COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

This seminar is designed to introduce students to the Life Course Perspective with a particular emphasis on the application of a life course perspective to the study of families and family processes. The structure of the seminar will expose students to the theory, advanced quantitative methods, and substantive topics that exemplify the intersection of Life Course and Family Sociology. Both of these specialties are inherently interdisciplinary in nature and thus course readings, although primarily drawn from sociology, will also incorporate history, psychology, demography, and human development.

Given the depth of theory and scholarship on Families and the Life Course, a single semester can provide only an overview of the existing scholarship. However, the design of the course is such that, hopefully, students will acquire a way of thinking about families that will serve as a point of departure for pursuing their own research ideas. Indeed, the structure of the course assignments is such that students can explore their interests through critical analysis of the weekly readings and the completion of an empirical final paper.

PREREQUISITES:

This is a doctoral seminar and requires in-depth substantive and methodological analysis of empirical research articles. Students enrolled in this course should have completed an MA in Sociology or affiliated disciplines. Students who have not yet earned their MA may enroll provided they have successfully completed courses in multivariate regression and quantitative research methods. Strong oral and written communication skills are expected. This is a reading, writing, and discussion intensive course.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED READINGS:

1) Students are required to read six to eight (6-8) scientific articles and book chapters each week as specified in the Topic Plan that follows. You can access these readings under the Required Readings area of the course Blackboard site. All required readings are denoted by an ► in the accompanying Topic Plan.

2) In addition to the required readings for each topic, I have also included a number of other citations that are recommended for further reading on a topic. Students are not expected to be familiar with these readings for this course. However, these sources may be valuable for your final paper and as you pursue further graduate study, including preparation for the family comprehensive examination and the development of your dissertation proposal.
**COURSE FORMAT:**

Class meetings will be primarily discussion based. This seminar format is successful only in so far as participants take the opportunity to read assigned readings carefully and critically, and come prepared to discuss them along with their own ideas and questions about those readings. I may lecture on occasion to explore the logic and details of the required readings in more detail or to raise relevant material from suggested readings and other sources.

Given the seminar format of this course and the fact that it meets once a week, attendance at each class session is mandatory; **students who miss more than one class meeting will have their final grade penalized a full letter grade.** I may grant exceptions to this policy in the case of documented illness, death, or athletic/extra-curricular activities (e.g., attendance at a national conference), as well as for religious holidays. For an exception to be granted, you must notify me in advance of your absence for one of the aforementioned reasons and turn any assignment due beforehand. **Note that prior notification and early submission of an assignment in no way guarantees that your absence will be excused.**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Students successfully completing this course will critically analyze the readings, carefully integrate the sometimes disparate course material, and apply this material in novel ways. Students are expected and will be required to do more than simply “summarize” the course readings.

*This is a reading, writing, and discussion intensive course.* The following methods of evaluation will be used to measure careful analysis, integration and application of the course material:

1) **Class Participation**

   Students are expected to demonstrate their proficiency with the required readings through *regular and relevant* class participation, as determined subjectively at the end of the course, consistent with the demands of a doctoral seminar. Proficiency means that (1) you should be able to speak about all aspects (e.g., theory, analysis, findings) of an assigned reading and (2) you should have questions about each assigned reading. If you find that you do not have questions—points of clarification, application to other related research areas, issues of methodology, and the like—about each reading, this is a clear sign that you have not devoted sufficient time and attention to the material.

   Please note that in the interest of maintaining classroom discussion and equitable “airtime” among participants, I will call on students in class. Students who fail to respond or otherwise demonstrate that they have not devoted sufficient time to preparing for class will be penalized.

   Students will earn 15% of their final grade based on their Class Participation. 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).

2) **Weekly Critical Analysis Papers**

   Students will prepare short essays *integrating* and critically *analyzing* the assigned readings, to be turned in via Blackboard for weeks 2-12,14. Ten (10) Critical Analysis Papers are required meaning that students may elect not to turn in papers on two weeks of their choice—except Weeks 2 and 14: all students must submit a Critical Analysis on these weeks. If you submit more than ten Critical Analysis Papers, I will use your 10 highest scores to calculate your final grade. Given the flexibility to not complete two papers without penalty, late Critical Analysis Papers will **NOT** be accepted.

   You should approach the Weekly Critical Analysis Papers as if you were preparing an entry for the *Annual Review of Sociology*—that is, integrating the assigned readings to tell the reader something about the “state of the field,” identifying common themes and findings across readings, noting
contradictions between readings, and attempting to resolve the source of such disagreements. The analyses are not simply “summaries,” however a certain amount of summarization (certainly no more than a sentence or two) is of course required to provide the proper basis for your critique. That said, the most important component of any successful Critical Analysis Paper is … critical analysis. Thus, you should also identify unresolved issues, controversies, and directions for further inquiry following their appraisal and integration of the readings. The description of the content required in these Weekly Critical Analysis papers is purposefully vague as they may take many forms, depending on your interests and depth of knowledge. Most certainly, however, these are NOT to be “reaction” papers or article-by-article “summaries.” The objective is “to see the forest for the trees.”

Each Critical Analysis Paper is to be a minimum of three but not more than four (3–4) typed double-spaced pages, citing sources (in ASA format) for everything that is not an original idea. Students who provide opinions without supporting evidence will earn a failing grade.

All Critical Analysis Papers must be submitted by 1:45 pm on the day class meets. As students have sometimes expressed that class discussion would have been helpful in processing some more difficult aspects of the material, you will have the opportunity to revise your submission by 8 pm that same evening. Obviously, you must have submitted what you anticipated was a final version of your paper to be able to revise it.

