

Sociology of Families

(MWF 14:00 – 15:50, July 3 – Aug 14)
University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta
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The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor’s office or the Department main office. Term assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor’s office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

Ethics Research: Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

Synopsis

I am thrilled that you decided to take this course. Welcome! Sociology is my area of interest and it is my pleasure to introduce you to its main concepts. Through the summer we will be looking at various aspects of the family historically and contemporarily, its various forms, and the various sociological ways to understand it.

Course Materials

Ambert, A-M. (2006) **Changing Families: Relationships in Context**. Toronto: Pearson.

An Important Note about Attendance

You are paying for this course, or someone who loves you is paying for it. You should thus come to class if only to get your money’s worth. This aside, attendance for this course is not mandatory. However, you should attend every class because the material you will be responsible for may not be found in the course books. Although we will cover most of the assigned textbook, I will bring in other relevant topics in the lectures. If you miss a class, you will have difficulty finding the information elsewhere. You may certainly photocopy a classmate’s notes, but it is my experience that other people’s notes are never as thorough as one’s own. Thus, although it is up to you to come to class, missing any class will likely interfere with you getting good grades.

Course Format

Will I lecture endlessly? This depends on you. Lectures can be tedious if given in a traditional manner. Often students forget what is said, dwell on details, and worry about which minutia of what the instructor said will be on the exam. I hope to prevent this. The course format will thus be an interactive lecture. I will talk a lot, but I encourage you to do the same. I will bring in relevant examples from my own experience, and I encourage you to do the same. If we do this, then the classroom will be a place of learning and not simply a place of dry information transfer. It will also be interesting. If you are a shy person believing that your life is insignificant in the grand scheme of things, note that sociology sees all lives as important. It is often concerned with experience of everyday life, and your experience is no exception. So don’t be afraid to speak up. If you hear only from me, you will be bored. If you hear from your classmates as well, you will not be bored.

Evaluation

People might see courses in sociology as a survey of facts. They might think that they will learn the latest statistics as well as the latest societal trends. This is not true of my course. Statistics are interesting but they are ephemeral – those a decade ago may be different than those of today. Instead, I am far more interested in conceptual learning – i.e., in the ability to think! I would like students to have the tools for understanding families and some practice in applying those tools. This course, therefore, is mostly about writing. I will not test you on your knowledge of statistics or dates. Instead, I will ask you to write critical thinking essays with logically laid out arguments.

You will be evaluated in three ways:	(1)	3 Take-Home Essays	35%
	(2)	1 Mid-term Exam	30%
	(3)	1 Final Exam	35%

(1) Take Home Essays: You will be invited to write three take-home essays, the first worth **5%** and the second and third worth **15%** each. For each assignment, I will give you one or more questions based on the text and lectures, you will take them home, ponder over them laboriously, and write an answer of 400 to 500 words for each one. You will then hand the final product in within seven calendar days or less. These essays are critical thinking exercises rather than research papers. You thus need nothing more than your text book and lecture notes -- and your brain. I hope that you have these things. Why is the first essay worth only **5%**? I am a fascist about spelling, grammar, and format. It is my experience that students do poorly on the first essay because of how they write it. To provide you with copious feedback on your writing, I am thus assigning the first essay for only nominal points so you may benefit from this feedback and apply to the next two essays. I will explain these essays further in class. I will also discuss the importance of good writing.

(2) Mid-Term Exam: This exam will be given in class. It will cover the first five chapters of the text book. There will be multiple choice questions, some short answers, and a choice of essays.

(3) Final Exam: This exam will be given during final exam week. It will cover chapters six to eleven of the text book. It will look exactly like the mid-term exam, only it will be a bit longer and there will be different stuff on it.

Exam Policies: You must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take an exam. All requests for deferral of an examination due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferred exams may be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. If you have missed an exam for a legitimate reason, you will be able to write a "make up" exam as close to the original exam as possible. The date and location will be at the convenience of the Sociology Department. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferred exam. Deferred exams will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

Grading

(1) Percentages and Equivalents

A+ = 95 - 100
A = 90 - 94
A- = 85 - 89

B+ = 80 - 84
B = 76 - 79
B- = 72 - 75

C+ = 67 - 71
C = 63 - 66
C- = 59 - 62

D+ = 54 - 58
D = 50 - 53
F = 00 - 49

(2) What do These Grades Mean?

A+	4.00	- Outstanding
A	4.00	- Excellent – superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.
A-	3.70	
B+	3.30	
B	3.00	- Good – clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.
B-	2.70	
C+	2.30	
C	2.00	- Satisfactory – basic understanding of the subject matter.
C-	1.70	
D+	1.30	
D	1.00	- Minimal pass – marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject.
F	0.00	- Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.

