FAMILY

Setting:
Fall 2011
T, R 4:55-6:10 p.m.
1 Washington Place, Rm. 501
FIRST-UG 35

Instructor:
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DESCRIPTION
We will attempt a lot in this First-Year Interdisciplinary Seminar.

First and foremost, we will conduct a critical examination of “family”—focusing particularly on the ways that academics, politicians, journalists and private individuals in the United States have understood that term over the past 150 years. As we will see, the legal, social and personal definitions of family are fluid and contested. It is not our job as a class to construct one definition of “family” upon which all of us can agree. Instead, we will identify the following: which social forces have attempted to define the term; under what circumstances those various definitions have been established and abandoned, limited and expanded; and what social effects the processes of definition have instigated.

At the same time, we will examine the concept of family through particular disciplinary lenses. For example, what can the field of history tell us about the family? For that matter, what is “history”? What are its particular research methodologies, and what types of knowledge do those methodologies produce? We will ask these questions about all the disciplines we encounter.

By the end of the course, you should have a comprehensive understanding of the many conceptualizations of family in the United States. You should also have a deeper knowledge of several academic disciplines and of interdisciplinary research—knowledge you can use as you begin to build your own Gallatin concentration.
BOOKS/READINGS

The following books are required reading:

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986)

The books are available in the textbook section of the NYU Bookstore, 726 Broadway. Readings will be posted on the course’s Blackboard site. **NOTE: You are not permitted to use laptops or other electronic devices during the seminar; you must print out the readings and bring them with you to class!**

ASSIGNMENTS

You are responsible for the following:

- Reading and being prepared to discuss all books, essays and short stories
- Writing three 6- to 7-page essays

For the first two essays, you should compare / contrast a subject or theme of your choice as it pertains to the book and another text we have read for that section of the course. For the third essay, you will need to compare / contrast a subject or theme of your choice as it pertains to *Peter Pan* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The purpose of these essays is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate the following: your knowledge of the readings; your understanding of the (dis)connections between authors’ arguments and methodologies; and your ability to express yourself clearly and succinctly.

EXTRA CREDIT

I am happy to give extra credit for substantive and engaging oral presentations. At the beginning of the semester, you may select a text you want to study especially closely and then present on it when we discuss it. The extra credit will range from a raise of one grade on one of your essays (B to B+, for example) to a raise of one grade for the entire course. Here is what you need to do to prepare for the oral presentation:

1. Read the piece you want to discuss carefully, and take notes.
2. Come up with one or two ideas that you would like to discuss in your presentation. Remember that the point of the talk is not to recap the plot or thesis of the piece, as we will have read it ourselves; instead, you should plan to expand on a point that you find especially interesting or troubling.
3. Meet with me to discuss your idea(s).
4. Prepare a 10-minute talk; I do not require that you write this out, and—indeed—presentations usually are best when they are made from just a few notes; if you do choose to write it out, 10 minutes speaking usually requires 3 double-spaced pages of text.
5. Prepare a brief one-page handout for every member of the class (18 people in all); the handout can take the form of a couple of questions or a very short outline; its purpose is to promote discussion, led by you, after your 10-minute presentation; this handout is separate from whatever notes you use to give your presentation—those are just for you. (You may also make a PowerPoint presentation, etc., but please make a hand-out as well.)
6. E-mail the handout to me the day before your presentation so that I can offer suggestions.
PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE

Because this course is a seminar, you should participate fully in discussions. You need to prepare for that: Print out and read everything closely; underline points that interest you and write out a few questions that you want to raise; in discussions, expand on points with which you agree and ask questions about statements or points of view you think are unclear. Of course, you may disagree with some of the readings or with my comments or those of the other students, but please do so in a way that respects others.

Attend class, be on time, and stay for the entire meeting. You are allowed one unexcused absence; additional absences may require written documentation, such as a doctor's note. Repeated absences and/or chronic lateness will result in lowered grades.

GRADING

I will grade you according to this formula:

- Three Essays - 25% each
- Participation/Attendance - 25%

In general, I will grade you on how well you articulate, develop and support your arguments. This includes keeping your arguments relevant to the question or issue at hand.

GENERAL WARNINGS

- I penalize LATE WORK. If you genuinely are unable to turn in a paper when it is due, please e-mail or phone me immediately.
- I strongly discourage INCOMPLETES and give them only for well-documented reasons. If I do agree to give you an incomplete, we will set a deadline by which you must submit all remaining work. The deadline most likely will be only 2 or 3 weeks after the last day of class.
- I insist on ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. As a student in a Gallatin course, you belong to an interdisciplinary community of scholars and artists who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin website—www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html—for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

CONCLUSION

Be assured that I want you to learn and to receive the good grades. Please make an appointment with me if you feel you are having difficulty in the course.
READING & DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

PART I — Introductions: Does “Family” Matter?

Tues., Sept. 6        You, Me, the Syllabus…

PART II — Definitions: What Makes a “Family”?

Tues., Oct. 4         Jonathan Marks, What It Means to be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People and Their Genes (2003); Introduction and Chaps. 1, 3 and 4
Thurs., Oct. 6        Marks, What It Means, Chaps. 6, 8 and 12
Tues., Oct. 11        NO N.Y.U. CLASSES; UNIVERSITY OFFICES ARE OPEN
Thurs., Oct. 13       FIRST ESSAY DUE—Start-of-semester Check-in

PART III — The Family in American History

Tues., Oct. 18        Ramon Gutierrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846 (Excerpt TBA)
CLASS SCHEDULE (cont.)


Tues., Nov. 8  Nancy Polikoff, Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage: Valuing All Families Under the Law (2008), Introduction-Chap. 5

Thurs., Nov. 10  Polikoff, Beyond Marriage, Chaps. 6-11

Tues., Nov. 15  SECOND ESSAY DUE—Pre-registration Workshop

PART IV — Representing the Family: Realities and Fictions

               Michael Medved, Hollywood vs. America (excerpt TBA)

Tues., Nov. 22  Class canceled.

Thurs., Nov. 24  HAPPY THANKSGIVING!—No Class Meeting

Tues., Nov. 29  J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan (1911), 236 pp.

Thurs., Dec. 1  Barrie (cont.)


Thurs., Dec. 10  Atwood (cont.)


Thurs., Dec. 15  THIRD ESSAY DUE—Final Farewells