

Professor Christine Percheski
Class Time: 2:00-3:20pm Mondays and Wednesdays
Office Hours: Wednesday 10am-noon or by appointment, 1812 Chicago, Rm. 208
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Sociology 101-6: American Families after the Sexual Revolution

Welcome to Northwestern! I am delighted to be your freshman advisor and to have you as a member of our freshman seminar.

Course Overview:

In this freshman seminar, we will explore how and why American families have changed over time. Although there are many topics related to families and family life, the focus of this writing-intensive course will be on changes in marriage and other romantic relationships since the 1950s. We will discuss changes in the ways that people find a romantic partner, the characteristics of their partners, and the duration of their relationships, as well as what these changes mean for the individuals involved and for the broader society. For example, we will consider the rise in the practice of couples living together before marriage, what this means to the couples involved, and how others see these relationships. Other topics include non-marital childbearing and same-sex unions.

In addition to exposing students to sociological concepts and exploring changes in American families, my goals for this course are for students to further develop their critical thinking and communication skills. In particular, we will focus on developing the writing skills necessary for a successful college education.

Course Expectations and Requirements

Students are expected to engage deeply with the subject material and to dedicate themselves to improving their reading, writing, and discussion skills. Class attendance and active participation are necessary to pass this course. More than one unexcused absence will result in a lower final course grade. Grades will be calculated in the following way (subject to small adjustments):

Weekly writing assignments	60%
Final research paper	30%
Class participation	10%

Reading

There are several required books for this course (see below). We will also read several articles, which are available in electronic format.

Bailey, Beth L. 1988. *From the Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rosenfeld, Michael. 2009. *The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions, and the Changing American Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Written Assignments

Students are required to submit weekly writing assignments, a group writing project, and one longer research paper. Expectations for written work will be discussed in detail in class meetings. For all writing assignments, please use Times New Roman 12 point font with 1 inch margins on all sides and double-space. Please include your name, the course number, and the date in the top left corner. More generally, written work is expected to be grammatically correct and without typos. **Always proofread!** Weekly writing assignments will be due at midnight on Sunday (except where noted otherwise) and will not be accepted late except under exceptional circumstances. Final research papers will be accepted late only after consultation with the appropriate dean.

Reading responses: For some weeks (see the agenda on subsequent pages), the weekly writing assignment will be a reading response, which should include the following: 1) a brief summary of the author's argument or thesis and the supporting evidence (one paragraph); 2) your critique of the argument or thesis (one to two paragraphs). In the critique, you may want to pose questions that you thought the author did not address, point out contradictions between this reading and other course readings, question the merits of the supporting evidence, argue against the author's logic, or point out the strengths of the argument and evidence. 3) your personal/subjective reactions to the material presented in this reading (one paragraph). This may include whether the information presented surprised you, whether this jars or resonates with your personal experiences or observations, and whether you think the phenomenon discussed is a positive, negative, or neutral change in American family life. Please clearly delineate what is your personal/subjective reaction from the author's argument and your critique of that argument.

Group Research and Writing Project: Three of the weekly writing assignments require you to work together as a group for the research part of the assignment. However, each person will be responsible for submitting a sole-authored writing component. This project is a content analysis of media coverage.

Final Research Paper: This paper will involve interviewing three family members or friends over age 30 about their experiences with dating, marriage, and family formation. More details will be provided later in the term.

Weekly Agenda: Writing Topics, Reading, and Writing Assignments

Week 1

Wednesday, September 22

Topics: *Discussion of academic integrity; Introduction to the course.*
(No writing or reading assignments due)

Week 2

9/27 & 9/29

Topics: *Writing in the social sciences; Thinking like a social scientist.*

Reading due:

1. Bailey pgs. 1-25;
2. Rosenfeld pgs. 1-17;
3. Edin pgs. 1-7.

Weekly writing assignment #1: *Portrayals of Family in Cultural Media.*

Students are asked to choose a popular example from two of three media forms (TV sitcom or drama, film/movie, or novel). For example, students might choose to compare an episode of the TV show *Mad Men* with the novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* OR to compare the movie *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* with an episode of the *Simpsons*. Describe how each chosen media source portrays families and family life. Discuss what the assumptions about families are in each media source, and compare across the two sources. This writing assignment should be about three pages in length.

