

FAMILIES IN CRISIS: THE WORKING CLASS

Fall 2017

COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number:	SOCI 398.001	Professor	David Warner
Credits:	3 Hours	Office:	Oldfather Hall 726
Meeting Times:	T, Th 2:00pm – 3:15pm	E-mail:	dwarner3@unl.edu
Location:	M&N B6	Office Hours:	T 9:30-10:30 pm, W 10:30-12 Noon, or by appointment
Prerequisites:	6 Hours sociology or related social sciences		

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

“These are the people who had believed in the promise of America—who had believed that if they deferred today’s pleasures, they would reap tomorrow’s rewards. They had played by the rules of the game—rules that promised anyone could make it if they tried hard enough, worked hard enough. So they tried hard, worked hard, obeyed the law, and taught their children to do the same... But the good life eluded them; the game was rigged.”

–Lillian B. Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (1976).

Following the 2016 election, the news media—in their effort to explain the results—settled on a narrative where the economic misfortunes of the “working class” had led to a backlash against establishment politics. Analysts called for political parties to pay attention to the “forgotten” and “invisible” blue-collar worker. The fact is, the economic—and as we will discover—cultural marginalization of “working class” Americans is not new. Rubin had reached this same conclusion 40 years ago in her now classic book. The situation for working class families has only deteriorated since then, with greater family instability, more economic insecurity, and even declining life expectancy. In this course, we will examine six contemporary monographs that will allow us to understand how the relative economic position of the working class has continued to erode, how this has affected their families and interpersonal relationships, and how they make sense of and interpret these changes. With the close readings of these books, rigorous discussion, and analytical writing, we will try to identify how politicians, policy makers, and communities might address the class divisions that have rendered the “American Dream” increasingly out of reach for the working class.

COURSE FORMAT:

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

Given the substantial out-of-class preparation required for successful analysis and synthesis of the assigned material, 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:

- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2014. *Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. ISBN: 978-0-87154-030-0
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York: The New Press. ISBN: 978-1-62-097225-0
- Pugh, Allison, J. 2015. *The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Age of Insecurity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-995771-2
- Putnam, Robert D. 2016. *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 978-1-47676-990-5
- Silva, Jennifer M. 2015. *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-023189-7
- Williams, Joan C. 2017. *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press. ISBN: 978-1-63369-378-4

Additional readings will be made available via Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students successfully completing this course will critically examine and synthesize primary scholarly works focused on the economic, social, and political conditions facing working class 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. Daily Chapter Notes (described below) will facilitate your participation. Your class participation must be done in a way that respects the diverse options of others.

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 requirements). While necessary for successful completion of this course, regular 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- (and indeed may earn a lower grade).

You are allowed to miss up to two (2) class meetings without penalty; additional absences or habitual tardiness/early departure will result in lower participation scores.¹

Attendance and Participation are **20%** 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

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.

analysis, or offering an original analysis of the data), and at least one discussion question (not a simple matter of clarification) that you could ask in class about the reading. Notes should be no more than ½ page per chapter. You must submit your notes for the assigned reading 15 minutes before the start of each class session (i.e., by 1:45 pm).

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 Canvas) for each reading is worth 10% of your final grade. 20 submissions will count toward your final grade. You must complete notes for the first set of readings for each book. You may miss any two other submissions without penalty, as long as you do not miss more than 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.

Daily Chapter Notes are **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 Canvas.

You are required to submit Critical Book Reviews of the first five books assigned. A Critical Book Review of the sixth book (Williams 2017) 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 7% of the final grade in this course. In total, the Critical Book Reviews are **35%** 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 Working Class 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 Canvas

The Final Paper is **20%** of your final grade in this course.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS:

You will submit all written work in this course electronically through Canvas. All submissions must be uploaded as a PDF and conform to the assignment instructions listed on Canvas.

Late Assignments will NOT be accepted under any circumstances. This also means that there will be no extensions granted for technology issues—*Canvas* maintenance, loss of internet connectivity, power outages, etc. Please plan to complete your assignments accordingly. If you do not submit an assignment on time, you will receive a score of *Zero (0)* on that assignment.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

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.

