



Human Development and Family Science Program  
A joint program of the College of Education and Human  
Development and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
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**HDFS 400.002 Advanced Family Processes (3:3:0)**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30- 11:45AM, Thompson 1020**  
**Fall 2015**

**Instructor:** Colleen Vesely, PhD  
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**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.”

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.

## Required Texts

Walsh, F. (2011). *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. NY, NY: Guildford 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/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.

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### ***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.

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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.

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## 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)	10/22, 12/16	40
Homework Assignments (3, 5 points each)	9/17, 10/8, 11/19	15
Final Paper (20 points), Drafts (5 points) & Presentation (5 pts)	11/24, 12/3, 12/10	30
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.

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## 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 (15 points)

To encourage student engagement and reflection of the assigned readings, three 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 Weeks 1-3). 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 (30 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.

**Draft paper Due: Nov. 24 (5 points)**

**Paper Due: Dec. 3 (20 points)**

**Presentation: Dec. 10 or 12 (5 points)**

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## Course Topics and Schedule

Week/Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments DUE
<b>Advanced Family Processes: Overview</b>		
Week 1: Sept. 1, Sept. 3	Course overview and introduction to family processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is family?</li> <li>• The New Normal: Diversity and Complexity</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Amato, <i>What is family?</i>
		Thursday: Walsh Ch. 1
Week 2: Sept. 8, Sept. 10	Views of Family Normality, Health, and Dysfunction: From Deficit to Strengths Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Systems Theory</li> <li>• Intersectionality</li> </ul>	Tuesday: <b>Family Systems Theory reading</b>
		Thursday: <i>Being Black is not a Risk Factor</i> (pp. 1-7 & an additional chapter of your choice)
<b>Varying Family Forms, Challenges, &amp; Strengths</b>		
Week 3: Sept. 15, Sept. 17	Couple Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gottman's 4 Horsemen</li> <li>• Transition to Parenthood</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh Ch. 3
		Thursday: NCFR Report focused on "Transitioning to Parenthood" (read Cowan & Cowan, plus one other article in the report) <b>DUE: Homework 1</b>
Week 4: Sept. 22, Sept. 24	Parenting & Dual Earner Couples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting Styles</li> <li>• Intersectionality (SES, race, family structure) and parenting</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh, Ch. 4
		Thursday: Lareau, <i>Unequal Childhoods</i> <i>OR</i> Collins, <i>Motherwork</i>
Week 5: Sept. 29 Oct. 1	Decoupling & Divorce, Parenting Across Households <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Exchange Theory</li> <li>• Kinscripts</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh Ch. 5 OR Fine, Ganong, & Demo, <i>Divorce: A Risk and Resilience Perspective</i>

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		Thursday: Walsh, Ch. 6 or 7  Optional reading: Pasley & Lee, <i>Stress and Coping within the context of Stepfamily Life</i>
Week 6: Oct. 6 Oct. 8	Gay and Lesbian Family Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Life Course Theory</li> <li>• Intersectionality (revisited)</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh, Ch. 8  Thursday: Goldberg, <i>Lesbian and Gay-Parent Families</i> or Gates, <i>Diversity among Same Sex Couples and their Children</i>  <b>DUE: Homework 2</b>
Week 7: Oct. 13 ( <b>no Tuesday classes</b> ) Oct. 15	Adoptive Families and Kinship Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attachment Theory</li> <li>• Intergenerational Ambivalence</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh Ch. 9  Thursday: Walsh Ch. 10
Week 8: Oct. 20 Oct. 22	Review for Midterm Exam  Midterm Exam	Tuesday: <b>DUE: Questions regarding course material for exam review</b> Thursday: <b>Midterm Exam</b>
<b>Cultural and Developmental Perspectives</b>		
Week 9: Oct. 27 Oct. 29	Cultural Dimensions in Family Functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture: A challenge to concepts of normality</li> <li>• Intersectionality of culture and structure</li> <li>• Cultural Competence and Humility</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Lynch & Hanson, Ch. 2  Thursday: Walsh, Ch. 12
Week 10: Nov. 3 Nov. 5	Immigrant Family Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acculturation Theory</li> <li>• Life Course Theory</li> </ul>	Tuesday: Walsh: Chapter 13  Thursday: Vesely, Goodman, Scurlock, <i>Turning Points and Transitions</i>

