

SOC 255: Dating, Relationships & Families

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Bellevue College

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Class meets: online

COURSE INTRODUCTION

How has dating changed in recent years?

Does 'hookup culture' have any role in forming our relationships?

What is a "family?"

Is "family" universally defined, or is it always somehow changing and evolving?

How do we form families?

How do families benefit and harm individuals?

Is the "family" falling apart?

What are the problems within families?

Are there things our society can do to help/support families?

If any of these questions interest you, then you are in the right place! Over the course of the quarter, we will explore these questions as well as many other fascinating topics pertaining to relationships and families. I look forward to working with you and sharing my enthusiasm for sociology. I have a passion for this subject matter, and I hope you will have a passion too. Welcome to our class!

I think relationships and families are fascinating. They are among the most dramatic social relationships in the world, as they can lead to both sheer joy and extreme pain. We might be thrilled to date, fall in love, and have children, but we may also experience deep sorrow from abuse, separation or divorce, and the death of a loved one. Although the experiences within relationships and families are often mundane (imagine the daily routines of household chores, for example), they can also be equally thrilling (for some, imagine having a baby). Indeed, families are a paradox in multiple ways.

For most of us, the family was central to our personal development as human beings. In our families – no matter what our families “looked” like and no matter the struggles we faced within them – we learned to become who we are. Likewise, families are central in the structure of societies. Families nurture, prepare, and train workers for the economy. Families also teach us culture and values, allowing the society to survive. Families are so important, in fact, that many scholars argue that individuals and societies would not exist without them.

Over the course of the quarter, we will examine several aspects of relationships and families using a sociological perspective, and we will conceptualize families *broadly* and *inclusively*. We’ll study the crucial interaction between families and other social institutions (like the economy and government). We’ll explore the social patterns and characteristics of families in America. We’ll learn about diversity within families (e.g. no two children come from the same family, even if they think they do), and we’ll study a wide range of relationships and family forms. Our overarching goal for the quarter is to place relationships and families in a social context. Indeed, families do not exist independently of their societies.

“The chief object of education is not to learn things but to unlearn things.”

–Gilbert Chesterton

“Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.”

-William Butler Yeats

LEARNING ATMOSPHERE

Students learn best when they are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Thus, this is an *active, interactive* course where you are expected to read, write, and discuss. I think of our class as a “collaborative learning community” where we all teach and learn from each other. Every time you make a comment or ask a question on the discussion boards, you teach something to the rest of us. I strongly believe that the “success” of a class has as much - more more! - to do with the students as the professor.

Regarding Safe Space: This class is a Safe Space for *all* students. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, queer-identified, nonbinary, and transgender students are welcome in this class and are encouraged to speak out and be an integral part of this class. Any questions about what this means should be brought to me immediately. All are welcome!

A note about inclusion: Everyone is welcome in this class and is encouraged to be an equal part of our class culture. However, bigoted comments and attitudes will not be tolerated. This means that insulting, belittling, degrading, or castigating a group of people (such as women, men, people of color, gays and lesbians, poor people, Christians, Jews, Muslims, veterans, and so on) will not be permitted. You are entitled to your beliefs, of course, but you are not entitled to make other people feel attacked, insulted, or victimized. It is also unacceptable in this class to 'justify' bigoted attitudes for any reason, including religion. If you are unable to express your beliefs in a non-insulting manner, please keep them to yourself. I think you'll find, however, that with a little practice, you can express your viewpoint in an open, respectful manner. If you have any doubts, feel free to check with me and I'd be happy to help you express yourself responsibly.

A note about online learning: Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon your perspective!), online classes are not for everyone. In general, they demand far more independent initiative and personal discipline than do classes that meet on campus. Additionally, online classes demand stronger reading and writing skills. If you are a student who likes having someone to keep you on your toes, such as reminding you regularly to keep up with your work, then online classes may not be a good choice for you (and I realize that "choosing" an on-campus class is not really an option right now, sadly). That's okay (it's not a failure on your part!)...some students simply thrive more when working on a "strict" daily routine, the kind of routine that on-campus classes provide. Thus, the students who succeed most at online learning tend to be those students who:

- are disciplined enough to check the course website around five-to-seven days per week;
- have enough personal initiative that they will contact their instructor (that is, me!) if they don't understand something;
- have good to excellent written communication skills;
- are good readers (i.e. they can sit down and focus on a reading, highlighting key concepts/ideas, and then study it well);
- are independent; AND
- have a basic understanding of computer culture and technology (navigating a website, uploading/downloading, discussion etiquette)

A note about course content: Since sociologists examine just about every aspect of the social world, we sometimes discuss provocative material. Please be advised that, when we explore controversial topics, they will be framed within an academic context. Furthermore, I expect you to communicate with others in a professional,

academic manner. If you have any questions or concerns about course content, please don't hesitate to let me know.

