

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

HDFS 401.DL1 - Family Law and Public Policy  
3 Credits, Fall 2020  
Online

**Faculty**

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**Prerequisites/Corequisites**

HDFS 200

**University Catalog Course Description**

Examines contemporary family life and the impact of government laws, policies, and programs on families over time and across contexts and cultures. Explores the intended and unintended consequences of policies for diverse families across a variety of policy matters, from anti-poverty and social welfare policies to health and environmental policies.

**Course Overview**

This course fulfills the **Writing Intensive** requirement in the HDFS major. Please note the writing requirements for the course throughout the syllabus to include the 15-page family policy research and analysis paper due 11/22/2020. The policy research and analysis paper will be completed through a draft/feedback/revision process. Your policy research tentative topic is due 9/7/2020. Your final topic selection is due 9/28/2020. Your abstract and paper outline are due 9/28/2020. The first draft of your paper is due 10/26/2020. I will provide commentary on the draft and the final version of your paper will be due on 11/22/2020. We will discuss this writing assignment throughout the course. All students are expected to meet with me via Zoom at least once during the semester to discuss your writing approach and outline for the paper.

**Course Delivery Method**

This course will be delivered online (76% or more) using an asynchronous format via the Blackboard Learning Management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard course site using your Mason email name (everything before @masonlive.gmu.edu) and email password.

This course utilizes a Blackboard online learning format requiring timely and active participation of all students throughout the semester. Activities to support student achievement of the learner outcomes include instructor presentations, videos, collaborative student work in small groups, assigned readings, and projects leading to written products. Students engage in timely critical reflection and accountable talk related to the learning activities.

**Under no circumstances, may candidates/students participate in online class sessions (either by phone or Internet) while operating motor vehicles. Further, as expected in a face-to-face class meeting, such online participation requires undivided attention to course content and communication.**

### *Technical Requirements*

To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with a standard up-to-date browser, either Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox is required (note: Opera is not compatible with Blackboard).
- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs, respectively, are available for free download:
  - Adobe Acrobat Reader: <https://get.adobe.com/reader/>
  - Windows Media Player: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player>
  - Apple Quick Time Player: [www.apple.com/quicktime/download/](http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/)

### *Expectations*

- Course Module: Because asynchronous courses do not have a "fixed" meeting day, our week will start and finish on the dates specified in the course schedule and on blackboard.
- Synchronous Sessions: There will be a few synchronous sessions for students who need to watch some videos they might not have access to otherwise.
- Log-in Frequency: Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communications from the instructor, class discussions, small group work, and/or access to course materials at least 3 times per week. At some points during the semester, you will have the opportunity to meet and conference with the instructor via Skype, Google Hangout, or another video form. These meetings will be scheduled via email and/or via a signup sheet on our Blackboard site.
- Participation: Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.
- Technical Competence: Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students who are struggling with technical components of the course are expected to seek assistance from the instructor and/or College or University technical services.
- Technical Issues: Students should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.
- Workload: Please be aware that this course is not self-paced. Students are expected to meet specific deadlines and due dates listed on Blackboard and in the Class Schedule section of this syllabus. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities and assignments due.
- Instructor Support: Students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content or other course-related issues. The instructor can meet via telephone or web conference. Students should email the instructor to schedule a one-on-one session, including their preferred meeting method and suggested dates/times.
- Netiquette: The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued. Students must always re-read their

responses carefully before posting them, so as others do not consider them as personal offenses. Be positive in your approach with others and diplomatic in selecting your words. Remember that you are not competing with classmates, but sharing information and learning from others. All faculty are similarly expected to be respectful in all communications.

- Accommodations: Online learners who require effective accommodations to insure accessibility must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services.

