

Department of Sociology
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA—LINCOLN
CONTEMPORARY FAMILY ISSUES
Fall 2015

COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number:	SOCI 325.001	Professor	David Warner
Credits:	3 Hours	Office:	Oldfather Hall 726
Meeting Times:	T, Th 3:30pm – 4:45pm	E-mail:	dwarner3 [at] unl [dot] edu
Location:	CBA 118	Office Hours:	T & Th 12:30-2:00 pm or by appointment
Prerequisites:	6 Hours sociology or related social sciences		

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

This course focuses on close readings of contemporary classics in family sociology, rigorous discussion, and analytical writing. The course examines theoretical perspectives and methodological issues in family sociology with the goal of increasing students' abilities to investigate and analyze research findings. This semester we will examine contemporary books that deal broadly with *families and social class*, with attention to how families differ in their approach to everyday tasks and their aspirations for the future depending on their position in the opportunity structure. Readings will provide a sociological perspective for understanding and assessing the macro- and micro-level interactions that shape contemporary U.S. families, as well as encourage and stimulate critical thinking.

This is a reading, discussion, and writing intensive course with required class attendance. If you are averse to any of these components, this course will unlikely be a good fit for you.

COURSE FORMAT:

Class meetings will primarily involve in-depth discussion. This format is successful only insofar as participants read the assigned books carefully and critically, attend class, and are prepared to discuss them along with their own ideas, reactions, and questions. I have designed the course requirements to incentivize timely completion of the assigned books and facilitate class discussion (see below).

Given the substantial out-of-class preparation required for successful analysis and synthesis of the assigned books, you will note that there are periodic "writing/reading days" built into the course schedule. We will not meet as a class on those days and you should use the time to work on your written assignments or begin reading for the next book. I will hold extended office hours during the regularly scheduled class time to be available for individualized assistance.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

There are six required books for this course:

1. Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York: Vintage Books. ISBN: 978-0307386380 [Abbrev.=TMGR]
2. Cooper, Marianne. 2014. *Cut Adrift: Families in Insecure Times*: University of California Press. 978-0520277670 [Abbrev.=CA]
3. Edin, Kathryn and Maria J. Kefalas. 2007. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. ISBN: 978-0520248199 [Abbrev.=PICK]

4. Edin, Kathryn and Timothy J. Nelson. 2013. *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. ISBN: 978-0520283923 [Abbrev.=DTBIC]
5. Gerson, Kathleen. 2010. *The Unfinished Revolution: How a New Generation Is Reshaping Family, Work, and Gender in America*: Oxford University Press New York. ISBN: 978-0199783328 [Abbrev.=TUR]
6. Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Second Edition, With an Update a Decade Later. Berkeley: University of California Press. ISBN: 978-0520271425 [Abbrev.=UC]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students successfully completing this course will critically examine and synthesize primary scholarly works related to the study of social class differences in U.S. families. The following methods of evaluation will be used:

1) Class Attendance & Participation

The discussion-based format of this course means that daily class attendance is essential and required. However, attendance alone is not sufficient. Students must also demonstrate their proficiency with the readings through regular and relevant class participation. Proficiency means that (1) you should be able to speak about all aspects (e.g., theory, analysis, findings) of a text and (2) you should have questions about the material. The completion of Daily Chapter Notes (described below) are designed to facilitate your participation. Your class participation must be done in a way that respects the diverse options of others (See Course Conduct below).

I will monitor and record students' attendance and class participation, assessing the overall quality of participation at the end of the semester (after the completion of all other course requirements). Students with regular and relevant participation will receive maximum credit. While regular attendance is necessary for successful completion of this course, attendance without participation will not earn full credit. Students who do not demonstrate regular and relevant participation will earn a grade no higher than a B- in this course (and indeed may earn a lower grade).

You are allowed to miss up to two class meetings without penalty; additional absences or habitual tardiness/early departure will result in lower participation scores. If you anticipate having a problem attending every class for its entirety due to known commitments (including participation in extra-curricular activities), this is not the right course for you.¹

Your Attendance and Participation will comprise **25%** of your final grade in this course.