A note about instructor availability: I have noticed that, sometimes, students who enroll in online classes have unreasonable expectations about their professor's availability. Please be aware that I am not online 24-hours a day. In general, I am online for this class a couple of hours per day. You will rarely be able to reach me in the evenings or on the weekends. I am, obviously, an active member of this course, but I do my coursework during the week, during daytime business hours. *Thus, please do not send to me late-night or weekend emails expecting an immediate response.* On Mondays-Fridays, I aim to respond to emails within 24-hours. Please adjust your expectations accordingly. Thanks! Please also know that I try hard to maintain a healthy work/life/family balance (it's taken me many years to figure out how to do this!), and so I do not read or respond to emails over holiday breaks - I need time away from work too! When the quarter is over, I submit grades promptly and then I am unavailable until the start of the next quarter.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing the course, the successful student will be able to:

- Describe the complexity of “family” as an idea, using a sociological perspective.
- Explain how families are connected to and shaped by culture and all the major social institutions, especially political and economic processes.
- Illustrate how gender, class, sexuality, and race structure intimate relationships.
- Debunk common myths about the family and relationships.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Texts: “Families and Their Social Worlds” by Secombe (4th edition)

Since our class is enrolled in the College Bookstore's "Inclusive Access" program, **you do not need to order a print copy of the book** (like you normally do for all college courses). **You already paid for an electronic copy of the book when you registered for the class**, and so you can read the book immediately by clicking on the "IA Course Materials" link on the course menu.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

The following outlines what you may expect of me as your instructor:

A sincere desire to help you learn. Since my ultimate goal is to help you learn, I have invested a significant amount of time into the design of this course site, with the hopes that the materials and assignments will enhance your learning. I think this course is understandable, interesting, and engaging. However, if at any time you are unclear or unsure about any aspects of the course - including reading material - feel free to contact me for assistance/clarification.

Fairness. Your grade will be based upon what I detect that you have learned and how I assess your performance. It is your job to clearly communicate to me (in your writing) that you understand the material. I don't negotiate final grades.

Respect and inclusion. This class is a "Safe Space" for all students. All are welcome!

The following outlines what I expect of you throughout the quarter:

A sincere effort to learn the course material. When participating in discussions and when writing papers, your comments should indicate to me that you have read and understand the course material. Some students wrongly assume that they can simply "wing it" in this class and still receive a high grade.

Preparation. You should keep up with the readings each week, particularly before contributing to our course discussion board.

Promptness. You should comply with all due dates, as **I do not accept late work. All assignments are due by 11:59pm on the listed due date. NO EXCEPTIONS (that includes computer problems - and remember, you can access Canvas via your cellphone).** You will learn that I am quite a stickler on due dates, so please learn to comply with all deadlines. I highly recommend that you plan to turn in your work early (with plenty of time to spare before the 11:59pm deadline - you can even turn in your work days early!).

I accept assignments ONLY in the following formats: pdf and Word. I also accept images. Do NOT send to me attachments in other formats. Submitting your work to me in other formats will result in a **zero** grade, unfortunately.

You can submit your work to me in the following ways:

(1) by uploading your work to Canvas (on the Assignments pages), or

(2) IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY ONLY (such as Canvas is shut down for maintenance), you can email your work to me at my Bellevue College address. denise.johnson@bellevuecollege.edu

It is your job to get your work in on time.

Contribution. Learning about each others' experiences and perspectives is an integral part of the learning process in this course. I believe that you will learn a lot about yourself and your fellow classmates. To work effectively in this course, therefore, you are expected to be an active participant in our learning environment. This is why you are required to contribute to class discussions. Please be advised that your grade will drop if you do not participate and contribute to the intellectual life of our class.

Respect, courtesy, and tolerance. Since learning about diverse experiences is central to this course, it is of the utmost importance that you respect your classmates' experiences, differences, and opinions. Disrespectful attitudes will not be tolerated.