## **Learner Outcomes or Objectives**

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

1. Develop an understanding of the ways in which families and government interact
2. Gain an understanding of family laws and policies that explicitly and/or implicitly impact families in US society by using policy research and analytical tools
3. Comprehend the definitions, approaches, and issues involved in family policy impact analysis and policy evaluation
4. Gain an understanding of family laws and policies in terms of their sensitivity to and supportiveness of diverse families using policy impact analyses
5. Develop an ability to apply a family perspective to policy-making and policy analysis
6. Expand their intellectual curiosity, interest, and understanding of the ways in which policies impact or will impact their individual and family functioning

## **Professional Standards (National Council on Family Relations)**

Upon completion of this course, students will have met the following professional standards:

This course is aligned with the standards established by the National Council on Family Relations, focusing specifically on the “Family Law and Public Policy” content area, to include “an understanding of the legal issues, policies, and law influencing the well-being of families.”

## **Required Texts**

### **No Text Required**

Rather than require a textbook, I will use a series of articles and other media to introduce you to family law and public policy (see schedule and Blackboard). Because this is a writing intensive course, you should familiarize yourself with the [7th Edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#). You can also access “Purdue’s OWL” website to guide you:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/apa\\_changes\\_7th\\_edition.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_changes_7th_edition.html)

## **Other Recommended Texts and Books**

Bogensneider, K. (2014). *Family policy matters: How policymaking affects families and what professionals can do* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Huntington, C. (2014). *Failure to Flourish: How law undermines family relationships*. NY: Oxford.  
Meyers, J. (2019). *Family law in a nutshell* (7<sup>th</sup> Ed.). St. Paul, MN: West Academic Publishing.

Polikoff, N. D. (2008). *Beyond (straight and gay) marriage: Valuing all families under the law*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Walker, L. (2015). *Family law and public policy*. New York: Wolters Kluwer.

## Course Performance Evaluation

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

### Specific Course Assignments

Assignments	Due Dates	Points
Class Participation and 3 Reading Summaries	Ongoing	15
Exams (Midterm = 25 points; Final = 25 points)	Midterm = 10/9 Final = TBD	50
Homework Assignments	Ongoing	15
Final Paper & Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Draft = 10 points</li><li>Final paper = 30 points</li><li>Presentation = 5 points</li></ul>	Draft = 10/26 Final Paper = 11/22 Presentation = 11/30	45
TOTAL		125

#### I. Participation and Reading Summaries (15 points)

##### Reading Summaries

- Students complete **THREE** summaries of the readings as follows:  
You are expected to read and summarize **THREE** of **FIVE** articles in this course as noted on the course schedule with an asterisk.\* These summaries are NOT regurgitations of the readings—they should be reflective, critical, and thoughtful. You might question some of the ideas raised in the readings or bring in materials from other classes to support or refute points. Rather than offer opinions, you might consider searching the web for alternative perspectives offered up by think tanks or professional organizations. Remember this is a writing intensive course – these summaries will get us reading and writing. I will also ask you to comment on the style of writing and take note of the structure of the article, so you begin attending to others' writing styles, not just content.

The summaries should be typed, single-spaced, checked for grammar and cohesion of thought, and should NOT exceed one page. Summaries are solo efforts and should not be worked on in groups. Please consider connecting with the Writing Center early and often. Summaries are to be your own original work. If you use ideas from other sources, you should cite those sources throughout (e.g., “According to \_\_\_\_”). Plagiarism will be dealt with according to university conduct codes. **Late summaries or email attachments of summaries will NOT be accepted without express permission from the instructor.**

#### II. Exams (Total: 50 points)

##### 1. Midterm Exam: 25 points

There will be one mid-semester multi-choice/short-answer/essay exam in this course to examine your comprehension of family policy terms, historical underpinnings, conceptual frameworks, and family policy matters. A discussion of the exam and review of key issues will be held prior to the examination.

**2. Final Exam: 25 points**

There will be an **optional** final exam that wraps-up the course and asks you to think back over the semester and reflect on what you have learned. You will be asked to select a family law or policy that is of interest to you, answer a number of questions about that policy/law, assess the policy regarding family impacts, and discuss policy implications for families. We will discuss this exam in greater detail in class.

