

**Sociology 345: Sociology of Families**  
Monday and Wednesday 8:00-10:00 (Location TBA)

Prof. Brian Gillespie  
*Email:* brian.gillespie@sonoma.edu  
*Phone:* (707) 664.2583

*Office Hours:* Mondays 2:00-4:00pm and Wednesday 7:00-8:00am (Stevenson Hall 2084-N)

**Course Introduction**

This course examines how society is shaped by families but also how society impacts families, our experiences within families, and even our understandings of what constitutes a “family.” Families are the most private and pervasive social institutions—they help shape our opportunities, values, goals, personalities. They are also a primary field for the expression of gender relations, emotional and sexual relationships, and adolescent socialization. Using lectures and small-group activities, we will explore the meaning of family and how it changes over time and varies across geographic places and cultures. In order to understand these variations and changes, it is important to look beyond individual explanations and consider the larger forces at play. Emphasis is placed on the debate between those who support inclusion and family diversity and those who are concerned that essential family ideals are in crisis.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completing this course, students should:

- Understand how our practices, roles, and beliefs about the family are related to broad social forces that are culturally dependent and change over time and across space.
- Recognize the ways that family organization and the roles of women, men, and children have changed over time.
- Distinguish between reality and politicized and sensationalized myths regarding family ideals, dynamics, and contexts.
- Engage sociological and interdisciplinary theories in order to understand contemporary issues in family life.
- Draw on a solid conceptual, methodological, and practical understanding of family dynamics.
- Understand the complexity of family life, including how family experiences are shaped by race, ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, and sexual orientation.
- Appreciate the diversity of family forms and patterns of family life.
- Recognize important controversies related to the family, including—but not limited to—divorce, parenting, reproductive decisions, and adolescent sexuality.
- Link everyday life in families to wider political and social struggles.
- Identify the ways that social policies shape family life.

## Required Readings

There is no required text for this course—however, a number of weekly readings will be made available on Moodle. Additional detailed and up-to-date information (e.g., instructions for assignments and/or revised due dates) will be posted there. Familiarize yourself with the contents of the Moodle page and consult it often. If you fail to follow these directions, you may not receive credit for assignments.

## Assignments and Evaluation

*Attendance, Assignments, and Participation (10%):* Preparation, prompt attendance at all class meetings, and active participation in class discussions and debates are required. It is crucial that you attend every session, read the assignments for the day in advance, prepare to discuss the assignments, and participate in class discussions.

*In-Class Quizzes (10%):* There will be two essay-based in-class quizzes on the readings for the week (and lectures from the previous week) worth 5% each. Quizzes will not be used to assess how well you memorized the readings or lecture but to check that you understand the main points and have engaged the material. **These points cannot be made up if you miss class—however the lowest quiz score of 3 will be dropped.**

*Writing Assignment (20%):* There will be a 4-5 page paper (typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins) due on **February 27**. The writing assignments is based on a handout prompt during week 3 that will detail at least two different options for paper topics.

*Photographic Essay (20%):* For this project, you will select a series of photos that can be meaningfully organized around a central theme regarding the family. We will discuss this project—and explore examples—in the first few weeks of the course. Copies of the photos and text should be presented in a traditional photo album, on poster board, pasted on to paper. This project will be due during **Week 14 (March 24 and March 26)**.

*Midterm Exam (20%) and Final Exam (20%):* An essay-based midterm exam on **March 8** and a cumulative multiple-choice final exam on **May 15** will evaluate your understanding of key terms, concepts, and theories from all lectures, videos, and discussions. There will be a brief discussion-based review in the class prior to each exam.

Final grade calculations will be done in the following manner:

Attendance and Assignments	10%
In-Class Quizzes	10%
Writing Assignment	20%
Photographic Essay	20%
Midterm Assessment	20%
Final Assessment	20%