Honesty. This means no cheating and no plagiarism. If you cheat/plagiarize, you fail. No excuses will be taken into account. Your work must be your own, except when asked to work with other students. Furthermore, you are required to acknowledge in your papers if you have borrowed any ideas, terms, or phrases, even if you have borrowed from a classmate OR from the Newman book. Please do not copy and paste material from wikipedia or any other website into your assignments, as this is a severe form of cheating (that is very easy to catch, by the way). If you cheat/plagiarize on any portion of a quiz, you'll receive a zero grade for the entire quiz. ***In this class, your assignments should be grounded ONLY in the textbook (rather than web resources, which are often wrong). This means that you should NOT do internet research in this class – all you need is in the course textbook.*** In fact, if you do outside research in this class, you will lose points. I dock points for this because: (a) information on the Internet is often misleading and/or inaccurate and (b) I need to make sure that you understand OUR TEXTBOOK (which is, after all, sociological, and the research cited in it is solid, reliable social science that has been vetted by experts in the field!). If you have any hesitation, or if you are in doubt about one of these issues, feel free to ask me.

GRADING

Grades are based on your performance on six factors: (1) exams, (2) discussion board participation, (3) a "cultural portrayals" project, (4) short essays, (5) mini-assignments, and (6) lecture notes. Each of these elements is awarded a specific number of points:

Exams (2 @ 150 pts each)	300 points (30% of your final course grade)
Discussion boards (10 @ 20pts each)	200 points (20% of your final course grade)
Cultural Portrayals Project	160 points (16% of your final course grade)
Essays (4 @ 30 points each)	120 points (12% of your final course grade)
Mini-assignments (6 @ 20 points each)	120 points (12% of your final course grade)
<u>Lecture notes (10 @ 10 points each)</u>	<u>100 points (10% of your final course grade)</u>
TOTAL	1,000 points

The following are the letter-grade equivalents to the percentages that show in Canvas:

Course Grade

A = 93% - 100%

A- = 90% - 92%

B+ = 87% - 89%

B = 83% - 86%

B- = 80% - 82%

C+ = 77% - 79%

C = 73% - 76%

C- = 70% - 72%

D+ = 67% - 69%

D = 60% - 66% (D is the lowest "passing" grade)

F = 0% - 59%

The following is a brief description of each of the course components:

(1) **Exams:** You will take two exams that integrate the course's activities (including lectures, films, etc.) and readings. Exams are designed to make sure you understand important course themes. Exams might include multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. Please note that **you cannot make up missed exams**. Exam dates are on the Course Calendar, so please plan ahead.

(2) **Discussion:** Each week, you will participate in large class discussions on the Canvas discussion board. It is your responsibility, as a member of our class, to respond thoughtfully not only to my prompt(s), but also to your classmates' comments. You are required to participate thoroughly in each week's discussion(s), as your grade will be based on the quality of your contributions and your level of involvement. In order to receive high grades on your discussion, you will need to:

(a) make an initial post about the topic by **Wednesday night of each week** (you will notice that each discussion has two due dates - one due date for your initial post, and another due date for your follow-up posts/responses) - your initial post should rely upon the readings, lecture, and/or videos, demonstrating to me that you know the material. Your initial post is worth 10 points. Then, you need to also...

(b) respond to AT LEAST 2-4 of your classmates' posts throughout the remainder of the week (i.e. contribute something intellectually meaningful). In other words, you will need to make a TOTAL of 3-5 high-quality posts each week- one will be your initial post (to my discussion prompt) and then the rest will be your responses to what others have said. I have set up the weekly discussions so that you cannot see what others have posted until you've made your own initial post first. Your initial post will be due by 11:59pm on Wednesday of each week, and your follow-up posts/responses will be due by 11:59pm on Sunday of each week.

The following are guidelines that you should follow in order to contribute to successful class discussions:

Your responses to my discussion questions should be in sentence/paragraph format, and you should avoid what I call "text message" grammar (that means no "u" instead of "you"). While format is always important (since it eases communication), the focus

in this class is primarily on content. Therefore, your comments should be meaningful and expand your classmates' understanding of the topic. The goal for our discussions is to deepen our understanding of the course themes.

On each discussion thread, you can earn up to twenty points for your contributions. Your posts must reflect real thought and deepen the conversation. Therefore keep the following in mind:

Say something that will contribute to a meaningful discussion--this requires time and thought! Thoroughly reflect on and think about the point you are making.