**III. Homework Assignments: (15 points)**

**Abstract and Detailed Outline + Revision: 10 points**

As noted on the syllabus schedule, please submit a 150-word abstract detailing your paper topic and a brief outline of the tentative contents of your final paper. The abstract/outline will likely change as you research your topic and further develop your ideas. However, this effort will facilitate forward movement with your work and will allow for our continued dialogue. All students are **strongly encouraged to meet with me individually** about your topic/paper outline. You will be given one opportunity to revise your abstract outline as directed on the course schedule.

**Letter to Policymaker: 5 points**

Select a cause, program, or pending legislation that is of interest to you. Write a 1-page letter to the appropriate public official at the local, state, or federal level to express your views and to ask for his/her support. Mail the letter and turn in a copy to the instructor. If you want to complete this assignment before the due date—especially if the issue is pending in Congress and you want to act in a timely manner—please contact me to discuss.

**IV. Final Paper and Presentation (45 points)**

**Policy Research and Analysis Paper: DRAFT = 10 points; FINAL= 30 points**

- Select a family policy or social problem in need of policy attention. Review the literature relevant to your topic to identify the historical, social, and political issues which might impact your policy topic (e.g., political movements, social trends, philosophies). Provide a description of the policy and activities associated with it and consider the impact of the policy on families (e.g., consider the intended and unintended consequences of your chosen policy for family functioning and well-being). Use the evaluation tools and family policy impact questions provided in class as a framework for conducting this analysis.
- Your paper should be typed, double-spaced (using 12-point font) and up to a maximum of **15 pages** in length (including title page, abstract, and references). **You are required to use a minimum of 10 professional sources (e.g., refereed journal articles, chapters from edited volumes).** It is critical that you cite all sources (including government, think tank, and other related websites); understand what plagiarism means and how to avoid it. All citations should be referenced using APA format (7<sup>th</sup> edition)—if you are not familiar with this format, see me early on for pointers. This paper should be your own work, not a collaborative effort. Acts of plagiarism—whether intentional or unintentional—will be dealt with following GMU policy.

Below is an **example** format that your research paper might follow; however, recognize that each topic will most likely require additional or alternative subject headers, etc.

- Page 1: Title page—following APA style guidelines
- Page 2: Abstract (150 word summary)

- Pages 3-13: [You might include some of these elements...]
  - Policy Overview: Brief description of the policy under investigation
  - Review of Literature
    - Theoretical framework relevant to the topic
    - Historical and contextual underpinnings related to policy
    - Changing trends in family life/political climate
    - Family values—perspectives from the Right and Left
  - Analysis: Impact of Policy on Families
    - [Theoretical framework guiding analysis]
    - Research findings related to policy evaluation/family impact assessment—intended and unintended consequences for families
  - Discussion and Recommendations for future
- Pages 14-15: References in APA format (May be single spaced)

### **Student Presentations: 5 points**

Students will present the findings of their research paper in brief to the class using PPT or some other presentation program. We will discuss this requirement in more detail as the class gets started.

## • **Other Requirements**

### **Written Assignments**

All formal written assignments will be evaluated for content and presentation. The American Psychological Association, 7th 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**

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/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>

