Where the assignment was not completed, a zero was scored and counted. All students completed at least one of the nine-step reviews of the periodical literature or the extant research base for the topic. Thus, revision was successful based on a) the increase of student completion rate and b) student comments on the IDEA evaluations. The assignment is consistently noted as one of value and is important for the student's future intimate relationship well-being; however, students are not always positive about reviewing the periodical literature.

Literature and Employer Support for Writing-to-Learn Assignments

Pedagogical principles driving revision of this formal writing assignment and assessment are addressed below. The relevant literature on writing-in-the-disciplines (Bean, 2011) is clear that well-designed writing assignments contribute to student learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2017). Anderson and colleagues (2017) analyzed responses from over 70,000 students in 80 bachelor's degree-granting institutions. Based on that analysis, they derived three pedagogical practices for effective or well-designed writing assignments. The evidence or research led to these practices: a) *interactive writing processes* that include receiving feedback (instructor and/or peer) on portions of the assignment during the term, and not simply a formal grade at the end of the semester when the assignment is due; b) *meaning-making writing tasks* that include higher-order learning objectives (Anderson et al., 2001) such as summarizing, describing, analyzing, and writing; and c) *clear writing expectations* that include clear assignment instructions and criteria for assessment. Last, incorporating best practices from Bean's chapter (2011) on formal writing assignments and the findings of Anderson and colleagues (2017) addressed earlier, the author retired a one-page handout explaining the semester-long assignment and divided the assignment into three sections, explicating learning objectives and assessment criteria for each. The last or fourth installment of the semester-long writing-to-learn assignment on premarital predictors of later marital success provided opportunities for students to review and incorporate instructor and peer feedback from the previous three sections for credit.

Based on the first CFLE content area, mate selection and marital success matter for those entering into long-term committed relationships. Meltzer and McNulty (2019) argue that intimate romantic relationships are highly associated with health outcomes, both physical and mental. In fact, they posit that poor relationship quality (the opposite of positive romantic relationships) is as strongly related to mortality as the influences of smoking and alcohol use are. The authors also address questions related to mate selection, especially in early stages of relationship formation. Other researchers find that several predictors influence marital relationships. For example, a recent book addresses a number of predictors including parental relationships (Plopa, Kazmierczak, & Karasiewicz, 2019), friendships (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2019), responsiveness (Stanton, Slatcher, & Reis, 2019) and sexuality (Impett & Muise, 2019).

Along with pedagogical principles derived from the writing-to-learn and premarital predictor literature, pedagogical principles addressed by the assignment and assessment align with what executives and hiring managers look for in recent college graduates. In 2018, the AACU (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018) published a report based on information from more than 500 business executives (e.g., private and non-profit organization owners, CEOs, presidents) and 500 hiring managers (e.g., directors, managers, supervisors) whose work effort included recruiting, interviewing and hiring new employees. These stakeholders have a clear focus on recent college graduate hires regarding applied learning and real-world experiences (AACU, 2018):

When hiring, executives and hiring managers place a high priority on graduates' demonstrated proficiency in skills and knowledge that cut across majors, and hiring managers are closely aligned with executives in the importance that they place on key college learning outcomes. The college learning outcomes that both audiences rate as most important include oral communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, working effectively in teams, working

independently, self-motivation, written communication, and real-world application of skills and knowledge. (p. 3).

Thus, this paper's assignment and assessment – Premarital Predictors of Later Marital Success – addresses the first family life education content area (see NCFR), Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts, particularly courtship and marital choice. The pedagogical principles employed are also designed to help students learn through writing and to be ready for future career employment as detailed by executive and hiring managers (AACU, 2018). These principles included: a) the interactive writing process with instructor feedback on three separate occasions; b) the meaning-making writing task (e.g., gleaning information from peer-reviewed quantitative literature regarding premarital predictors of later marital success and selection and discussion of premarital predictors); and c) the clear writing expectations about analyzing the four couples, predicting the status of their marriage after eight years. Further, it is hoped that family life educators, drawing from the following portion of this paper delineating the assignment, assessment, and learning objectives, will be able to use or adapt this in their efforts with higher education students.