2) Daily Chapter Notes

To help you prepare for each class, you are required to complete notes on the assigned reading before each class. These notes are to be organized by chapter. Notes for each chapter must include a succinct summary of the main points/findings, at least one analytical comment (either critiquing the author's analysis, or offering an original analysis of the data), and at least one discussion question you could ask in class about the reading. Notes should be ½-1 page per chapter. You must submit your chapter notes for the assigned reading before the start of each class session (i.e., by 3:30pm).

¹ Students with more than two *unexpected* absences due to documented major illness, serious injury, or personal crisis *may* be offered alternative arrangements for completion of course requirements. Such arrangements are solely at my discretion and will be made on a case-by-case basis.

These chapter notes will not only help you be prepared to contribute to class discussion, but will also be useful for your Critical Book Reviews and the course Final Paper (see below).

There are 22 class meetings with assigned readings and for which you are required to submit chapter notes. The chapter notes contribute to your course grade in two ways:

- *Completion.* Simply submitting chapter notes (via Blackboard) for each reading is worth 10% of your final grade. 20 submissions will count toward your final grade. You may miss two submissions without penalty, but you can only miss one submission per book.
- *Content.* I will evaluate the content and quality of your chapter notes for a randomly selected subset of submission within each book. There will be at least 12 evaluations; 10 of these evaluations will count toward your final grade for a total of 15%. I will evaluate the content of the random selections of chapter notes after we have finished reading the book.

If you fail to submit chapter notes more than once for a single book, a zero will be calculated into your total submission score (and potentially the content score if that day is selected for content evaluation) even if you have otherwise submitted all of the other chapter notes.

Overall, your Daily Chapter Notes will comprise **25%** of your final grade in this course.

3) **Critical Book Reviews**

For each of the six required books you will prepare a critical academic book review. The Critical Book Review is **NOT** a “reaction” paper or a simple summary of the text, but a thorough evaluation of the arguments and evidence put forth by the author(s).

Each Critical Book Review is to be about three (3 ±½) double-spaced type-written pages and you must support your analysis with evidence from the text. More detailed instructions on the content and format of the Critical Book Reviews is available on Blackboard.

The due dates for the Critical Book Reviews are listed (also listed in the [Course Schedule](#) at the end of the syllabus) are as follows:

Critical Book Review	Due Date
#1 TMGR (Cherlin)	Th 9/3
#2 PICK (Edin & Kefalas)	T 9/29
#3 DTBIC (Edin & Nelson)	Th 10/15
#4 UC (Lareau)	Th 11/5
#5 CA (Cooper)	T 11/24
#6 TUR (Gerson)	W 12/9

You are required to submit Critical Book Reviews of the first five books assigned. A Critical Book Review of the sixth book (Gerson 2010) is optional and your five highest scoring reviews will count toward your final grade if elect to submit a review for this book.

Each Critical Book Review is worth 6% of the final grade in this course. In total, the Critical Book Reviews will comprise **30%** of your final grade in this course

4) **Final Paper**

Your final paper in this course will be integrative in nature, asking you to synthesize the cross-cutting major themes of the six required texts. These papers may take a number of directions and I leave it to each student to pursue that which she or he finds most interesting. The only substantive

guideline is that the paper must be integrative—not simply a summary of each of the texts or an extended Critical Book Review—and say something interesting surrounding the course topic of social class differences in families.

The final paper is to be a minimum of five but not more than seven (5-7) double-spaced type-written pages. You must support your analysis with evidence from at least 5 of the 6 required texts *and* you must include at least 5 additional references from outside readings. More detailed instructions on the content and format of the Final Paper is available on Blackboard

The final paper will is **due by 11:59 pm on Tuesday, December 15** and is worth **20%** of your final grade in this course.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS:

You will submit all written work in this course electronically through the Assignments tab on Blackboard; detailed instructions for how to do this can be found there. All submissions must also conform to the assignment instructions listed on Blackboard.

Late Assignments will NOT be accepted under any circumstances. This also means that there will be no extensions granted for technology issues—*Blackboard* maintenance, loss of internet connectivity, power outages, etc. Please plan to complete your assignments accordingly.

If you do not submit an assignment by the date and time that it is due, you will receive a score of **ZERO (0)** on that assignment.