- Receipt of a grade point average of 1.70 may not be sufficient for promotion or graduation (See individual undergraduate-faculty regulations).

Handing in Papers Outside of Class, Return of Final Papers, and Release of Final Grades

1. When students are unable to submit papers at class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant rather than at the Sociology Department main office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the Sociology Department main office. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, (i.e., outside an instructor's office, the department office, etc.). Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will only be available for pick-up during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology department. They are only available online.

(3) The ZZZZZ Factor of Grading, and Grading Appeal

Multiple choice questions are easy to grade and a trained porcupine could do so as easily as a professor. Subjective essays are more complex. While there are certainly objective criteria, there is a subjective element that only someone with years of experience can apply. While it is simple to sort essays into "exceptional," "above average," and so on, it is difficult to discern the differences between **A** and **A-** or **A-** and **B+**. How do I do this? Objective content notwithstanding, the only answer I can give you is that the higher grade was a matter of **Zing! Zest! Zippiness! Zap! and Zeal!** -- otherwise known as the **ZZZZZ-factor**. In other words, essays that receive the highest grades are those whose arguments, logical format, and use of words are superior to those that do not.

While I have more experience in grading essays than you (probably over 100,000 graded at this point), I reluctantly admit that I am not infallible. Thus, if you feel that you have been done a dirty deal and deserve a higher grade, hand me back the graded essay within a week and write down the reasons why you believe your grade should be higher. Be brief, but be specific. An acceptable critique might be "*Your marginal comment tells me that you did not understand what I meant.*" An unacceptable critique might be "*I mean come on dude!! At least I wrote the stupid thing, didn't I?*" I will then take your comments and re-evaluate your essay carefully. If I have mistreated you, I will correct my errors. Remember however that instructors as a rule are boring old people with no lives. They thus have all the time in the world to read your essays carefully at first sitting.

Grading Logic (as well as advice) for Take Home Essays

Some students think that instructors look at essays and grade them according to their mood. If it is income tax time, the proportion of F's goes up. Please be assured that this is not the case. Here is the logic that I will use to grade your papers.

(1) Does the student respond to the question, or does he/she write about matters irrelevant to it?

Quite often, I find that students begin to answer a question and then go on to matters having nothing to do with what is asked. If you are asked to write an essay comparing American and Canadian crime rates, then the chemical composition of alcohol or housing shortages in Argentina are not relevant. Everything in your essay should pertain only to the question. You will lose points for subjects not relevant.

(2) Is the student able to apply the concepts involved and make logical connections among them?

If, for example, you are asked to apply a particular theory to events that take place in social life, can you actually do this? Can you explain the concepts of the theory and show how they are relevant to the matter at hand and *vice versa*?

(3) Does the student leave himself or herself out of the essay? One mistake students often make is to write about themselves when they have not been asked to do so. If, for example, you are asked to explain crime as a consequence of poverty, it is irrelevant that your Aunt Prudence was poor, that you volunteer at a soup kitchen, that you brought a homeless person in for Christmas, or that you don't have enough money to pay for this course. It is also irrelevant how you were raised, what you had for dinner the night before, or which brands of lipstick you believe do not smudge. Get the point? *The essay is about the question being asked. It is not about you and you are not the centre of the universe!*

(4) Is the student's essay free of bias, moral judgment, religious dogma, emotion, exaggeration, sensationalism, hyperbole, or melodrama? There is no need to tell me that rape, child molestation, and murder are bad things. I already believe this and I assume in advance that you also feel this way. So we should just pull ourselves together and move on. Sociology is a discipline which attempts to look at events, traits, and behaviours as accurately and objectively as possible, and assess them theoretically. It does not go beyond this. It makes no assumptions about the existence or non-existence of God, nor does it judge people. Please keep these things in mind when writing your essays.

(5) Is the Essay Full of B.S.? While you may think me base, boorish, and bawdy for using the acronym *B.S.*, I think it is an excellent one to describe some of the thinly veiled attempts I have read to pad essays, talk around a subject, or say nothing while appearing to say something. *B.S.* makes your essay appear as though you are trying to pad it so as to reach the required length. It also gives a poor impression. Keep in mind that instructors have read thousands of essays with this type of prose (not to mention written a few of their own in their student days) and are experts at detecting such attempts. *B.S.* fumes out of essays and instructors must hold their noses while giving you the bad grades you deserve.

(6) Is there a logical flow to the student's essay? You have something to say in your essay. It is your job to communicate it well. You should therefore think about how you organize your ideas. They should flow in a logical manner. Essays that appear to ramble or start at the middle and end up at the beginning will lose points. Give the reader a sense of where you are going. By the way, a conclusion is not a repetition of what you have already said; it is a summary bringing together your main points.

