



College of Education and Human Development/  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Human Development and Family Science Program  
4400 University Drive, MS 4C2, Fairfax, Virginia 22030  
Phone: 703-993-3844; Fax: 703-993-4370; email: [hdfs@gmu.edu](mailto:hdfs@gmu.edu)  
<http://hdfs.gmu.edu>

**HDFS 400.001 Advanced Family Processes (3:3:0)**  
**Mondays, 4:30PM- 7:00PM, East 121**  
**Fall 2014**

**Instructor:** Colleen Vesely, PhD  
**Office:** 1102 Thompson Hall  
**Telephone:** 703-993-5346  
**Email address:** [cvesely@gmu.edu](mailto:cvesely@gmu.edu)  
**Office hours:** by appointment

### **Course Description**

Examines family system dynamics and processes, with an emphasis on cultural and contextual factors that influence family functioning and well-being over the lifespan. Examines both healthy and dysfunctional family processes (including abuse, neglect, and family violence). Explores evidence-based practices and interventions that promote family health, resilience, and well-being.

### **Nature of Course Delivery**

This course utilizes a distributed learning format requiring active participation of all students. Students are expected to complete all class readings prior to each session so as to engage in active dialogue, productive learning, and critical reflection. Activities will include instructor presentation, small-group discussions, student presentations, videos, and whole class sharing to support course content. In addition, a Blackboard online component of coursework is required.

### **Learner Outcomes**

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse experiences of contemporary families across the lifespan,
- Show understanding of how cultural and contextual factors influence family functioning and well-being,
- Apply family theories to explain family processes within diverse contexts,
- Understand some of the normative and non-normative challenges and opportunities faced by American families across the lifespan,
- Demonstrate an understanding of both healthy and dysfunctional family processes
- Show understanding of current evidence-based practices and interventions that foster family health and resilience.

### **Professional Standards**

This course is aligned with the standards established by the National Council on Family Relations, focusing specifically on the “internal dynamics of families” content area, to include

“an understanding of family strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate to each other.”

## Required Texts

Walsh, Froma. (2011). *Normal Family Processes, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition: Growing diversity and complexity*. NY, NY: Guilford Press.

## George Mason University Policies and Resources for Students

- Academic integrity (honor code, plagiarism) – Students must adhere to guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>].
- Mason Email – Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, division, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].
- Counseling and Psychological Services – The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops, and outreach programs) to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- Office of Disability Services – Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor in writing at the beginning of the semester <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- The Writing Center (Optional Resource) – The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].
- University Libraries (Optional Resource) – The George Mason University Libraries provide numerous services, research tools, and help with using the library resources [See <http://library.gmu.edu/>].

## Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

**Core Values Commitment:** The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles.

## Collaboration

Collaboration is an important human activity that involves shared responsibility in promoting healthy, productive lives, and educational success. We commit ourselves to work toward these

goals in genuine partnerships with individuals, families, community agencies, schools, businesses, foundations, and other groups at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

### ***Ethical Leadership***

In all professions represented by the college, leadership is an essential component denoting ability and willingness to help lead professional practice to higher levels. We commit ourselves to practice ethical leadership through deliberate and systematic attention to the ethical principles that guide all leaders in a moral society.

### ***Innovation***

We have a history of creating dynamic, innovative programs, and we are dedicated to continue creating innovative approaches in all areas of our work. We commit ourselves to seeking new ways to advance knowledge, solve problems, improve our professional practice, and expand on our successes.

### ***Research-Based Practice***

The best practice in any discipline is based upon sound research and professional judgment. We commit ourselves to basing our instruction, scholarship, and policy recommendations on well-established principles that, wherever possible, emerge from research and reflection on its implications for professional practice.

### ***Social Justice***

Social justice embodies essential principles of equity and access to all opportunities in society, in accordance with democratic principles and respect for all persons and points of view. We commit ourselves to promoting equity, opportunity, and social justice through the college's operations and its missions related to teaching, research, and service.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

## **Course Requirements**

### **General Requirements**

1. The completion of all readings assigned for the course is assumed. Because the class will be structured around discussion and small group activities, it is imperative that students keep up with the readings and participate in class.
2. Attendance in class and/or online is important to students' learning; therefore, students are expected to make every effort to attend class sessions and/or complete online modules within the designated timeframe. Absences, tardiness, leaving early, and not completing online modules in the designated timeframe may negatively affect course grades. If, due to an emergency, students will not be in class, they must call the instructor and leave a message or send an email before class. The following policy is from the university course catalog:

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students

who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

3. In line with Mason's policy that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious holidays, students shall be given an opportunity to make up, within a reasonable time, any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of any intended absences for religious observations in advance of the class that will be missed. Notice should be provided in writing as soon as possible.
4. During face-to-face and live online meetings, cell phones, pagers, and other communicative devices are not allowed in this class. Students must keep them stowed away and out of sight. Laptops or tablets (e.g., iPads) may be permitted for the purpose of taking notes only. Engaging in activities not related to the course (e.g. gaming, email, chat, etc.) will result in a significant deduction in their participation grade.
5. It is expected that assignments will be turned in on time. However, it is recognized that students occasionally have serious problems that prevent work completion. If such a dilemma arises, students should speak to the instructor prior to the assignment due date (when possible). If the student does not communicate with the instructor, a late penalty will be applied.
6. Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when responsible for a task, students will perform that task. When students rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, they will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind), students will ask for guidance and clarification.

### **Written Assignments**

All formal written assignments will be evaluated for content and presentation. The American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition (APA) style will be followed for all written work. All written work unless otherwise noted must be completed on a word processor and should be proofread carefully. (Use spell check!) If students are not confident of their own ability to catch errors, they should have another person proofread their work. When in doubt, they should check the APA manual. Portions of the APA manual appear at the Style Manuals link on the Mason library web guide at <http://library.gmu.edu/resources/edu/>. Students may consult the Writing Center for additional writing support.

Students will do the following:

1. Present ideas in a clear, concise, and organized manner. (Avoid wordiness and redundancy.)
2. Develop points coherently, definitively, and thoroughly.
3. Refer to appropriate authorities, studies, and examples to document where appropriate. (Avoid meaningless generalizations, unwarranted assumptions, and unsupported opinions.)
4. Use correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

## Grading Criteria

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	60-69	D	Below 60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C				
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-				

## Grading Policy

All CEHD/CHSS undergraduate and graduate students are held to the university grading policies as described in the Academic Policies section of the current catalog, which can be accessed at <http://catalog.gmu.edu>

## Specific Course Assignments

Assignments	Due Dates	Points
Attendance and Participation	Ongoing	15
Exams (Midterm = 20 points; Final = 20 pts)	Oct 16; Dec 11	40
Homework Assignments	Ongoing	20
Final Paper (25 points) & Presentations (5 pts)	Dec 4	25
TOTAL		100

### I. Attendance and Participation (15 points)

**Because active participation and engagement are imperative for optimal learning, preparation for and participation in in-class activities will be evaluated based on the following criteria:**

- Students attend class, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class period.
- Students complete readings and prepare for class activities prior to class as is evidenced by their ability to discuss and write about the concepts presented and examined in the texts as well as participate fully in related activities.
- Students are actively involved in in-class and online learning experiences as is evidenced by (1) participating in all activities, (2) engaging in small and large group discussions and in-class exercises, (3) completing written work related to the activities, and (4) supporting the participation and learning of classmates.
- Students show evidence of critical reflective thinking through in-class and online discussions, activities, and written reflections. Go to mymason, <http://mymason.gmu.edu>, to login to Blackboard 9.1.

## II. Exams (Total: 40 points)

Midterm (20 points): There will be one in-class midterm short-answer and essay exam that will cover class lectures, discussions, readings, etc. Exams will be closed book.

Final (20 points): The final exam will be a comprehensive essay exam that will cover course materials and readings, focusing on culturally-responsive, evidence-based practices and family interventions that promote resilience and family well-being.

## III. Homework Assignments: Summary of Readings (20 points)

To encourage student engagement and reflection of the assigned readings, four times throughout the semester (5 points each), students will provide one-page single-spaced integrative summaries of the readings/ course topics to date (eg. Homework Assignment 1 should focus on the readings and course discussions from Walsh Ch. 1-4 and class discussions on 8/25 and 9/8). Students will be expected to contribute to class discussions based on their chosen summaries. The summaries are not a regurgitation of the readings, but a synthesis of the readings informed by in-class discussions as well as students' independent thought, including a reflection of the meanings students are deriving from these readings. Summaries are due in Blackboard by the beginning of each class they are due.

