

**George Mason University**  
**College of Education and Human Development**  
**College of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Human Development and Family Science**

HDFS 400.001– Advanced Family Processes  
3 Credits, Spring 2018  
Mondays/Wednesdays 9:00-10:15 am  
Global Center 1306B

**Faculty**

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**Prerequisites/Corequisites**

None

**University Catalog 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. Offered by [Graduate School of Education](#). May not be repeated for credit.

**Course Overview**

The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the Mason Core curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. While it is not feasible to design courses that cover "all" areas of general education, synthesis courses should function as a careful alignment of disciplinary goals with a range of Mason Core learning outcomes.

Many departments may require a Capstone Experience instead of a Synthesis course. Please see your major advisor to confirm which requirement you must complete.

**Course Delivery Method**

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 or Objectives**

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

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse experiences of contemporary families across the lifespan,

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

### **Learning Outcomes for Synthesis**

Upon completing a synthesis course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.)
2. Using perspectives from two or more disciplines, connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns

Apply critical thinking skills to:

1. Evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources, OR,

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

### **Course Performance Evaluation**

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

#### **• Assignments and Examinations**

##### **I. Exams (Total: 30 points)**

Midterm (15 points): There will be one in-class midterm short-answer and essay exam that will cover class lectures, discussions, readings, etc. Exam will be closed book.

Final (15 points): The final exam will be a comprehensive essay exam that will cover class lectures, discussions, readings, etc. Exam will be a take home exam.

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

To encourage student engagement and reflection of the assigned readings, two times throughout the semester (10 points each), students will provide one-page single-spaced integrative summaries of the readings/ course topics to date (e.g. Homework Assignment 1 should focus on a single aspect of the readings and course discussions from Weeks 1-3).

**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 critical thought, including critical reflection of the meanings students are deriving from these readings as they relate to*

*their personal and professional experiences.* Summaries do not need to include information on every topic discussed, but rather, successful summaries tend to go into depth on one topic with strong critical reflection. Summaries are due in Blackboard by the beginning of each class they are due.

**III. Video Assignment on Family Stress Theory (5 points)**

During Week 11 there will be asynchronous online coursework in which you will view a film and write a short paper applying family stress theory. There will be more details on this assignment provided in class closer to week 11.

**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 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 8-10 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 to the class. We will discuss the expectations of these presentations in class.

**Due Dates:** 2/20 (topic idea)

3/18 (annotated bibliography) - 6 points

4/15 (draft of final paper to peer) - 3 points

4/17 (feedback on draft to peer) - 3 points

4/24 (final paper due) - 15 points

4/29, 5/1 (Presentation of Paper) - 3 points

**• Other Requirements**

**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.

**Note:** To determine whether the campus is closed due to inclement weather, call 703-993-1000 or go to [www.gmu.edu](http://www.gmu.edu).

### 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 at <http://infoguides.gmu.edu/content.php?pid=39979>. 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.
5. Type the paper with double spacing, indented paragraphs, 1-inch margins all around, and 12-point Times New Roman font.

### • Course Performance Evaluation Weighting

Assignments	Due Dates	Points
Attendance and Participation	Ongoing	15
Exams (Midterm = 15 points; Final = 15 pts)	3/25, 5/8	30
Homework Assignments (two, 10 points each)	2/11, 3/6	20
Video Assignment	4/10	5
Final Paper (15 points), Annotated Bibliography (6 points), Draft & Feedback to Peer (6 points) & Presentation (3 pts)	2/20 (topic idea) 3/18 (annotated bibliography) 4/15 (draft of final paper to peer)	30

	4/17 (feedback on draft to peer) 4/24 (final paper due) 4/29, 5/1 (Presentation of Paper)	
TOTAL		100

• **Grading Policies**

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-				

All CEHD 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>. Those students enrolled in a CEHD Licensure Graduate Certificate program, however, must earn a B- or better in all licensure coursework. A degree-seeking graduate student will be dismissed after accumulating grades of F in two courses or 9 credits of unsatisfactory grades (C or F) in graduate courses. A 3.0 grade point average is required for completion of the graduate degree.

**Professional Dispositions**

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

**Class Schedule**

Week/Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments DUE
<b>Advanced Family Processes: Overview</b>		
Week 1: 1/21	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>	Monday: NO CLASS
		Wednesday: Amato, <i>What is family?</i> Walsh Ch. 1
Week 2: 1/28	Views of Family Normality, Health, and Dysfunction: From Deficit to Strengths Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Systems Theory</li> <li>• Family Strengths</li> </ul>	Monday: Ingoldsby, <i>Family Systems Theory</i>
		Wednesday: <b>No in-person class meeting this day</b> , as Dr. Vesely has a local research presentation. Instead we will have an asynchronous <b>**online class**</b> <a href="#">Being Black is not a Risk Factor (pp. 1-7 &amp; an additional chapter of your choice)</a>