(7) Is the essay written in proper format? What does one do when one has written an essay and it is short of the required page length? One indents the margins a little more, triple spaces the lines, skips spaces between paragraphs, or **bolds the text**. If one still comes up short, one can enlarge the font, or choose a font that is larger. Are you serious? Do you people really think we don't see this! It is painfully obvious all the time and it will lose you points. Instructors are not idiots (yes, there are exceptions). A normal college paper should have about 25 to 28 lines per page, indentations for paragraphs, no spaces between paragraphs, be double spaced, and have borders of no more than an inch all around.

(8) Is the essay free of spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and incorrect word choices? PaiPers thit our. poUrly ritten in turms of grAmer speling weel **kiNda** an **sorta** looze ponts: Please eddit poopers befoure we handle. Thm inn. Iff eye caint uNnerstand; the popper" howw inn th HELLLL kin eye gradde itt?

Feedback

Despite my frustration with the occasionally poorly written essay, I am always **thrilled** to read your papers. As a rule, I will write copious marginal notes. These marginal notes will be of three types: **(1)** Critiques telling you where you have gone wrong in your argument, **(2)** complimentary notes telling you where you have zeroed in on concepts well, and **(3)** notes about grammar and spelling. If you are dissatisfied with any feedback I give you or do not understand its meaning, please come and see me.

A Few Rules and Policies for my Classroom

(1) Cell Phones and other Noisy Gadgets: In this age of information, many of us consider it essential to be constantly wired to cyberspace, ready to receive calls, voice messages, and text messages from important people like boyfriends and gossip pals in an instant. Please be aware, however, that classrooms are dead zones where such messages are not to enter. Nothing disturbs a class more than electronic renditions of Bye-Bye Birdie, Somewhere Over the Rainbow, or the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Before you enter your classes, turn off your cell phones, pagers, and other annoying gadgets that **Ding, Beep, Buzz, and Sing** to me!

(2) Lateness: Getting out of warm and comfortable beds on rainy grey mornings is one of life's unavoidable miseries. Many, me included, hate doing so. Others, even though they carry cell phones and pagers (see above) have ironically never heard of alarm clocks, leaving their natural body rhythms to guide their lives instead. While natural body rhythms may suffice for the hunters and gatherers of simpler societies, they are inadequate for a time-ordered post-modern society like our own. Thus, get an alarm clock -- get two if you have to -- get out of bed, and show up for class on time!

(3) Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: As an undergraduate, I knew what plagiarism was and thought everyone did. I was surprised, however, that there are some students blissfully unaware that they should not copy another person's work and pass it off as their own. Do not do this under any circumstances! It is wrong, it is dishonest, and it will get you in deep trouble! Some students, for example, have handed me papers copied from a book, or downloaded from internet sites, and **I have caught them**. Please be aware that in this age of information there are quite sophisticated programs that can detect such activities. If you use another person's ideas, you must properly cite them. If not, you are liable and will likely **fail the course**. You must also be thoroughly familiar with the University of Calgary's Policy on Academic Misconduct, as follows:

Academic Misconduct: cheating is regarded as a serious academic offence. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

(4) Special Needs: Even though I have a doctorate in sociology, I was a high school drop out. I got D's and F's in my courses and never finished my final year. I had for the longest time internalized this failure and thought of myself as dumb and stupid. These were the days when no one recognized dyslexia (and other learning disabilities) and many, like me, suffered. Today, we do recognize that some people learn differently. If you suspect that you have a learning disability, it is a good idea to have this assessed professionally. If you do have a learning disability, and there is something you feel I should know about your style of learning in my classroom or your special needs in learning, please come and talk to me. I will assist you in any way I can and keep all that you say confidential. The same applies for other types of disabilities. Please familiarize yourself with the University of Calgary's policy on Academic Accommodation, as follows:

Academic Accommodation: Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**

(5) Respect for Others: As Canadians, we are among the luckiest people in the world. We live in a truly multicultural society where our differences enrich the world in which we live, make us strong, and serve as an example to the rest of the world. Students as well as instructors vary by skin colour, ethnicity, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and individuality. Disrespect toward others on the basis of such traits will not be tolerated in my classroom. People are also different in terms of outlooks on life, morality, and opinions related to controversial issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and whether Coke is better than Pepsi. You are free to tell others that you disagree with their outlooks or opinions, but you must still treat them with respect and follow appropriate standards of etiquette. Please remember two things and keep them in mind throughout life:

People with true integrity and class accord good manners to all, not simply those with whom they agree.

There are no such things as people with no morals. There are only people whose morals differ from yours.