Department of Sociology  
*UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN*  

**FAMILIES AND THE LIFE COURSE**  
(Graduate Seminar in Family)  

Fall 2014

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**Course Information:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number:</th>
<th>SOCI 904-001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credits:</td>
<td>3 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Times:</td>
<td>W 2:00-4:35 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar Room:</td>
<td>Oldfather Hall 707</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td>Professor David Warner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office:</td>
<td>Oldfather Hall 726</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail:</td>
<td>dwarner3[at]unl[dot]edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Hours:</td>
<td>W 10:00am – 12 Noon or by appointment</td>
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**Course Description & Objectives:**

This seminar is designed to introduce students to the Sociology of the Life Course with a particular emphasis on the application of life course theory to the study of families and family processes. The structure of the course will expose students to the theory, methods, and substantive topics that exemplify the intersection of Life Course and Family Sociology. Of course, both of these specialties are inherently interdisciplinary in nature and thus course readings, while 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 and analyzing the study of 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 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 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. These readings are available in 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. You are not expected to be familiar with these readings for this course. However, these sources will undoubtedly be valuable for your final papers and as you pursue further graduate study, including in your preparation for your comprehensive examinations and the development of your dissertation proposal.
3) I also recommend that you read Howard Becker’s (1986/2007) *Writing for Social Scientists*. This is an excellent text by a renowned sociologist and prolific author on some of the common stumbling blocks that graduate students (and their professors) face in scholarly writing and practical solutions to avoiding these. Although I will not be assigning material explicitly, I encourage you to purchase a copy and (re)read it at your leisure. I promise that it will help you to more clearly express your thoughts, critically evaluate scholarly texts, and produce well-written, compelling assignments in this course (and in your careers).

**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, reactions, 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 memorize “facts” or “summarize” articles. *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**

Each class session has a set of six to eight (6-8) readings matched to it. Students are expected to demonstrate their proficiency with the readings through *regular and relevant* class participation, as determined 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 2-13. Ten (10) Critical Analysis Papers are required meaning that students may elect not to turn in papers on two weeks of their choice. If a student chooses to turn in more than ten Critical Analysis Papers, the 10 highest scores will be used to calculate their final grade. Given the flexibility to not complete two papers without penalty, late Critical Analysis Papers will **NOT** be accepted.

Students should approach the Weekly Critical Analysis Papers as if they 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, students 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 a student’s interests and depth of knowledge.¹ Most certainly, however, these are **NOT** to be “reaction” papers or article-by-article “summaries.”

Critical Analysis are to be a minimum of three but not more than four (3-4) type-written pages, citing sources (in ASA format) for everything that is not an original idea (*see* Writing Guidelines below). Students who provide opinions without supporting evidence will earn a failing grade. Papers should reflect a scholarly writing style: coherent and well-reasoned, integrative, and with a minimum of spelling and grammatical errors. These should be polished demonstrations of your writing and critical thinking abilities, not rough drafts.

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 life course theory. 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 30 double-spaced pages (all inclusive). The paper must include a well-developed front end with clear ties to life course theory and prior studies, empirical analyses using secondary 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:


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. Note that if you cite material not listed on this syllabus you must provide a full reference at the end of your paper (in ASA format).
The purpose of the empirical final paper is to help students prepare original works worthy of publication in peer-reviewed journals. To that end, students may find that it is more productive to "dovetail" with the requirements of another course or to collaborate with a student in this course:

A) Dovetailing with the requirements of other seminars in which you are enrolled is allowed provided that you (1) petition in writing me and the other instructor of your intent; (2) receive written permission from me and the other instructor to dovetail; (3) and make clear how substantively dovetailing will enhance the final product(s) for both seminars. Dovetailed final papers will be evaluated to a higher (subjective) standard than papers authored for this course alone.

B) Collaborating with another student in the class on the empirical paper is also allowed provided that you petition in writing your intent to do so and make clear why collaborating on the paper is justified (e.g., complimentary interests, analytic skills). Collaborative final papers will be evaluated to a higher (subjective) standard than sole-authored papers and each student will be required to submit a peer assessment of their co-author's contribution.

Students who wish to explore the possibility of dovetailing or collaborating with another student should meet with me as soon as possible.

**Paper Deadlines:**

1) **Prospectus.** Students must submit a one-page prospectus of their paper-topic for approval no later than the beginning of class on **Wednesday, September 17**th (Week 4). The prospectus must describe the primary research question to be addressed, the data that will be used (including justification for using these data), brief detail of the key concepts, and the proposed analytic strategy. I will return these with written comments no later than the following class. I encourage students to meet with me prior to submitting the prospectus to ensure that their topics are 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. So, for example, a student who writes an “A” paper, but turned in a late prospectus will earn a “B.” 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 **Friday, November 21**st, but this is not required. I will return the draft with written comments and suggestions for improvement no later than Wednesday, December 3**nd**.

3) **Presentation.** Students will prepare a 12 minute conference style presentation on their paper and deliver this on last day of class, **Wednesday, December 10**th. Presentations are to be 10 minutes in length, with the remaining time reserved for questions, and should be delivered using PowerPoint or some other similar presentation software.

4) **Final Submission.** The final paper is due by **3 p.m. on Wednesday, December 17**th. Late papers will not be accepted. 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 (5%) and Final Paper (25%).
**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 3.5 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%).

Students will earn their final grade in this course based on their total weighted performance on each of the course requirements described above. Final grades in this course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To earn a(n)</th>
<th>A+</th>
<th>students need an average weighted performance of at least</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
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Additional, lower, final course grades are possible following 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. Students 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. Indeed, the schedule of readings is only complete through the third week of class and the remaining weeks will be forthcoming. All changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.
**TOPIC OUTLINE & ASSIGNED READINGS**

**W 8/27  The Foundations of Life Course Theory**


* = Required Reading
An Overview of Life Course Theory

(WEEK 2)


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading


Granovetter, Mark S. “The Strength of Weak Ties.” *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360-1380


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading
W 10/15  Marriage and Partnership  (WEEK 8)


* = Required Reading
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg, Abbie E. and Aline Sayer</td>
<td>“Lesbian Couples’ Relationship Quality across the Transition to Parenthood.”</td>
<td><em>Journal of Marriage and Family 68:87-100.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading


* = Required Reading
WIDOW(ER)HOOD


* = Required Reading
**W 11/26**  
*No Class – Thanksgiving Break*

**W 12/3**  
*Revisiting Life Course Theory: Challenges and Critiques*  
(WEEK 14)


**W 12/10**  
*Student Final Paper Presentations*  
(Order to be Assigned)  
(WEEK 15)

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11.  
12.  

* = Required Reading