Students will earn 50% of their final grade based on these 10 Critical Analysis Papers.

3) Final Paper and Presentation

Students will submit a final empirical research paper on a family topic of their choosing that is firmly grounded in a life course perspective. This paper should be prepared as a submission to a peer-reviewed journal—such as the Journal of Marriage and Family, Advances in Life Course Research, or another outlet. Papers should be no more than 25 double-spaced pages (all inclusive). The paper must include a well-developed front end with clear ties to the life course perspective and prior studies, empirical analyses (preferably with publicly-available data), and a complete discussion of the findings. Ideally, students will submit this paper (following revision) to ASA in January for presentation at the Annual Meeting in August. Students are responsible for securing IRB approval for the analysis of the data as applicable.

For guidance on how to organize and write an empirical paper, please see:


The purpose of the empirical final paper is to help students prepare original works for publication in peer-reviewed journals. To that end, you may find that it is more productive to “dovetail” with the requirements of another course. You may do this so long as you: (1) petition in writing me and the other instructor of your intent to dovetail; (2) receive written permission from me and the other instructor to do so; (3) and make clear how dovetailing will enhance substantively the final product(s) for both seminars.

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1 You will not be penalized for drawing on outside or recommended readings, but must show sufficient familiarity with all of the required readings each week. As the semester progresses, in order to demonstrate successful integration of the course material, you are expected to draw on relevant readings previously assigned in the course. If you cite material not listed on this syllabus, you must provide a full reference at the end of your paper (in ASA format).
Dovetailed final papers will be evaluated to a higher (subjective) standard than papers authored for this course alone. See me as soon as possible if you are thinking about dovetailing.

**Paper Deadlines:**

1) **Prospectus.** Students must submit a two-page (double-spaced) prospectus of their paper-topic for approval no later than the beginning of class on **Wednesday, September 21**th (Week 5). The prospectus must justify the need for the primary research question to be addressed, identify the data that will be used (including justification for using these data), describe the key concepts, and indicate the proposed analytic strategy. Think of this as a Specific Aims page for a grant proposal. I will return these with written comments no later than the following class. I encourage you to meet with me prior to submitting the prospectus to ensure that your topic is appropriate and the scope of coverage feasible.

   Students who submit a paper prospectus after the due date will receive a one-letter grade reduction on their final paper. *I will not accept any final papers on topics that have not been approved.*

2) **Optional Rough Draft.** I encourage students to submit a rough draft of their final paper no later than **5 pm on Tuesday, November 22nd**, but this is not required. I will return the draft with written comments and suggestions for improvement no later than **Wednesday, November 30th**.

3) **Presentation.** Students will deliver a 10-12 minute conference style presentation of their paper, followed by a question and answer period, on last day of class **Wednesday, December 7**th. Presentations should be delivered using PowerPoint or the like.

4) **Final Submission.** The final paper is due by **11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, December 13**th. Final papers must incorporate feedback received from the class presentation and, if applicable, the rough draft review.

   Students will earn the remaining 35% of their Final Grade based on the quality of their Presentation (10%) and Final Paper (25%).

**Submitting Assignments:**

You will submit all written work in this course through the Assignments tab on Blackboard; detailed instructions for how to do this can be found there. All assignments must be submitted in PDF format and follow the **Writing Guidelines** (posted under “Course Documents” on Blackboard).

*I will not accept late papers under any circumstances.* If you do not submit an assignment on time or submit only a partial assignment, you will receive a score of zero on that assignment.

**Grading Schema:**

All assignments in this course will be evaluated using a letter-based system. These letter grades and their corresponding percentages are as follows: A=95%; B=85%; C=75%; D=65%; and F= 50%. Plus/minus designations will also be used. A designation of + adds 3 percentage points to the above and a designation of – subtracts 3 percentage points. For example, a score of B+ corresponds to 88%, while a score of B- corresponds to 82%. Truly exceptional assignments, those that demonstrate a depth of knowledge and integration of material at the highest level and otherwise free from error, may be awarded a grade of A++ and scored at 100%. Other letter grade combinations will be used and correspond to the percentage midway between the constituent letter grades (e.g., A-/B+ is equivalent to 90%).
You will earn your final grade in this course based on your total weighted performance on each of the course requirements described above. Final grades in this course will be assigned as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Average Weighted Performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82%</td>
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Additional, lower, final course grades are possible following the system described above. However, the Department of Sociology policy is that the minimum acceptable grade in a course at the 800- or 900-level is a “B” and thus students must earn an average weighted performance of at least 85% on the course requirements. These percentage cut-offs are absolute. You must earn the average weighted percentage listed for each grade; I will not “round-up” final grades.

**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; 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/ja/code/three.shtml](http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml)).”

I strongly encourage students to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the UNL Student Code of Conduct, including what constitutes an academic integrity violation. As stated by the Office of Graduate Studies, “Graduate students are held to a ‘zero tolerance’ standard for all aspects of the Student Code of Conduct, including plagiarism” ([http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/plagiarism](http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/plagiarism)). It is my policy that any student found committing acts of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade in this course at minimum and will be reported the Chair of Graduate Studies, the Department Chair, and the UNL Judicial Officer. There are no exceptions to this policy.

**Right of Revision:**

I reserve the right to modify any aspect of this course syllabus, including the Course Requirements and Grading Schema, at any time as need be. All changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.