

BDP 101: CHILDREN AND SOCIETY
Forum Seminar, Spring 2011

Class Meeting Time: Wednesday 2-4 p.m. (January 19-March 9)

Class Room: PAR 301

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Course Description: Children in Society focuses on research, practice, and policy pertaining to children and their development. The course will be organized around different sources of influence on children's development within a social system: characteristics of the child, the family, schools, the broader community, and socio-cultural factors. Faculty members from across campus will introduce students to the breadth, complexity and interdisciplinary nature of issues pertaining to children and development. The course is restricted to freshmen and sophomores.¹

Attendance & Preparation: The course format generally will consist of presentations by two outside guests, followed by discussion and in-class activities. Because the presentations are a central part of the course, attendance is required: If you miss more than one class, your course grade will be reduced by one letter grade (exceptions will be made only in special cases, e.g., serious and documented medical difficulties). Please come to class prepared to listen to the presentations and contribute to discussions. *Please avoid being late to class as it will be disruptive to our guest speakers and the other students.*

Course Requirements:

Reaction Papers. You will be asked to write brief essays (approximately 2-3 paragraphs each) for each class session for which there is a guest speaker (i.e., excluding the January 19 and March 9 sessions). The goal is to provide an opportunity for thinking critically about current issues pertaining to children and society, and expressing those thoughts in writing. Papers will be graded on a 10-point scale. We will be seeking your personal reactions to the presentation, not simply a summary of the presentation. Reaction papers will be due by midnight on Wednesday following each class session; papers should be e-mailed to each of the instructors and the TA. Please e-mail reaction papers as part of an e-mail message, and not as an attachment. Put "BDP101 reaction paper" as the subject header. Late papers will be penalized. The 6 papers, together, will be worth 30% of your grade. A more detailed description of these "reaction papers" is attached.

¹ Exceptions may be made for students in the Bridging Disciplines Program.

Readings. Readings may be assigned as background for some of the presentations. You should read these assignments prior to class. The readings will be available on Blackboard. Information about how to access these articles will be provided to you when the assigned readings are ready for review.

Papers. The primary writing assignment will consist of two interrelated papers. The first paper will be a summary of two or more research articles on a specific topic related to children and society. You will be given a list of topics at the first class that you can use to help you select a topic, and will be given an opportunity to select a topic during the class session. The first paper should be about 2-3 type-written pages in length. For the second paper, you will expand the first paper, using the research discussed in the first paper to set the stage for a more complete overview of the topic. The overview could take a number of forms; it could involve additional research on the topic, but it could instead involve, for example, interviews of relevant experts, an analysis of information in the popular media, or an analysis of recent legislation in that area. Whatever the content, however, the second paper should be at least 4-5 pages in length. Hand-outs containing more detailed descriptions of the assignments will be provided. We encourage you to meet with us for help in coming up with a topic or if problems or questions arise while you are working on your papers. The first paper will account for 20% of your course grade; the second will account for 30%.

Group Project. During the first class session, each student will select a topic area from among those listed on the Paper/Group Projects handout. The topic areas are: (1) Characteristics of the Child, (2) Families, (3) Schools, (3) Communities, (5) Socio-cultural Influences: Media; and (6) Socio-cultural Influences: Race, Ethnicity and Economic Levels. Those students who have selected a given topic will be responsible for covering that topic in a group project that will be presented on the last day of class. Consequently, each member of this group should select a specific paper topic within that general topic area, and members of the groups should make sure that their topics are dispersed (that is, each member of the group should select a different specific paper topic). Although each student in the group will conduct research into that topic on an individual basis during the term of the course, the group as a whole will conduct a brief presentation for the March 9 class session. That presentation should integrate the knowledge gained from the individual papers in a coherent manner. Additional information on the group presentation will be provided in a separate handout. The group project will account for 20% of your grade.

