Sociology 247: Family and Modern Society
Fall 2023

Professor: Elaine Weiner (elaine.weiner@mcgill.ca)

Class Time: Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Location: ARTS W-120

Office Hours (Professor): Fridays 12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m. or by appointment (Campus office: LEA 732)
Teaching Assistant: see myCourses announcements for TA contact information and office hours

“A family is the nucleus of civilization.” – William James Durant

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.” – Jane Howard

Course Description

By definition, sociology involves the systematic study of human social behavior, interaction and organization. Sociologists are particularly interested in understanding how human social life is shaped by social forces (e.g., globalization) and social structures (e.g., class). This is a survey course designed to introduce you to the study of one particular institution of human social life – the family. In this class, we will explore a variety of concepts, methodologies, theoretical perspectives and empirical findings pertaining to the sociological study of family, with particular reference to Canadian and American families.

Course Materials

Most course materials are available via the myCourses site (e.g., assigned readings, Powerpoint slides etc…). Please insure that you check the site on a regular basis for announcements, etc. You should, however, use the URL links on this syllabus to link to assigned podcasts, videos, documentaries, etc… for listening and/or viewing.

Course Organization and Requirements

Class Format: I will lecture on Tuesdays and Fridays. Conferences will be held on Thursdays, during our regularly scheduled class time. No sign-up for conferences is required. No lecture, however, will be held on Friday, September 1st or Thursday, October 19th. You must attend at least six conferences, of your choosing, in order to receive credit (i.e., = 5% of your final grade). Should you attend any less than six you will receive no credit.

Listen, Watch & Read

These are the kinds of questions you should be thinking about as you are listening, watching and reading assigned materials in order to best process them:

1. What is/are the main point(s)?
2. What kind of evidence is relied on in order to make the point(s)? What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of evidence used/arguments made?
3. What are the larger implications of the point(s) made?

To further guide you towards thoughtful engagement with the assigned materials, I have devised some comprehension questions pertaining to the assigned materials (posted on myCourses). These are for your own study purposes.

I strongly encourage you to stay up-to-date on the assigned materials as this will enable you to most effectively synthesize them with lectures.

Course Requirements:

1 In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
Conference Attendance = 5%
3 ‘Think About It’ Responses – 45% (15% each) to be submitted online via the ‘Assignments’ link on myCourses
Midterm Exam = 20% (in class, Tuesday, October 17th)
Final Exam = 30% (to be scheduled during the final exam period)

Note: If you have a disability and require any special accommodations, please let me know.

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).

‘Think About It’ Responses

Think About It Responses involve applying what you are learning and promoting your critical engagement with course material. You are required to write three responses over the course of the semester. Detailed instructions and due dates for these responses are provided on myCourses.

Note: Please proofread your work, spelling errors/typos are not acceptable. You will lose 1% of your assignment grade for any such errors (= 1% per error).

Exams

I consider all materials in this course including readings, lectures, podcasts and documentaries/videos to be ‘fair game’ for exams. The midterm exam will be held in class on Tuesday, October 17th; it will be comprised of multiple choice and short answer questions. The final exam will be a three-hour exam, scheduled during the university’s final exam period, that is comprised of multiple choice, short answer and long essay questions. The final exam will be cumulative.

Note: The Midterm exam CANNOT be made up, except in instances of a doctor-verified illness, family emergency/death or a natural disaster. Also, according to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1., General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca.

Late Submission Policy

For each day that an assignment is late, the grade will be lowered by half a grade (e.g., if the initial grade is a B- and you submit the assignment a day late, your final paper grade will be a C+).

Copyright Protection

All materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) used in this course are protected by law and may not copied or distributed in any form without explicit instructor permission.

Additionally, infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Distraction-Free Zone

The use of mobile computing (e.g., laptops) or communication devices (e.g., cell phones, recorders) is not permitted without my permission (thus, please come equipped with paper and pencil or pen).

General Academic Policies

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L’université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l’on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l’étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).
Course Schedule

SECTION I: SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY: THE FOUNDATIONS

Topics: Defining 'Family' and How We Know What We Know about Families
August 31, September 5 and 8


SECTION II: FAMILIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: CRISIS, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Topic: Canadian and American Families in Historical Perspective
September 12 and 15


SECTION III: INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Topic: Dating and Love
September 19, 22 and 26

(https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/06/crazygenius-is-online-dating-destroying-romance/570154/) ~23 minutes


Topic: Cohabitation
September 29 and October 3


Topic: Marriage
October 6, 13 and 20

**MIDTERM (in class) Tuesday, October 17th**
Conference cancelled on Thursday, October 19th

Poptech (2011) “Stephanie Coontz: On Marriage” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwtb7jz8G4k) ~19 minutes

SECTION IV: HOUSEWORK AND PARENTING

**Topic: Reproductive Labor**
*October 24, 27, 31 and November 3*


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**Topic: Reproductive Labor**
*October 24, 27, 31 and November 3*


**Topic: Parenting**
*November 7, 10 and 14*


**SECTION V: FAMILY DISSOLUTION AND REFORMATION**

**Topics: Divorce and Remarriage**
*November 17 and 21*

- Wall Street Journal (2012) “Why ‘Grey Divorce’ is Surging” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCtFma4064k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCtFma4064k)) ~5 minutes


SECTION VI: TOWARDS A CARING SOCIETY; COURSE WRAP-UP

Topic: Towards a Caring Society
November 24 and 28 (Note: Thursday, November 30th follows a Monday schedule)


Roy, Katica. 2020. “I’m a Breadwinner Mom and This is Why Helping Women in the Sandwich Generation is Good for the Economy.” Fast Company April 17.

Topic: Course Wrap-Up and Review
December 5

NO READINGS ASSIGNED