Method
Assignment, Assessment, and Student Learning Objectives

This assignment and assessment (see Figure 1: Premarital Predictors Assignment and Assessment Chart and Figure 2: Assignment Rubric), was delivered in face-to-face and online formats and clearly explicated in the university's Learning Management System (LMS). The instructor introduces the "what and why" of the assignment, then reviews each part of the four components. The assignment incorporates most of the evidence-based principles outlined in Bean (2011). An exemplary student assignment is also included online for students to consider as they develop their own responses. Class discussions are conducted at least two weeks before due dates for each component. Last, the semester long assignment is broken into three separate components with a fourth allowing students to resubmit the entire assignment after having reviewed and incorporated instructor and peer feedback.

The premarital predictors of later marital success assignment and assessment (see Figure 1) are based on the student a) reviewing three of five quantitative peer-reviewed articles on premarital predictors of later marital success; b) selecting a maximum of five known premarital predictors and writing a brief paragraph about each predictor and how the literature links that predictor to later marital success (i.e., stability and satisfaction); and c) using the chosen predictors to evaluate four couples introduced, before their marriages, in vignettes by Holman (2001, pp. 2-12).

Students are provided with the couple vignettes (Holman, 2001), the five peer-reviewed quantitative articles or book chapters (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Hill & Peplau, 1998; Larson & Hickman, 2004; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006), and information on how to conduct a 12-step quantitative review (Locke, Silverman, & Spirdoso, 2010, especially the chapter on "Staying Organized When Reading a Quantitative Report"). These are securely hosted in the University Library's E-Reserves system, with all copyright considerations managed by the library. The 12-step as completed by an exemplary student is also included in Appendix A.

The *first component* (see Figure 1) of the assignment, "Gleanings from the Peer-Reviewed Literature," includes following the American Psychological Association's (APA) style for references. Learning objectives for this assignment follow the revised Bloom's taxonomy

(Anderson et al., 2001). In this first component, these include "students will demonstrate the ability to: a) complete three, nine step reports (many do not have a methods or statistical background, so steps 7-9 or data, analysis, and results are not included) based on Form 7.1, "12 Steps to Understanding a Quantitative Research Report," found in Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso (2010); and b) create a reference page following American Psychological Association (APA) style for each of their chosen three articles. Thus, students review quantitative peer-reviewed journal articles comprising the extant literature on premarital predictors of later marital success, complete three summary reviews or nine steps for each article chosen, and last, create a reference page of three references following APA style.

In the *second component* (see Figure 1), "Five Premarital Predictors of Later Marital Success," learning objectives for this component include a) students will summarize their chosen five premarital predictors of later marital success derived from and supported by literature reviewed in the first component, and b) students will explain how the chosen predictor is associated with later marital stability and or satisfaction.

Learning objectives for the *third component*, (see Figure 1), "The Four Couples: Analysis and Prediction," include a) students will assess how the chosen premarital predictors from the second component apply to each of the four engaged couples provided in the vignettes (Holman, 2001); and b) students will predict which couples, eight years later, are married (two), divorced (one), or unhappily married (one). The predictions are based upon chosen predictors in component two and student assessment of the premarital predictors relative to the four engaged couples. The final component (see Figure 1), "Review, edit, and Submit complete final project," provides students opportunity to review and incorporate peer and instructor feedback by revising and resubmitting their work for credit.

