

SOC 120: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

University of Wisconsin-Madison

2025 Spring - Lecture Section (LEC 001) Syllabus¹

Course Website: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/444689	
Instructor: Katrina Q. Wang	E-mail: katrina.wang@wisc.edu
Office: 7127 Sewell Soc Sci	Office Hours: Thu, 2:30 - 3:30 PM or by appointment
Lecture Section Time:	Tue & Thu, 04:00 - 05:15 PM
Lecture Section Location:	5106 Sewell Soc Sci

Teaching Assistant: Della Tao		E-mail: ytao43@wisc.edu
Office: 8120E Sewell Soc Sci		Office Hours: Mon & Wed, 2:00 - 3:00 PM
Discussion Section	Time	Location
DIS 301	Tue, 09:55 - 10:45 AM	6228 Sewell Social Sciences
DIS 302	Tue, 11:00 - 11:50 AM	6228 Sewell Social Sciences
DIS 303	Tue, 12:05 - 12:55 AM	6228 Sewell Social Sciences
DIS 304	Tue, 13:20 - 14:10 AM	6228 Sewell Social Sciences

Credits: 4. Approximately 10 hours of lecture, section, and readings/homework per week.
Requisites: None.
Course Designation: Breadth - Social Science.
Level: Elementary.
L&S Credit: Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S.

¹ Adapted from Professor Felix Elwert's SOC120 syllabus.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Families serve as the core of both personal identity and social organization, embodying a unique blend of private and public functions. *Privately*, families are where individual lives unfold, providing a space for emotional connection, growth, and support throughout life's stages. In this intimate setting, families influence our values, identities, and personal choices. *Publicly*, however, families impact society at large by shaping future generations, perpetuating social norms, and both mitigating and reinforcing social inequalities. They are essential to the collective good, acting as the foundation of social structure, labor, and policy implications.

This course delves into families as both private and public institutions. Through the lens of family sociology and social demography, we will explore how families function as intimate units while also operating as a part of society's broader system. Our discussions will focus on key aspects such as the evolving roles of family members, the impact of social class and race on family dynamics, and the way public policies—on issues like parental leave, marriage, and caregiving—shape family life.

Key topics include:

- **Private Dimensions:** How families provide an environment for personal growth and socialization, influence relationship dynamics, and adapt in response to internal changes like marriage, parenting, and aging.
- **Public Dimensions:** How families serve social purposes by transmitting cultural norms, supporting economic stability, and affecting social mobility. We'll also examine the role of family in the public sphere through policy implications and its intersections with labor, education, and healthcare.
- **Intersecting Roles:** How the private aspects of family life, such as gender roles, caregiving, and child-rearing, intersect with public expectations and social policies that shape family structure and influence the economic and social resources available to them.

A major goal of this course is to understand the dynamic interplay between families' private functions and their public significance. We'll analyze how family structures and expectations evolve in response to social changes, demonstrating that families are not static but adapt in response to shifting cultural, economic, and policy landscapes.

SOC 120 is an introductory course ideal for students who want to explore the balance between family as a private space and its function as a public institution. Seniors and students with a background in social science are also welcome and may alternatively consider the advanced course, SOC 640.

FORMAT

Lectures: This course meets in person. You're expected to complete all required readings before class. Bring your notes and be ready to engage—asking and answering questions is encouraged. Lectures will build on the readings, highlighting key issues and introducing new material beyond the texts. All the handouts are on the Canvas website, however, coming to the class is important. There will be exam-related knowledge that will only be mentioned during class.

Sections: Sections also meet in person, and you should complete all readings before attending. Weekly discussion sections offer a chance to dive deeper into the material, with an emphasis on active engagement. Attendance is required, as sections are a vital part of the course experience. Your TA will provide a separate section syllabus with additional instructions. This is your time to actively participate and explore the topics in depth.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Gain a solid understanding of key facts about the American family—both historically and in the present—including its diversity and evolving nature. Examine major social science theories and perspectives on the family. Identify central arguments in contemporary family debates. Apply course concepts to current events through written assignments, connecting academic insights to real-world developments.

