FAMILY

Setting:
NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study
FIRST-UG 35
Fall 2014
M, W 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
1 Washington Place, Rm. 501

Instructor:
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COURSE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OUTCOMES

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)
- J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (1911)

The books are available in the textbook section of the NYU Bookstore, 726 Broadway. Readings will be posted on the course’s NYU Classes 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!

ASSIGMENTS
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.

PARTICPATION & 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.
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. Ask yourself: What new insight can I bring to the conversation?
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.

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 to explain why and so that we can decide on a final deadline.
- 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. 3**
Introductions: You, Me, the Syllabus…

**PART I — THE FAMILY UNIT**

**Mon., Sept. 8**

**Weds., Sept. 10**
Adrienne Rich, “Mother and Son” and “Motherhood and Daughterhood” (1976, 1986), 66 pp. total

**Mon., Sept. 15**

**Weds., Sept. 17**

**Mon., Sept. 22**

**Weds., Sept. 24**
Butler (continued)  

**Thurs., Sept 25**
*First Response Essay Due*

**PART II — INTIMATE MATTERS**

**Mon., Sept. 29**

**Wed., Oct. 1**

**Mon., Oct. 6**

**Wed., Oct. 8**

**Mon., Oct. 13**
*No N.Y.U. Classes; University Offices Are Open*

**Wed., Oct. 15**
*Mandatory Concentration-Brainstorming and Pre-registration Meeting with Gallatin First-year Class Adviser, Yevgeniya Traps*

**Mon., Oct. 20**

**Wed., Oct. 22**
Gordon (continued)

**Thurs., Oct. 23**
*Second Response Essay Due*
PART III — THE FAMILY AND THE STATE


Exhibit Visit: “Haunted Files: The Eugenics Record Office,” at NYU Asian / Pacific / American Institute, 8 Washington Mews  (*Meet in Gallatin lobby*).


Weds., Nov. 19  Atwood (continued)

Madonne Miner, “‘Trust Me’: Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (1991), 19 pp.

Thurs., Nov. 20  *Third Response Essay Due*

PART IV — FAMILY ALTERNATIVES & AMBIGUITIES

Mon., Nov. 24  **Audio CD:**  *Ghetto Life 101* (LeAlan Jones & Lloyd Newman, 1993; 30 minutes)


Weds., Nov. 26  **HAPPY THANKSGIVING!—No Class Meeting**


Weds., Dec. 10  Barrie (continued)


Thurs., Dec. 11  *Fourth Response Essay Due*
**WRITING TIPS & GRADING GUIDELINES**

**DUE DATES**
- First essay: **Thursday, Sept. 25**
- Second essay: **Thursday, Oct. 23**
- Third Essay: **Thursday, Nov. 20**
- Fourth Essay: **Thursday, Dec. 11**

**ESSAY GOALS**
The purpose of each essay is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the readings, your ability to engage in a thoughtful yet critical way different authors’ arguments and points of view, and your ability to write concisely and analytically. You choose the specific topics you will engage.

For each essay, you should **MAKE A CLAIM OR ARGUMENT** concerning 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. For example, for the second essay, you might choose to compare and contrast Gordon’s discussion in *Moral Property* of the politics of obstetrics with Rich’s analysis in “Hands of Flesh, Hands of Steel” of early male obstetricians.

**HOW DO I WRITE A STRONG THESIS?**

Good question! Your **THESIS STATEMENT** is almost certainly the most important one or two sentences of your essay, as it succinctly explains to the reader **YOUR CLAIM or ARGUMENT** and the **CONCLUSIONS** you have drawn from your analysis. Typically, in a paper of this length—4 to 5 pages—the thesis statement will come at the end of the introductory paragraph.

Let’s imagine that you decide to write about patriarchy as it is described by Octavia Butler in *Kindred* and by Adrienne Rich in her chapter, “The Kingdom of the Fathers.”

- **WEAK / NON-EXISTENT THESIS:** Both Octavia Butler and Adrienne Rich discuss patriarchy. *Why is this thesis weak?* It is merely descriptive—it does not say anything about how Walker or Rich understand the concept of patriarchy, or whether they agree or disagree about its effects.