Figure 1
Premarital Predictors Assignment and Assessment Chart

Premarital Predictors: Assignment Steps, Points, and Blackboard/Turnitin Due Dates (by 11:30 p.m.)						
	POINTS	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Gleanings from the Peer-Reviewed Literature: Complete a 9/12 Step Review for three articles. Each review is limited to two pages maximum and double spaced for each article (**6 pages maximum**). You are allowed to copy/paste but must include where you found the information in the article. **Submit on Blackboard/Turnitin.**	25	14-Sep			
Create a reference page following APA style!! (note that you provide this in step 1 of the 9/12 step). Submit on Blackboard/Turnitin.	0	14-Sep			
Five Premarital Predictors of Later Marital Success: Derive your top 5 predictors and write a descriptive paragraph for each - (clearly define the premarital predictor) - explaining how it influences later marital success (stability and satisfaction). You will also cite the article you reviewed that supports your choice. At least three sentences will be needed. Grammar and syntax will be assessed. **Two pages maximum and double spaced. Submit on Blackboard/Turnitin.**	25		19-Oct		
The Four couples: Analysis and Prediction. Use your five predictors as criteria for the later marital outcome prediction. Recall, after eight years of marriage, two couples are happily married, one is unhappily married, and one is divorced. *You will substantiate/defend your prediction based on your chosen predictors and the extant literature you chose.* At least three sentences will be needed per predictor. Grammar and syntax will be assessed. **Four pages maximum and double spaced, required. Submit on Blackboard/Turnitin.**	25			16-Nov	
Review, Edit, and Submit *complete final project; please note what changes you made based on previous feedback (9/12 steps and reference page, 5 predictors and descriptive paragraph(s), and couple analysis) Submit on Blackboard/Turnitin.*	25				1-Dec

Figure 2
Assignment Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Organization and Quality of Writing (8 pts.) Excellent: 7-8 Good: 5-6 Fair: 3-4 NI: 0-2	Organization of paper as a whole is logical and cohesive. Connections among paragraphs are clearly articulated. Transitions between paragraphs are smooth. Every paragraph makes one distinct and coherent point expressed in a clear topic sentence. The parts of each paragraph connect logically and persuasively.	Paper fully meets the parameters of the assignment but is not excellent. Paper demonstrates a good grasp of family principles but some awkwardness in applying them. Organization of paper as a whole is logical and apparent, but transitions between paragraphs and some sentences are not consistent. Every paragraph makes one distinct and coherent point and, for the most part, the parts of each paragraph connect logically and effectively.	Paper does not address some aspects of the assignment. Organization of the paper as a whole can only be discerned with effort. Not all parts of the paper fit the organizational structure. Not all the parts of the paper are effectively integrated. In a number of paragraphs, there is not a distinct or coherent point. In a number of paragraphs, the parts do not connect logically.	Paper does not address the assignment. Paper is inconsistent with creative writing principles (i.e. it fails to answer the thesis or writing proposition) Organization of the paper as a whole is not logical or discernable.
Clarity and Completeness (8 pts.) Excellent: 7-8 Good: 5-6 Fair: 3-4 NI: 0-2	Paper clearly identifies a demonstrable central narrative. Provides the reader with a clear sense of direction that will follow. Reveals the organizational structure of the paper. Guides the reader smoothly and logically into sentences and paragraphs. Sentence structure is clear and complete. Quotations are framed effectively in the text.	Paper clearly identifies a central narrative, but with some ambiguity. Gives the reader a reasonably good sense of the nature of evidence that will follow. Paper is, for the most part, precisely worded and unambiguous. Sentence structure is mostly clear. Quotations are framed effectively in the text.	Paper identifies a narrative that is demonstrable, though not stated sufficiently clearly. Does not guide the reader with a clear sense of direction very well. Wording is imprecise or ambiguous fairly often. Sentence structure is often confusing. Quotations are not framed effectively in the text.	Throughout the paper, wording is imprecise or ambiguous. Sentence structure is consistently confusing.

Figure 2.
Assignment Rubric, continued.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Reflection **(5 pts.)** Excellent: 5 Good: 3-4 Fair: 2 NI: 0-1	Paper shows thoughtful and insightful ideas and phrases that the author communicates well. Author connects concepts, narrative, and ideas to reviewed articles at some practical level (Step 12).	Paper has some reference to author's thoughts but not to a high degree. Author somewhat connects, narratives, and ideas to reviewed articles (Step 12).	Paper has little reference to author's thoughts, and shows a lack of depth. Phrasings and connection of personal thoughts are confusing.	Paper has no reference to author's thoughts, ideas and/or feelings at Step 12. Paper is unacceptably organized.
Grammar, Syntax, and Spelling **(4 pts.)** Excellent: 4 Good: 3 Fair: 2 NI: 0-1	Paper is **free of errors** and appropriately formatted. There are **no** incomplete or run-on sentences. There are **no** spelling or grammatical errors.	There are two or less minor spelling or grammatical errors. There are one to two run-on sentences. There are no spelling errors. < 3 grammatical errors	There are a number of spelling and grammatical errors. There are multiple run-on sentences.	There are multiple grammatical, syntax, and spelling errors. Apparent that paper may have not been read aloud or proof read at all.