Fully explain and elaborate your points, using examples, evidence and logic to explain. Rely on evidence whenever possible, as this course is a social science course, and you are learning the social science perspective. Speak with precision regarding your meaning, rather than being vague or general.

Respond to the topic, not the author. This does not mean you should ignore the person who wrote the original post, but it means you need to focus on the ideas in the post and how to further the conversation on the topic, not tell the author what you think of his or her post.

Place your reaction in the context of the discussion. Make sure that you **clearly connect your response** to the week's (or previous weeks') themes.

Minimize prejudices, biases, unfounded beliefs, and too much reliance on emotional reactions, which can sidetrack good sound judgment and opinions rooted in your learning and in the sociological perspective. It is easy for bias, belief and emotion to dominate a discussion because we have existing emotions around the topic at hand, or because we fall prey to "reductionism" (seeing individuals as causes of their predicaments, which have social roots and solutions).

Feel free to be personal and interpersonal on the threads, in addition to substantive discussion. This aspect of discussion helps the group bond as a community. Remember, too, that you will apply many of the topics to your own social worlds. Be careful, however, not to go WAY off on a personal tangent--stay focused on the topic. The assignment forums are reserved for analyzing the assignment of the week.

Examples of good discussion posts include: clarifying or expanding the relevant concept if important points are missing, vague or incorrect; looking at the issue from another angle or perspective; adding pertinent information; asking a question that forces your

classmates to think more in depth on the topic. Posts such as “Well said! I completely agree with you!” won’t receive credit. You need to contribute to our thinking on the topic, and this requires more depth.

I'm looking forward to an engaging and interesting discussion board!

(3) **Cultural Portrayals Project:** You will analyze cultural artifacts of your choosing - such as television shows, movies, advertisements, music, etc. - to discover how representations of families in the media have changed over time. You'll write your observations into an analytical paper. Details are provided in the Week Eleven Module.

(4) **Essays:** You will complete four essays throughout the quarter that require you to reflect on the course material and/or observe the social world. You should do your best to address every essay question thoughtfully, clearly, and completely, as you can earn up to 30 points for each essay. These essays will be graded not only on their completeness (Did you adequately address all the components of the assignment?), but also on their thoughtfulness (Does your essay show that you understand and thought hard about the course

material/readings? Do you connect your answer to the course materials?). PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT THESE ESSAYS WITHOUT FIRST READING THE BOOK and WATCHING THE LECTURES - I will definitely be able to tell if you are "shooting from the hip" rather than relying on what you've read to help you with the assignment. And PLEASE DO NOT DO “INTERNET RESEARCH” FOR THESE ESSAYS – you should rely solely on the course materials (if you rely on other sources, your

grade will suffer as I need to ensure that you understand the book, which is far more reliable than much of the Internet). Essays vary in length - most are roughly 500 words. Please note that I will not accept late essays.

(5) **Mini-Assignments:** Some weeks, you will have one “mini-assignment” to complete. Sometimes these will be activities for you to complete, and other times they may be personal reflections. They will vary. These assignments will be posted for you in the Modules.

(6) **Lecture Notes:** You will watch lectures on Canvas and take notes while you watch. You'll submit these notes for a grade. NOTE: this should be an “easy” way to earn full or close-to-full points so don't pass up these assignments! All you need to do is demonstrate to me that you watched and understand the important points from lecture.

The **Disability Resource Center** serves students with a wide array of learning challenges and disabilities. If you are a student who has a disability or learning challenge for which you have documentation or have seen someone for treatment and if you feel you may need accommodations in order to be successful in college, please contact us as soon as possible. If you are a student with a documented autism spectrum disorder, there is a program of support available to you. If you are a person who requires assistance in case of an emergency situation, such as a fire, earthquake, etc, please meet with your individual instructors to develop a safety plan within the first week of the quarter. The DRC office is located in B 132 or you can call them at 425.564.2498. Deaf students can reach them by video phone at 425-440-2025 or by TTY at 425-564-4110. Please visit our website for application information into our program and other helpful links at www.bellevuecollege.edu/drc

College Anti-Discrimination Statement (Title IX)

Bellevue College does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity; color; creed; national origin; sex; marital status; sexual orientation; age; religion; genetic information; the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability; gender identity or veteran status in educational programs and activities which it operates. For further information and contacts, please consult College Anti-Discrimination Statements.