REQUIREMENTS

There are five requirements for passing Soc 120: (1) completing the readings, (2) attending and participating in sections, (3) completing online reading quizzes, (4) submitting two writing assignments, and (5) taking two midterm exams and one final exam.

1. Readings: Most of your readings will come from the textbook.

Required: Cherlin, Andrew J. 2024. *Public and Private Families: An Introduction (10th edition)*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

The textbook and any additional required or recommended readings are accessible on Canvas. You may also choose to order a physical copy if preferred. To access the full eBook version of Cherlin's textbook, go to the course website on Canvas, click on "McGraw-Hill Connect," then select "Connect Library," where you can view and annotate the textbook.

The textbook is also available as a SmartBook through reading quizzes listed under "Assignments" on Canvas. Note, however, that the eBook in Connect Library and the SmartBook quizzes are not linked,

so any highlights or annotations in one will not transfer to the other. Choose the method that best suits your study style. For optimal performance, we recommend using Google Chrome to access the online content.

I've intentionally kept the reading load at a moderate level (usually under 30 pages per week) to allow for in-depth engagement. Teaming up with classmates for reading discussions is highly encouraged (your TAs can help connect you with study partners in section). Bringing insights from these discussions into lectures and sections will enrich the class experience and support your learning.

A bibliography of optional readings is included on the last page of this syllabus. These books are great resources for delving deeper into the subject—feel free to explore them.

2. Reading Quizzes: You will complete an online reading quiz before most lectures, based on the required readings. Quizzes are found under “Assignments” on Canvas, not via McGraw-Hill Connect. Each quiz will open 7 days before its due date, allowing you to take it at your convenience. Quiz scores make up 10% of your final grade, so consistent completion is essential.

For your convenience, the online quizzes for textbook readings include direct links to relevant passages. Please note that quizzes may also contain questions about required readings outside the textbook, which won't have direct links within the quiz itself. We will count your 16 highest quiz scores out of 20. Since the four lowest quiz scores will be dropped, we will not be able to offer extensions, make-ups, or reopen quizzes under any circumstances.

You will have unlimited attempts to complete each quiz with no time limit. However, your grade will be calculated as the average score of all your attempts, not your highest score. Therefore, you should approach your first attempt seriously, as it will contribute to your overall score rather than being used to manipulate results.

3. Discussion Sections: Discussion sections are an essential component of the course, accounting for 15% of your final grade. With 15 total weeks, each week's attendance and participation contributes 1% (two 0.5%-s). You will receive full credit for Spring Recess week by default (as a bonus!). If your TA cancels a session for the week, you will receive full credit for that week.

Each week's section attendance and participation is graded on a 10/10 scale, based on your level of engagement and contributions in the discussion. Thoughtful participation in section is key, and you will be graded on the quality—not just frequency—of your contributions. To prepare, complete all readings beforehand and bring questions, reflections, and observations to share. Engaging with classmates constructively and creatively will enhance the discussion.

Attendance in sections is required. You are allowed up to one absence without penalty (for attendance but not participation). For any missed section, it is your responsibility to catch up on notes and missed content. A second absence will lower your attendance grade to 10%, a third to 5%, and a fourth to 0%. Note that the attendance portion is significant, as 5% can make a difference of half a letter grade in your final score. In cases of medical or personal emergencies that require extended absences, please contact both the instructor and your TA.

4. News Reflections: You'll complete two brief assignments on current news topics related to the course, collectively worth 15% of your grade. These reflections allow you to connect course material to real-world events. For each reflection, select two news articles on an assigned topic from approved sources, dated on or after Jan 1, 2025. Provide a two-sentence summary of each article and then write a 500-word essay relating the articles to course material. Length of words below 450 or above 500 will receive 5% penalty of the total grade. Submit assignments electronically on Canvas (under Assignments) by 3:59 PM on the due dates listed in the syllabus. Late submissions will receive a grade of zero, with no exceptions, so plan to submit well ahead of the deadline. Detailed instructions are available on the course website.