<b>Couple Relationships, Transition to Parenthood, &amp; Parenting</b>		
Week 3: 2/4	Couple Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gottman's 4 Horsemen (<i>Couple &amp; Family Therapist Guest Lecture</i>)</li> <li>Transition to Parenthood</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh Ch. 3
		Wednesday: NCFR Report focused on "Transitioning to Parenthood" (read Cowan & Cowan, plus one other article in the report)
Week 4: 2/11	Parenting Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intersectionality (SES, race, family structure) and parenting</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh, Ch. 4 <b>DUE: Homework 1</b>
		Wednesday: James et al., <i>The Central Role of Race and Racism in Reframing FST</i> OR Lareau, <i>Unequal Childhoods</i>
<b>Diverse Family Structures</b>		
Week 5: 2/18	Decoupling & Divorce, Parenting Across Households <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Exchange Theory</li> <li>Kinscripts</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh Ch. 5
		Wednesday: Fine, Ganong, & Demo, <i>Divorce: A Risk and Resilience Perspective</i> <b>DUE: Final Paper Topic</b>
Week 6: 2/25	Decoupling & Divorce, Parenting Across Households (CONT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Exchange Theory</li> <li>Kinscripts</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh, Ch. 6 or 7
		Wednesday: Pasley & Lee, <i>Stress and Coping within the Context of Stepfamily Life</i>
Week 7: 3/4	Gay, Lesbian, and Trans Family Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Life Course Theory</li> <li>Intersectionality (revisited)</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh, Ch. 8
		Wednesday: McGuire et al., <i>Transfamily Theory</i> OR Few-Demo et al., <i>Queer Theory, Intersectionality, and LGBT-Parent Families</i> (focus on Introduction and Table 1) <b>DUE: Homework 2</b>
<b>Week of 3/11</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	
Week 8: 3/18	Adoptive Families and Kinship Care	Monday: Walsh Ch. 9 <b>DUE: Annotated Bibliography for final paper</b>
		Wednesday: Walsh, Ch. 10 Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE) Resources
<b>3/25</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	<b>Monday: In-class Midterm Exam</b>

<b>Cultural and Developmental Perspectives on Family Functioning</b>		
Week 9 & 10: 3/27, 4/1, 4/3	Cultural Dimensions in Family Functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrant Family Processes</li> <li>• Life Course Theory</li> </ul>	Wednesday (3/27): Lynch & Hanson, Ch. 2
		Monday: Walsh, Ch. 12-13 <b>**Sign-up for individual paper meeting with Dr. Vesely for week of 4/8</b>
		Wednesday: Vesely, Goodman, Scurlock, <i>Turning Points and Transitions</i> OR Vesely, Letiecq, & Goodman, <i>Immigrant Family Resilience in Context</i>
Week 11: 4/8 (no in-class meeting; asynchronous online class & individual final paper meetings with Dr. Vesely)	Families, Stress, and Trauma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Stress Theory</li> <li>• Family Illness</li> <li>• Family Homelessness</li> <li>• Family Violence</li> </ul>	<b>No in-class meetings this week—instead complete the following as well as an individual meeting with Dr. Vesely re: final paper</b> Ingoldsby et al., <i>Family Stress Theory</i> Choose one: Walsh, Ch. 19 (illness) Articles on homelessness (in Bb) Child Abuse and Neglect chapter in Handbook of Social Work Practice with Vulnerable and Resilient Populations (2014) (in Bb) NCFR report on Intimate Partner Violence (read pages F2-F4 & article of your choice) <b>Complete video assignment DUE by 11:59PM on 4/10</b>
Week 12 4/15	Developmental Perspectives on Family Functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Resiliency Framework</li> <li>• Death, Dying, and Grief in Families</li> </ul>	Monday: Walsh, Ch. 17 <b>DUE to partner: FINAL PAPER-DRAFT for paper workshop (send via email and cc Dr. Vesely)</b>
		Monday: NCFR Report: Families & Therapy, Boss, <i>Closure: Why it's a myth?</i> Review: <a href="https://onbeing.org/programs/pauline-boss-the-myth-of-closure/">https://onbeing.org/programs/pauline-boss-the-myth-of-closure/</a> <b>DUE to Partner: FINAL PAPER Feedback (send via email and cc Dr. Vesely)</b>
<b>Evidence-Based Practices, Family Interventions, &amp; Course Wrap-up</b>		
Week 13: 4/22	Culturally- and Contextually Relevant, Evidence- and Family-Based Practices and Interventions	Monday: Lynch & Hanson, Ch.3 Guest Lecturer ( <i>Megan Fitzgerald</i> ) Readings TBA

		Wednesday: Course Wrap-up <b>DUE: FINAL PAPER- FINAL DRAFT</b> <i>(you must attend class for paper to be accepted on time)</i>
Week 14: 4/29	Presentations	Monday: Paper Presentations
		Wednesday: Paper Presentations
Week 15: 5/6	Final Exam distributed via Bb on 5/6	<b>Monday: Last day of class</b> <b>Final Review</b>
		<b>Take home Final Exam, DUE 5/8 by 11:59PM in Bb</b>

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

### 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: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

### GMU Policies and Resources for Students

#### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

#### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to [tk20help@gmu.edu](mailto:tk20help@gmu.edu) or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursesupport.gmu.edu/>.



- The Writing Center 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/>).
- The 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/>).
- The Student Support & Advocacy Center staff helps students develop and maintain healthy lifestyles through confidential one-on-one support as well as through interactive programs and resources. Some of the topics they address are healthy relationships, stress management, nutrition, sexual assault, drug and alcohol use, and sexual health (see <http://ssac.gmu.edu/>). Students in need of these services may contact the office by phone at 703-993-3686. Concerned students, faculty and staff may also make a referral to express concern for the safety or well-being of a Mason student or the community by going to <http://ssac.gmu.edu/make-a-referral/>.

**For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit the website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/>**

**For the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, please visit the website <https://chss.gmu.edu/>.**