NB: SHSU Academic Success Center (http://www.shsu.edu/centers/academic-success-center/) and Writing Center (http://www.shsu.edu/centers/academic-success-center/writing/index.html) are for you! In addition, they provide excellent Handouts: http://www.shsu.edu/centers/academic-success-center/writing/handouts.html Many students struggle with "lower order concerns" and should review the handouts/tools provided in order to learn and receive the best possible score on the written assignments for this course.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides an overview of pre- and post-revision of the assignment on premarital predictors of later marital success. After revising the assignment into four components, with one component due approximately once per month of an academic semester, all students completed at least three-quarters of the components. Some students completed only one or two reviews of the periodical literature. To address these issues, the instructor provided commentary on the LMS and went over it in class, along with one of the instructor's quantitative, peer-reviewed, and published articles, highlighting each of the 12 steps. The instructor queried students and found that most had not completed a basic course on research methods and statistics, affirming the choice *to not* have the students complete steps three of the 12 steps (see Locke, Silverman, & Spirdoso, 2010, chapter seven) or steps 7 (data), 8 (analysis), and 9 (results). The instructor even allowed students to copy and paste passages from the literature into the 12 step matrix, providing highlighted notes where the students found the material in the article. This has helped students complete most if not all of the three required reviews (e.g., 9/12 steps) of extant literature on premarital predictors.

Table 1

Student Completion Rates for Premarital Predictors Assignment - Revised in 17 Fall

Semester Long Assignment		
16 FA	12 (26%) did not do the assignment	33 completed the assignment
17 SP	13 (22%) did not do the assignment	46 completed the assignment
After Assignment Redesigned into Four Components		
17 FA - 19 SP	All (200+) completed at least 3/4 components	

Student feedback in formal (i.e., anonymous IDEA evaluation comments) and informal (i.e., discussion with the instructor and via email) versions affirms that the assignment results in student learning. Thus, this writing enhanced class and this particular assignment help students engage with literature on coupling and successful intimate relationships in a marital context. Overall, this assignment is designed to meet requirements of the Family Life Education Content Area, Families and Individuals in Societal Context, particularly courtship and marital choice. Furthermore, the assignment (see Figure 1) incorporates the three research-based writing-to-learn principles derived from the work of Anderson and colleagues (2017). These include an interactive writing process, meaning-making writing tasks, and clear writing expectations. The revised assignment, using the previously mentioned writing-to-learn principles, was divided into four distinct components and found all students completing most if not all of the assignment (see Table 1). Thus, students were engaging with the literature and deriving their top predictors of future committed or marital relationships. Classroom discussions over the assignment often found students assessing their current relationships in addition to those of their caregivers or parents. Instructors interested in using or adapting this assignment can review the materials provided in Figures 1 and 2, and the work of one student provided in Appendices A-C.

References

Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Cruikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pintrich, P. R., . . . Wittrock, M. C. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of education objectives, abridged edition*. Addison Wesley Longman.

Anderson, P., Anson, C. M., Fish, T., Gonyea, R. M., Marshall, M., Menefee-Libey, W., . . . Weaver, S. (2017). How writing contributes to learning: New findings from a national study and their local application. *Peer Review, 19*(1), 4-8.

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (AACU, 2018, July). Fulfilling the American dream: Liberal education and the future of work: Selected findings from online surveys of business executives and hiring managers. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2018EmployerResearchReport.pdf

Bean, J. C. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking and active learning in the classroom* (2nd ed.). John Wiley and Sons.

Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said, "I Do": Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66,* 613-626. doi: 10.1111/j.oo22-2445.2004.00041.x

Fehr, B., & Harasymchuk, C. (2019). Friendships: close relationships throughout the life course. In D. Schoebi & B. Campos, (Eds.), *New directions in the psychology of close relationships* (pp. 45-61). Routledge.

Hill, C. T., & Peplau, L. A. (1998). Premarital predictors of relationship outcomes: A 15-year follow-up of the Boston Couples Study. In T. N. Bradbury, (Ed.), *The developmental course of marital dysfunction* (pp. 237-278). Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511527814.010

Holman, T. B. (2001). *Premarital prediction of marital quality and breakup: Research, theory, and practice.* Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

IDEA (Individual Development & Educational Assessment; n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.ideaedu.org/

Impett, E. A., & Muise, A. (2019). Relationships and sexuality: You reap what you sow in the bedroom. In D. Schoebi & B. Campos, (Eds.), *New directions in the psychology of close relationships* (pp. 136-152). Routledge.

Larson, J. H., & Hickman, R. (2004). Are college marriage textbooks teaching students the premarital predictors of marital quality? *Family Relations, 53*(4), 385-392. doi: 10.1111/j.0197-6664.2004.00045.x

Locke, L. F., Silverman, S. J., & Spirdoso, W.W. (2010). *Reading and understanding research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Ragan, E. P., & Whitton, S. W. (2010) The premarital communication roots of marital distress and divorce: The first five years of marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*(3), 289-298. doi: 10.1037/a0019481

Meltzer, A. L., & McNulty, J. K. (2019). Relationship formation and early romantic relationships. In D. Schoebi & B. Campos, (Eds.), *New directions in the psychology of close relationships* (pp. 9-27). Routledge.

National Council on Family Relations (NCFR, n.d.). Family Life Education Content Areas. Retrieved from https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/fle_content_areas_2014_0.pdf

Plopa, M., Kazmierczak, M., & Karasiewicz, K. (2019). The quality of parental relationships and dispositional empathy as predictors of satisfaction during the transition to marriage. *Journal of Family Studies, 25*(2), 170-183. Doi: 10.1080/13229400.2016.1211550

Stanley, S. M., Amato, P. R., Johnson, C. A., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20*(1), 117-126. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.20.1.117

Stanton, S. C. E., Slatcher, R. B., & Reis, H. T. (2019). Relationships, health and well-being: the role of responsiveness. In D. Schoebi & B. Campos, (Eds.), *New directions in the psychology of close relationships* (pp. 118-135). Routledge.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT EXAMPLE OF THE 9/12 STEP ASSIGNMENT
(from Locke, Silverman, & Spirdoso, 2010).

12 (9) Steps to Understanding a Quantitative Research Report

Directions: Record notes in only enough detail to support recall in absence of the original document. For Blackboard (LMS) Turnitin submission/grading, PLEASE DOUBLE SPACE.

1. **CITATION.** What study report is this? Record a complete reference citation.

Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Ragan, E. P., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). The premarital communication roots of marital distress and divorce: The first five years of marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*(3), 289-298. doi:10.1037/a0019481

2. **PURPOSE AND GENERAL RATIONALE.** In broad terms, what was the purpose of the study, and how did the author(s) make a case for its general importance?

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which observed and self-reported indicators of negative and positive premarital communication were related to marital adjustment

and divorce 5 years into marriage. Specifically, we were interested in how changes in communication over time, starting before marriage, were associated with future marital quality (page 294 right column).

3. **FIT AND SPECIFIC RATIONALE.** How does the topic of the study fit into the existing research literature, and how is that provenance used to make a specific case for the investigation?