This is a “news” “reflection” “essay,” which fundamentally revolves around people. This means you must take a clear position. Whether you agree, disagree, or remain neutral, having a well-defined opinion is crucial. While I don't oppose using AI as a tool to inform and enhance your work, the human element—your unique perspective and judgment—is irreplaceable. AI can assist in gathering data, offering insights, or organizing ideas, but it cannot substitute the authenticity and intentionality of your own voice.

If you do not have a clearly stated opinion and fail to structure the entire essay around supporting that opinion in a concise and compelling manner, you will likely score a 59/100 on this assignment. There will be no opportunity to resubmit, so it's essential to approach this task with clarity and focus from the start. Your opinion should be explicit, your arguments coherent, and your evidence tightly aligned with your central point. Remember, even a neutral stance requires justification and depth—indifference or ambiguity won't suffice. Make your position clear, back it up effectively, and stay on track throughout the essay to succeed.

5. Exams: There are two midterm exams and one final exam, accounting for 60% of your final grade. All three exams cover material presented in lectures and required readings. They will include and only include multiple-choice and multiple-answer questions focusing on concepts, facts, and mechanisms discussed in class. The exams are non-cumulative. All exams will be conducted online using the Honorlock system. Each exam will have a duration of 1 hour 45 minutes and must be completed

within 24 hours from the exam start time. For example, the first midterm will be available at 4:00 PM on February 18 and will close at 3:59 PM on February 19.

Since you will be self-tracking your exam time, please plan accordingly. The exam is designed to take 70 minutes to complete. However, to ensure fairness and flexibility, I am extending the standard exam time to 105 minutes (1 hour and 45 minutes), giving all students 1.5 times the original duration (this means most of the McBurney students have already been granted extra time). If you require additional accommodations beyond this extended time, you must inform both the instructor and the TA of your request no later than 3:59 PM on February 6.

Missed Exams: Given the course size, make-up exams are not feasible. (1) If you must miss one or two of midterm exams due to serious illness, family emergency, or a university-sponsored activity, your final exam score will carry more weight. However, we strongly recommend taking all three exams; skipping one (or two) of the midterm exams generally puts too much pressure on the final. (2) Students needing to miss the final must provide a compelling reason in advance, or they will receive a score of zero on that exam.

6. Extra Credit: Please note that attending the WHAT (workshop) talk series cannot be counted as both extra credit and a discussion make-up at the same time. Here are the requirements for attending the session: (1) Open your camera during the session. (2) Ask one thoughtful question or give a thoughtful comment during the discussion. (3) Submit a 300-word essay to Canvas that includes what you said (your question or comment) and the speaker's response. The essay must be submitted to Canvas no later than seven days after the talk to qualify for extra credit. You will have two opportunities for extra credits this semester. Each opportunity is worth 0.5% of your total grade.

To encourage active participation in class, I will provide two opportunities to earn extra credit by answering questions during lectures. Each time, you must raise your hand and answer one question in a thoughtful and meaningful way to qualify. Each opportunity will add 0.2% to your total grade.

Since these extra credit opportunities are available, the final total grade will not be curved. It is your responsibility to keep track of these opportunities and ensure that your participation is recorded.

January

- **Week 1 - 23 (R):** Introduction
 - Recommended: Cherlin, Table of Contents
- **Week 2 - 28 (T):** Kinship & Course Logistics
 - Required: Watch “Connect Orientation Video” (Canvas → Assignments)
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 1-8
 - Syllabus quiz due
 - Quiz 1 due
- **Week 2 - 30 (R):** Early Family History (Note: Online Lecture)
 - Required: Goldthorpe, *Family Life in Western Societies*, pp. 8-16
 - Recommended: Coontz, “What’s Love Got To Do With It?”
 - Recommended: Goody, *The European Family*, Chapters 3-5

