

Sociology 286
Marriage, Kinship, and the Family

Fall 2003

Course Syllabus

I. **General Information**

Professor: Dr. S.K. Sanderson

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-12:00; Wednesdays, 11:00-12:30

II. **Required Reading Materials**

1. Burton Pasternak, Carol R. Ember, and Melvin Ember, ***Sex, Gender, and Kinship: A Cross-Cultural Perspective***. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.
2. Packet of lecture outlines and partial class notes. (Available at Pro-Packet, located near Domino's in the University Square Mall.)

III-A. **Course Content.**

Different kinds of courses in marriage and the family have been taught for decades in American universities. Courses with these words in the title are frequently taught in departments of home economics or similar departments, and this is the case in our own university. Moreover, virtually all sociology departments teach one or more courses in the family. Some of these courses have a rather practical focus, others are more theoretical, and still others combine practical and theoretical concerns. This course falls into the more theoretical category. It will introduce you to a broad range of social-science theory regarding the family, drawing on the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. The course will also have another focus that distinguishes it sharply from other family courses at IUP: it will be a **comparative** course, which means that it will explore the vast array of family and marriage patterns found throughout the broad

range of human societies. The course, or at least some parts of it, may very well have a practical value for you, but that is incidental to its main purpose, which is the social-scientific understanding of the family as a basic type of human social arrangement.

One can look at the family from either a macrolevel or a microlevel perspective. A macrolevel perspective emphasizes the study of patterns of marriage, family, and kinship as they exist at the level of entire societies. This perspective emphasizes the relationship of the family to other social institutions, and also looks at how the family is embedded in the class, racial, and ethnic structures of complex societies. This course will have a strong macrolevel flavor, and it will give considerable attention to the cross-cultural, comparative, and historical analysis of family life. However, we will also take a microlevel look at the family, especially later in the course. Here we will be concerned with the interactions of individuals within marriages and families. Such issues as mate selection, marital interaction, divorce and remarriage, parenthood and child rearing, and domestic and sexual violence are some of the most important microlevel aspects of the family that we will be exploring. To the extent possible, we will also explore these more micro issues from a comparative and historical perspective.

There should be something for everybody in this course. I am more interested in the macrolevel issues, while many students are likely to be more interested in the microlevel issues. But this course will offer a balanced treatment of both kinds of issues.

III-B. *Course Structure*

The course is formally planned as predominantly a lecture course, but I hope to have quite a bit of discussion and debate. Many of the issues that we will be exploring are hotly controversial, and this ought to stimulate many questions and a lot of discussion. I will deliberately try to stir up controversy at various points in the course. I love controversy. Truth be told, I crave it!! And the introduction of controversy into college courses can be a great learning experience. Everybody learns more when they encounter sharply opposing sets of ideas and are required to think them through.

IV. *Examinations*

There will be 4 major exams in the course, the final included. These will consist entirely of objective questions: multiple-choice, true-false, and matching.

V. *Grading*

Each exam counts 25% of your final grade. I use a straight percentage system of grading as follows: 85% and above = A; 75-84% = B; 65-74% = C; 50-64% = D; below 50% = F.

VI. *My Educational Philosophy*

I am a rather old-fashioned, no-nonsense professor. I have a reputation on this campus as one of the more demanding instructors and harder graders. I expect my students to work hard and to put forth a strong effort. A great deal of information is given out in class, and you must pay close attention all the time. In the classroom I am often weaving together complex arguments, some of which take a fair amount of time to develop. You have to stay focused and keep your mind from wandering. Once it starts to wander, you are in trouble. If you miss an essential piece of an argument, you miss the whole thing.

For me, the most important purpose of education is to expand the powers of the mind and increase the amount of knowledge at your command. Becoming an educated person is hard, but it is a terrific accomplishment. It is one of the most important things a person can do. Education is not simply about learning things you will need on a job. In fact, very little of what you learn in college has any direct relevance for that. Education is for life, not just for a job.

If you do the things I ask of you, you may very well earn a high grade. But even more importantly, you will learn a great deal, and the two together should give you a strong sense of pride and satisfaction. **If you want to learn a lot and don't mind working hard, I am your man. If you don't, then this course is not for you!**

VII. *Course Outline and Reading Assignments*

Class

Meeting Topic & Assignment

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|---|---|
| 1 | Course Introduction |
| 2 | Theoretical Foundations: Sociobiology
Types of Human Societies (students read packet on their own) |
| 3 | Incest & Incest Avoidance (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, chs. 5-6) |
| 4 | Cross-Cultural Analyses of Marriage, Family, & Kinship
(Pasternak/Ember/Ember, chs. 4, 10-12) |
| 5 | Cross-Cultural Analyses (cont'd) |
| 6 | Cross-Cultural Analyses (cont'd) |
| 7 | Cross-Cultural Analyses (cont'd) |
| 8 | EXAM #1* |

- 9 Reproductive Behavior
- 10 Gender Inequality in Human Societies (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, ch. 3)
- 11 Gender Inequality (cont'd)
- 12 Gender Inequality (cont'd)
- 13 Human Sexuality in Historical & Comparative Perspective (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, ch. 2)
- 14 Human Sexuality (cont'd)
- 15 Human Sexuality (cont'd)
- 16 **EXAM #2**
- 17 Historical Development of the Modern Western Family
- 18 Family Variations in Industrial Societies
- 19 Race and Family Patterns
- 20 Mate Selection (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, chs. 7-8)
- 21 Marital Power and Marital Satisfaction
- 22 **EXAM #3**
- 23 Divorce (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, ch. 9)
- 24 Parenthood
- 25 Domestic & Sexual Violence (Pasternak/Ember/Ember, pp. 183-84)
- 26 Alternative Family Lifestyles
- 27 The Current Crisis & Possible Future of the Family
- 28 Grand Conclusions

FINAL EXAM DURING FINALS WEEK

*Please note that exam dates are provisional and subject to slight change.