

**SOC 2830 – Family and Society
Fall 2011, Section 001**

**Professor Michael D. Gillespie, Ph.D.
Blair Hall 1103, T/R: 11:00a–12:15p**

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Office Hours: W: 12:00p-1:30p

T / R: 2:30p-4:00p

F: 11:00a-12:00p

or by appointment

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Blog: <http://familyandsociety.wordpress.com/>

Following the course title, this class is about **families and society**. Families are a significant social institution both historically and in modern social systems, and constantly scrutinized by researchers, politicians, and the general public without an understanding of the social forces outside of the family which constrain, enable, and define their existence.

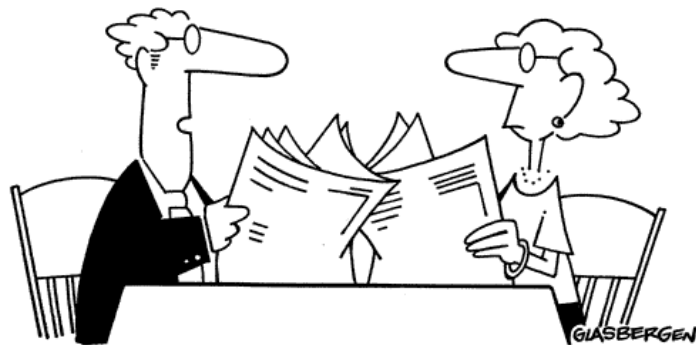
This course is designed to consider the family as a social institution in the United States, with a focus on how other institutions affect the family, and how families affect the broader social system.

This course is **not** about “dating and mating” or interpersonal experiences within families often covered in psychology or social work classes. Family structures and the behavior of family members in general, are conditioned largely by structural influences rather than biology, psychology, or even culture. The collective behavior of a family may reinforce or challenge social norms, but consequently, reflect the social forces that affect their conditions of existence, impacting such things as interests, preferences, perceptions, choices, options, and other behaviors.

We will study the family and the social system in the United States, including where they overlap, and where they are in conflict. We will examine popular ideals, images, and myths associated with the family in the United States and seek to explode the myth of the stable and harmonious family of the past, misconceptions of family roles, the falsities of a monolithic family form, and the pressure to develop undifferentiated experiences.

For example, the traditional or ‘normal’ family is anchored in a male-dominated, white, middle-class assumption about society where male-breadwinners and female homemakers are dominant. By challenging and transcending this unrealistic concept of the family, the dimensions of social class, gender, and race/ethnicity will allow us to systematically understand the family’s varied connections and interactions with society’s institutions.

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“I work 85 hours a week and you work 90 hours a week, but we earn too much to be classified as a ‘working family’.”

In the end, we will see that there is no consensus on the family, but a diverse set of experiences, orientations, and processes.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who fully engage in the course by attending class, completing written requirements, and giving their best, good faith effort to comprehend the material will be able to answer the following questions:

1. How is the family involved in social reproduction?
2. What does the family do to ensure that societies function effectively?
3. How do families acquire, maintain, and use the means to meet the necessities of existence in society?

In addition, students will be able to:

4. Think sociologically about the family.
5. Analyze how the family has changed over time.
6. Critically examine the intersections that the family has with other elements of the social structure.
7. Appreciate the diversity of families in modern U.S. society.

TEXTBOOK AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

MAJOR TEXT:

Benokraitis, Nijole V. 2011. Marriage and Families: Changes, Choices, and Constraints. 7th Edition. Prentice Hall

RESEARCH TEXT:

Pew Research Center. 2010. "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families." Pew Research Center's Social and Demographic Trends Project: Washington, DC.

The *major text* by Benokraitis will serve as the 'backbone' to class, and is available at Textbook Rental. [The research report by the Pew Research Center is available on WebCT.](#)

Throughout the semester, we will draw on material from the textbook, but we will also read numerous selections from other sources. These **applied** readings will be announced in class and made available on WebCT throughout the semester. **To participate fully in lecture and class discussions, as well as complete course assignments, you are expected to complete all applied reading assignments.**

Think of the textbook as your "user guide" to the course and the applied readings as specific applications in the *sociology of the family*.

Because this course will utilize current events as well as history, applied reading assignments will be given **two-weeks** in advance. You are responsible for keeping up-to-date with the reading schedule and for completing all reading assignments. Lecture cannot possibly cover all the material from the reading assignments, but all of this material is considered (and expected) "fair game" for the written assignments.

