**Contemporary Families in the United States**

HDFS 201 Spring 2017: Online

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**Course Description**

An introduction to families with application to personal life. Focuses on diversity in family structure, social class, race, gender, work and other social institutions.

**Course Learning Outcomes**

1. Use theoretical frameworks to interpret the role of the family within social process and institutions.
2. Describe the nature, value, and limitations of the basic methods of studying individuals and families.
3. Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in inequity.
4. Explain how difference is socially constructed.
5. Analyze current social issues, including the impact of historical and environmental influences, on family development.
6. Analyze ways in which the intersections of social categories such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, interact with the country’s institutions to contribute to difference, power, and discrimination amongst families.
7. Synthesize multiple viewpoints and sources of evidence to generate reasonable conclusions.

**HDFS 201 Contemporary Families in the United States** fulfills the Social Processes and Institutions (SPI) and Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) requirements in the Baccalaureate Core for Oregon State University.

Human beings are inevitably social, influencing and being influenced by social groups. The social sciences study social institutions and processes and deal with the human behaviors and values that form and change them, and are essential for an understanding of contemporary society.

The DPD requirement engages students in the intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. The unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the United States and in other countries is sustained through a variety of individual beliefs and institutional practices. These beliefs and practices have tended to obscure the origins and operations of social discrimination such that this unequal power distribution is often viewed as the natural order. Examination of DPD course material is intended to enhance meaningful democratic participation in our college community and our increasingly multicultural U.S. society.

**Class Structure and Content**

There are lectures, discussions and reflections every week, in addition to the assignments and examinations, which will help facilitate bridging theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

The content we cover in this class will challenge many assumptions you have, which is good. Although challenging one's assumptions is healthy, it might not always feel that way. When exposed to new knowledge, it is very normal to feel frustrated and overwhelmed. So, I ask you to keep an open mind as we proceed through this class together. I promise you, it will be worth it!

**Class Structure Spring 2017**

**LBCC Comprehensive Statement of Nondiscrimination**

LBCC prohibits unlawful discrimination based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, use of native language, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, veteran status, age, or any other status protected under applicable federal, state, or local laws.

**Required Materials**

* Cherlin, A. J. (2010). *Public and Private Families: An Introduction* (**7th Ed.**) Boston: McGraw Hill (Using the 6th or 8th editions are fine as well, although there are some terminology/content differences).

Three additional readings:

* Johnson, Allen (nd).  [“The Social Construction of Difference”.](http://www.odec.umd.edu/CD/UNIVERSAL%20READINGS/The%20Social%20Construction%20of%20Difference%20Johnson.pdf) (pp. 15-20.)
* Kaufelt, Kathleen (1994). Race, gender & class: Social Class: By Design or Default? (pp. 117-119; 125-127; 132-135). **(LINK THROUGH MOODLE)**
* Rishoi, Christy (2003)**.** [Identity and the Coming-of-Age Narrative.](http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/60745.pdf) (pp. 1-10).
* There will also be some shorter readings, and additional resources that are not listed here, but are in Moodle in the appropriate weeks. **More readings may be added as the term progresses.**
* Ability to access and utilize Moodle, Turnitin within Moodle, your LBCC email, Google Drive, and LBCC Library databases regularly.

