

SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY
SOCI 170
FALL 2025 (August 21 – December 8, 2025)
San Jose State University



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Class Meeting Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00AM-10:15AM

Location: Dudley Moorhead Hall, Room 231

Office Hours: T/TH 8-9AM in person or via Zoom, or by appointment

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Families are dynamic, diverse and deeply connected to the social, economic, and political worlds in which they exist. In this course, we will explore the family as a social institution –how it is defined, how it changes, how it interacts with inequality, and how it shapes (and is shaped by) policy.

Our work will be guided by sociological theory, empirical research, and contemporary debates. The course is organized into four thematic units, each building toward your ability to apply sociological thinking to real-world family issues.

You will learn not only *what* research says about families, but also *how* to engage critically with competing perspectives, communicate clearly, and connect theory to lived realities.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

1. Describe the elements of family relationships and how definitions of “family” change over time and across contexts.
2. Summarize and apply key theories on family formation, roles, and negotiation of responsibilities.
3. Analyze how public and social policies support or harm families.
4. Explain how families accumulate, share, and allocate resources, and how this relates to inequality.
5. Evaluate programs and policies that address family needs at local, state, and national levels.
6. Recognize and analyze intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other axes of inequality in family processes.
7. Assess empirical research for methodological rigor and strength of evidence.
8. Communicate sociological ideas clearly in writing and speech to both academic and public audiences.

EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS

- **Engage actively:** Our discussions and activities depend on your preparation and participation.
- **Complete readings before class:** Jot down key points, questions, and observations. You don’t have to “master” the reading before class, but you do have to be ready to think and talk about it.
- **Respect all perspectives:** Take issue with ideas, not people. Practice curiosity and thoughtful engagement.
- **Honor deadlines:** Major assignments have clear due dates. **Late work will not be accepted. No exceptions.**
- **Care for yourself and others:** This course addresses personal and sometimes sensitive topics. You are never required to disclose personal experiences, and alternative arrangements can be made when necessary.

COURSE COMPONENTS & GRADING

1. Short Reflection Prompts (20%)

Purpose: These short reflections ensure you stay engaged with readings, media, and class discussions while practicing concise, analytical thinking.

Each week, you'll respond to a prompt posted on Canvas. In a response of at least 150-250 words, you'll be asked to do one of the following: compare two readings, apply a theory to a contemporary issue, critique a research method, connect a concept to a real-world example.

2. "Policy Lab" Group Facilitation (15%)

Purpose: To develop teamwork, public speaking skills, and the ability to connect sociological theory to current California family policy.

In small groups, you'll lead a class session on an assigned topic. Facilitations will be held on Thursdays (unless otherwise specified) and groups will be randomly assigned.

Your facilitation must include:

1) Reading synthesis (key points from the week's readings)

2) California Policy Lab - Analysis of a recent state bill, law, or local policy proposal related to the week's topic (e.g., foster care reform, paid family leave, reproductive health access, immigration policy, etc).

3) Interactive Component - Class activity such as a debate, poll, think-pair-share, or case study discussion.

3. Media Analysis: Families in Film/TV (20%)

Purpose: Critically examine cultural narratives about family in popular media and connect them to sociological concepts.

Format: Choose a movie, television show, or streaming series episode with strong family representation. Identify and analyze sociological concepts, family structures, stereotypes, and intersectional themes (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc). Choose your format: Short paper (3-4 pages) OR Recorded presentation (5-6 minutes).

4. Topic Project: Sociological Family Case Study (25%)

Purpose: Allow you to explore a family-related issue of personal or academic interest in depth, using sociological theories and research.

This project is completed in three milestones:

1. Proposal (1-2 paragraphs) - Identify your topic and research question
2. Annotated Source List - At least 5 scholarly or credible sources with 3-5 sentence summaries
3. Final Product - Choose your format:
 - a. 5-6 page research paper
 - b. Podcast episode (15 minutes)
 - c. Narrated slideshow (10 minutes)

5. Mini Pop Quizzes (20%)

Purpose: Encourage consistent preparation and retention of key concepts, while assessing your understanding of readings and discussions.

Throughout the semester 5-8 short quizzes will be given in class. Each quiz will consist of 3-5 short questions and will be based on the readings, lectures, and in-class discussions. Ten minutes will be allotted for mini quizzes and administered at the start or end of class.

COURSE OUTLINE

UNIT 1: Defining Families & Theoretical Foundations

Week 1 - August 21 (Thursday)

- Welcome & Course Overview
- Intro activities: syllabus review, "What is family?" discussion
- To Do: Intro video due **Sunday, August 24, 11:59PM**

Week 2: August 26 & 28

- Topic: Sociological Thinking & Family History
- Due: Reflection Prompt #1 (**Sunday, August 31, 11:59PM**)

Week 3: September 2 & 4

- Topic: Marriage, Singlehood, and Family Forms
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #1 (Thursday)
- Due: Reflection Prompt #2 (**Sunday, September 7, 11:59PM**)

UNIT 2: Inequality, Resources & Family Life

Week 4: September 9 (Tuesday)/September 11 - No class

- Topic: Family Poverty & Public Transfers
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #2 (Tuesday)

- Due: Reflection Prompt #3 (**Sunday, September 14, 11:59PM**)

Week 5: September 16 & 18

- Topic: Fertility & Reproduction
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #3 (Thursday)
- Due: Media Analysis (**Sunday, September 21, 11:59PM**)

Week 6: September 23 & 25 (No class both days)

Week 7: September 30 & October 2

- Topic: Diverse Family Strategies
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #4 (Thursday)
- Due: Reflection Prompt #4 (**Sunday, October 5, 11:59PM**)

UNIT 3: Institutions, Policy, & Family

Week 8: October 8 & 9

- Topic: Intermarriage & Interracial Relationships
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #5 (Thursday)
- Due: Reflection Prompt #5 (**Sunday, October 12, 11:59PM**)

Week 9: October 14 & 16

- Topic: Parenthood by Adoption
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #6 (Thursday)
- Due: Family & Social Policy Analysis (**Sunday, October 19, 11:59PM**)

Week 10: October 21 & 23

- Topic: The Family & Education
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #7 (Thursday)
- Due: Reflection Prompt #6 (**Sunday, October 26, 11:59PM**)

Week 11: October 28 & 30

- Topic: Cohabitation & Hooking Up
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #8 (Thursday)

Week 12: November 4 & 6

- Topic: Immigration, Deportation & Mixed-Status Families
- Policy/Lab Facilitation #9 (Thursday)

UNIT 4: Change, Continuity & The Future

Week 13: November 11 & 13

- Topic: Foster Families, Health & Family Leave
- Policy Lab/Facilitation #10 (Thursday)

Week 14: November 18 & 20

- Topic: Union Dissolution & Repartnering
- Future of the Family Symposium - Student presentations

Week 15: November 25 & 27

- Thanksgiving Recess - No Class

Week 16: December 2 & 4

- Wrap-Up & Final Presentations
- Topic Paper Due: Friday, December 12, 11:59PM

TEXT & READINGS

All required readings and other materials will be available on Canvas. Optional recommended (but not required) readings will also be posted on Canvas for those interested in graduate study or further exploration.