McGill University
Sociology 247: Family and Modern Society
Fall 2008

Class Location: BURN 1B45
Class Meeting Times: 4:35 - 5:25 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays
Professor: Elaine Weiner
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. or by appointment
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“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

• Coursepack

The coursepack (prepared by Eastman Systems, Inc.) is available at the McGill University bookstore. A copy of the coursepack will also be placed on reserve in the McLennan-Redpath library. I will be using WebCT Vista to make available slide presentations, handouts, exam review sheets, etc…, so please check the course site on a regular basis.

Course Organization and Requirements

Class format: Lectures not only cover material from the readings, but also material which is not in the readings. So, while attendance is not mandatory, it is in your interest to attend lecture. Additionally, in order to be best-prepared, you should do the readings as scheduled (see the “course schedule” below). This will enable you to better follow my lectures and to most effectively synthesize lecture and reading materials.

CONFERENCES: Conferences will be held every Friday (locations and times TBA), with the exception of Friday, September 5th on which day I will lecture. No sign-up is necessary. You must attend 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.

Reading: These are the kinds of questions you should be thinking about as you are doing your reading for this course in order to best mentally process the materials:

1. What point or argument is the author trying to make?
2. How does the author go about supporting his/her argument? What kind of evidence is s/he relying on? What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of his/her argument and/or research?

3. What are the implications of the author’s argument and/or findings?

Course Requirements:

Mid-term Exam = 30% (Monday, October 20th)
Final Exam = 35% (to be scheduled during the final exam period)
Papers = 30% (due Monday, December 1st)
Conference Attendance = 5%

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

Exams
I consider all materials in this course including readings, lectures, videos, and discussions to be “fair game” for the exams. Exams are comprised of a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions.

Note: The Midterm exam CANNOT be made up, except in instances of doctor-verified illness, family emergency/death or 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.

Paper
You are required to write a paper, ~8-10 pages in length (double-spaced) (further guidelines will be made available on WEBCT Vista). This paper is due Monday, December 1st).

“The State of the Family: Recommendations to Government”: You have been called as an “expert” on the family to address the Canadian Parliament (or the U.S. Congress, your choice). You are to write a short briefing and to conclude with a few recommendations to the government as to what kinds of actions you believe it should take in order to improve the contemporary circumstances of families in Canada (or the U.S.).

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

General
Academic
Policies
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information.
Course Schedule

SECTION I: SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY: THE FOUNDATIONS

September 3 and 5
Topic(s): COURSE INTRODUCTION; DEFINING “FAMILY”

September 8, 10 and 15
Topic(s): CRISIS OR CHANGE?: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE FAMILY; FAMILY THEORIES AND METHODS

SECTION II: CANADIAN AND AMERICAN FAMILIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

September 17 and 22
Topic(s): CANADIAN AND AMERICAN FAMILIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

September 24
Topic(s): THE FAMILY OF THE ’50s

SECTION III: PREMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

September 29, October 1, 6, and 8 (Monday, October 8th NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Holiday)
Topic(s): COURTSHIP/DATING AND SEX

**In-class video showing: Love in the Twenty-First Century (Nightline)**

### October 15

**Topic(s): COHABITATION**


### SECTION IV: MARRIAGE

**October 22, 27 and 29
Topic(s): MARRIAGE: HETEROSEXUAL AND HOMOSEXUAL**


**In-class video showing: God Only Knows: Same Sex Marriage**

*In-conference video showing: Why Get Married? (also on 4-hour reserve at the McLennan-Redpath Library)*

### SECTION V: HOUSEWORK AND PARENTING

**November 3 and 5
Topic(s): REPRODUCTIVE LABOR**


**November 10 and 12
Topic(s): MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD**


**In-class video showing: Daddy and Papa**

November 17 and 19

**Topic(s):** REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES


**In-class video showing: Genetically Correct: Ensuring Perfect Babies**

SECTION VI: FAMILY DISSOLUTION AND REFORMATION

November 24 and 26

**Topic(s):** DIVORCE AND SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES; REMARRIAGE AND BLENDED FAMILIES


SECTION VII: VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY; COURSE SUMMATION

December 1

**Topic(s):** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE


December 2

**Topic(s):** COURSE SUMMATION