

Families and Health

SOC427H1S

Winter 2026

Schedule: Tuesdays, 11:10am - 1:00pm

Instructor: Joanna R. Pepin [j.pepin@utoronto.ca]

Office Hours: By appointment

1 Course Description

This seminar course examines how families influence individual and collective well-being, with particular attention to midlife, a critical period shaped by fertility decisions, parenting responsibilities, relationship changes, and work and family responsibilities. Students will develop expertise by selecting a specialization lens (e.g., a life stage, role, demographic group, or specific context) that allows them to apply course topics to an area of personal interest and broaden the range of issues we examine together. Students will also strengthen professional writing skills through in-class writing, peer review, and collaborative discussion, culminating in persuasive op-eds that connect course concepts to public debate. Most class sessions will be structured around peer-led presentations and facilitated discussions, creating a collaborative space for exploring ideas and perspectives, with approximately 30 minutes reserved most weeks for students to actively develop their op-ed and presentation through iterative drafting, feedback, and sustained engagement with the writing process.

1.1 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Explain how family roles and relationships affect midlife health and well-being, and communicate these insights clearly verbally and in writing.
- Strengthen skills as thinkers, writers, and presenters who can critically evaluate and articulate ideas from the health and family academic literature.
- Integrate feedback to improve writing and verbal communication while crafting public-facing work that synthesizes and conveys sociological insights on family and health.

1.2 Prerequisite

The prerequisite to take this course is successful completion of 1.0 SOC at the 300-level. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time and without notice.

2 Required Texts

There is no textbook for this course. Required readings will be available via Quercus.

Class will be primarily discussion based and your participation will require that you have completed the readings before coming to class. Please bring a copy of the assigned readings with you to class.

3 Components

All assignments, evaluations, and tests must be submitted via Quercus.

Assessment	Notes	Weight	Due
Participation	attendance + contributions required	25%	Weekly
Perusall reading annotations	10 graded weeks; completeness and quality	10%	Weekly
Class leader & response paper	Presentation + co-facilitation + 2-3 pg response	20%	TBD
Specialization lens	3 parts total; see subweights	45%	
Zotero bibliography		(10%)	Weekly
Presentation		(15%)	Week 11 12
Op-ed paper		(20%)	TBD

4 Schedule

Course topics are subject to changes before the first day of class.

Week	Dates	Topic
1	6-Jan	01 Overview & Introduction
2	13-Jan	02 Fertility
3	20-Jan	03 Parenthood
4	27-Jan	04 Marital Status
5	3-Feb	05 Relationship Transitions
6	10-Feb	06 Relationship Quality
	17-Feb	NO CLASS - Reading Week

Week	Dates	Topic
7	24-Feb 07	Partner Spillover
8	3-Mar 08	Intimate Partner Violence
9	10-Mar 09	Work and Family Interface
10	17-Mar 10	Divisions of Labour
11	24-Mar	<i>Presentations</i>
12	31-Mar	<i>Presentations</i>

5 Evaluation

5.1 Participation, including attendance (25%)

The best outcome for a seminar is that we thrive together, creating something larger than the sum of our parts. To help achieve this, you are expected to:

- **Read and prepare:** Complete all assigned readings before class and develop a stance toward them—whether by raising questions, offering critiques, considering theoretical implications, or connecting them to other materials.
- **Attend consistently:** You may miss one session without penalty. Beyond that, absences require documentation; otherwise, your participation grade will be reduced.
- **Engage constructively:** Contribute to discussions by asking questions, sharing insights, and listening thoughtfully. Speak when your contribution advances the conversation, and engage ideas at their strongest rather than dismissing them superficially.
- **Bring in your specialization lens:** When appropriate, connect course topics to your chosen lens (life stage, role, demographic group, or context) to enrich class discussions and broaden our collective understanding.

Participation will be assessed based on: attendance, engagement, analytic quality of contributions, familiarity with readings, the value of contributions to overall discussion (including etiquette and impact on class morale), and the integration of specialization lens insights.

Class Absence Policy:

You are allowed to miss one session (*Life Happens Pass*) without it affecting your participation grade. **You do NOT need to email me to explain your absence or to supply medical notes or other kinds of documentation to use your Life Happens Pass.**

If you miss another session, you must justify your absence with appropriate documentation (see below) to avoid a reduced participation grade. For any session (beyond the first) you miss without supplying acceptable documentation, your participation grade will be reduced by 2.5%.