*A DETAILED READING ASSIGNMENT GUIDE FOR EACH SECTION OF THE COURSE
WILL BE AVAILABLE ON WEBCT*

Preparation and Engagement:

You are expected to attend every class, having read and prepared for a discussion, in-class exercise, and/or guest speaker. You must come willing and capable of participating. *To be capable of participating you must have read the material and you must have developed your own interest in the issues covered in the assignment.*

Access and use of WebCT:

No materials will be distributed in class. Supplemental materials, assignment guides, course announcements, and grade feedback will be posted prior to each class session. You are responsible for obtaining course information through WebCT:
<https://online.eiu.edu/webct/>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grade Requirements: 250 Total Points

Below is a list of the course assignments with total point values. Each item listed is required.

Paper Project: 160 total points

Please refer to the attached explanation of the paper project for details, point distribution, and due dates.

Reading Quizzes 30 total points (6 quizzes, 5 points each):

Reading quizzes will focus on a particular concept from that day's reading assignment or class discussion. They are unannounced and you must be in class to complete them. Reading quizzes are short answer essay questions.

Blog Discussion, Journal and Personal Reflection (6 posts, 10 points each; 60 points):

Each week, a discussion topic and thread will be posted on our course blog (<http://familyandsociety.wordpress.com>). This blog is an online journal providing context and background for our course and in-class activities, as well as an exploration in my (Prof G.'s) interest in the public treatment and discourse of the family in the United States.

Each student is expected to read the blog and respond to 6 threads within the established timeframe. There will be more than 6 postings; however each student is only responsible for 6 responses. Your responses will type-written, and **no longer than one double-spaced page**. Responses will be submitted in the 'Assignments' section of WebCT, tracked by the professor, and noted in your WebCT grade book.

It is the student's responsibility to read the discussion topic, review the materials for each, consider the question posed, and write an informed and critical response.

There are no concrete criteria for *how* to respond to a discussion, but each student is expected to write from their own perspective, whether supportive, critical, confused, or otherwise, and **must** include material from lecture and/or

course readings. Responses will be evaluated on their engagement with each thread through the utilization of course materials, critical (but respectful) analyses, and thoughtfulness of their reflection.

Also, each student is expected to post 2 public responses to 2 separate threads of their choice. It is understood that some students are not comfortable with speaking in class, and therefore to allow for *all* voices to be heard, each student is expected to make two public contributions via the "Leave a Reply" function on the blog. Other students should feel free to respond to public postings by their peers, but **MUST** be respectful just as we were in an actual classroom discussion.

COURSE GRADING

Based on the requirements, there are 250 points to be earned in this course. Final letter grades are based on the following scale:

A:	225-250 (90% or greater)
B:	200-224 (80% - 89.9%)
C:	175-199 (70%-79.9%)
D:	150-174 (60%-69.9%)
F:	<150 (<59.9%)

At any moment in the semester, you can gauge your progress in the course by taking the total amount of points you have earned divided by the total amount of points possible for the assignments you have completed to that point. I will also attempt to keep your grades up to date on WebCT.

Grading FAQ:

Question: Do you grade on a "curve"?

Answer: No. I grade on points; a grading curve is simply grade inflation.

Question: Can I earn extra credit?

Answer: Any opportunities for extra credit will be afforded to all students in the course and at the discretion of the instructor.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Course Ground Rules:

Sociology is one of the few subjects that allows us to explore ourselves as part of something bigger, how something beyond our immediate lives has the ability to impact who we are, and also how who we are impacts other individuals and groups. Sociology is dynamic and exciting.

Surviving this class, first and foremost is through your own energy, engagement, inquisitiveness, and ability to be open-minded. An environment conducive to open dialogue is the goal. The classroom is a space for learning, not just from lecture but also from your fellow students.

There are three ground-rules under which you and I will be approaching this course:

1. If you always agree with me, then there is only one of us doing the thinking – and that is dangerous!
2. You are expected to be active in creating your own knowledge.
3. Do not be afraid to ask questions in or outside of class.

Class Attendance:

You will sign-in each class-period. While attendance is ***not*** a part of the grade requirements for this course, if you have 5 or fewer absences from lecture, you will be eligible for Prof. G's rounding rule. The rounding rule means that if you are within 1.5 percentage points of the next grade level you will receive the next highest grade (i.e. you have a 78.5% after the final exam, and hence a C, you will earn a B). In essence, your attendance can only help your grade by being present to learn the course material and if you are within the rounding interval!