**Evaluation**

1. **2 minute reflections:** There are eight 2 minute reflections worth 10 points each, for a total of 80 points for the term. Points will be awarded on quality and thoughtfulness. These 2 minute reflections focus on synthesizing information (readings, lectures, discussions, etc.) we have covered, and the practical application of these ideas to your life. In essence, these reflections are a self-check to ensure you are retaining the information we are covering, while also being able to apply these concepts to the real world. All reflections will involve [critical thinking](http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/10/11/essay-what-political-campaign-shows-about-need-critical-thinking) and the [higher levels of thinking as defined by Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy](http://ww2.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm) (analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, creating).
2. **Discussion Boards:** There are 8 discussions boards, worth 10 points each, for a total of 80 points for the term. In these discussions you will post a response to the prompt/question, then reply to a minimum of two students. As was aforementioned, the content in this class can resonate deeply and challenge beliefs you have, which is good, so please post and respond to fellow students in respectful ways. Also, please be prepared to connect class content to your initial posts. **You must do both the initial post to the prompt/question and the responses to two students for full credit.**
3. **Movie/Documentary Review:** For this assignment, which is worth 50 points, you are to choose one movie or documentary that deals with diverse familial structures in the United States; you will then write a review. The movie or documentary must cover and be relatable to class content. If you have questions as to whether or not the movie or documentary you selected will work for this assignment, you can email me with questions. See the assignment details for more information.
4. **Journal Article Review:** For this assignment, which will be worth 50 points, you will pick one scholarly article (by utilizing the LBCC databases) that deals with a topic of your choice, and write a review. Note, that the topic must be relatable to class content we have covered, or will cover during the course of the term. If you have questions as to whether or not the journal article you selected will work for this assignment, you can email me with questions. See the assignment details for more information.
5. **Extra Credit Paper:** For extra credit, you will have the opportunity to write a coming of age narrative, which will be worth 20 points. See the assignment for more details.
6. **Midterm Essay Questions:** At midterm time (week 5) you will answer 1 - 3 essay questions. It will be heavily focused on the Difference, Power, and Discrimination and Social Processes and Institutions aspects of this course. The exam is open note and book. The exam questions will be available week 4. The exam is worth 100 points.
7. **Final Essay Question:** At the end of the term you will demonstrate your understanding of current issues, how social processes and institutions influence families, and the variations in power and discrimination they experience based on their differences. Doing this requires you to evaluate and to synthesize class material. As with the midterm, the final is open note and book. The exam question will be available week 10. The final exam is worth 100 points.
8. **Lectures/Readings:** Although you will not be evaluated on the lectures/readings, they are a critical component to this course. The lecture powerpoints in some weeks are more general, and in some weeks more specific. They are a complement to the book, not a replacement. **You will be expected to draw from the powerpoints/book in all of your assignments.** Sometimes there will be links to websites, and short videos embedded within the powerpoints. They are there to provide more examples to help contextualize the information.

**A Note on Due Dates**

* All due dates are located on the syllabus. **On these days, the work us due by 11:55 pm.**

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| **Evaluation Totals**  Midterm Exam 100 points  Final Exam 100 points  2 Minute Reflections 80 points  Discussion Boards 80 points  Documentary Review 50 points  Journal Article Review 50 points  Total Points Possible: 460 points | **Grading Scale**  A = 414-460  B = 368-413  C = 322-367  D = 276-321  F = 275 or less | **Remember that the evaluation totals and grading scale DO NOT include the extra credit paper.** |

**Instructor’s Notes**

It is my purpose to help you understand the concepts in this class as deeply as possible.  I want you to retain these concepts in your long-term memory, as opposed to your short-term memory. To reach this goal, we will all engage in critical thinking. What is critical thinking? [Take a look at this article (linked and attached) and pay attention especially to numbers one, two, and five.](http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/10/11/essay-what-political-campaign-shows-about-need-critical-thinking) I’ll be looking for you to question and think in a critical manner throughout the course. If you are unfamiliar with this kind of thinking, there will be exercises to help you learn how to approach materials critically.

The assignments are intended to help you make personal and cultural connections to the course content, and to support the development of your [*sociological imagination*.](http://sites.middlebury.edu/utopias/files/2013/02/The-Promise.pdf) How is what we are studying relevant to your daily life? Can you look at your life experience from an alternative view? Making these kinds of connections is both more challenging and more rewarding than merely memorizing content.

I make it a high priority to grade your work promptly (usually within one week post due date). **Late work is an exception, and will be graded at the Instructor’s discretion,** **following the grading of all on-time work from all of my classes.**If you submit late work, you may not see the evaluative grade until the end of the term.

**Campus Resources**

Many resources such as the Library, Learning Center, the Writing Desk, and Family Connections, are available to you as a student. They are described on the LBCC website.

You should email/meet with your instructor during the first week of class if:

* You have a documented disability and need accommodations,
* Your instructor needs to know medical information about you, or
* You need special arrangements in the event of an emergency.

If you have not accessed services and think you may need them, please contact Disability Services/Center for Accessibility Services in Red Cedar Hall or at 917-4789. If you have documented your disability, remember that you must complete a Request for Accommodations form every term in order to receive accommodations.