5.2 Perusall reading annotations (10%)

We will use Perusall, a browser-based collaborative reading tool, to engage with course texts. Instead of reading in isolation, you will annotate directly in the document, highlight key ideas, ask

questions, and respond to classmates' comments to turn reading into a shared conversation. Perusall automatically evaluates your engagement on a pass/fail basis for each assignment, considering both the quantity and quality of your annotations and how well they stimulate discussion. Your overall Perusall grade will be the average of these marks. To receive credit, you must post insightful and useful annotations 24-hours before class (e.g., Mondays at 11am); late submissions will not earn credit. To access Perusall, go to <https://app.perusall.com/join/pepin-gryxz> and enter the course code: PEPIN-GRYXZ

Late Perusall Policy:

You are allowed to miss one week (*Life Happens Pass*) of Perusall annotations without it affecting your participation grade. **You do NOT need to email me to explain your missed assignment or to supply medical notes or other kinds of documentation to use your Life Happens Pass.**

Because these assignments are available from the first week of the term and directly facilitate our in-class work, no further extensions or makeups will be offered once a deadline has passed, for any reason.

5.3 Class leader & response paper (20%)

Beginning in Week 2, each student will be assigned one of two designated readings for a given week. Your leadership role has two components:

1. **Individual Presentation:** Each student prepares their own short presentation (about 10 minutes) using slides (PowerPoint or similar). In your presentation, briefly summarize your assigned reading, then focus on analyzing the paper's strengths and limitations, extending the discussion by raising new questions, and connecting the article to other course readings.
2. **Discussion Facilitation:** After the presentations, you (and potentially a co-facilitator) will lead the class discussion on the week's topic. Use insights and questions drawn from classmates' Perusall annotations to spark dialogue, encourage participation, and deepen understanding of the readings.
3. **Individual response paper:** You must submit a 2–3 double-spaced page response paper within one week of your discussion facilitation. This paper should briefly summarize the main points from the readings (no more than one page), then extend the conversation by reflecting on your own reactions, insights, and connections. It should draw on all the week's readings and, where relevant, link back to earlier course materials. Although there may be two student leaders each week, these papers are to be written and submitted individually.

Missed Class Policy:

Students who miss their scheduled class leader role (presentation and co-facilitation) will be, at the instructor's discretion and **only with required documentation**, either: (1) rescheduled to lead a different reading/topic or (2) given an alternative assignment consisting of publicly posting on Quercus a recorded slide-narrated version of the presentation along with a mini-podcast that poses substantive discussion questions and connects the week's theme to a relevant news example.

Extension Policy:

A 7-day grace period is available for all students, for any reason (documentation not required) for

the Individual Response Paper. **You do NOT need to inform me if you decide to use the grace period.**

Note that further extension requests for legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student's control are considered from the *primary deadline*, not from the date of the 7-day grace period automatically applied.

After this 7-day grace period, the late deduction is **5% for each 24-hour period** the assignment is late starting after the last day of the grace period.

5.4 Specialization lens (45%)

During class, I will ask you to choose a specialization lens (e.g., life stage, role, demographic group, specific context) to research over the course of the semester. You will apply your specialization lens in three ways:

Bibliography (10%)

- Find at least 2 sources per week that relates your specialization lens to the weekly topic.
- Maintain a bibliography in [Zotero](#).
- Evaluation will consider consistency, quality of sources, and demonstrated connections to readings.

Individual presentation (15%)

- Deliver a 5-minute presentation that previews the central argument of your upcoming op-ed paper, followed by 5-minute question and answer. The presentation should not just summarize readings but instead lay out your intended claim and demonstrate how you will build and substantiate it.
- Your presentation must explicitly draw on course materials and your Zotero bibliography to argue, support, and extend your point. This means weaving together evidence from weekly readings and your Zotero bibliography to show the strength and coherence of your argument.
- Each student must also act as an effective audience member, including asking a question or offering a substantive comment on at least two other classmates' presentations.

Op-Ed paper (20%)

- Write a polished op-ed (800–1,000 words) for a general educated audience.
- Draw on your Zotero bibliography and course readings to make a persuasive argument about a family and health issue.
- Graded on originality, strength of argument, integration of sources, and writing quality.

Missed Presentation Policy:

Students who miss their scheduled individual presentation will be, at the instructor's discretion and only with required documentation, either: (1) rescheduled to present on an alternative day and time or (2) given an alternative assignment consisting of publicly posting on Quercus a recording of a slide-narrated version of the presentation, a mini-podcast that poses and answers 3–4 substantive discussion questions that could have been asked during your live Q&A, and an Audience Engagement

Reflection (800 words) that engages with at least two classmates' presentations from the alternative presentation week.