- **GOOD (BUT NOT GREAT) THESIS:** Octavia Butler and Adrienne Rich would agree that patriarchy is detrimental to everyone, but especially to women. *Why is this thesis just “so-so,” etc.?* This thesis puts the two writers in dialogue with each other, which is important. However, the conclusion that “patriarchy is detrimental to everyone, but especially to women,” while accurate, is also very obvious—it feels like you, the essay writer, have simply regurgitated the two works without really engaging them.

- **TERRIFIC, WONDERFUL, “LET’S GIVE THAT KID AN A+!” THESIS:** While Octavia Butler and Adrienne Rich would agree that patriarchy is detrimental to everyone, and especially to women, their interests diverge. Butler seems most interested in showing how patriarchy operates hand-in-hand with racism, whereas Rich focuses more on how patriarchy debilitates women and children. *Why is this a great thesis?* It makes a cogent and insightful argument, while explaining each author’s point of view with nuance and respect.
OTHER WRITING GUIDELINES

Please keep in mind the following:

- **Minimum length is 4 full double-spaced pages; maximum length is 5 full double-spaced pages. Please NUMBER all of your pages.**
- Can you use “I”? Yes, but do it only for clarity’s sake and to avoid the torturous passive voice; steer clear of anecdotes. **OKAY:** “In this paper, I compare X and Y in order to show that…” **NOT OKAY:** “I would like to illustrate my point with a long story about my beloved late grandfather, who…”
- On **FIRST REFERENCE**, use the author’s full name and the work’s full title: “In *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, Linda Gordon…”; on **SECOND REFERENCE**, use the author’s last name and a shortened version of the title, if appropriate: “Gordan’s *Moral Property* is not a novel…”
- When do you italicize **TITLES** and when do you put them in quotation marks? Titles of books should be in italics; titles of short stories, essays and book chapters go in quotes.
- **CITE** where appropriate; the easiest format is a parenthetical reference that occurs at the end of a sentence. For example, a sentence might end like this: “…is just one issue that families in the United States must face” (Smith, 103). **NOTE:** As shown here, the parenthetical citation contains only the author’s last name and the number of the page that contains the quote; the citation properly goes after the closing quotation mark but before the final period.
- **PROOFREAD!** I am a stickler for correct grammar. The most common errors involve subject-object disagreements, subject-verb disagreements and pronoun lapses. For example, this sentence is grammatically incorrect: “Almost every parent wants what is best for their child.” It is incorrect because *parent* is singular but *their* is plural. You could fix this in any number of ways. Perhaps easiest would be to write simply: “Almost all parents want what is best for their children.” Likewise, “the woman that works there…” is incorrect. It should be “the woman who works there…”
- Do you need a **BIBLIOGRAPHY**? No, unless you cite work that does not appear on the syllabus, in which case you need to include in the Bibliography all the materials you cited, even ones that do appear on the syllabus.
- Can you submit your paper via e-mail? Yes, but it must arrive on the due date, and it must be saved **AS A P.D.F.**
- Feel free to e-mail me with any questions.
- Write well!

GRADING SCALE

**AN “A” PAPER:**
- Compares / contrasts the texts fully and in a clear and logically structured way in relationship to **one subject or theme**; engages issues and arguments in their complexity; contains fluid and polished prose; and
- Begins with an introduction that contains a clear and comprehensive thesis statement that identifies a) the specific subject or theme that is the focus of the comparison / contrast; and b) a sense of what conclusions you draw from this comparison / contrast; and
- Supports the thesis and larger analysis with pertinent but brief quotes from and / or specific references to each text, using an appropriate citation format; and
- Has obviously been proofread several times, as correct grammar and appropriate word choice exist throughout; and
- Ends with a strong concluding paragraph that sums up the points made throughout the essay.

**A “B” PAPER:**
- Is lacking in one of the elements above.

**A “C” PAPER:**
- Is lacking in two of the elements above.
- Reads like a first draft.

**“D” & “F” PAPERS:**
- Are lacking in more than two of the elements above.
- Read like “zero” drafts.