The overarching aim of the current study was to assess how negative and positive communication, assessed by both self-report and observational coding of interactions before marriage, predict future divorce and marital satisfaction. Starting before marriage provides a better test of the enduring dynamics model than starting after marriage. This study is also the first to investigate how positive and negative communication assessed by observational coding changes from before marriage to 5 years into marriage, and how these changes predict marital outcomes (page 291 right column).
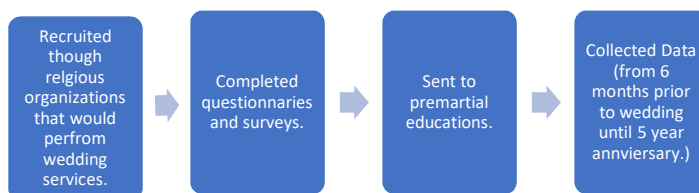
4. **PARTICPANTS**. Describe who was studied (give number and characteristics) and how they were selected.

Participants were 208 couples (N=416 partners) who had taken part in a larger study on the effectiveness of premarital education. Couples who did not marry or who did not complete a premarital assessment were excluded, as were couples for whom we could not verify marital status at the time of their fifth wedding anniversary. When the study began, the participants were, on average, 26.55 years old (SD = 5.26) with a median education of 16 years and a median income of $30,000 to 39,999.

5. **CONTEXT.** Where did the study take place? (Describe important characteristics.)

Prevention and Relationship Enhancement program.

6. **STEPS IN SEQUENCE.** In the order performed, what were the main procedural steps in the study? Describe the diagram in a flowchart, showing order and any important relationships among the steps.

Recruited though relgious organizations that would perfrom wedding services. → Completed questionnaries and surveys. → Sent to premartial educations. → Collected Data (from 6 months prior to wedding until 5 year annviersary.)

7. **CONCLUSIONS.** What did the author(s) assert about how the results in *Step 9* responded to the purpose(s) established in *Step 2*, and how did the events and experiences of the entire study contribute to that conclusion?

The studies reviewed above show somewhat inconsistent findings, despite assessing similar constructs. The inconsistency of the findings are in part due to differences in data collection and data reduction, how interaction was measured (self-report vs. observation), time of follow up, sample size and composition, level of initial satisfaction, difference in measures of outcome (stability, satisfaction, combinations of stability and satisfaction), and differences in coding systems and tasks used. Nevertheless, across time, labs, tasks, and outcomes, there are links between premarital and newlywed communication quality and later outcomes. Moreover, studies suggest that negative communication is a better predictor of marital outcomes than positive communication, and all the more so when combined with low levels of positive communication (page 291 left column).

The picture of non-distressed couples 5 years into marriage from an interaction perspective supports current theories of distress and intervention in that couples who start marriage with lower negatives and higher adjustment and who maintain high levels of positives are "at risk" for marital success. The findings support the use of prevention programs that focus on keeping happy couples happy by helping couples learn skills to handle the inevitable negatives in marriage and to protect and maintain positives (Markman et al., 2010) and suggest the use of these programs before marriage or early in marriage. (page 297 top left paragraph)

8. **CAUTIONS.** What cautions does the author(s) raise about the study itself, about interpreting the results, or the **limitations**? Add here any of you own reservations.

First, all couples in the study completed a premarital intervention, and thus the patterning of the findings might be different for couples who did not participate in a premarital intervention. Second, because all the couples were marrying through religious organizations, it is possible that they were somewhat more religious than the average couple planning marriage.
Third, we used a cutoff of 100 to define distress and non-distress. Although this is justified based on prior research, it is possible that included in the distressed group were some couples who were not all that distressed.
Fourth, we did not include a self-report measure of positive communication.
Fifth, we did not present data on communication over time for those couples who divorce.
Sixth, many of the couples have had a child during the first 5 years of marriage and this transition likely affected their communication (page 296 right column)

9. **DISCUSSION.** What interesting facts or ideas did you learn from reading the report? Include here anything that was of value, including: results, research designs and methods, references, instruments, history, useful arguments, or personal inspiration.

The article focuses on how to keep marriages complete and happy from a premarital stand point. By looking at the couple before marriage it gives a new area of research to focus on. I learned that prevention programs may be helpful to remain happy in relationships and that it may help teach skills on how to better handle disagreements and arguments that may come up between partners.