### **Professional Dispositions**

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

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>

## Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignment (all linked material on Blackboard)
<b>Week 1</b> Aug 24	<b>Introduction:</b> Syllabus: Family Law and Public Policy <b>An Overview of US Family Law and Policy</b>	Syllabus *Mason et al. (2001). Child and Family Policies in the United States at the Opening of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.
<b>Week 2</b> Aug 31	<b>I. Social Policies and Families</b>  <b>II. Government &amp; Family Relations—</b> Basics of government and legal system Review of relationship between federal and state governments AND families	*Letiecq, Anderson, & Joseph. (2013). Social Policies and Families Through an Ecological Lens  <b>EXPLORE:</b> US Constitution: <a href="http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html">http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html</a> VA Constitution: <a href="http://law.lis.virginia.gov/constitution">http://law.lis.virginia.gov/constitution</a>
<b>Week 3</b> Sept 7	<b>Research &amp; Theory as it Applies to Policy:</b> Theoretical frameworks to guide policy development and analysis	*Trzcinski, “An ecological perspective on family policy”  <b>DUE 9/7: Tentative Topic</b>
<b>Week 4</b> Sept 14	<b>Family Policy Evaluation and Family Impact Analysis (FIA)</b>  <b>FORM GROUPS based on Topic</b>	* <a href="#">The Family Impact Handbook</a>  <b>EXPLORE:</b> <a href="https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/">https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/</a> [Esp Family Impact Resources]
<b>Week 5</b> Sept 21	<b>Immigrant Families</b>  <b>FIA Example:</b> DREAMers and their Families  NCFR Immigrant Family Policy Brief	*Mahatmya & Gring-Pembele  *Vesely et al. <a href="https://www.ncfr.org/resources/research-and-policy-briefs/immigrant-families-across-life-course-policy-impacts-physical-and-mental-health">https://www.ncfr.org/resources/research-and-policy-briefs/immigrant-families-across-life-course-policy-impacts-physical-and-mental-health</a>
<b>Week 6</b> Sept 28	<b>Family Violence</b> <b>Child Abuse and Neglect</b>  <b>FIA Example:</b> Legal Rights of Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren	*Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield (on BB) <b>EXPLORE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="https://vakids.org/kids-count-data">https://vakids.org/kids-count-data</a></li> <li><a href="https://www.urban.org/research/publication/fighting-child-abuse">https://www.urban.org/research/publication/fighting-child-abuse</a></li> <li><a href="https://www.clasp.org/issues/children-youth-families">https://www.clasp.org/issues/children-youth-families</a></li> </ul> <b>9/28: MIDTERM EXAM POSTED</b> <b>DUE 9/28: First Draft Abstract+Outline</b>



		<b>DUE BY 10/2: Summaries x 3</b>
<b>Week 7</b> Oct 5	<b>Work and Family Policy Matters</b> (e.g., Welfare Reform, ECEC, FLSA, Contingent workforce, Health Care, Social Security, retirement)  <b>Family Leave Policies: FMLA</b>	<b>EXPLORE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://iwpr.org/policy/">https://iwpr.org/policy/</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcr-employee-paid-leave">https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcr-employee-paid-leave</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://www.newsweek.com/gavin-newsom-california-governor-2019-budget-family-leave-program-parental-1288053">https://www.newsweek.com/gavin-newsom-california-governor-2019-budget-family-leave-program-parental-1288053</a></li> </ul> <b>DUE 10/9 at 11pm: MIDTERM EXAM</b>
<b>Week 8</b> Oct 12	<b>Family Complexity, Structure, and Family Privilege</b> Marriage Fundamentalism Marriage Equality Divorce and Child Custody	<a href="#">Cherlin &amp; Seltzer (2014)</a> Letiecq (2019): Family Privilege <a href="#">Family Story Project</a>  <b>DUE 10/16: Revised Abstract+Outline+REFS (2 minimum)</b>
<b>Week 9</b> Oct 19	<b>Writing Workshops via Zoom</b>	APA 7 <sup>th</sup> Edition
<b>Week 10</b> Oct 26	<b>Parents, Children, and Education</b> --Early Childhood Education and Care --Education policy --Transgender children, schools & the law	Readings TBD <b>Due 10/26: Draft Policy Paper (5 pps min; 5 REFS min)</b>
<b>Week 11</b> Nov 2	<b>Housing, Food Security, and Public Policy</b>	<b>Readings TBD</b> Excerpts from Desmond, M. (2017). Evicted.
<b>Week 12</b> Nov 9	<b>Different Approaches to Translating Family Research to Policy:</b> Influencing the future of family law and policy—The role of educators, advocates, and activists <b>Writing Workshops via Zoom</b>	*Letiecq & Anderson
<b>Week 13</b> Nov 16	<b>Writing Workshops via Zoom</b>	<b>Due 11/22 by 11pm: Final Family Policy Paper</b>
<b>Week 14</b> Nov 23	(Thanksgiving Break Nov 26-29)	Work on Presentations and Policy Letter
<b>Week 15</b> Nov 30	<b>Student Presentations</b> <b>Course Wrap-Up:</b> Course Evaluation <b>Last day of semester = 12/5</b>	<b>Due week of 11/30: Student Presentations</b> <b>Due 11/30: Letter to Policy Maker</b>
<b>Week 16</b> FINAL EXAM	<b>Optional Final TBD</b>	<b>DUE: Optional Final TBD</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 <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>).
- 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 <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

### *Campus Resources*

- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>.

