FAMILY

Setting:
FIRST-UG 35
Fall 2012
M, W 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
1 Washington Place, Rm. 501

Instructor:
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DESCRIPTION

Each of us has a unique history, but invariably all of us have been profoundly influenced by our individual families—however we or the state define them. Whether we felt loved as children or not, nurtured or neglected, supported or discouraged, comforted or wounded, our families and their particular circumstances have shaped us more than we might care to believe.

This First-Year Interdisciplinary Seminar examines family in two specific ways. First, we will look at the emotional bonds and tensions that can and often do exist between spouses, siblings and—perhaps most fundamentally—parents and children. How are these emotions shaped by history and culture? Can individuals transcend them? What does it mean for an individual to claim or seek to build a family? Second, we will look at some ways the state has asserted its authority over the intimate relations that constitute the family and its interior life. Marriage, sexual relations, birth and child-rearing are all areas that the state has at one time or another sought to control. How has the state justified its attempts to regulate familial relations? When have families sought such oversight, and when and how have they struggled to maintain their autonomy?

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 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 four 4- to 5-page essays

The course is divided into four thematic sections. An essay is due the last day of each section. For each essay, you should compare / contrast a subject or theme of your choice as it pertains to the book we discussed for that section and another reading of your choice from the syllabus. 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 your analysis 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. Identify 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 (19 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 or show a YouTube clip, 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 base your final grade on this formula:

- Four Essays - 20% each
- Participation/Attendance - 20%

In general, I will grade your essays 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

Families in the United States—in all their logical, confusing, beautiful, troubling and contested manifestations—are a fascinating topic of study, so I hope you enjoy this course! Please be assured that I want you to learn and to receive good grades, so make an appointment with me if you feel you are having difficulties of any kind.
READING & DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Weds., Sept. 5
Introductions: You, Me, the Syllabus…

PART I — THE FAMILY UNIT

Mon., Sept. 10

Weds., Sept. 12
Adrienne Rich, “Mother and Son” and “Motherhood and Daughterhood” (1976, 1986),
66 pp. total

Mon., Sept. 17

Weds., Sept. 19
Mandatory Meeting with Orientation Leaders

Mon., Sept. 24

Weds., Sept. 26
Walker (cont.)

First Response Paper Due

PART II — INTIMATE MATTERS

Mon., Oct. 1

Wed., Oct. 3

Mon., Oct. 8

Wed., Oct. 10

Mon., Oct. 15
No N.Y.U. Classes; University Offices Are Open

Wed., Oct. 17

Mon., Oct. 22
Mandatory Concentration-Brainstorming and Pre-registration Meeting

Wed., Oct. 24
Gordon (cont.)

Second Response Paper Due
READING & DISCUSSION SCHEDULE (cont.)

PART III — THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

Mon., Nov. 19        Polikoff (cont.)

Third Response Paper Due

Weds., Nov. 21       HAPPY THANKSGIVING!—No Class Meeting

PART IV — FAMILY ALTERNATIVES & AMBIGUITIES

Weds., Dec. 12       Atwood (cont.)

Fourth Response Paper Due