COURSE COMMUNICATION:

Please contact me using the email address on page 1. We will not be using Canvas's built in Conversations/Inbox function because it is not secure. Messages sent to me through the Canvas Inbox ("Send a Message") feature will not be responded to. Students are also prohibited from emailing other students through Canvas Inbox. Any messages sent to other students via Conversations/Inbox will be monitored, and inappropriate contact (in violation of the UNL Student Code of Conduct) will be reported.

RESPONSIBLE LAPTOP USE:

In addition to being a distraction to others, 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. 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:

<i>Weight of the Course Requirements:</i>	
Course Attendance & Participation	200 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)	350 points
Final Paper	200 points
<hr/>	
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, the grade of “A” is earned by students whose demonstrated mastery is truly “outstanding.”

Final grades in this course will be based on the total points earned and assigned 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%

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+.

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 Canvas 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). 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. Extra credit will be added to student scores at the end of the semester.

In the interest of fairness, extra credit opportunities will not be offered to individual students.

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.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

“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; ...Complicity in Academic Dishonesty; Falsifying Grade Reports; [and] Misrepresentation to Avoid Academic Work (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.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

In compliance with *The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA), all identifying course materials, including graded written papers, 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, athletic coach, 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNED READINGS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Class #</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment Due *</i>
T 8/22	1	Introduction to the Course	
Th 8/24	2		Hsu (2016); MacGillis (2016); Monnat (2016)
T 8/29	3	The Rise & Fall of the WC Family	Cherlin: Intro, Chap. 1-2
Th 8/31	4		Cherlin: Chap. 3-4
T 9/5	5		Cherlin: Chap. 5-7
Th 9/7	6	Writing/Reading Day— <i>No class</i> [†]	Critical Book Review #1 Due by 11:59 pm
T 9/12	7	Inequality of Opportunity	Putnam: Chap. 1-2
Th 9/14	8		Putnam: Chap. 3
T 9/19	9		Putnam: Chap. 4
Th 9/21	10		Putnam: Chap. 5
T 9/26	11		Putnam: Chap. 6, “Our Kids” methodology
Th 9/28	12	Writing/Reading Day — <i>No class</i> [†]	Critical Book Review # 2 Due by 11:59 pm
T 10/3	13	Coming of Age	Silva: Chap. 1-2
Th 10/5	14		Silva: Chap.3-4
T 10/10	15		Silva: Chap. 5-6, Conclusion
Th 10/12	16	Writing/Reading Day — <i>No class</i> [†]	Critical Book Review #3 Due by 11:59 pm
T 10/17	17	FALL BREAK — <i>No class</i>	
Th 10/19	18	Interpersonal Relationships	Pugh: Chap 1-2
T 10/24	19		Pugh: Chap 3-4
Th 10/26	20		Pugh: Chap 5-6
T 10/31	21		Pugh: Chap 7-9, Epilogue
Th 11/2	22	Writing/Reading Day — <i>No class</i> [†]	Critical Book Review #4 Due by 11:59pm
T 11/7	23	Cultural Anxiety & Mistrust of Elites	Hochschild: Appx A, Part I
Th 11/9	24		Hochschild: Part II
T 11/14	25		Hochschild: Part III
Th 11/16	26		Hochschild: Part IV, Appx C.
T 11/21	26	Writing/Reading Day — <i>No class</i> [†]	Critical Book Review # 5 Due by 11:59 pm
Th 11/23	28	THANKSGIVING — <i>No class</i>	
T 11/28	29	The Politics of Class in the U.S.	Williams: Chap. 1-5
Th 11/30	30		Williams: Chap 6-11
T 12/5	31		Williams: Chap 12-14, Conclusion
W 12/6			Critical Book Review # 6 Due by 11:59 pm (<i>Optional</i>)
Th 12/7	32	Course Conclusion	
W 12/13			Final Paper Due by 11:59 pm

*For all reading assignments (except Week1), Chapter Notes are due via Canvas 15 minutes before the start of class (1:45pm).

[†] Individualized assistance available during this time.

DISCLAIMER: Everything in this syllabus is subject to change as circumstances develop. Any and all changes will be announced in class and posted on *Canvas* and students are responsible for these revisions as announced.