Extension Policy:

A 7-day grace period is available for all students, for any reason (documentation not required) for the Zotero Bibliography and Op-Ed Paper. **You do NOT need to inform me if you decide to use the grace period.**

Note that further extension requests for legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student's control are considered from the *primary deadline*, not from the date of the 7-day grace period automatically applied.

After this 7-day grace period, the late deduction is **5% for each 24-hour period** the assignment is late starting after the last day of the grace period.

5.5 Arts & Sciences Grading Scale

Percentage	Letter	GPA	Definition
90-100	A+	4.0	Excellent
85-89	A	4.0	
80-84	A-	3.7	
77-79	B+	3.3	Good
73-76	B	3.0	
70-72	B-	2.7	
67-69	C+	2.3	Adequate
63-66	C	2.0	
60-62	C-	1.7	
57-59	D+	1.3	Marginal
53-56	D	1.0	
50-52	D-	0.7	
0-49	F	0.0	Inadequate

6 FAQs

6.1 Can I have an extension?

The policies on deferrals/incompletes/extensions described for each assessment above are aligned with Universal Design for Learning principles. All students know the policies in advance, and they apply equally to all students.

Students who miss their class leader and co-facilitator assignment, specialization lens presentation, or are late in submitting an assignment will receive a deduction as outlined above or mark of zero unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. Within three days of missing a deadline, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with one of the following:

- Absence declaration via ACORN (can only be used once during the semester)
- U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
- College Registrar's letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)
- Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Because flexibility is built into the class already, there will be no further extensions or individualized opportunities to improve your grade. I will offer the benefit of the doubt that whatever caused you to miss a class or deadline was valid. That may be illness, oversleeping, a technical glitch, a family emergency, or something else. I understand that students, much like faculty, have responsibilities and priorities outside of their schoolwork, and that all of us have unexpected difficulties that may arise. This is why I build flexibility into the course. You will receive no judgement from me for taking advantage of that flexibility.

We all need to use caution and weigh the costs and benefits of our choices appropriately. I trust you to do so and not make additional requests beyond the flexibility offered here. This flexibility is designed to offer all students the same opportunities rather than favoring only those students who are comfortable making special requests. If you are dealing with a prolonged issue that is interfering with your ability to stay engaged in the class and meet course standards, I strongly encourage you to reach out to your College Registrar who may be able to connect you with university support.

Be aware that assignment closing dates and deadlines are automated within Quercus. For example, if something is due at 11:59pm on Mar 1st, it will be marked late if it is submitted at 12:00am on Mar 2nd, and if an assignment is set to close (i.e., late assignment is not accepted) at 11:59pm on Mar 1st, Quercus will not accept submissions at 12:00am on Mar 2nd. I will not provide extensions due to slow internet, connectivity issues, or other technical delays that result in submission after the deadline. Start the submission process well enough in advance to ensure that your assignments will be fully submitted before the deadline.

6.2 Can I do extra credit?

I don't offer extra credit out of fairness for all students in the course.

I appreciate that you are managing competing demands on your time and that you care about your grade. Instead of spending extra energy completing even more assignments, use it to do your best on the remaining assessments.

Please do not ask for opportunities for extra credit, as it isn't just a harmless request. Even the request itself adds to the instructor's workload by requiring responses outside the planned curriculum, and it signals a lack of trust in the professor's commitment to academic integrity. Such requests also undermine fairness, erode equity, and weaken trust in the grading system among peers.

6.3 Will you change my grade?

If you have a question about the grading of any piece of work or believe that your assignment or test has been mismarked, first consult with the TA who graded your work. For simple mathematical errors, simply alert your TA of the mistake. Sometimes these happen. For other grade appeals, submit a short memo that clearly states specific reasons to justify the request and backs up these reasons with evidence from your assignment. If you cannot resolve your questions with the TA, you should consult with the instructor.

If you ask for your grade to be changed on any assignment, your grade may stay the same, be increased, OR decreased after the TA or instructor reconsiders your work. Be advised that we err on the side of being too generous, rather than stingy, during the first pass of grading. Thus, it is possible that when your assignment is re-examined, your grade might be lowered.

Any questions about grading an assignment or test **must be raised within two weeks of the date that the assignment was graded**. In other words, if you do not review your work in a timely fashion, you may forfeit your right to question the grading of your work.

6.4 What if I need to contact you?

Only use your University of Toronto email when corresponding and start the email subject line with “SOC427”.

