Professor Christine Percheski
Email: c-percheski@northwestern.edu
Office Location: 1812 Chicago Avenue, Rm. 208

Sociology 210 Families and Society, Fall 2012

Class Time: Mondays & Wednesdays 9:30-10:50am  Location: Parkes 224
Office Hours: Mondays 4-5pm & Tuesdays 2:30-4pm

Course Overview
This course is designed to provide an overview of the changes, continuities, and variations in family experiences in industrialized countries over the past century. We will explore explanations for these trends and discuss the implications for individuals and society. Although the course covers a great deal of valuable material about family life, it is not a self-help course or an instruction manual for mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, or children. Rather, the course is an introduction into the sociological study of families.

We will start by considering the extent of family change in the U.S. and other industrialized countries in recent decades. We will discuss how social scientists study families and what types of theories and evidence they use to explain family change.

The second section of the course will focus on changes in dating, sexual relationships, and marriage. We will begin by examining how dating and courtship patterns have changed over time and vary across social groups. Next, we will look at the rise of premarital cohabitation and how cohabitation is similar to and different from marriage. We will then consider the extent to which marriage has undergone redefinition, and we will discuss why intimate unions dissolve.

Next, we will look at some activities of the family: having and raising children and interacting across generations and with kin. We will start by considering the factors contributing to declines in the average number of children per family and the rise in nonmarital fertility as well as how parenting and childrearing have changed. Finally, we will turn our focus to intergenerational ties and how extended families and kin support one another.

Section I. How have families in industrialized countries changed in recent decades? How can we study changes in families?

Section II. How and why have dating, marriage and cohabitation changed?

Section III. How and why have (selected) activities of the family changed? Fertility, Childrearing, Intergenerational Ties, & Kin Support.
Course Goals and Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to 1) understand how social scientists study families, as well as the limitations of our research methods; 2) describe in broad terms how families in industrialized countries have changed throughout the twentieth century; 3) describe trends in marriage, divorce, and fertility for the whole population of the United States and for population subgroups defined by race/ethnicity and social class; 4) explain and evaluate possible causes of these changes; and 5) understand the relevant public policy issues involving families, and how social science research can inform policies.

This course will also emphasize understanding graphs, figures, and tables relevant to course material. No prior statistics courses are required, but students will be expected to know how to read and describe figures and graphs by the final exam.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to do all required reading and engage deeply with the subject material. Class attendance is expected. Grades will be calculated as follows:

- Class participation: 15%
- Reading responses: 20%
- Family histories project: 25%
- Final exam: 40% (Dec 13, 3-5pm)

Required Books:

Class participation: To fully participate, students should complete all readings in advance of class and are required to submit at least one relevant discussion question on the readings to the Blackboard forum ONCE per week.

Reading Responses: Students will write three reading responses of approximately two pages in length. Guidelines will be distributed in class and on Blackboard.

Family Histories Project: This project is an opportunity for students to interview people in their own family or in other families and relate their experiences of family formation to the relevant course material. Directions will be posted on Blackboard. Papers are due 12/10 at noon. Late papers will lose 5 points a day and will not be accepted after 12/14.

Final Exam: The final exam will take place as scheduled by the Registrar on December 13, 3-5pm. Students are not permitted to take the exam at a different time. All University policies regarding final exams apply.
Core Topics and Reading Assignments

Introduction: What is a Family? How are Families Changing? How Do Sociologists Understand Family Changes and Variations?

October 1

October 3

October 8

Changes and Continuities in Intimate Relationships, Love, and Sex

October 10
1. Furstenberg et al. “Growing Up is Harder to Do” (Reader 38-44).

October 15

October 17
**Marriage, Cohabitation, & Separation**

**October 22**
1. Coontz. “What’s Love Got to Do With It? A Brief History of Marriage” (Reader 32-8)

**October 24**

**October 29**
2. Excerpt from Rosenfeld. 2007. The Age of Independence.

**October 31**

**November 5**

**Parenthood, Childhood, & Intergenerational Relationships**

**November 7**

**November 12**
1. Edin & Kefalas. Promises I Can Keep. (Reader)

**November 14**
November 19

November 21 – No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!

November 26
3. Meezan & Rauch. “Gay-Marriage, Same-Sex Parenting, and America’s Children.” (Reader 327-338)

November 28

December 3 (Please note that we are meeting even though this is Reading Period.)
1. Bengston. “Beyond the Nuclear Family.” (Reader 225-236)

December 5: FINAL EXAM REVIEW

FINAL EXAM: December 13, 3-5pm

The Family History Project is due Monday, December 10 at noon. Students are welcome to turn it in early.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Respectful Dialogue: Some of the topics that we discuss in this course may resonate closely with our own personal experiences, may challenge closely-held personal, moral, or political beliefs, or may be controversial. I will do my best to create an intellectually vibrant and respectful atmosphere. I request that you contribute to this by acknowledging the diversity of experiences and opinions related to the course topics, refraining from the use of slang or pejorative terms, treating others with respect and civility, and honestly communicating with me and your classmates if you feel that we are not treating a particular perspective with respect. Please make me aware of any concerns that you may have, and I will do my best to address them.
Additionally, students are requested to turn off their **CELLPHONES** and not use their **COMPUTERS** for non-course related purposes during class (i.e. no surfing the web or email!). If we catch you using electronic devices for non-course related purposes, you will not be allowed to bring them to class again. If you have to leave early or arrive late, please do so quietly.

**Communication:** The best way to contact me is through email. Please include an informative subject line such as “Soc 215 Assignment Question” or “Anticipated Absence from Soc 310” and sign your full name.

**Academic Integrity:** Northwestern has strict policies regarding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Examples of academic dishonesty include passing off other people’s work as your own, cheating on exams or other in-class assignments, collaborating with other students on assignments where collaboration is prohibited, and not giving others (students, faculty, writers, and scholars) credit for their ideas or words. Respecting the academic integrity of yourself and others means always citing sources correctly and never contributing to or benefiting from any activities that further academic dishonesty (e.g. selling or buying term papers, contributing exam copies to exam banks without the instructor’s permission, etc.). Additionally, **you may not reuse papers or portions of papers** (anything longer than one paragraph) from a previous class for an assignment for this class. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me.

Students should be advised that they may be required to submit their work electronically. All student work may be analyzed electronically for violations of the university's academic integrity policy and may also be included in a database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content. **Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated! All suspected violations of academic integrity will be referred to Dean Sheldon.**

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Per university policy, any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD; 847-467-5530) and to me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential.

**Absences:** Please let me know by the second week of class about anticipated absences for religious holiday observances. Students who are absent for illness or family emergencies and miss an assignment are required to contact me as soon as the situation arises.