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 upper-level undergraduates (who have taken Soc. 360, Statistics for Sociologists I, or equivalent) or graduate students.

Readings

Students are expected to read the assigned readings for each week before coming to class. Readings can be found under the ‘Content’ tab of the course website at Learn@UW. There is no required textbook.

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated on six short in-class quizzes (20%), two non-cumulative in-class exams (20+20%=40%), a short paper (20%), a brief written reflection (5%), and attendance, participation and discussion (15%).

1. **Quizzes.** There will be six brief, in-class quizzes on the material. These quizzes will be given during the first 15 minutes of class. The quizzes will be held on September 17, September 29, October 8, November 3, and November 12, and December 3. I will drop your lowest grade and count your five highest quiz grades toward your final grade (5*4%=20%). There are no make-up quizzes (except for sickness or other legitimate absences).

2. **Exams.** There will be two in-class, non-cumulative exams held during regular class sessions on Thursday, October 22nd and Thursday, December 10th. The first exam will cover the
course material (including readings, lectures and videos) from the first 6 ½ weeks (through October 20th), and the second exam (non-cumulative) will cover the material from the last 7 weeks (through December 10th). 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 22nd.)

3. **Paper.** A short paper is due on Thursday, November 19th (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.** As Woody Allen says, “Eighty percent of success is just showing up,” and I believe it’s important for you to show up and contribute to our class environment. 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.

**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.

Accommodations. Please send me an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: [http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu](http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu). Provide a copy of your accommodations request (VISA) to the instructor by the end of the second week of class. We try to reserve rooms and proctors by the third week in class, so we must know of all accommodations by then.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation; campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university’s web page for details: [https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698](https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698).

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.writing.wisc.edu](http://www.writing.wisc.edu). 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). See next section regarding ‘Academic Integrity.’

**Academic integrity.** As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students: https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity. According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as, an individual:

- Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- Forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- Assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students’ website (above). 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. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please don’t hesitate to ask.

**Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights.** The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the Chair, Professor Pamela Oliver, 8128 Social Science (Pamela.Oliver@wisc.edu).

**Departmental learning objectives.** Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

- **Critically Evaluate Published Research:** Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.
- **Communicate Skillfully:** Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
- **Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:** Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the “why” and “how” of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.
• *See Things from a Global Perspective:* Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.

• *Prepare for Graduate School and the Job Market:* Students use their social research skills to identify opportunities for employment or further study, assess their qualifications for these opportunities, and identify strategies for gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to improve their qualifications. Students are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios of their written work and educational experiences to aid them in preparing applications.

**Useful websites:** I encourage you to become familiar with various on-line resources available about aspects of family life and trends (and to use relevant information in your class paper), for example:

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


Sociology 640: Sociology of the Family

Schedule and Required Readings

Thurs., Sept 1: NO CLASS

Tues., Sept. 8: Introduction (to the course and to each other)


Thurs., Sept. 10: What Is a Family?


Tues., Sept. 15: What’s Happening to the Family?/Is the Family in Decline?


Thurs., Sept. 17: Families throughout History

Quiz 1 (first 15 minutes of class).

[Review Coontz 2010 from Sept. 8th.]


Tues., Sept. 22: Guest speaker – Tim Smeeding, Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of Public Affairs and Economics, La Follette School of Public Affairs, UW-Madison

(see: https://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/faculty-staff/faculty/timothy-smeeding)

Lecture on: “Intergenerational Mobility: The Importance of Family Structure and Parents”

Assigned reading:
Thurs., Sept. 24: Classic, Economic and Feminist Theories


Supplementary:


Tues., Sept. 29: Biosocial and Life Course Perspectives

Quiz 2 (first 15 minutes of class).


Supplementary:

Thurs., Oct. 1: Marriage


Tues., Oct. 6: Marriage and Public Policy


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

Thurs., Oct. 8: Cohabitation

Quiz 3 (first 15 minutes of class).


Supplementary:

**Tues., Oct. 13: Divorce, Remarriage, and Stepfamilies**


**Thurs., Oct. 15: The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children**


**Tues., Oct. 20: Fertility Patterns, and brief exam review**


**Thurs., Oct 22: ** **In-class Exam 1**

**Tues., Oct. 27: Family Structure and Children’s Wellbeing**


**Thurs., Oct. 29: Guest speaker – Lawrence (Lonnie) Berger, Professor of Social Work and Director, Institute for Research on Poverty, UW-Madison** (see: https://socwork.wisc.edu/lonnie-berger)

Lecture on: “Men in Disadvantaged and Complex Families”

**Assigned reading:**

**Tues., Nov. 3: Families and Inequality**

*Quiz 4 (first 15 minutes of class).*


**Thurs., Nov. 5: Parenting and Social Class**


**Tues., Nov. 10: Families in Challenging Economic Times**


*In class: Watch PBS Frontline Documentary “Two American Families,” 2013 (84 mins.)*

**Thurs., Nov. 12: Same-Sex Families**

*Quiz 5 (first 15 minutes of class).*


**Tues., Nov. 17: Men in Families**


**Supplementary:**

Thurs., Nov. 19: Non-Resident Fathers

*Paper due in class.*


**Tues., Nov. 24: NO CLASS, but please spend 1 hour talking to a family member (over break or any time before) and write up a short reflection (see assignment)**

**Tues., Nov. 26 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)**

Thurs., Dec. 1: Nonmarital Childbearing, including cross-national comparisons


Thurs., Dec. 3: Unmarried Families in the U.S.

*Quiz 6 (first 15 minutes of class).*


*Supplementary:*


Tues., Dec. 8: Family Change in International Perspective

Thurs., Dec. 10: The Future of the Family, discussion, and brief exam review


Tues., Dec. 15: ** In-class Exam 2 **

(Note: There will be NO exam in the scheduled final exam time on Dec. 22nd.)

Revised: October 12, 2015