Grading: The final grades for the course will be assigned as follows: The combined scores for the reaction papers will account for 30% of your grade; the first paper will account for 20% and the final paper for 30%; and the group project will account for 20%. Letter grades will then be calculated as follows: Scores that are 90% or above will be an "A," 80-89% will be a "B," 70-79% will be a "C," and 60-69% will be a "D." The plus/minus grading system will be used in this course. If you have questions about the grading policy, please talk to one of the professors or the TA.

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is an integral and essential part of the educational process. Because dishonesty harms the individual, other students and the integrity of the University, scholastic dishonesty of any type WILL NOT be tolerated. The penalty for academic dishonesty of any type is a grade of F and referral to the Dean of Student's Office.

Students with disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY. Dr. Echols and Dr. Ortiz are available to discuss any appropriate academic accommodations that might be necessary for this course.

Office hours: The office hours of the professors are printed on the syllabus and those of the TA will be announced in class. Feel free to drop in during those times if you have questions regarding guest presentations, or for help with writing assignments/projects. You can also use those times to ask us general questions about children and society, or about the Bridging Disciplines Program in Children & Society, a program that allows students to take a set of courses and participate in research/internship activities within this area. If you can not come in during office hours, you can make an appointment by talking with one of us after class, calling us at the numbers listed on the syllabus, or sending e-mail.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

- January 19 Introduction/Overview**
- January 26 Topic: Characteristics of the Child**
- February 2 Topic: Influences of the Family**
- February 9 Topic: Schools and their Influences on Children and Society
ARTICLE SUMMARY DUE**
- February 16 Topic: Characteristics of the Community as Influences on Children**
- February 23 Topic: Socio-cultural Influences**
- March 2 Topic: Bringing it all Together
SECOND PAPER DUE**
- March 9 Group Presentations**

REACTION PAPERS

Goal: The goal of the reaction paper is to provide an opportunity for thinking and writing critically about issues related to children and society.

Format: The papers should be about 2-3 paragraphs in length. They will be written for each class session for which there are presentations from invited speakers (i.e., excluding the January 19 and March 9 sessions).

Content: The reaction papers should show that you have thought about the issues described in the presentations. For classes for which there is an assigned reading, your reaction paper also should respond to the reading. You can choose to “react” in a number of different ways. You may discuss thoughts, ideas or concerns raised by the presentations (and, if relevant, the reading). You may discuss whether you agree or disagree with particular points that are raised. You might discuss how the presentations relate to particular experiences that you have had, information that you’ve learned in another course, or other topics covered in this course. You also could discuss possible implications of the information discussed in the presentations. Whatever approach you take, however, you will need to give some basis for your comments. If the presentations generate some ideas or concerns for you, be sure to say where those ideas or concerns come from (discussing both the parts of the presentation that elicited the ideas/ concerns and also what in your background or what other knowledge—from this course or outside of it—contributes to those ideas/ concerns). If you agree or disagree with a position that is presented, state WHY you agree or disagree (i.e., give a justification for your position). If you choose to relate a presentation to personal experiences or other knowledge, be clear about how the experiences/knowledge are relevant. If you discuss possible implications, you will need to ground your proposals in points raised in the presentations. Most importantly, we really want to see your own thoughts in the reaction papers: DO NOT simply summarize the presentations. On the other hand, do not simply give reactions without referring to specific points in the presentation; be sure to make explicit the links between your comments and the content of those presentations.

Grading: Reaction papers will be graded on a 10-point scale. In general, the highest scores will be reserved for reaction papers that are well organized, provide appropriate justification for the arguments presented, and provide insightful comments. Low scores will be given for a paper that is little more than a summary, or includes arguments without providing the reader with adequate justification or information to support the arguments. At the end of the semester, grades on all of the reaction papers will be averaged and weighted so that they account for 30% of the final grade. The hope is that, because each paper is not weighted very heavily, students will feel comfortable trying out different ideas in the reaction papers. At the same time, they are weighted heavily enough that if a student puts minimal effort into them, the final course grade will suffer.