

SOCIOLOGY OF AMERICAN FAMILIES: CONTEXT AND CHANGE

SOC 281 SEC M002 • Spring 2009
11:00AM to 12:20PM

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Course Description:

What defines family? Who defines family? How are families both constructed and structured? How do families function? What roles do families play in community and society? What roles do individuals play in families and why? Is a family a biological or a societal given, or can families be chosen? These are some of the questions students will address in the Sociology of Family.

In this course we will examine how families vary and change over time. We will also look at the many ways families and family members are defined via societal norms. But also, families and their members are often constructed against those same norms, challenging legal, political, economic, and even medical standards of what constitutes a family. Throughout the course, students will explore questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality as they intersect with family life, identity, and public policy. Additional themes to be covered include marriage, motherhood, community, capitalism, the state, globalization, and social justice.

Required Texts (available at Follett's Orange bookstore):

Coontz, Stephanie

2006 *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Penguin.

Coontz, Stephanie (second ed.)

2008 *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas

2005 *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chauncey, George

2005 *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate over Gay Equality*. New York: Basic Books.

Assignments & Grading:

Attendance & Participation	
Discussion Questions	10%
Midterm Family History	20 %
Exams	20% (to be averaged)
Final Project	30%

Attendance: Final grades will be lowered for students who miss more than three classes. Participation grade is based on in class discussion and online blackboard discussion. I will occasional post online conversation starters, but online discussion will primarily be the responsibility of the students.

Discussion Questions: Each student will sign up for a day to be a discussion leader. You will be responsible for writing and sharing 2-3 discussion questions based on the days assigned readings.

The Family History is due around midterm. You will write a 3-5 page paper in which you discuss your family's formation, traditions and experiences. You will receive a detailed assignment later in the semester.

Final Project: You will be assigned to small 3-4 member groups. Your group is responsible for choosing a topic, question or debate related to contemporary family issues. Your group will research the topic or debate and then collectively produce an series of essays, exploring different facets or opposing views on this topic. You will receive a detailed assignment later in the semester.

Exams will be in class and include multiple choice and/or essay components.

Grading Scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	65-66
F	0-64

Notes:

- 1) The professor reserves the right to change the syllabus and assignments. Changes may be made to accommodate the specific needs of the class.
- 2) High standards of academic integrity are valued and required by both the university and myself.
 - a. **Plagiarism, intended or unintended, will not be tolerated.** A student caught plagiarizing will face serious consequences.
 - b. When producing written assignments and the final research paper, citations, proper use of quotation marks and paraphrasing, along with a

bibliography are requisite. For guidance see me or go to the Writing Center at <http://wrt.syr.edu/wc/wcintro.html> or visit HBC 101.

- C. Online sources must be cited properly and use carefully. See me if you have questions.
- 3) **Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For more information, see Office of Disability Services, <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>
 - 4) Feel free to email me. Please allow 24 hours for a response. I will notify students if there will be a longer delay in email activity (due to travel, illness, etc.).
 - 5) Readings listed for each day of class in the course schedule are to have been read **prior** to coming to that day's class. This is a reading intensive course; you will want to keep up with the readings to do well.
 - 6) Student athletes need to submit permission forms signed by a coach in advance to be excused from class and are responsible for making up missing assignments and readings.
 - 7) Classroom conduct: This course is heavily reliant on discussion, which includes difficult dialogue at times. **This is an inclusive and safe classroom.** All discussion points, opinions, and questions are valued; as such students are expected to treat one another and the professor thoughtfully and with respect.
 - 8) Cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off before coming to class. **Please do not text message or work on your laptops during class!**
 - 9) Let's have a great semester!

Foundations

- January 13: Introductions & Handout
January 15: Sociology of Families

Kinship and Marriage: Historical Foundations of Family

- Jan: 20 Marriage Begins "*Marriage: A history*" Intro and chap 1, 2, 3,
Jan 22: Ancient World "*Marriage: A history*" Chap. 4, 5,
Jan 27: "*Marriage: A history*" The Middle Ages: Chap 7 & 8
Jan 29: The 16th-19th Century Chap. 9, 12,
Feb 3: The 20th Century "*Marriage: A history*" Chap 14 & 15
Feb 5: Short Exam 1

Contemporary Family Forms: The Impact of Social Location

- Feb 10: *American Families* Intro and Chapter 1
- Feb 12: *American Families* Chapter 12 & 13
- Feb 17: *American Families* Chapter 14 & 30
- Feb 19: *American Families* Chap 11 & 15
- Feb 24: *American Families* Chap 17 & 22
- Feb 26: Midterm Project Due: A Sociological Look at My Family.

The Family as a Force for Socialization

- March 3: *American Families*; Chapter 10 and 33
- March 5: *American Families*: Chap 26 and “Childcare Dilemmas in Contemporary Families” and Maternal Employment: and Time with Children” (on Blackboard)
- March 10: Spring Break!
- March 12: Spring Break!
- March 17: *American Families*: Chap 23 & 25
- March 19: *No Class*.
- March 24: *American Families*: Chap 26 and “Does Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” (on Blackboard)
- March 26: *Short Exam 2*

Applying Our Sociological Imagination: Engaging Contemporary Issues

- March 31: “*Why Marriage*” Intro, Chap.1
- April 2: “*Why Marriage*” Chap 2 & 3
- April: 7 “*Why Marriage*” Chap 4 & 5
- April 9: “*Promises I Can Keep*” Intro chap 1
- April 14: “*Promises I Can Keep*” Chap 2 & 3
- April 16: “*Promises I Can Keep*” Chap 4 & 5
- April 21: Mayfest: No Class
- April 23: *Promises I Can Keep*” Chap 6 & Conclusion
- April 28: Wrapping Up.

May 1: Final Project due