General description and objectives:

In Canada as in most developed countries, families have experienced profound transformations over the last forty years. On the one hand, the increased participation of women in the labour market has led to an important reorganization of family life, and both parents now have to juggle work and family expectations. On the other hand, the decline of fertility has led to a sharp reduction of family size. The introduction of the Divorce Law in 1968 marked the beginning of a redefinition of conjugal life, characterized by an increase in the number of divorces, the decline of marriage and the progression of cohabiting unions, as a way to form a union and raise a family. More recently, the rights and obligations of cohabiting couples at separation has been at the centre of legal cases and political debates, and the notion of “parenthood” is being revisited.

These changes have brought a substantial increase in the number of new family configurations (single-parent families and step-families; cohabiting couples with children; same-sex couples with children). Individuals’ family life no longer follows a known and predetermined sequence of events, marked by the ceremony of marriage, the birth of children and their successive departure from home, and the death of one of the spouses. For an increasing proportion of individuals, family life now extends over a succession of various family episodes with blurred contours.

This seminar introduces students to a vast array of literature that studies families from different perspectives. The first part of the course deals with theoretical concepts (e.g., notions of kinship, filiation, marriage) and methodological issues faced when approaching the study of family. The next three sessions focus on the redefinition of conjugal and parental life that has taken place over the last two decades, and on the institutional responses developed by different provinces and countries to take into account these new realities. The following sessions examine some aspects of family life (such as intergenerational exchanges, balancing family and work) that have been altered by recent changes in conjugal and work behaviours.
Requirements and evaluation:

1. Participation (20%):

   **Class discussion leaders (10%)**: Each week, some pre-designated students will start the session by summarizing (5 minutes) the main points of argument in the assigned readings. They are expected to prepare a few questions or highlight some points of debate to spark and orient class discussion. The summaries and discussion starters should be broadly drafted in a short paper (one page long) to be handed in. A sign-up sheet will be available for students to select their preferred day to lead.

   **Participation in discussions (10%)**: Students are expected to read all the assigned readings in order to actively participate into the class discussions.

   Both leading and participating in discussions will be evaluated on the clarity of the presentation, the quality, rigour and relevance of the interventions, the openness towards others’ point of views, and the critical and constructive nature of the exchanges.

2. **Take-home exam**: the take-home exam is designed to ensure that students understand the concepts and definitions introduced in the readings and discussions, and to further stimulate reflection. The exam should be approximately 5 to 6 pages (doubled space) long, and will count for 20% of the final grade. It will be based on the materials read up to February 2. The exam will be distributed on February 2 and is due on February 16.

3. **Research and presentation of a court case dealing with family issues**: working in small teams, students will choose a recent court case dealing with family issues, such as union rights and obligations (e.g., the right of gay couples to marry or the rights and obligations of cohabiting couples) or legal parenthood (e.g., the number of parents a child can have or the rights of donors/surrogate parents vs adoptive parents). First, they are expected to make a clear and succinct presentation of the case and of the main arguments of the ruling. Second, half of the team is expected to take position in favour of the ruling decision and to present the arguments to support their claim; the other half is to argue against the ruling. Students are to do a class presentation of their research and to turn in a copy of the synopsis of their presentation or of their Power Point presentation (March 15). The oral and written presentation will count for 20% of the final grade and will be evaluated according to the quality of the documentation and the clarity and logic of the presentation.

4. **A final paper that consists of conducting a personal research on a chosen topic in family sociology.** This research should result in a 20 pages long paper (doubled space), including references, which comprises a critical review of existing studies on the chosen topic. Figures or tables may be included but will not count to the paper length.

   The topic of research should be chosen by turning in a proposal indicating your goals (1 page or less) by March 29 at the latest. Students must set up individual meetings with the professor to review proposals.

   Final papers will be presented during the last day of class, on April 12; this presentation will count for 10% of the final grade. The final paper is due on April 15, and will be graded on 30%. The evaluation will be based on: the clarity, the precision and logic of the writing and of the argumentation; the capacity of synthesis; the effort and quality of the personal
reflection and critical analysis; a judicious use of data, if appropriate; the quality of the bibliography.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Disability and illness policies
Individuals with university recognised disabilities will be afforded special considerations in the setting of examination times and venues and depending on the type of disability may be given extra time to complete the required work. Assignments and/or projects that are late due to illness will not be accepted without an authoritative third party excuse and explanation. Examinations will not be re-scheduled without the same considerations.

Academic Integrity
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Right to submit in English or French written work that is to be graded
In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Calendar, Themes and Due Dates

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<td>3. January 26</td>
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<td>4. February 2</td>
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Schedule and Reading list

Readings can either be found by clicking the hyperlink in the syllabus or on myCourses (readings are not in both places). You can also search for articles through the library.

1. **Introduction** (January 12)
   Presentation of the syllabus and discussion on interests and expectations.
   Brief introduction to different approaches to study ‘family’.

2. **Kinship and family systems** (January 19)

3. **Theorizing families** (January 26)

4. **Defining and measuring families** (February 2)

5. **Diversification of conjugal and family life** (February 9)
6. **Marriage or cohabitation: Does it Matter?** (February 16)

7. **Family and parenthood in question** (February 23)

8. **Family change and intergenerational relations** (March 8)

9. **Students’ presentation: Court cases focusing on conjugal/parental relations** (March 15)

10. **Combining family and work** (March 22)
11. *Ethnic and migrant families* (March 29)

12. *Open topic* (April 5)
   Readings TBA.

13. *Students’ presentation of their final paper* (April 12)