COURSE CONDUCT:

Learning cannot occur in an environment devoid of respect and I place the utmost premium on respectful conduct in in this course. Respectful course conduct encompasses at least two things:

- 1) Engaging in classroom behavior that facilitates the educational goals of your fellow classmates. Accordingly, I expect students enrolled in this course will: (a) arrive on time; (b) turn off/silence their cell phones; and (c) use laptops/iPads/tablets responsibly for course purposes consistent with the guidelines below.

Please also refrain from eating during class—the noise and odors are also distracting. Beverages are fine, so long as they are not disruptive.

- 2) Engaging in behavior that respects the opinions of all members of the class. We will discuss controversial issues involving families. We all have experiences and opinions about the family as a social institution. Differing viewpoints are welcomed and students are encouraged to share their opinions in a respectful manner that does not belittle, demean, or personally-attack another.

RESPONSIBLE LAPTOP USE:

In addition to being a distraction to others, unregulated use of laptops or other electronic devices for note-taking is associated with reduced classroom attention, poorer understanding and retention of material, and worse overall course performance (see McCoy 2013). Nevertheless, I recognize that students feel their note-taking ability is enhanced by the use of a laptop or tablet and you may use these devices in this course as long as you do so responsibly. Smartphones or other electronic devices may not be used for any purpose in this course and must remain stowed and powered-off /silenced at all times.

Responsible laptop/tablet use means that:

- Prior to the start of class, you: (1) close ALL programs, applications, etc. except for your note-taking software (MSWord, Notepad, etc.); (3) disable wireless internet access; (4) mute speakers; and (5) disable any screensavers, or set to a blank screen.
- During class, you: (1) use your laptop only for note-taking; (2) remain engaged in the class discussion; and (3) refrain from using your laptop in any way that is distracting to others.

Inappropriate laptop use in this course will result in lower class participation scores and may result in revocation of this privilege if your behavior is a distraction to the education goals of your classmates. You will receive a single verbal warning for any laptop misuse.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT MASTERY:

You will earn your final grade in this course based on your demonstrated mastery of the course material as indicated by your performance on each of the above-described course requirements as follows:

Weight of the Course Requirements:	
Course Attendance & Participation	250 points
Daily Chapter Notes	
Completion (20 @ 5 points each)	100 points
Content (10 @ 15 points each)	150 points
Critical Book Reviews (highest 5 @ 70 points each)	300 points
Final Paper	200 points
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Total Possible:	1000 points

Final grades will be determined based on the percentage of total points you earn. I will not force final course grades into a normal distribution and thus it is possible for everyone in this class to earn an “A.” However, most final grade distributions are approximately normal and the modal student earns a final grade in the B-range, reflecting “average” mastery. The grade of “A” is earned by students whose demonstrated mastery is truly “outstanding.”

The highest point totals used to assign final grades in this course are as follows:

A+	=	97%	B	=	83%	C-	=	70%
A	=	93%	B-	=	80%	D+	=	67%
A-	=	90%	C+	=	77%	D	=	63%
B+	=	87%	C	=	73%	D-	=	60%
						F	<	60%

These percentage cut-offs are absolute. You must earn the minimum percentage of total points listed for each grade; final grades will not be “rounded-up.” A student with 89.9% of the total points has earned a B+. *No Exceptions.*

Note that, per University policy, students taking this class “Pass/No Pass” must earn at least a C.

EXTRA CREDIT:

You will have the chance to evaluate the course through two anonymous Blackboard surveys— a Mid-Semester Course Evaluation and a Final Course Evaluation— and will earn 10 points of extra credit for each. Completing both evaluations will provide the equivalent of 2% of the total points available in the course (enough to move a student “on the bubble” from a B+ to an A-, for example). Any extra credit earned will be added to your total points earned at the end of the semester. Completion of the course

evaluations is voluntary. The Mid-Semester Course Evaluation will be available during the 8th week of the semester, the Final Course Evaluation during the 15th week. Instructions for completing the course evaluations will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

In the interest of fairness, extra credit opportunities will not be offered to individual students; you are advised to put in the amount of preparation necessary to complete successfully the course requirements.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

I strongly encouraged you to familiarize yourself with the University's Academic Integrity Policy, which reads in part: "The maintenance of academic honesty and integrity is a vital concern of the University community. Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty shall be subject to both academic and disciplinary sanctions. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following... Cheating; Fabrication or Falsification; Plagiarism; Abuse of Academic Materials; Complicity in Academic Dishonesty; Falsifying Grade Reports; [and] Misrepresentation to Avoid Academic Work (from the UNL *Student Code of Conduct*, <http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code>)."