APPENDIX B.
STUDENT EXAMPLE OF HIS/HER CHOSEN FIVE PREMARITAL PREDICTORS

<u>Five Predictors</u>

<u>Communication Skills:</u> This is productive conflict resolution and positive responses in communication. When communicating is done well and it is constructed of positive communication between partners the marital satisfaction and quality of relationship increases. Effective communication skills avoid conflict and fighting; this removes unnecessary stress that may otherwise occur. When negative communication takes place frequently marriage satisfaction in the marriage may decrease and leaves the couple unable to connect. (Larson and Hickman)

<u>Similar values, beliefs and attitudes:</u> When topics like religion or family structure come up between partners they typically have similar views. This is something that the couple connects over and is able to create a bond. This is a piece of a relationship foundation and when it occurs the relationship satisfaction tends to increase. In the case when "opposites attract" and they struggle with things like gender roles a decrease of satisfaction takes place. (Larson and Hickman)

<u>Parent and In-law Support:</u> Family plays a large role in life; especially in relationships. Any support from family and in-laws make life a little easier and happier. This support can be emotional, physical or even financial. (Larson and Hickman)

<u>Parental Marriage and Divorce:</u> Children who are raised in a married household ad a divorced household are going to be used to different lifestyles. They may even have to different views of what love is and how they see marriage. The lifestyle they viewed growing up may lay a foundation of who they want to be in a relationship and marriage. A happy and healthy parental marriage and an absence of divorce can lead to a better quality marriage. (Larson and Hickman)

<u>Education:</u> This is referring to any education the partners received. When coupled are poorly educated they tend to have an increased chance to divorce. If one partner has received more education than the other this may also become a risk factor. This is where a statement like "knowledge is power" would come in. The more education a couple has can increase their marital satisfaction, especially for men. The more pre0-marital education a male receives can potentially increase marital satisfaction and lower the risk of divorce. (Larson and Hickman)

APPENDIX C
STUDENT ANALYSIS OF FOUR COUPLES
(from Holman, 2001, pp. 2-12)

Predictors (P1-P5) and Couple Analysis (C1-C4)

PR1: Communication Skills. This is productive conflict resolution and positive responses in communication. When communicating is done well and it is constructed of positive communication between partners the marital satisfaction and quality of relationship increases. Effective communication skills avoid conflict and fighting; this removes unnecessary stress that may otherwise occur. When negative communication takes place frequently marriage satisfaction in the marriage may decrease and leaves the couple unable to connect (Larson & Hickman, 2004).

PR2: Similar values, beliefs and attitudes. When topics like religion or family structure come up between partners they typically have similar views. This is something that the couple connects over and is able to create a bond. This is a piece of a relationship foundation and when it occurs the relationship satisfaction tends to increase. In the case when "opposites attract" and they struggle with things like gender roles a decrease of satisfaction takes place. (Larson & Hickman, 2004).

PR3: Parent and In-law Support. Family plays a large role in life; especially in relationships. Any support from family and in-laws make life a little easier and happier. This support can be emotional, physical or even financial (Larson & Hickman, 2004).

PR4: Parental Marriage and Divorce. Children who are raised in a married household and a divorced household are going to be used to different lifestyles. They may even have two different views of what love is and how they see marriage. The lifestyle they viewed growing up may lay a foundation of who they want to be in a relationship and marriage. A happy and healthy parental marriage and an absence of divorce can lead to a better quality marriage (Larson & Hickman, 2004).

PR5: Education. This is referring to any education the partners received. When coupled are poorly educated they tend to have an increased chance to divorce. If one partner has received more education than the other this may also become a risk factor. This is where a statement like "knowledge is power" would come in. The more education a couple has can increase their marital satisfaction, especially for men. The more pre-marital education a male receives can potentially increase marital satisfaction and lower the risk of divorce (Larson & Hickman, 2004).

C1: Heidi and David UNHAPPILY MARRIED

PR1: Communication while dating and during engagement was mainly positive and smooth. They effectively communicated and were able to discuss their relationship openly. Only on one occasion was their lack of communication during Christmas time.

PR2: Both partners grew up in a small town and came from farming families. Heidi and David both have a few siblings also. This gives them a strong foundation on similar attitudes and experiences.

