

SYLLABUS

Marriage and Family Relationships

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Text: Strong, B, and T. Cohen. *The Marriage and Family Experience: Intimate relationships in a changing society*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 13th Edition, 2017

The 12th edition is also permissible and might be cheaper.

The URI bookstore has new and used copies of this text available. You may also purchase it through third party vendors such as Amazon. Just be sure you have the correct version of the text.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR KNOWING THE CONTENTS OF THIS SYLLABUS

ABOUT THE COURSE

Welcome to *HDF 230*, the online version of *Marriage and Family Relationships*. The focus of this introductory level course is an examination of committed relationships and family experiences from a variety of perspectives and points of view. Although the primary emphasis is on research studies that have examined the family, this course will also help you develop insight into your personal life, relationships, and family experience as a basis for personal and professional development.

The course is structured as five units, each focusing on a different aspect or view of family life.

First we will look at the big picture. We will examine what we mean by “family”, how we define it, and why we need families (what are families supposed to do?). We will see that our ideas of families have changed over time and that our ideas of how families

“used to be” may not be all that accurate. We will also discover that family life varies widely across different cultures.

The second unit examines how we form romantic relationships: falling in love, choosing a partner, living together, and what ingredients predict success in happy couples. The third unit examines how we sustain intimacy over the long haul: getting married, having children, caring for ill or aging parents.

In the fourth unit we take a close up look at the inner workings of family. We examine the importance of good communication as a critical skill in managing and resolving conflict. We will study family violence and sexual abuse as two examples problems families face, and how they can get assistance in dealing with them.

In the fifth unit we will expand the lens and examine the contexts in which families reside. We will examine challenges of balancing work and family life, unemployment, income challenges, and dual earner families. We will take a look at how this works for most families. We take a close up look at divorce and remarriage, the impact on children and how it is altering the form families take. This last unit also celebrates what families do well, highlighting their strengths and looking at specific activities that seem to enrich family life. Families need to constantly adjust to meet changing circumstances such as children growing older, illness, financial worries, and how to balance work and family life.

I. The Family in Perspective

- A. The family as an institution, past and present
- B. The family as an institution, across cultures
- C. The importance of research on the family

II. Forming Intimate Relationships

- A. Friendships and love
- B. Living together

III. Sustaining Intimate Relationships

- A. Choosing a partner
- B. Parents and children

IV. Family Challenges

- A. Communication
- B. Managing conflict
- B. Violence and sexual abuse

V. The Evolving Context of Families

- A. Balancing work and family
- B. Divorce and remarriage
- C. Building Strong Families

Be sure to read the all of the content in the syllabus. You should start with a review of the courses *goals* to see what it is you will need to accomplish. Examine carefully the course *structure* because it contains the rules by which we will conduct the course and you will be accountable for knowing them. Lastly the *evaluation* section outlines how you will be graded for the course.

GOALS

The goals for this course are described in terms of what *you* should be able to do when the course is over. My hope is that you will see the world a little differently and have more questions than answers when we are done. Because this course is an introduction, there are limits to how much we can cover. You will no doubt identify many topics of family life that we could have included but simply did not have time to address. That is why we have more than one course in family studies. That said, by the time we are done you should be able to:

- Separate myth from the realities of family life by thinking more critically
- Appreciate the diverse forms which family relationships may take.
- Describe the impact of social class on family life
- Understand the challenges families face over the life cycle
- Describe communication patterns in happy relationships
- Explain the relationship between conflict and intimacy in good relationships
- Describe different styles and strategies of parenting and raising children
- Understand the relationship of economics to the quality of family life
- Explain the principle models used in understanding family violence
- Explain the effects of sexual abuse in families, both initially and long term
- Discuss factors affecting the likelihood of divorce and its impact
- Understand the challenges faced by stepfamilies as well their strengths
- Recognize and explain the characteristics of strong families

STRUCTURE

The text will serve as your primary reading reference. There will occasionally be an additional article you will be asked to read. These will be posted and you will have access to them on-line. These will be an important part of our discussions each week. You are expected to participate in the discussions with regular postings. I participate in these discussions and will get you started each week with a question I want you to discuss. There will be weekly quizzes or exams based on the readings in the text for that week. You will not be quizzed on the other readings. They are for discussion only.

Readings

Here is the course calendar listing the text chapter readings for each of the weeks. The chapter readings are what you need to have read for the current week. So for example, when we start week three you should have already read Chapters 8 and 10 in the text. Additional readings that I assign are posted for that week. These will usually be a full length article(s) that I want you to discuss.