## IV. Final Paper: Family Processes Research Paper (25 points)

Guided by family theories and conceptual frameworks, students will examine in greater depth the processes, functioning, and well-being of families based on differing family forms or configurations (e.g., single-parent, multigenerational households, two-parent), differing cultural dimensions (e.g., intersections of race/ethnicity and class), and/or differing developmental trajectories across the lifespan (e.g., families with preschoolers, aging parents).

- Students will choose their topics, provide a framework for their investigation, and conduct a review of the relevant literature. For example, a student might 1) explore homeless families, parenting practices, and child well-being guided by an ecological perspective, or 2) examine African immigrant family stress, coping, and mental health outcomes using the Double ABCX Model, or 3) explore refugee families' experiences acculturating and navigating a new society using the resiliency framework.
- Students should explore both the challenges facing these contemporary families and their strengths and resilience characteristics.
- Students should also examine extant evidence- and family-based practices and interventions designed to promote family resilience and well-being and provide suggestions for future intervention work.

These 15 page MAX papers require clear writing, critical thinking, and incorporation of peer-reviewed journal articles and other sources in the family research literature. APA format required.

Students will present their papers briefly to the class. We will discuss the expectations of these presentations in class.

**Paper Due: Nov 24 (20 points)**

**Presentation: Dec 1 (5 points)**

## Course Topics and Schedule

Week/Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments <b>DUE</b>
<b>Advanced Family Processes: Overview</b>		
1: Aug 25	Course overview and introduction to family processes  The New Normal: Diversity and Complexity	Walsh: Chapter 1
Sept. 1	LABOR DAY- NO CLASS	
2: Sept 8	Views of Family Normality, Health, and Dysfunction: From Deficit to Strengths Perspective	Walsh: Chapter 2  Reading: <a href="#">Being Black is not a Risk Factor</a>
<b>Varying Family Forms, Challenges, &amp; Strengths</b>		
3: Sept 15	Couple Interaction in Contemporary Two-Parent Families	Walsh: Chapter 3-4 <b>Homework Assignment 1 DUE</b>
4: Sept 22	Risk and Resilience After De-Coupling Remarriage and Stepfamily Life	Walsh: Chapter 5, 7  Reading: Fine, Ganong, & Demo, "Divorce: A Risk and Resilience Perspective" or Reading: Pasley & Lee, "Stress and Coping within the context of Stepfamily Life"
5: Sept 29	Contemporary Single Parenting	Walsh: Chapter 6  Reading: <a href="#">Rogers-Dillon, review of Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice</a>
6: Oct 6	Gay and Lesbian Family Life	Walsh: Chapter 8  Reading: Goldberg, "Lesbian and Gay-Parent Families"  <b>Homework Assignment 2 DUE</b>

7: Oct 14 (TUES)	Adoptive Families and Kinship Care	Walsh: Chapter 9-10
8: Oct 20	Midterm Exam	<b>DUE: Midterm Exam</b>
<b>Cultural and Developmental Perspectives</b>		
9: Oct 27	Cultural Dimensions in Family Functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture: A challenge to concepts of normality</li> <li>• Intersections of Race, Class, and Poverty</li> </ul>	Walsh: Chapter 11-12  Reading: Lindsey & Sanchez, "Homeless Families"  <a href="#">Washington Post, "With shelters full, homeless families have nowhere to go"</a>  <b>Homework Assignment 3 DUE</b>
10: Nov 3	Immigrant Family Processes	Walsh: Chapter 13  Reading: TBD
11: Nov 10	Developmental Perspectives on Family Functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Resilience</li> <li>• Normative Family Transitions</li> <li>• Death, Dying, and Grief in Families</li> </ul>	Walsh: Chapter 16-18
12: Nov 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Hassles and Family Stress</li> <li>• Illness, Disability, and Family Stress</li> <li>• Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Family Life</li> </ul>	Walsh: Chapter 19  Reading: Helms, Walls, & Demo, "Everyday Hassles and Family Stress"; Gelles, "Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Families"  <b>Homework Assignment 4 DUE</b>
<b>Evidence-Based Practices and Family Interventions</b>		
13: Nov 24	Culturally- and Contextually Relevant, Evidence- and Family-Based Practices and Interventions	Readings: TBD <b>DUE: FINAL PAPER</b>
14: Dec 1	Interventions (cont'd) Paper Presentations Wrap-up & Review	<b>DUE: Paper Presentations</b>
15: Dec	Final Exam	<b>DUE: FINAL EXAM</b>

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus as needed. If changes are made, you will be notified of the changes in class or by your university e-mail address.