I will make every effort to respond to emails within 24-48 business hours (i.e., Monday through Friday, between 9am – 5pm). **Questions with answers in the syllabus will not get a response.**

Academic tip #1 How to address instructors (and TAs)

- Err on the side of formality
 - For faculty (with Ph.D.s), use “Professor LastName” or “Dr. LastName” unless directed otherwise.
 - Instructors without Ph.D.s usually invite you to use first names (but will likely not be offended if “Professor” slips out).
- Use a formal, respectful writing style
 - Include opening and closing salutations (e.g., ‘Dear Prof. X’, ‘Sincerely, Student Y’).
 - No text-speak (e.g., ‘Hey!’ ‘Hi there!’).
- Do your part in solving what you need to solve.
 - Don’t ask about something that’s answered right on the syllabus.

6.5 Can I record or share class materials?

Video, audio, and photographic recording of lectures is **prohibited** without my explicit permission. The selling or dissemination of tests, study guides, and homework assignments is prohibited without my explicit permission. The selling or dissemination for commercial purposes of notes derived from my lectures is also prohibited without my explicit permission.

Permission to record or share lectures/meetings may be granted to a student at the discretion of the instructor and normally for the sole purpose of accommodating a student's accessibility needs and only for the purposes of private study. Students who are entitled to record the lectures because of accessibility accommodations are required to sign a form stating that the recording is made for personal use only. Out of fairness to everybody (and because it is unlawful to record somebody without their consent in Ontario), this will be required of all students who wish to make a recording of the lectures. Students who have obtained permission to record a lecture should do so in a manner which ensures the privacy of other students present.

7 Policies & Required University Notices

7.1 Quercus Information

This course uses the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post information about the course. This includes posting readings and other materials required to complete class activities and course assignments, as well as sharing important announcements and updates. New information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term. To access the course website, go to the U of T Quercus log-in page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>.

SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES POSTED ONLINE: Grades posted on Quercus are for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, including any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved and posted on ACORN at the end of the course. Please contact me as soon as possible if you think there is an error in any grade posted on Quercus.

7.2 Assignment Submission

All written work must be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins using 11 or 12 point Times New Roman, Aptos, Calibri, or Roboto.

Written work must be submitted via Quercus. No work will be accepted over e-mail. When you submit files, they should be in PDF or .doc(x) format unless otherwise specified. Other file formats will not be graded and will be treated as unsubmitted assignments.

Students can typically expect work to be returned within two weeks unless extenuating circumstances dictate otherwise. Please consider that instructors also have other professional responsibilities, personal lives, and other demands on their time.

7.3 Academic Integrity

Students are expected to know and adhere to the University's principles of academic integrity. Any act of plagiarism or other unethical behavior will be addressed in accordance with University guidelines. Please see the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) for specific information on academic integrity at UofT.

7.4 Plagiarism Detection

Turnitin plagiarism detection software is integrated within Quercus. It uses text matching technology to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the [Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site](#). I am not comfortable with the widespread use of this software, which effectively provides large quantities of student work to a for-profit company whose future business uses may include using it to train machine learning and AI tools. Consequently, none of the assignments for this course are set for automatic review by Turnitin. However, if I have reason to suspect plagiarism, I may use this tool to detect plagiarism.

If you object to your work being subject to review by Turnitin, add a comment when you submit your assignment. If I do find that we need to review your assignment for plagiarism and you have asked that I not use Turnitin, I will ask that you provide sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper you submit is truly yours. If you cannot or decline to provide the requested documentation and do not consent to us using Turnitin for review, I will decline to mark the assignment.

Plagiarism: Be careful to avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the [Code of Behavior on Academic Matters](#)). Do not present someone else's ideas as your own. Give proper references to others' ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, err on the side of a reference. Turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second (or third etc.) course, is considered an academic offense that results in students being referred off to the Office of Academic Integrity.

7.5 Artificial Intelligence

Students may choose to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools as they work through writing assignments. I encourage you to limit their use to brainstorming ideas, outlining, and grammar/copy editing. Be aware that AI tools are often wrong, overly generic, and lacking in critical nuance. My expectations for you are considerably higher than that: you must demonstrate persuasive argumentation, critical thinking, and creative connections between ideas beyond what these tools can provide.

If an assignment is suspected of being substantially written by AI (e.g., the paper goes beyond minor edits or grammar fixes and relies on AI for significant portions of content), you may be asked to meet with me for an oral exam on the material. Failure to pass the oral exam will result in a failing grade for the assignment. Academic integrity is about doing your own work, not outsourcing your thinking and learning to a human or a machine. Over-reliance on AI will prevent you from learning the skills necessary to succeed in this class, and students remain fully accountable for the work they submit.

7.6 Accessibility and Student Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as> as soon as possible.

7.7 Writing Support

Students are urged to seek assistance from the University of Toronto [Writing Centre](#) should they anticipate challenges in this area.