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

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

**HDFS 401**  
**Assignment Rubric for Final Paper (30 points possible)**

**NCFR Content Area:** Family Law and Public Policy, to include an understanding of the legal issues, policies, and law influencing the well-being of families.

**Name:**

	<b>No Evidence</b>	<b>Beginning (Limited Evidence)</b>	<b>Developing (Clear Evidence)</b>	<b>Accomplished (Clear, convincing, substantial evidence)</b>	<b>SCORE</b>
<b>CRITERIA</b>					
<b>I. Policy Overview:</b> Provides a comprehensive overview of the selected family policy topic and relevant historical, social, political, economic climate surrounding policy. Student should use a minimum of three separate sources in this section (2-3 pp.) <b>(7 points)</b>	Does not include a comprehensive overview of policy topic (0)	Includes some discussion of the policy topics as defined but uses fewer than three sources (1-3)	Provides a discussion of the policy 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. (4-6)	Provides a well-integrated, thoughtful discussion of the policy topic and policy climate and cites three or more peer-reviewed empirical articles. (6-7)	
<b>II. Utilizes family theory or conceptual framework to guide investigation:</b> Applies at least one family theory or conceptual framework in guiding policy analysis, using at least one theory-related source (1-2 pp.) <b>(5 points)</b>	Does not discuss any family theories or conceptual frame (0)	Attempts to apply family theory and/or uses less than one source (1-2)	Applies one family theory or conceptual frame using less than one source to explain the issue (3-4)	Successfully applies one or more family theories or conceptual framework using 1-2 sources to explain the issue (4-5)	
<b>III. Using FIA, examines the intended and unintended consequences of policy for family</b>	Does not provide an analysis of policy impacts(0)	Attempts to discuss policy impacts but includes limited	Provides some discussion of policy impacts and/or uses fewer than two	Provides an in-depth discussion of policy impacts and uses two or	

<b>well-being:</b> Provides a clear analysis of impact of policy on family well-being. Uses 1-2 additional sources (2-3pp.). <b>(5 points)</b>		discussion and/or uses fewer than one additional source (1-2)	additional sources. (3-4)	more additional sources. (4-5)	
<b>IV. Explores policy alternatives:</b> Provides a clear discussion of possible policy alternatives to ameliorate unintended outcomes of policy for families and to promote family well-being. Uses a minimum of 1-2 additional sources (2-3pp.). <b>(5 points)</b>	Does not discuss any family policy recommendations (0)	Attempts discuss family-based policy alternatives and/or uses less than one source (1-2)	Provides some discussion of policy alternatives using less than one source to explain the issue (3-4)	Successfully provides an in-depth discussion of family policy alternatives using 1-2 sources to explain the issue (4-5)	
<b>V. APA formatting:</b> Student cites all articles used using correct APA formatting for both in-text citations and reference list. <b>(5 points)</b>	Does not provide references and/or in-text citations (0)	References and in-text citations are not in APA format (1-2)	References and in-text citations are in APA format but they include more than two minor errors (3-4)	References and in-text citations are in APA format and they contain no more than two minor errors (4-5)	
<b>VI. Grammar and Spelling:</b> Student's paper is error free. <b>(3 points)</b>	Contains more than 10 errors in spelling and grammar (0)	Contains five to ten spelling or mechanical errors (1)	Contains three to five spelling or mechanical errors (2)	Contains less than two spelling or mechanical errors (3)	

**Total points** \_\_\_\_\_ **(out of 30 total)**