Sociology 101-6: American Families after the Sexual Revolution

Welcome to Northwestern! I am delighted that you are a member of our first-year seminar. You are beginning a wonderful intellectual journey at Northwestern, and this seminar is an important part of this experience. My goal is to help you make the most of the time that you invest in this course. Additionally, I will serve as your advisor for Fall quarter.

Course Overview:
In this seminar, we will explore how and why American families have changed in recent decades. Although there are many topics related to families and family life, the focus of this writing-intensive course will be on changes since the 1950s in marriage and other romantic relationships and the context of childbearing. 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 the context in which they have children. We will consider what these changes mean for the individuals involved and for the broader society. Topics include dating and “hook-ups”, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, and same-sex marriage.

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 and classroom discussion 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: 50%
- Final paper: 30%
- Class participation: 20%

Reading
There are two required books for this course (see below). We will also read several articles and book excerpts, which are available in electronic format on Canvas and/or as a reader from Quartet. Students should bring the readings with them to class.


Written Assignments
Students are required to submit weekly writing assignments and one longer final paper. Expectations for written work will be discussed in detail in class meetings. For all writing assignments, please use 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 should be uploaded to Canvas by 11pm (except where noted otherwise). Assignments will be accepted late but will lose a full letter grade for every 24 hour period past the due date. Final papers will be accepted late only after consultation with the appropriate dean.

**Reading responses:** For most weeks, 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 strength 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. Reading responses should be no more than 2 pages; I will not read any text that extends onto a third page. If your response is longer, please edit it to be shorter. Writing succinctly is an important skill!

**Final Paper:** This paper will involve interviewing three family members or friends over age 30 about their experiences with dating, marriage, and family formation and putting their narratives in the context of social science research. More details will be provided later in the term.
Weekly Agenda: Topics, Reading, and Writing Assignments

**Week 1, September 21**
**Topics:** Discussion of academic integrity; Introduction to the course
**Writing Focus:** The writing process; Adopting a growth mindset

**Reading for Wednesday (9/21):**

**Weekly writing assignment #1:** 1.5 page reflection on writing strengths, due Friday (9/23) at 5pm on Canvas

**Week 2, September 26 & 28**
**Topics:** Thinking like a social scientist
**Writing Focus:** Writing analytically

**Reading for Monday:**

**Reading for Wednesday:**
- Rosenfeld, pgs. 1-17.
- Dweck. “Beliefs that Make Smart People Dumb”

**Weekly writing assignment #2:** 1.5 page reflection on Dweck article, due Wednesday in class.

**Week 3, October 3 & 5**
**Topics:** Changes in young adulthood
**Writing Focus:** Giving writing feedback to others

**Reading for Monday:**
- Rosenfeld, pgs. 18-41.

**Reading for Wednesday:**
- Rosenfeld, pgs.42-84.

**Weekly writing assignment #3:** Reading response to Rosenfeld excerpt

**Week 4, October 10 & 12**
**Topics:** Changes in young adulthood (cont’d); Changes in courtship and dating
**Writing focus:** Incorporating feedback and revising

**Reading for Monday:**

**Reading for Wednesday:**

**Weekly writing assignment #4:** Substantially revise writing assignment #3
Week 5, October 17 & 19
Topics: Changes in dating on college campuses
Writing Focus: Writing effective summaries and critiques
Reading for Monday:

Reading for Wednesday:

Weekly writing assignment #5: Reading response addressing two of the three assigned readings

Week 6, October 24 & 26
Topics: Theories of family change
Writing focus: Making effective arguments
Reading for Monday:
- Rosenfeld, pgs. 85-123 & 156-168.

Reading for Wednesday:

Weekly writing assignment #6: Reading response to Bailey reading

Week 7, October 31 & November 2
Topics: Changes in Childbearing Contexts
Writing focus: Writing succinctly; Library skills
Reading for Monday:
- Edin & Kefalas, pgs. 1-70.

Reading for Wednesday:
- Edin & Kefalas, pgs. 71-103.

Weekly writing assignment #7: Reading response to Edin & Kefalas

Week 8, November 7 & 9
Topics: Non-marital Childbearing
Writing focus: Revising; writing conclusions
Reading for Monday:
- Edin & Kefalas, pgs. 104-137 & 187-220

Reading for Wednesday:
- Excerpt from Edin & Nelson, Doing the Best I Can

Writing assignment #8: Compare Promises I Can Keep with Doing the Best I Can
Week 9, November 14 & 16  
Topics: Families and Public Policy  
Writing focus: Making effective arguments  
Reading for Monday:  
Reading for Wednesday:  
No Writing assignment

Week 10, November 21  
Topics: Families and Public Policy, Part 2  
Reading for Monday:  
- An additional reading, to be announced  
NO CLASS ON NOVEMBER 23.  
Weekly writing assignment #9 (due by November 22): Reaction to course material. Please write a 1-2 page paper reflecting on the readings. From which reading did you learn the most? What material was most surprising to you or most challenged your previous beliefs?

Reading Period, December 1 & 3  
Topics: Synthesizing studies of family change; The future of families in the U.S.  
Writing Focus: Strategies for overcoming writing problems  
Class WILL MEET during Reading Period, but there will be no new reading or writing assignments. Attendance is expected.

December 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.

Communication: The best way to contact me is through email. Please include an informative subject line such as “Soc 101 Assignment Question” or “Advising Appointment Request.” Except under unusual circumstances, I will answer your emails within 24 hours on the weekdays and 48 hours on the weekends.

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. Upholding academic integrity means always citing sources correctly and never contributing to or benefiting from any activities that further academic dishonesty. 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 need for accommodations is requested to speak to AccessibleNU and to me as early as possible in the quarter. 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.