

## *Family policies shape practice, perception, evaluation, definition of eligibility, options & outcomes. – Karen Bogenschneider*

### **Integrating Family Policy into Curriculum**

“Family policy encompasses all those policies that address the five main functions of families—family formation, partner relationships, economic support, childrearing, and caregiving. Examples of family policies include child care, child support, divorce, family violence, juvenile crime, long-term care, marriage, teenage pregnancy, welfare reform, etc.” (Bogenschneider et al., 2012, p. 8). These are explicit policies, designed to achieve specific goals regarding family life. Implicit policies, those not primarily intended to affect families, but that have indirect consequences on family functioning and well-being, can be found (for example) in the areas of healthcare, tax reform, housing, poverty, the justice system, and workplace rules.

Some departments have the space in their curriculum for specific family policy courses, and can devote an entire semester to analyzing family policy and incorporating family perspectives in policymaking. For these courses, the Family Impact Seminar website (see [FamilyImpactSeminars.org](http://FamilyImpactSeminars.org)) offers extensive curriculum information and supplemental materials. While there is a great value in teaching a policy course, family studies programs can also integrate policy education throughout the curriculum. Key points to consider:

- Many issues about family life, law, services and support are highly contested. Students may benefit from debating and grappling with viewpoints that are independently valid and yet opposed.
- Becoming sensitized to policy implications of research and program evaluation is an ongoing process.
- Developing skills in recognizing, analyzing, and developing alternatives takes more than one exposure to family policy.
- Opportunities for advocacy and action occur in many situations. Helping students recognize the policy implications across situations builds competence and awareness of advocacy roles and influences.
- Comparative and global examples are needed to help policy analysis to rise above purely local practice.

### **Some examples of family policy integration across curriculum:**

- Introduction to Family Studies** – At a more basic level, policy implications can be discussed with each topic in a survey course. Included in the discussion can be an overview of policy shifts that have contributed to demographic and social shifts in the experience of family. Students can be asked to utilize demographic and policy information to support an argument for either family decline or family resilience. This experience can provide an introduction to advocacy and support for an argument or approach.
- Family Resource Management** – Students explore local, regional and national policies and then discuss examples of how families utilize those policies or manage the impact that those policies have on the family’s experience.
- Family Theories** – After studying the different family theories, students can be introduced to the concepts of family policy and family perspective in policy making. Students can explore how theory influences policy making.
- Contemporary Trends in Family Studies** – When studying contemporary social issues affecting families, students can explore the relevant policies and the social, historical and political significance of the policies and their impact on family wellbeing. Students can be asked to research one topic further and write about policy alternatives at the local, national and global level. Topics could include: the economy – current issues of poverty, LGBT families, foster care/adoption, child welfare, families with disabilities, family violence, immigration, human trafficking.
- Family Law** – Students study the history of family law, state and federal statutes and relevant case law that is affecting families. Students discuss how statutes and case law influences policies at the local and state level.
- Services to Children and Families** – A specific family impact lens on programs and services and the process and effectiveness of implementation of those services provides an in depth look at how family impact analysis can be utilized in assessing programs and services. Students research how policies influence the services available to families, the procedures and requirements for families to access services and the process of implementation of the services. Students can then be challenged to consider effectiveness and alternative approaches to implementation of the programs.
- Parenting Across the Lifespan:** Policy implications can be discussed on each topic covered in the course such as disabilities, nutrition, family composition, sex education, children's rights, divorce & custody, violence & children's discipline, grandparent caregiving, advocacy & parenting education.

- Global families:** Content can address family law, human rights, international standards & treaties, women's and children's status, abuse & neglect, transnational & immigrant families, citizenship & travel, communication, population demography, indigenous families.
- Aging and Family:** Issues such as intergenerational family support, legal problems of caregiving, guardianship & inheritance, living arrangements, community infrastructure, consumer protection can be addressed.
- Internship Experiences and Service Learning** – Students who engage in an internship will encounter policies at their sites. Students are asked to reflect on their experiences and also consider how policy influences the work that is done at the internship site. Real world experience with policies will enhance the curriculum.
- Capstone Course in Family and Human Services** – Capstone courses offer students the opportunity to research and explore family topics. Content can then expand to consider the influence of policy on the field such as professional issues of accreditation, licensing, and ethics, history and trends in family policy, understanding social change & involvement, interpreting research to professionals and decision makers, recognizing the impact of social policy on professional best practice.
- Graduate level:** Curriculum can focus on developing the argument for a trend, relating theories to policy applications, looking at research for validity in shaping policy discussions, identifying new areas for policy development and supporting research, understanding the impact of policy disagreements on higher education and academic freedom.