PR3: David's family was very supportive and welcomed Heidi in to their home and family. They both were very close to their families and had many positive interactions. During their relationship before marriage they were able to witness how their families interacted and they grew a strong bond. This provides them a strong emotional and physical support from their families.

PR4: Heidi's father passed away early in her life and does not have a very good memory of him, her mother never remarried. Heidi grew up in a single parent household. Her idea of marriage and love may be different from David's. David's parents had a very good marriage and were very close, he described their relationship as "solid." This created a good model of marriage for him. These parental models may explain the quick engagement.

PR5: Both partners were at an internship they received from their respected university. Heidi and David are receiving similar educations which can lower the risk of divorce.

C2: Linda and Steve DIVORCED

PR1: They struggled with communication from the start. Linda admits to both of them struggling in this area. They do not discuss feelings well and end up angry with each other quickly. This negative communication raises their risk do divorce.

PR2: From the information provided they didn't not have many things in common. However; opposites sometimes attract. This can cause a lot of arguments when it comes to large life decisions later in their marriage.

PR3: Steve's family means the world to him and he has a great devotion to them. His family was very supportive of the marriage and was quick to support him. Linda on the other hand had no support from her mother or step-father. They didn't agree with her getting married and never wanted her to. Without the support from both sides of parents this can be a risk factor of divorce.

PR4: Steve had a very strong family background with two happy parents who were very stable and affectionate. This may have had a factor in his quick engagement to Linda. With that being said Linda had the opposite experience growing up. She was the oldest of two siblings, her parents divorced when she was young and her mother went on to marry two other men who were not positive role models. Linda grew up with emotional abuse from her step fathers. This raises the risk factor divorce due to having an unhealthy relationship with marriage.

PR5: Like Heidi and David, Steve and Linda met at university and received similar educations. This allowed them to be on an equal level and has a positive impact in their relationship.

C3: Jean and Bob HAPPILY MARRIED

PR1: Communication during the struggles of their relationship was positive. Jean was very truthful about how she felt about how old Bob's parents were and about where they would be living. This being a positive experience made it easier to move on into their future and make large life decisions. As a couple who has positive communication marriage satisfaction is higher.

PR2: They had similar family structures and were both the youngest of their siblings. They also had family friends in common while allowed them to connect and also had topics to talk about. This allowed them to bond on different levels.

PR3: Both families were supportive of this marriage; especially Bobs! With them knowing Jeans family this added to their out pour of supportive. This raises the likely hood of satisfaction in their marriage.

PR4: Jean's and Bob's parents were both happily married and created a positive environment of marriage and love! Bobs mother passed away after he married, but he always respected her relationship with his father and remembers how tender they were with one another. Even though Jeans parents didn't show much affection this provided a happy marital experience which can lead to their own marital happiness.

PR5: Jean graduated before Bob from university but both of them received a degree. Jean struggled with work and jobs while Bob finished school and was a little unsure during this time if he was the one. But their education level was the same with both of them receiving a degree. This can put them in a better financial class because they both can work and support each other, giving them the opportunity to have a successful marriage.

C4: Becky and Josh HAPPILY MARRIED

PR1: Josh had concerns of Becky's dependence on her family and while Becky also had her concerns they decide to move forward with getting married after communicating their issues and concerns. This positive communication goes a long way and allows this marriage to work.

PR2: Even though they had very different families and lifestyles growing up, Becky and Josh had similar values. This is allowing them to connect and when making hard life decisions they have the same ideas. This is a huge piece of a healthy foundation for a relationship. The financial situations from their parents may cause some conflict in the future.

PR3: While both families supported the couple, Becky's mother felt she was too young to be getting married and was a little unsure. In the end it was nothing but positive support from all family and friends. This is great because it creates a positive beginning into a marriage.

PR4: The parents of the partners both had happy marriages but not without conflict. However, Becky wanted to be nothing like her mother was with her father. While they were happy she waited on his hand and foot leaving Becky to decide on what she wanted in her marriages, which was too be two people who worked together.

PR5: Both were receiving an education but Josh was a couple years older. There is not enough information to decide if this predictor effect this relationship.