**Tools for Success**

* Login to Moodle at least three times a week.
* Plan for upcoming assignments before they are due.
* Be prepared to question, think, and discuss the material.

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| **Week** | **Topic** | **Readings** | **Assignments** | **Due Dates** |
| **1**  *April, 3* | The Study of Families and Theoretical Perspectives; Diverse Family Structures. | Syllabus, Chapters 1 & 2 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection** | **Thursday 4/6**  **Saturday 4/8**  **Sunday 4/9**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **2**  *April, 10* | Gender; the social construction of difference and discuss Movie/Documentary Review | Chapter 3 &  [The Social Construction...](http://www.odec.umd.edu/CD/UNIVERSAL%20READINGS/The%20Social%20Construction%20of%20Difference%20Johnson.pdf) article | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Reminder: Movie/Documentary Review Due Next Week** | **Thursday 4/13**  **Saturday 4/15**  **Sunday 4/16**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **3**  *April, 17* | Social Class and Poverty | Chapter  4 & Race, gender & class: Social Class: By Design or Default? Conceptualization of Poverty as Hegemonic Discourse (**link through Moodle**) | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Movie/Documentary Review Due** | **Thursday 4/20**  **Saturday 4/22**  **Sunday 4/23**  **Sunday 4/23**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **4**  *April, 24* | Race and Ethnicity; Social Policy, and discuss Midterm | Chapters 5 & 14 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Reminder: Midterm Exam Paper Due Next Week** | **Thursday 4/27**  **Saturday 4/29**  **Sunday 4/30**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **5**  *May, 1* | Sexualities | Chapter 6 & [Identity and the Coming of Age Narrative](http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/60745.pdf) | **Midterm Exam Paper Due** | **Sunday 5/7**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **6**  *May, 8* | Cohabitation and Marriage, and discuss Journal Article Review | Chapter 7 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Reminder: Journal Article Review Due Next Week** | **Thursday 5/11**  **Saturday 5/13**  **Sunday 5/14**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **7**  *May, 15* | Divorce and Stepfamilies, and discuss Extra Credit Paper | Chapters 12, 13 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Journal Article Review Due** | **Thursday 5/18**  **Saturday 5/20**  **Sunday 5/21**  **Sunday 5/21**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **8**  *May, 22* | Working Families | Chapter 8 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Reminder: Extra Credit Paper Due Next Week** | **Thursday 5/25**  **Saturday 5/27**  **Sunday 5/28**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **9**  *May, 29* | Parent-Child Relations, the Elderly and Families | Chapters  9 & 10 | **Discussion post**  **Respond to two students**  **2-minute reflection**  **Extra Credit Paper: Coming of Age Paper Due** | **Thursday 6/1**  **Saturday 6/3**  **Sunday 6/4**  **Sunday 6/4**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |
| **10**  *June, 5* | Intimate Partner Violence  Final Review | Chapter 12 | **Reminder: Final Exam Paper Due Next Week** | **No work due;**  **prepare for final paper.** |
| **11**  ***June, 12*** | ***Finals Week*** | N/A | **Final Essay Exam Paper Due** | **Tuesday 6/13**  **Due by 11:55 pm on each day.** |

*The Instructor reserves the right to make changes in the course schedule. Changes will be announced in class and posted in the live link to this syllabus (from Moodle).*

\*Class days are scheduled for you to write and submit your essay exams. These may change if there are one or more snow/closure days or instructor illness that affect the class schedule.  *Jeff*

**What Exactly is Critical Thinking? From *Inside Higher Ed,*** October 11, 2012

## By [Paul Gary Wyckoff](https://www.insidehighered.com/users/paul-gary-wyckoff)

Everyone applauds the idea of critical thinking, and liberal arts colleges often make their ability to teach critical thinking a key selling point. But no one seems to define what they mean by that term.