### **Activities in family policy education for many different policy topics:**

- Evaluating a research article for use in policy discussions.
- Writing a family policy brief for use with advocacy or program planning.
- Using some family impact analysis tools on a specific question.
- Taking a news article and following it up in a library search for research to support or question the thesis.
- Shaping final papers to include recommendations for policy or program changes.
- Using debates that have several sides not just yes or no to develop policy alternatives.
- Using state & international comparisons to help spark new ideas in policy.
- Choosing an issue and developing an advocacy or intervention strategy and plan.
- Using teams to examine different regions of the world or a country for how policies are implemented.
- Designing a research or evaluation project to address a policy issue.
- Having students bring in news that touches on family policy for discussion.
- Attending campus seminars on related topics and making the links in the evaluation of the presentation.
- Contrasting 2 changes in policy and how they were advanced, blocked, or compromised as a basis of discussion.
- Writing the same material for different audiences such as the public media, professional training, testimony at hearings, family life education, or building a consortium.
- Examining the speeches and writing of activists.
- Interviewing an elder about their own opinions over time on some family issue.
- Using clickers with larger classes to do some policy attitude discussions.
- Discussing "hot topics" and how to handle them in class.
- Including policy implications in the lectures on almost every topic in family studies.
- Bringing in activists from other disciplines into class presentations
- Using popular culture & literature to spark discussion (use either very classic or a student cohort experience).
- Group work: writing legislation, building a utopia, training human service workers, cross training in specific areas like child custody or preventing abuse, mandatory reporting, identifying values and unintended consequences, building a seamless referral program.
- Using computer searches to find family advice and policy groups and vetting their information for quality and agendas or to look at different state and local laws on a family issue.
- Brainstorming: new policies, taking a policy and adapting it to another culture, funding policy implementation.

For more information or sample assignments, please contact:

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## Introduction to Family Studies – Family Change: Decline or Resilience? Position Paper

Marriage has been the fundamental social arrangement throughout much of American history, providing structure and meaning in people's lives. It has marked entry into adulthood – the point at which children gain economic independence from their parents, leave the family home to forge their own families, and engage in sexual activity. Traditional gender roles have provided scripts that guided and organized how work, both inside and outside the home, would be divided and how children are raised. Recent trends over the last 60 years have seen major shifts in the way marriage and family life are conceptualized, leaving many wondering what those changes will mean for the future of families. Are those changes working against families, or are they signs of increased diversity and a need to think more broadly about what family life means? For this assignment you will need to reflect on these issues and take a stand on one side of the argument: are families in decline or are they resilient? Your position papers must be two to three pages in length using 12-point Times New Roman font with double-spaced lines and standard one-inch margins on all sides. This paper must also include at least 4 references from the textbook that further support your position.

\*Coontz, S. (2005). The American family: New research about an old institution challenges the conventional wisdom that the family today is worse off than in the past. In K. R. Gilbert (Ed.), *Annual editions: The family* (pp. 2-6). Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

\*LeBey, B. (2005). American families are drifting apart: The sexual revolution, women's liberation, relaxation of divorce laws, and greater mobility are fracturing the traditional family structure. In K. R. Gilbert (Ed.), *Annual editions: The family* (pp. 7-9). Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

## Global Families – Policy Assignment: An Analytic and Comparative Project

Choose one family issue that has cross-national and cross cultural implications and involves several different regions or subcultures. The project could include a short briefing paper for an agency designing and funding projects or policy or it could be a pre-proposal for a program or policy initiative with a plan for action. It must be supported by appropriate and comprehensive research and annotated bibliography. At least 6 international peer reviewed articles, 3 citations to international agencies and programs, and appropriate some news articles must be included in the paper. Develop a poster to sum up the project research for professionals or to raise awareness among the ordinary people. Develop a statement of the problem with a selected bibliography for your handout at poster presentation. Submit the topic and selected references for approval and feedback.

## Parenting Across the Lifespan – Parenting Website Reviews

Select a website intended to solicit advice on parenting children and youth (be sure to get the website pre-approved by your instructor). In a brief 2-3 page paper, address the following questions:

- Describe how the site uses research on parenting and human development.
- How well does it serve parents? Parent educators? Caregivers & teachers of children and youth? Public policy makers and advocates?
- Attractiveness and ease of using, including language level and clarity.
- Inclusiveness and diversity appeal.
- Suggestions for referral and more technical information?
- Are family policies or legal issues included? What basis is given for any recommendations?

## Upper-level Capstone – Research Paper:

1. Choose a research topic directly related to family studies that has policy and practice implications both in the United States and internationally.
2. In addition to appropriate theory, research and practice readings in family science peer reviewed journals you may wish to do some field work to look at the practical aspects.
3. The paper should be appropriate to share with family service professionals who deal with the topic or policy makers who shape the programs addressing the topic.
4. Prepare an executive summary (1-2 pages) suitable to support a policy or practice briefing on your research and enough copies to share with the class when you do a 5 minutes policy briefing.
5. Paper should be 12- 15 pages, with appropriate citation and in APA style. At least 15 peer reviewed articles must be included in the research.
6. Both a developed and developing country should be included in the analysis.