What is "Class Participation"?

Class participation is class engagement. Engagement in this course is exercised through your continued and productive contribution: reading assignments are completed, assignments are finished and submitted on time, and you come to class ready to be engaged.

Engagement in the course is both critical to your personal success and the success of the group.

If you are going to be absent from a class session and have a legitimate reason for missing class (emergency, illness, death, etc.), please contact me by email or telephone prior to the start of class.

It is your responsibility to be accountable for your attendance and engagement in the class. While I do not take attendance, in-class assignments cannot be made-up; providing a legitimate justification for missing class and a possible assignment is necessary.

You are expected to attend every class: While class attendance is NOT part of your grade, the content of the course, as well as the quizzes and exams, is a product of what happens in the classroom.

The textbook is a road map, but your participation and attendance are what make the course most interesting and informative. Being overly absent is detrimental to your learning experience and understanding of sociology.

General Classroom Conduct Policy:

In all of my classes, I strive to provide a positive and productive learning environment for students. It is important that we all act in a respectful manner toward each other and do not disturb the class.

I ask your cooperation in observing the following rules:

- Arrive on time.

- Do not come and go during the class period. This is disrespectful and disruptive for me and your fellow students. If you must go to the restroom, do so quietly, causing as little disruption as possible.
- Observe the electronics policy at all times (see below).
- Do not carry on side conversations with your neighbors unless you will be prepared to share with the rest of your colleagues.

THE Electronics Policy:

If you bring your cell phone to class, please show respect for me and the other members of the class by either turning it off or setting it so that it does not make any noise. It is unacceptable to make or receive calls, or to text message while in the classroom. You will be asked to leave if you are using a cell phone while in class; this includes text messaging.

Should you be an EMT, police officer, or other professional “on call,” please set your phone to vibrate during class, and quietly leave the classroom to return any calls received. Failure to abide by this policy will result in your dismissal from the classroom.

I do not allow use of personal computers in class. If you do bring your PC to lecture, you will be required to put it away or to leave the classroom. If you must use a computer for academic purposes, you must bring appropriate documentation from the office of student services.

Academic Integrity:

ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO COMPLETE THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT WORK. While students are encouraged to study in groups, their completed assignments are expected to be the independent work of the individual student.

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the provisions of the University’s Student Conduct Code, available online at: www.eiu.edu/~judicial.

These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submissions, plagiarism, complicity to such acts, computer misuse, and classroom disruptions. Any breach of academic integrity will result in a failing grade. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic misconduct, you will be referred to the Director of Student Standards for appropriate actions.

You are responsible for your work, the quality of your work, and the validity of your work. Any violation of academic integrity is serious and, if founded, will result in a zero for the assignment.

Ignorance is not an excuse and will not prevent a failing grade.

Help with course material:

Office hours are provided for students to seek guidance and help with course content. Office hours are provided for the sole purpose of helping students and should be taken advantage of as needed. I am more than willing to go the extra mile, but only if you are, too.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Disabilities Statement:

Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) if they wish to discuss any necessary academic accommodations.

Medical Emergency Statement:

For medical emergencies, go to the nearest phone and call 911. All faculty offices have telephones and during normal business hours (8-12 and 1-4:30), the Sociology Office (Blair 3170) is open.

Be sure to state the floor and room number of the emergency to the 911 operator. If possible, someone should go to the central entrance of Blair Hall to direct EMS personnel to the medical emergency scene. If the medical emergency is on the second or third floor, someone else should hold the elevator on the first floor for EMS use.

Tornado Statement:

In case of a tornado warning, proceed to the center of the hallway on the first floor, near the posted severe weather signs. Under no circumstances should you attempt to leave the building.

Building Fire Statement:

In case of fire, activate the fire alarm and exit the building. When a fire alarm sounds, everyone must exit the building and cannot re-enter the building until allowed by the building coordinator or fire department official. Fire alarms are located at the north and south ends of the corridors just inside the fire doors.

The closest exits for all classrooms in Blair are on the north and south ends of the building. Under no circumstance should the elevator be used. Group assembly areas for all classes in Blair are either on the patio area between Blair and Old Main or on the southeast corner of the North Quad. As you exit the building, continue moving well away from the exits so that you do not impede the progress of other students or the work of fire officials. Move a safe distance away from the building.

DISCLAIMER

The course content and this syllabus are subject to change at any time to allow for a flexible and open learning environment.