As I prepared for the start of classes this fall, I tried to pinpoint the critical thinking skills I really want my students to learn. And as I listened to public debates on everything from tax policy to Obamacare, five essential thinking skills seemed to be missing, again and again. So, based on our dysfunctional national dialogue, here are the "core competencies" I hope to instill in my students:

**1. The ability to think empirically, not theoretically.** By this I mean the habit of constantly checking one's views against evidence from the real world, and the courage to change positions if better explanations come along. I have great admiration for scholars like Richard Muller, the University of California physicist and global warming skeptic, whose work was heavily funded by the conservative Koch brothers. When new, more comprehensive data from his own research team provided convincing evidence of global temperature increases, [Muller changed his mind, and later sounded the alarm about carbon dioxide emissions.](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/opinion/the-conversion-of-a-climate-change-skeptic.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) Unfortunately, however, much of our public debate on many issues seems to be a clash of theoretical world views, with neither side willing to dispassionately examine the evidence or modify their views. In Congress, the individuals most willing to change their minds – the moderates – have been systematically driven out by more extreme candidates who are dedicated to holding fast to their predetermined positions, regardless of subsequent facts.

**2. The ability to think in terms of multiple, rather than single, causes.** When you drop a book, it will fall on the floor -- a single-cause event. But most of the interesting things in the world have multiple causes; educational success, for example, is affected by a student's aptitude, but also by the educational achievements of the student's parents, the quality of the school he or she attends, and the attitudes and intelligence of the other students in that school. In such cases, simple comparisons become unreliable guides to action, because the effects of intervening variables haven't been screened out. So, for example, judging a president by Reagan's famous question – "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" – implicitly assumes that presidential actions are the only variable affecting the economy. This is, of course, nonsense – our globalized economy is affected by a huge variety of factors, including exchange rates, oil prices, the fate of the European Union, the strength of the Chinese economy, and so on. In these situations, we need higher-order analysis that adjusts for these external factors to gauge the true effect of a policy.

**3. The ability to think in terms of the sizes of things, rather than only in terms of their direction.** Our debates are largely magnitude-free, but decisions in a world with constrained resources always demand a sense of the sizes of various effects. For example, President Obama contends that investments in education and infrastructure are crucial to the nation’s future growth. And it makes intuitive sense that better-educated workers would be more productive, and that repaired highways could transport goods to market more quickly and at lower cost. But Republicans are dead-set against new taxes to pay for these investments. In such a polarized situation, the only way to finance these programs would be to borrow money, and these days much of the government’s borrowed funds are supplied by overseas investors from places like China and Japan. The interest payments on government bonds, then, are a real hindrance to economic growth. The wisdom of these investments, therefore, depends critically on the magnitude of the two effects. How big are the payoffs from investments in education and infrastructure? How much of our debt is owned by foreigners, and what interest rate will we have to pay to them? These kinds of debates cannot be solved by looking only at the direction of anticipated effects, because without quantification, we have no basis for comparison of those effects. In politics and policy, size matters.

**4. The ability to think like foxes, not hedgehogs.** In his seminal book, *Expert Political Judgment*, Philip Tetlock followed Isaiah Berlin in distinguishing between hedgehogs, who know one big thing and apply that understanding to everything around them, and foxes, who know many small things and pragmatically apply a "grab bag" of knowledge to make modest predictions about the world. In his study of hundreds of foreign policy experts over 20 years, Tetlock showed that foxes outperform hedgehogs in making predictions, and hence tend to make better decisions. But our current political climate favors hedgehogs, because they tend to be more confident, forceful, and predictable in their views. Mitt Romney's choice of Paul Ryan as a running mate can be seen as an attempt by a fox (Romney) to capture some of the allure and excitement surrounding a hedgehog (Ryan).

**5. The ability to understand one's own biases.** An expanding literature in psychology and behavioral economics suggests that we are full of unconscious biases, and a failure to understand these biases contributes to poor decision-making. Perhaps the most common and dangerous of these is confirmation bias, the tendency to seek out information in accordance with our previous views and ignore or dismiss information contrary to those views. This undermines our ability to weigh the evidence in an evenhanded manner. Our media culture reinforces this problem, as liberals have their MSNBC, *The Nation, The New York Times* and think tanks like the Center for American Progress, while conservatives have their Fox News*,* the *National Review, The Wall Street Journal* and the Heritage Foundation. In the current world, no one need bear the inconvenience of contrary information.

In general, our public debates are textbook examples of non-critical thinking. But these five traits can provide a foundation for a more enlightened dialogue in the future. And students with these skills will think about their world in a deeper, more constructive way.

*Paul Gary Wyckoff is professor of government and director of the Public Policy Program at Hamilton College.*

