Course Description

This course examines the nature of and change in family life from a sociological perspective, while incorporating insights from other fields, including demography, psychology, and economics. A key underlying theme of the course is how inequality is intertwined with patterns of family change. The course reviews some cross-national and historical variation in the family; however, the focus is on U.S. families in recent decades. Contemporary debates and issues are explored, with emphasis on research evidence and considering potential implications for public policy. A major goal of the course is to encourage students to critically evaluate their own assumptions about families as we together consider the research evidence and discuss the larger issues and implications.

Prerequisites

This course is open to graduate students and upper-level undergraduates. Undergraduates must have at least junior status or permission of the instructor.

Readings

Students are expected to read the assigned readings for each week before coming to class. This is particularly important because the class meets only once per week, and discussion will be a key element of the course. Readings can be found (organized by week) under the ‘Content’ tab of the course website at Learn@UW. If there is enough student interest, I can also submit a packet of readings for you to purchase as a course pack from the Social Science Copy Center. There is no required textbook.

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated on four short in-class quizzes (4*5%=20%), two non-cumulative in-class exams (20+25%=45%), a short paper (20%), and attendance, participation and discussion (15%).

1. Quizzes. There will be four in-class quizzes on the material. These quizzes will be given during the first 15 minutes of class and are worth 5% each of your grade (4*5%=20%). These will be short answer questions. The quizzes will be held on September 27, October 11, November 8, and November 22.
2. **Exams.** There will be two in-class exams held during regular class sessions on Monday, October 25\(^{th}\) and Monday, December 13\(^{th}\). The first exam will cover the course material (including readings, lectures and videos) from weeks 1-6, and the second exam (non-cumulative) will cover the material from weeks 8-13. These will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The first exam is worth 20% of your grade, and the second exam is worth 25% of your grade (20% + 25% = 45\%). (Note that there will be NO exam during the scheduled final exam time on December 20\(^{th}\).)

3. **Paper.** A short paper is due on Monday, November 29\(^{th}\), but you should feel free to submit it earlier. The paper assignment will be distributed in class (and posted on the course website). The paper should be no more than 8 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font). I will give you guidance about how to cite relevant references. The short paper will count for 20% of your final grade. Late papers will not be accepted and will receive a grade of zero.

4. **Attendance, Participation and Discussion.** I will take attendance each class, and more than one unexcused absence will count against your participation grade. Students should come to class prepared to demonstrate an understanding of the assigned readings. This entails reading all of the assigned material before each class and actively participating in class discussion. Class attendance, participation and discussion counts for 15% of your final grade, of which 5% comes specifically from submitting discussion questions (to be described in class).

**Expectations and Information**

**Course Policies.** The professor adheres to all Department, College, and University policies regarding accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, incompletes, plagiarism, and student evaluation of the course and its instruction.

**Accommodating Students with Disabilities.** The University is legally obligated to provide appropriate accommodation for students with documented disabilities. To make special arrangements for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course, you must qualify for disability services through the McBurney Disability Resource Center. Their website has detailed instructions on how to qualify ([http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu](http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu)). Please notify me within the first two weeks of class if you have or anticipate having authorization from the Center, and we will make necessary arrangements.

**Writing Center.** Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources and classes offered by the Writing Center (located at 6171 Helen C. White Hall) to help with organization, thesis statements, grammar, sentence structure, and appropriate citations. See: [www.wisc.edu/writing](http://www.wisc.edu/writing). Before submitting your short paper, you are expected to be familiar with the guidelines on the Writing Center website about “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (see: [http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html)). See section below regarding ‘Plagiarism and Academic Integrity’.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity.** As with all courses at UW, exams and papers are to be original work. Copying of phrases, sentences or paragraphs without proper and appropriate citations, or copying of the overall presentation structure from textbooks, journal articles, newspaper articles, or the internet will be considered plagiarism.
(http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html#definition) and are grounds for removal from the class and/or University. A clear definition of plagiarism, as well as information about disciplinary sanctions for academic misconduct, may also be found in the University of Wisconsin Statute 14 (http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/uws/uws014.pdf). If you have questions about plagiarism specifically, you should consult the information on the Writing Center website regarding “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html). Knowledge of these rules is your responsibility, and lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct.

**Useful Websites**

I encourage you to become familiar with various on-line resources available about aspects of family life and family trends, for example:

Century Foundation – www.tcf.org
Child Trends – www.childtrends.org
Council on Contemporary Families – www.contemporaryfamilies.org
Future of Children – www.futureofchildren.org
National Center for Family and Marriage Research – http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu
National Council on Family Relations – www.ncfr.org
National Marriage Project (University of Virginia) – www.virginia.edu/marriageproject
U.S. Census Bureau (population trends) – www.census.gov
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
  - Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation – www.aspe.hhs.gov
Sociology 640: Sociology of the Family

Schedule and Required Readings

In general (though not always), the first part of each class will be lecture, and the second half will involve discussion, watching a video, or doing a small-group activity to better engage with the material. **Note that this syllabus may be updated as the course develops. If there is an update, I will announce it in class and post the revised version on the course website.

**Section I: Background and Theoretical Perspectives**

**Week 1**
**Mon., Sept. 13: Introductions (to the course and each other)/Families in History, and What Is a Family?**


**Week 2**
**Mon., Sept. 20: Is the Family in Decline?**


And *four* responses by Norval Glenn, Judith Stacey, Philip Cowan, and David Popenoe (“A Plea for Objective Assessment …” “Good Riddance …” “The Sky is Falling….” and “The National Family Wars”).

**Week 3**
**Mon., Sept. 27: Theoretical Perspectives on the Family – Classic, Economic, and Biosocial**

*Quiz #1 in class.*


(9/27 readings continued next page)


Section II: Current Topics in Family Sociology

Week 4
Mon., Oct. 4: Marriage


Week 5
Mon., Oct. 11: Marriage and Public Policy

Quiz #2 in class.


In class: Watch PBS Frontline Documentary “Let’s Get Married,” 2002 (60 mins.) plus discussion

Week 6
Mon., Oct. 18: Cohabitation


Brief exam review.
**Week 7**
Mon., Oct. 25: **In-class Exam 1**

**Week 8**
Mon., Nov. 1: Divorce, Remarriage, and Stepfamilies


**Week 9**
Mon., Nov. 8: Families and Socioeconomic Status

*Quiz #3 in class.*


**Week 10**
Mon., Nov. 15: Father Absence and Children’s Wellbeing, including Related Public Policies


*In class: Watch PBS documentary “The Vanishing Father,” 1995 (60 mins.) plus discussion*

**Week 11**
Mon., Nov. 22: Father Involvement and the Role of Men

*Quiz #4 in class.*


(11/22 readings continued next page)


**Week 12**

*Mon., Nov. 29: Fertility Trends, including Differences by Education*


**Week 13**

*Mon., Dec. 6: Nonmarital Childbearing and ‘Fragile Families’*


Brief exam review.

**Week 14**

*Mon., Dec. 13: ** In-class Exam 2 ***

(Note: There will be NO exam in the scheduled final exam time on Dec. 20th.)

Revised: September 13, 2010