February

- **Week 3 - 4 (T):** U.S. History I
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 25-31
 - Required: Coontz, “The Evolution of American Families”
 - Recommended: Goldthorpe, *Family Life in Western Societies*, Ch. 2, pp.18-40
 - Quiz 2 due
- **Week 3 - 6 (R):** U.S. History II
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 38-52
 - Required: Fischer and Hout. “The Family in Trouble: Since When? For Whom?”
 - Recommended: Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early 21st Century”, pp. 33-43
 - Quiz 3 due
- **Week 4 - 11 (T):** Sociological Approaches to the Family & Research Methods
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 9-16
 - Quiz 4 due
- **Week 4 - 13 (R):** Gender
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 3
 - Required: Orenstein, “What’s Wrong with Cinderella?”
 - Required: Maglaty, “When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink”
 - Quiz 5 due
- **Week 5 - 18 (T): Midterm I (on Week 1 - 4)**
- **Week 5 - 20 (R):** Class, Status, and Families
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 5

- Recommended: Schmid and Mollica, “Impact of Childhood Trauma Reaches Rural Wisconsin.”
- Quiz 6 due
- **Week 6 - 25 (T): Race, Interracial Marriage**
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 115-131
 - Quiz 7 due
- **Week 6 - 27 (R): Sexual Orientation**
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 36-37, 46, 72-78
 - Recommended: Canaday, “We Colonials: Sodomy Laws in America”
 - News Reflection #1 (Gender and Families) due on Canvas at 3:59 PM
 - Quiz 8 due

March

- **Week 7 - 4 (T): Sex**
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 79-86
 - Required: Wade, “The Promise and Peril of Hookup Culture.”
 - Required: Lundquist and Curington “Love me Tinder, Love Me Sweet”
 - Recommended: Wade and Heldman, “Hooking Up and Opting Out—Negotiating Sex in the First Year of College.”
 - Recommended: Armstrong et al, “Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?”
 - Quiz 9 due
- **Week 7 - 6 (R): Marriage and Cohabitation**
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 7
 - Quiz 10 due
- **Week 8 - 11 (T): Work and Families I**
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 164-167
 - Recommended: Hsin and Felfe, “When does Time Matter?”
 - Required: Bianchi, “Maternal Employment and Time with Children”
- **Week 8 - 13 (R): Work and Families II**
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 167-182
 - Required: Hochschild, “Joey’s Problem”
 - Recommended: Daminger, “De-gendered processes, gendered outcomes.”
 - Quiz 11 due
- **Week 9 - 18 (T): Children and Parents**
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 9

- Required: Lareau, “Invisible Inequality”
- Quiz 12 due
- **Week 9 - 20 (R):** No Class, Spring Recess
- **Week 10 - 25 (T):** No Class, Spring Recess
- **Week 10 - 27 (R):** No Class, Spring Recess

April

- **Week 11 - 1 (T): Midterm II (on Week 5 - 9, not cumulative)**
- **Week 11 - 3 (R):** Old Age and Widowhood
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 10
 - Quiz 13 due
- **Week 12 - 8 (T):** Divorce I
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 255-260
 - Quiz 14 due
- **Week 12 - 10 (R):** Divorce II: Consequences and Causality
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 161-267
 - Recommended: Li, “The Impact of Divorce on Children’s Behavior Problems”
 - Required: Elwert, notes on causality (Canvas)
 - Quiz 15 due
- **Week 13 - 15 (T):** Remarriage and Stepfamilies
 - Required: Cherlin, pp. 267-278
 - News Reflection #2 (Parents and Children) due on Canvas at 3:59 PM
 - Quiz 16 due
- **Week 13 - 17 (R):** Same-Sex Marriage
 - Required (review): Cherlin, pp. 37, 76-77, 152-153, 312
- **Week 14 - 22 (T):** Legal Approaches to the Family; Domestic Violence
 - Required: Minow: Redefining Families
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 11
 - Quiz 17 due
- **Week 14 - 24 (R):** Family Change at Home and Abroad
 - Required: Cherlin, Chapter 13
 - Recommended: Lesthaeghe, “The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition”
 - Quiz 18 due
- **Week 15 - 29 (T):** Public Policy

- Required: Cherlin, Chapter 14
- Quiz 19 due

May

- **Week 15 - 1 (R): Final Exam (on Week 11-15, not cumulative)**