Any student found committing acts of academic dishonesty in this course will receive a failing final grade and will be reported to the Chair of the Sociology Department and the University Judicial Officer.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln will provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate fully in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Students with documented disabilities should contact me via [email](#) to set up an appointment for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation.

GRADE CHECK FORMS:

Students participating in various campus organizations, intercollegiate athletics, or as a condition of scholarship receipt may be required to solicit mid-semester evaluations of their performance-to-date in their courses. Such "Grade Check" Forms will only be signed during my Office Hours. Please plan accordingly.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

In compliance with *The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA), all identifying course materials, including graded written papers and exam scores, will be provided directly to each student and will not be posted, displayed, or otherwise made available in a public forum. Although students may sign a FERPA Waiver consenting to the release of educational records to a parent, guardian, counselor, etc., the grades or progress of any student in this course will **NOT** be discussed with anyone but that student— except as necessary with the office of Services for Students with Disabilities or the Judicial Officer.

<p><i>DISCLAIMER:</i> Everything in this syllabus is subject to change as needs and circumstances develop. Any and all changes will be announced in class and posted on <i>Blackboard</i> and students are responsible for these revisions as announced.</p>

COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNED READINGS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Class #</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment Due *</i>
T 8/25	1	Introduction to the Course	
Th 8/27	2		
T 9/1	3	Family Change in the U.S.	TMGR: Intro, Chap. 1-2
Th 9/3	4		TMGR: Chap. 3-4
T 9/8	5		TMGR: Chap. 5-8
Th 9/10	6	Writing/Reading Day <i>No class—individual assistance available</i>	Critical Book Review #1 Due by 11:59 pm
T 9/15	7	Single Motherhood	PICK: Pref., Intro., Appx. A-B
Th 9/17	8		PICK: Chap. 1-2
T 9/22	9		PICK: Chap 3-4
Th 9/24	10		PICK: Chap 5-6, Concl.
T 9/29	11	Writing/Reading Day <i>No class—individual assistance available</i>	Critical Book Review # 2 Due by 11:59 pm
Th 10/1	12	Unmarried Fatherhood	DTBIC: Into., Chap. 1
T 10/6	13		DTBIC: Chap. 2-3
Th 10/8	14		DTBIC: Chap.4-5
T 10/13	15		DTBIC: Chap.6-8
Th 10/15	16	Writing/Reading Day <i>No class—individual assistance available</i>	Critical Book Review #3 Due by 11:59 pm
T 10/20	17	FALL BREAK <i>No class</i>	
Th 10/22	18	Class Differences in Childrearing	UC: Chap. 1-2, Appendix. A, Chap. 3-5
T 10/27	19		UC: Chap. 6-7
Th 10/29	20		UC: Chap. 8-11
T 11/3	21		UC: Chap. 12-13
Th 11/5	22	Writing/Reading Day <i>No class—individual assistance available</i>	Critical Book Review #4 Due by 11:59pm

T	11/10	23	Families in the Global Economy	CA: Preface, Intro., Chap. 1-2
Th	11/12	24		CA: Chap. 3-4
T	11/17	25		CA: Chap. 5-6
Th	11/19	26		CA: Chap. 7, Concl., Epilogue
T	11/24	26	Writing/Reading Day <i>No class—individual assistance available</i>	Critical Book Review # 5 Due by 11:59 pm
Th	11/26	28	THANKSGIVING <i>No class</i>	
T	12/1	29	Work/ Family Balance	TUR: Chap. 1-2, Appx. 1-2, Chap. 3-4
Th	12/3	30		TUR: Chap. 5-7
T	12/8	31		TUR: Chap. 8-9
W	12/9			Critical Book Review # 6 Due by 11:59 pm <i>(Optional)</i>
Th	12/10	32	Course Conclusion	
T	12/15			Final Paper Due by 11:59 pm

*For all reading assignments, Chapter Notes are due via Blackboard before the start of class (3:30pm)