COURSE CALENDAR

Date	Topic	Reading
Week 1	The functions of marriages and families	Chapter 1
	Studying the Family - Scientific Issues	Chapter 2
	Dynamics and Diversity of Families	Chapter 3
Week 2	Love and Commitment	Chapter 5
	Living together	Chapter 9
Week 3	Choosing a partner	Chapter 8
	Parents and children	Chapter 10
Week 4	Communication and Managing conflict	Chapter 7
	Violence and sexual abuse	Chapter 12
Week 5	Balancing work and family	Chapter 11
	Separation and divorce	Chapter 13
	Building Strong Families	Chapter 14

Discussions

You will be assigned to a discussion group at the beginning of class. This is the closest we can come to “in-class” discussions and is your opportunity to share your ideas with your classmates. I will guide the discussion by posting the discussion topic for that week. This will be based most often on the assigned reading (see above) but occasionally I will post announcements or special assignments or activities I want you to do for a given week. You are expected to make a meaningful contribution and have your discussion group respond. I will give you a discussion guide that explains what good participation looks like. You will be graded on your participation.

You are not expected to comment on every topic but the more you do the more you will get out of the class. Comments like “I agree, amen, yup, me too, and I’m down with that” are not considered “meaningful” contributions. This is the “fun” part of the class. So the more you speak up, and the more thoughtful your comments, the more everyone benefits. And remember to follow proper netiquette.

Weekly Quizzes

You will have a quiz on the content of the material we covered IN THE TEXT for that week ONLY. There is no final exam. **This WEEKLY QUIZ IS TIMED, meaning you will only have a certain amount of time (usually an hour) to complete it. The quiz is available during the entire current week on the course calendar. You can complete the quiz at any time during the week until midnight of the last day. You will only get one attempt, so be sure you know the dates and times of each weekly quiz. THERE ARE NO REPEATS AND NO MAKE-UPS.** So prepare well.

YOU MUST HAVE A STABLE BROADBAND CONNECTION (OR HAVE ACCESS TO ONE) TO TAKE THESE QUIZZES. If your connection or browser fails during the time you are taking the test, the answers you saved will be there when you reconnect but you will lose time because the clock keeps running. And remember you only get one attempt.

Communication

The way you keep in contact with me is through [Messages](#). This is where you can ask questions about the course. You should check this on a regular basis. Sending email to my uri.edu address (listed above) is akin to calling me at home, so use it judiciously!

Please do NOT contact me regarding technical difficulties with browsers, ad blocking, software downloading, or other computer related questions. There is a consultant available to help you with such problems. The consultant can be reached by phone at 401.874.HELP

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the weekly quizzes and discussions. Each weekly quiz is worth 50 points. I will count the total of your best four of the five weekly quizzes toward your grade total. The discussions are worth 50 points of your total.

Weekly quizzes (total of best four)	200
Discussions	50
TOTAL point value	250

A CAUTIONARY TALE(S)

Throughout this course you will be exposed to a variety of information or data about families. This information may or may not reflect your own experience but its value is this: It will enable you to learn about how other people experience family life. You may find some of the material controversial. You can learn a good deal by searching for insights from persons with whom you disagree. You are not asked to give up strongly

held beliefs without examining their virtue, but be open enough to other ideas, beliefs, research findings and values, to make new perspectives possible.

Make sure you "hit the ground running" when the course begins because you only have six weeks from the opening day to the final weekly exam, less time than you would normally have before a regular semester midterm. You should try to read as much of the material in advance of the opening bell. Many students fall behind, some so far they can not salvage the semester. This is where discipline comes in. Getting a slow start may not hurt your chances of victory in a long-term endurance race, but it pretty much guarantees failure in a sprint - and this six-week course is a sprint. It also means you will need to get good at "learning" on your own since you will be relying on your readings to provide you with enough guidance to answer the questions you will find on the weekly quizzes and to participate in the discussions.

Studying families is different from studying robotics or plants. Because we all grew up in families and are currently involved in relationships the subject matter feels very familiar. My hope is that you will be excited about the things you learn and want to share this enthusiasm. But like the adage that a lawyer who represents herself has a fool for a client, it is not a good idea to try to fix your relationships on the basis of what you learn here. So don't try to be your family's therapist. Don't draw conclusions, diagnose, or offer advice to boyfriends, girlfriends, best friends, partners, parents, or other family members on the basis of what you learn here. Remember a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. I have been practicing family psychology as a clinician and researcher for 20 years and I still am amazed at how much I don't know. One thing I do know. Some of you will do this anyway. But don't say I didn't warn you.