**Course Description:**

“Balancing work and family” is one of the catch-phrases of the decade, reflecting the challenges of successfully meeting both work and family responsibilities. This course will examine the social and demographic changes that have put work and family on the policy agenda, the different strategies used to balance work and family, and the impact of those strategies on women, men, and children. We will discuss social theories about employment decisions, social change, social norms, and issues of gender and socioeconomic equality. We will conclude with a broad overview of the responses of employers and government to current work-family issues, which will be followed by an in-depth examination of parental leave policies.

**Course Format:**

This course is designed to be an interactive exploration of a new topic. As such, there are readings assigned for every class period. You will be expected to complete these readings and will frequently be given discussion questions to think about as you read, which will focus the following day’s discussion. Class time will be used for lecture, discussion, and work on components of the course assignments listed below.

**Course Requirements:**

**Class Preparation and Participation:**

Short assignments will frequently be given out at the end of class to guide your reading and help you prepare for the following day’s discussion. These assignments will be collected periodically and will be graded with a check, check plus or check minus. Since this course will be much more interesting if everyone participates in class discussions, 5 points of your final grade will reflect your classroom participation; another 5 points will reflect your classroom preparation.

**Assignment 1: Work and Family: Perceptions versus Realities**

Work and family are issues frequently discussed in the contemporary media and in people’s everyday lives. Sometimes our perceptions about what’s going on in people’s lives are accurate, other times our perceptions differ markedly from reality. On the first day of class, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about your perceptions of current work and family issues. For the next few days, we will learn the facts about these issues. For this assignment, you will be asked to write a short paper (2-3 pages) comparing your original perceptions of work and family issues to the actual data presented in class. Were your original perceptions accurate? Were there places where they differed from the statistics discussed in class? Where do you think your original perceptions came from (e.g. from observing people in your community, from your family, from the media, from things you have read, etc)?

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to think critically about your perceptions of the social world, of particular social phenomenon (work and family issues in this case), and about where these perceptions come from. We all look at the world from our own viewpoint and base our perceptions in part on our own experiences. It is important to be aware of these when we start reading about a new subject.

**Assignment 2: Linking Theories to ‘Real World’ Decisions**

In this project, you will each select someone to interview about his or her work and family decisions, particularly during the years when they had small children. How do new parents decide whether and how much to work? What factors influence work-family decisions? How do people feel about these choices several years later? You will present your interview findings to the class so that we have a group of interviews to use for discussion and analysis. After classroom
discussion, you will write a 7-8 page paper relating the choices and decisions of the respondents to the theoretical models of employment and the division of labor discussed in class.

*Note: All students must complete a short, on-line human subjects training for this project.*

This project serves two purposes. First, it encourages you to critically think about the different theories of women’s employment and couples’ division of labor by examining them in the context of individual life histories. In addition, the interview and subsequent discussions will expose you to the advantages and limitations of qualitative research.

**Exams**

There will be two take-home exams during the semester – one midterm and one final exam. Both will include short answer and essay questions, requiring you to understand and apply information and concepts from class readings and discussion.

**Evaluation and Grading**

- 10% Class preparation and participation
- 10% Assignment 1 (short paper)
- 25% Assignment 2 (interview project and paper)
- 25% Mid-Term Exam
- 30% Final Exam

**Course Outline:**

The course has been broken up into several sections. These sections are listed in bold. Below each section is a list of key questions that we will be discussing during that time. Each day of class is listed in the syllabus. All readings and major assignments due that day are listed under the date.

**Section 1: Yesterday and Today: Trends in work and family arrangements**

1. How do today’s work and family arrangements compare with those of previous generations?
2. Are changes occurring in the United States happening in other countries?

**June 23 – Introduction**

**June 24: Background Information**


**June 25: Background Information**


**June 26: The Media and Social Science Research & Putting Research Results in Historical Perspective**

Section 2: Sociological Concepts and Theories

1. What do we mean by “work” and “family” and how have these institutions changed?
2. How does social change occur? How do individuals, norms, and institutions interact?
3. What are the primary theories explaining changes in women’s employment behavior?

June 27: The Institutions of Work and Family

June 30: More on Institutions and Social Change

Assignment 1 Due: Work and Family: Perceptions versus Realities


July 1: Theories of Women’s Employment

July 2: Qualitative Research Methods in Social Science Inquiry
Handouts

July 3: Linking Theory to Research: Designing the Interview Protocol

Handouts

Human subjects training must be complete

July 4: No Class

Section 3: The Influence of Changing Work and Family Strategies on Women, Men, and Children

1. How are women and men balancing work and family? What are the challenges they face? What are the rewards?
2. How do work-family strategies and concerns differ by race and class?
3. How do parents’ work-family strategies influence children’s development?

July 7: Overview

Interviews must be done – discussion of main findings
Moen - “Implications for Marriages, Families and Children” p. 61-95

July 8: The Gender Wage Gap

July 9: “The Wages of Motherhood”

July 10: “The Second Shift”


July 11: What’s Stressful – work or home?

July 14: Presentation & Discussion of Interview Projects
Assignment 2 Due: Linking Theories to ‘Real World’ Decisions

July 15: Families and Time


July 16: Alternative Caregivers: Nannies, Fathers


July 17: Effects on Children


July 21  MIDTERM EXAM DUE by 5:00 pm

Section 4: Workplace and Social Policy Responses
1. What are possible ways to reduce work-family conflict?
2. What role do values, goals, and ideologies play in policy-making?
3. What are the possible positive and negative consequences of different policy options?

July 22 (Tues): Overview
Moen – “Implications for Employers, Unions, and Governments” and “Conclusions and Implications” p. 97-133.
July 23 (Wed): Values and Ideology in Social Policy


July 24 (Thurs): Policies in Writing & Policies in Practice
Handouts

July 25 (Fri): Workplace Policies – and Review of Midterm Exams
Rewrites of papers due in class – hand in original papers as well.

a. Parental Leave: An In-Depth Example

July 28 (Mon): Introduction to Parental Leave
Handouts on national and state parental leave policy.


July 29 (Tues): Parental Leave in International Perspective

July 30 (Wed): The Impacts of Parental Leave

July 31 (Thurs): Debating Parental Leave Options
Handouts

August 1 (Fri): Putting it All Together

August 4 FINAL EXAM DUE by 4:00 pm