Week 3

10/4 & 10/6

Topics: *Research skills & Giving writing feedback to others; Changes in courtship, dating, and couple formation.*

Reading due:

1. Bailey, pgs. 26-96 & 119-140.
2. Excerpt from England, Shafer, & Fogarty. 2008. "Hooking Up and Forming Romantic Relationships on Today's College Campuses." in *The Gendered Society Reader*, edited by Michael Kimmel. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weekly writing assignment #2: Reading response to assigned reading from Bailey book.

Week 4

10/11 & 10/13

Topics: *Writing thesis statements & Common problems with writing mechanics; Public opinion and family change.*

Reading due:

1. Usdansky. 2009. "A Weak Embrace: Popular and Scholarly Depictions of Single-Parent Families, 1900-1998." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71: 209-225.
2. Thorton & Young-DeMarco. 2001. "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes Toward Family Issues in the United States: The 1960s Through the 1990s." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63: 1009-1037.
3. Rosenfeld. pgs. 143-155.

Weekly writing assignment #3: Rewrite Assignment #1; Group research and writing project, part 1 (due 10/13)

Week 5

10/18 & 10/20

Topics: *Making effective arguments; Changes in young adulthood & increasing couple diversity.*

Reading due:

1. Rosenfeld, pgs.18-84.
2. Furstenberg. 2010. "On a New Schedule: Transitions to Adulthood and Family Change" *Future of Children* 20(1): 67-87.

Weekly writing assignment #4: Group research and writing project, part 2

Week 6

10/25 & 10/27

Topics: *Editing your own writing; Theories of family change.*

Reading due:

1. Rosenfeld, pgs. 85-123 & 156-168.

Weekly writing assignment #5: Reading response to assigned reading from Rosenfeld book.

Week 7

11/1 & 11/3

Topics: *Entering the scholarly conversation; Nonmarital childbearing.*

Reading due:

1. Edin & Kefalas, pgs. 7-70.
2. Ventura. 2009. "Changing patterns of nonmarital childbearing in the United States." NCHS Data Brief 18, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD.

Weekly writing assignment #6: Group research and writing project, part 3

Week 8

11/8 & 11/11

Topics: *Writing conclusions; Changes in the meaning of marriage.*

Reading due:

1. Edin & Kefalas, pgs. 104-137 & 187-220
2. Smock et al. 2005. "Everything's There Except Money': How Money Shapes Decisions to Marry among Cohabiters." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67: 680-696.

Weekly writing assignment #7: Reading response to assigned reading from Edin and Kefalas book.

Week 9

11/15 & 11/17

Topics: *Making effective arguments, take 2! Marriage and public policy*

Reading:

1. Dion. 2005. "Healthy Marriage Programs: Learning What Works." *Future of Children* 15(2): 139-156.
2. Cherlin. 2003. "Should the Government Promote Marriage?" *Contexts* 2(4): 22-29.
3. Gerstel & Sarkisian. 2006. "Marriage: The Good, the Bad, and the Greedy" *Contexts* 5(4): 16-21.

Weekly writing assignment #8: Write a succinct argument (1-2 pages) for or against government funding of marriage promotion programs.

Week 10

11/22

(11/24: No Class)

Topics: *Strategies for overcoming writing problems; The big picture (summing up what we've learned this term).*

Reading due:

1. Excerpts from Perry v. Schwarzenegger trial and associated op-eds.
2. Rosenfeld, pgs. 169-189.

Weekly writing assignment #9: Reaction to course material. Please write a two-page paper reflecting on the readings. Which reading was your favorite or the one from which you learned the most? Was any of the material that we covered surprising to you?

Week 11

11/29 & 12/1

Topics: *Studying for exams and writing final papers.*

Class WILL MEET on Wednesday of Reading Period, but there will be no new reading or writing assignments. Attendance is expected.

Week 12

12/6 Final papers due at 4pm. Students may turn papers in early but not late!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Class Conduct and 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 issues that we discuss, 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 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 101 Assignment Question” or “Freshman Advising Appointment Request.” Except under unusual circumstances, I will answer your emails within 24 hours on the weekdays and 48 hours on the weekends. In the case of an emergency, you are welcome to call the Google Voice number listed at the top of the syllabus in addition to sending an email.

Academic Honesty and Integrity: Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. 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 other students or 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.). If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me.

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: Students will occasionally need to miss class because of religious holidays, illness, or family emergencies. Please let me know by the second week of class about any anticipated absences, such as religious holiday observances. If you need to miss class for an unanticipated reason, such as illness or family emergency, please email as soon as you realize that you will be missing class. Students with repeated absences may be referred to the appropriate dean.