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<p>Week 11: Nov. 10 (<b>no in-class meeting</b>) Nov. 12</p>	<p>Families, Stress, and Trauma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Stress Theory</li> <li>• Family Illness</li> <li>• Family Homelessness</li> <li>• Family Violence</li> </ul>	<p>Tuesday: No in-class meeting (asynchronous online class) <b>Reading on Family Stress Theory TBD</b></p> <p>Thursday: Walsh, Ch. 19 (illness) OR Lindsey &amp; Sanchez, <i>Homeless Families</i> AND <a href="#">Washington Post, “With shelters full, homeless families have nowhere to go”</a></p> <p>OR Helms, Walls, &amp; Demo, <i>Everyday Hassles and Family Stress</i> (daily stress)</p> <p>OR Read NCFR report on Intimate Partner Violence (read pages F2-F4 and an article of your choice)</p>
<p>Week 12: Nov. 17 Nov. 19</p>	<p>Developmental Perspectives on Family Functioning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Resiliency Framework</li> <li>• Death, Dying, and Grief in Families</li> </ul>	<p>Tuesday: Walsh, Ch. 17</p> <p>Thursday: NCFR Report: Families &amp; Therapy, Boss, <i>Closure: Why it’s a myth?</i></p> <p><b>DUE: Homework 3</b></p>
<b>Evidence-Based Practices and Family Interventions</b>		
<p>Week 13: Nov. 24 Nov. 26 (no class)</p>	<p>Final Paper Workshop</p>	<p>Tuesday: <b>DUE: FINAL PAPER- DRAFT for paper workshop</b></p> <p>Thursday: Enjoy spending time with family and friends</p>
<p>Week 14: Dec. 1 Dec. 3</p>	<p>Culturally- and Contextually Relevant, Evidence- and Family-Based Practices and Interventions</p>	<p>Tuesday: Readings: TBD</p> <p>Thursday: Readings TBD <b>DUE: FINAL PAPER- FINAL DRAFT</b></p>
<p>Week 15: Dec. 10 Dec. 12</p>	<p>Paper Presentations Wrap-up &amp; Review</p>	<p><b>DUE: Paper Presentations</b></p>
<p>Dec. 16 10:30AM</p>	<p>Final Exam</p>	<p><b>DUE: FINAL EXAM</b></p>

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**HDFS 400**  
**Assignment Rubric for Final Paper**

**NCFR Content Area:** Internal Dynamics of Families, to include an understanding of family strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate to each other.

**Standard #1:** Student has knowledge and understanding of theory related to diverse family processes and interpersonal relationships across the lifespan

**Standard #2:** Student has an understanding of families and their relationships to other institutions, such as educational, health, governmental, religious, and occupational institutions.

**Standard #3:** Student can apply knowledge and understanding of family processes, interpersonal relationships, and the ways in which families interact with other societal institutions across the lifespan

**I** = The outcome is introduced with this criterion

**R** = The outcome is reinforced with this criterion

**A** = The outcome is assessed with this criterion

	No Evidence	Beginning (Limited Evidence)	Developing (Clear Evidence)	Accomplished (Clear, convincing, substantial evidence)	SCORE
CRITERIA	0	1	2	3	
<b>I. Defines topic and provide overview:</b> Provides a comprehensive overview of the selected family form, cultural dimension, and/or developmental trajectory and relevant family processes/outcomes under study. Student should use a minimum of 4 separate sources in this section (2-3 pp.) <b>STANDARD 1 (A)</b>	Does not include a comprehensive overview of defined topic	Includes some discussion of the topics as defined but uses fewer than three sources	Provides a discussion of the topic as defined and cites at least three peer-reviewed empirical articles. However, section may not be well-integrated or necessary details are not included.	Provides a well-integrated, thoughtful discussion of the topic as defined and cites four or more peer-reviewed empirical articles. (3)	

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<p><b>II. Utilizes family theory or conceptual framework to guide investigation:</b> Applies at least one family theory or conceptual framework in explaining the issue, using at least one unique theory-related source (1-2 pp.) <b>STANDARD 1 (A)</b></p>	Does not discuss any family theories or conceptual frame	Attempts to apply family theory and/or uses less than one source	Applies one family theory or conceptual frame using less than one source to explain the issue	Successfully applies one or more family theories or conceptual framework using 1-2 sources to explain the issue (4)	
<p><b>III. Examines the challenges, strengths and resilience characteristics of families under study:</b> Provides a clear discussion of the challenges, strengths and resilient characteristics emblematic of their chosen families (based on form, culture or developmental trajectory). Uses 2 additional sources (2-3pp.). <b>STANDARD 1 (A)</b></p>	Does not provide a discussion of challenges and strengths	Attempts to discuss challenges and strengths/resilience but includes limited discussion and/or uses one or fewer additional sources	Provides some discussion of challenges and strengths/resilience and/or uses fewer than two additional sources.	Provides an in-depth discussion of challenges and strengths/ resilience and uses two or more additional sources. (4)	
<p><b>IV. Explores evidence- and family-based practices/ interventions and policies:</b> Provides a clear discussion of the extant practices and intervention strategies designed to promote family well-being. Integrates this discussion with the role of related family policy. Uses a minimum of 2 additional sources (1-2pp.). <b>STANDARD 2 (R)</b> <b>STANDARD 3 (R)</b></p>	Does not discuss any family interventions or family policies	Attempts discuss family-based practices, interventions, or policies and/or uses one or fewer sources	Provides some discussion of family-based practices/ interventions and policies using less than two sources to explain the issue	Successfully provides an in-depth discussion of family-based practices/ interventions and at least one related policy using 2 or more sources to explain the issue (3)	
<b>ELEMENTS OF WRITING RUBRIC</b>					
<p><b>V. APA formatting:</b> Student cites all articles used using correct APA formatting for both in-text citations and reference list.</p>	Does not provide references and/or in-text citations	References and in-text citations are not in APA format	References and in-text citations are in APA format but they include more than two minor errors	References and in-text citations are in APA format and they contain no more than two minor errors (3)	

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<b>VI. Grammar and Spelling:</b> Student's paper is error free.	Contains more than 10 errors in spelling and grammar	Contains five to ten spelling or mechanical errors	Contains three to five spelling or mechanical errors	Contains less than two spelling or mechanical errors (3)	
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