Syllabus

SOC6024H: Special Topics in Health/Mental Health: Families

Winter 2025

Professor: Joanna Pepin
Time & Location: Thursdays, 10 am - 12 pm, Room 17146
Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description

This seminar course will explore theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, debates, and polices related to the ways families influence people's health and mental health. Emphasis will be placed on evaluating the institutional systems and policy contexts associated with families, health, and mental health. Students will finish the course with a better understanding of how family roles and social contexts impact health behaviors and well-being over the life course. The course is also designed to develop a wide range of writing skills that are essential for academic and professional careers. Students will engage in peer review and group discussions to provide and receive constructive feedback to refine their drafts and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Course Objectives

- Explain how families influence people's well-being across different generations and contexts, from childhood through old age, and at key transitions and life stages.
- Evaluate the effects of health care policies, family leave policies, and social support systems on families and health.
- Develop skills as thinkers and writers who can critically evaluate and synthesize the health/mental health and family academic literature.
- Improve ability to integrate feedback, thereby refining and strengthening professional writing skills and subject matter knowledge.

Components

Assessment	Worth
Participation	20%
Presenting & Discussion Leader	20%
Reading Notes	15%
Writing Assignments (Policy Brief; Grant Proposal; Op-ed)	45%

Evaluation

Participation

Using a seminar format, class sessions will consist primarily of student presentations and student-led discussions focused on the readings. Participation will be assessed based on the submission of 2 discussion questions by 5pm the day before each content class (10 in total), the quantity and quality of contributions to class discussions, demonstrated ability to actively listen and engage with classmates, and the depth of understanding of the readings as evidenced by their contributions.

Presenting & Discussion Leader

Each student will lead 2 content class session based on the assigned readings. These presentations will loosely be based in the style of a session discussant at an academic conference, consisting of a formal presentation by the speaker followed by a facilitator led discussion of the readings, collectively about 45 minutes in length. We will work out the schedule for each student's presentation during the first-class meeting. Depending on class enrollment, students may be working with another student in a given week.

Reading Notes

Students will create reading notes on three readings which are required on a comprehensive exams reading list related to this course (i.e., Health, Family) and that is not required reading for this class. The purpose of this assignment is to help students situate their own interests in broader theoretical debates happening in the field and to aid in generating a deep discussion during class. These assignments are also beneficial for students preparing for comprehensive exams. Assignment details will be provided separately. Students will submit these by 5pm the day before a related course topic.

Writing Assignments

Through the lens of families and health/mental health, three distinct documents (e.g., policy brief; grant proposal; op-ed) will be completed throughout the course of the semester which answer the following questions: (1) What do we know? (2) What do we wish we knew? (3) What should the public know? These assignments are designed to expand understanding of the subject matter while facilitating writing skills. We will dedicate significant time to workshopping assignment drafts during class sessions, gaining experience employing an iterative writing process. Students will produce polished versions of each assignment, which they will submit throughout the semester (see schedule below) for written feedback from the instructor. Final versions of each document must be submitted on a date to be determined following week 12.

Schedule

Specific topics and required readings will be posted on Quercus.

Week	Dates	Topic	Due
1	09-Jan	Overview & Introduction	
2	16-Jan	Guest Speaker – Philip Cohen	
3	23-Jan	01	
4	30-Jan	02	
5	06-Feb	03	Policy Brief
6	13-Feb	04	
7	20-Feb	05	[Reading Week]
8	27-Feb	06	
	06-Mar	No class	Grant Proposal
9	13-Mar	07	
10	20-Mar	08	
11	27-Mar	09	Op-Ed
12	06-April	10	

Course Policies

Assignment Submission

All written work must be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins using 11- or 12-point Times New Roman, Aptos, Calibri, or Roboto.

Written work must be submitted via Quercus. No work will be accepted over e-mail. Files should be in PDF or .doc(x) format. Other file formats will not be graded and will be treated as unsubmitted assignments.

Late Policy & Course Extensions

On-time attendance and participation are expected. It is not possible to give an extension on participation marks or the class presentations. Reading notes will never be accepted late, as students can simply choose another week to submit an assignment (3 out of 10). Late paper assignments will be penalized at a rate of 2% per day up to 10% (5 days) and will not be accepted thereafter, except where there are legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student's control.

Note: Extensions beyond the term end date (not the last day of instruction but the actual end of term, e.g., the last day of a winter term class may be April 6, but the term ends April 30) requires a discussion with the instructor and the graduate office, as well as completion of an SGS request for an extension of course work form. These forms will be considered by the graduate office and are not automatically approved.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to know and adhere to the University's principles of academic integrity. Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any act of plagiarism or other unethical behavior will be addressed in accordance with University guidelines. Please see the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) for specific information on academic integrity at UofT.

Plagiarism Detection

Turnitin plagiarism detection software is integrated within Quercus. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the [Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation](#) web site. I am not comfortable with the widespread use of this software, which effectively provides large quantities of student work to a for-profit company whose future business uses may include using it to train machine learning and AI tools. Consequently, none of the assignments for this course are set for automatic review by Turnitin. However, if I have reason to suspect plagiarism, I may use this tool to detect plagiarism.

If you object to your work being subject to review by Turnitin, add a comment when you submit your assignment. If I do find that we need to review your assignment for plagiarism and you have asked that I not use Turnitin, I will ask that you provide sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper you submit is truly yours. If you cannot or decline to provide the requested documentation and do not consent to us using Turnitin for review, I will decline to mark the assignment.

Plagiarism: Be careful to avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the [Code of Behavior on Academic Matters](#)). Do not present someone else's ideas as your own. Give proper references to others' ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, err on the side of a reference. Turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second (or third etc.) course, is considered an academic offense that results in students being referred off to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Artificial Intelligence

Students may choose to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools as they work through the writing assignments. I encourage you to limit your use to collecting ideas, searching for literature, grammar/copy editing, and outlining. Be aware that AI tools are often wrong, overly generic, and lacking in critical nuance. My expectations for you are considerably higher than that. You will need to be more persuasive and creative at building arguments,

thinking critically, and making connections between ideas than any of these tools. Over-reliance on AI will prevent you from learning the skills necessary to complete work at the level expected for this class. Students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit.

Accessibility and Student Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as as soon as possible.

Equity and Diversity Statement

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca.