

Marriage and Child Wellbeing
WWS 593a
Wednesday, 9:00 am - 12:10 pm
Robertson 029

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Office Hours: By appointment

Reading Materials Required:

Reading Packet or On-Line citations and library reserves

Description of Class:

Families vary greatly in structure, which can have a profound impact on children's wellbeing and future prospects. This course will look at trends and outcomes of family formation, and marriage in particular, and examine reforms proposed by policy makers that would impact marriage. In doing so, students will learn to evaluate and be critical of research in this area. This course is being offered in conjunction with the Future of Children journal. As part of this course, students will actively participate in a two-day rough draft writers' conference on marriage and child wellbeing on October 14-15, 2004.

Description of Paper: The paper will be a critique of one of the rough draft chapters submitted at the conference.

First, the paper will analyze the chapter for what we call the ABCDE's: 1) Is the chapter **A**ccurate? Does the research support the findings? 2) Is the chapter **B**alanced? Does it present all the evidence and sides of the argument fairly? 3) Is the chapter **C**omprehensive? Does it answer all the questions posed in the Table of Contents? 4) Does the chapter **D**ifferentiate between the good research and the bad? Does it weed through all the evidence and present the reader with the best research possible? 5) Can the chapter **E**ducate a wide audience? Has it met the journal's goal of translating top quality research into accessible information? At the end of the day, can we say what works and what doesn't work?

Second, the paper will identify the chapter's main messages for the different target audiences we are trying to reach – policy makers at different levels of government, professionals in the field, and the media. For each target audience, the student will write a one-page “talking points” synopsis for each of the identified target audiences.

Grades: The overall grade for each student will be weighted as follows:

60% Paper
40% Class Participation

SYLLABUS

Class 1. Wednesday, September 15, 2004

Introduction: Organization of Course, *The Future of Children* volume on Marriage and Child Wellbeing

Lecture: The Emergence of Marriage as Public Issue

Video and Discussion: Let's Get Married (the PBS special by Alex Kotlowitz)

Class 2. Wednesday, September 22, 2004

Lecture: American Marriage in the 21st Century

Reading:

- “Marriage on the Public Policy Agenda: What Do Policy Makers Need to Know from Research?” Karen Seefeldt and Pamela Smock, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, U. of Michigan, National Poverty Center Working Paper Series #04-2, Feb. 17, 2004 (on-line at http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/)

Assignment:

A student will present the paper assigned for the reading, analyzing it for the ABCDE's, identifying possible target audiences, and distilling the main message for each of these audiences.

Class 3. Wednesday, September 29, 2004

Lecture: The Impact of Family Formation Change on Family Income and the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Children

Reading:

- “Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children,” Paul Amato, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62:1269-1287 (on-line in electronic library or on reserve)

Assignment:

A student will present the paper assigned for the reading, analyzing it for the ABCDE's, identifying possible target audiences, and distilling the main message for each of these audiences.

Class 4. Wednesday, October 6, 2004

Lecture: Family Formation Choices of Low-Income and Minority Families, and Specific Policies Targeted at those Families

Reading:

- “The Determinants of Marriage and Cohabitation among Disadvantaged Americans: Research Findings and Needs,” Final Report, David Fein, et al., Abt Associates, March 2003 (on-line at www.abtassoc.com/reports/litrev_abt.pdf)
- “Few Good Men: Why Poor Women Don’t Remarry,” Kathryn Edin, The American Prospect, Vol. 13, Issue 7, April 8, 2002 (Found at www.prospect.org/print/V111/4/edin-k.html)
- “Strengthening Fragile Families,” Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan in One Percent for the Kids: New Policies, Brighter Futures for America’s Children, Isabel Sawhill, ed. (Brookings Institution Press) (on reserve)

Assignment:

A student will present the paper assigned for the reading, analyzing it for the ABCDE's, identifying possible target audiences, and distilling the main message for each of these audiences.

Class 5. Wednesday, October 13, 2004

Lecture: Gay and Lesbian Parenting and Marriage

Reading:

- Steven Lowell Nock, “Affidavit in the Ontario Superior Court, Halpern v. Attorney General of Canada (on-line at http://marriagewatch.org/cases/Canada/ontario/halpern.aff_nock.pdf)
- “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, American Sociological Review, 2001, Vol. 66 (April: 159-183) (on-line at <http://sociology.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/319/asr.pdf>)

Assignment:

A student will present the paper assigned for the reading, analyzing it for the ABCDE's, identifying possible target audiences, and distilling the main message for each of these audiences.

ROUGH DRAFT WRITERS' CONFERENCE (Agenda in Reading Packet)

October 14, 2-6:30 pm (dinner optional)

October 15, 9-4:30 pm

Attendance Mandatory

(Students will be asked to take notes at the conference).

Class 6. Wednesday, October 20, 2004

Discussion: Wrap-Up and Looking Forward: Given what we have learned this semester, what should marriage policy be? What role should the government have in forming and implementing this policy? To whom should marriage policies be targeted?