This course treats arguably the single most important institution in American society: the family. It is the source of most domestic consumption expenditure as well as most of the labor supplied to the economy. More fundamentally, it, in its many forms, is the locus of child rearing, the process by which the next generation of citizens and economic actors is created. We will employ microeconomic theory and other advanced tools to the study of the economic situation of the contemporary family.

This is an advanced course in economics; therefore, you must have successfully passed intermediate microeconomics (Econ 410). Graduate students should check with Prof. Turchi. You will also find it extremely helpful already to have completed Economics 400 (Statistics) or an equivalent course.

The format of the course is lecture/discussion. There will be a final exam (15% of the final grade), an essay midterm (35%), a paper (35%), a group oral presentation of your paper (10%) and a notebook containing your "reading reports" (5%). Other exercises designed to aid in comprehension of the material may be assigned as needed.

Books for Purchase:


Recommended Purchase: Paul D. Allison, Multiple Regression: A Primer. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1999. This is a very useful and clearly written guide to regression analysis of which you will see a lot in this course.

You may also need to refer back to an intermediate microeconomics book at various times in the course, particularly at the beginning.

Much of the reading that you will do in this course will be in articles from economics and other journals, and in chapters from books. The reading list that follows contains two types of readings, required and optional. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are optional; all others are required. All of the readings are on print reserve in the undergraduate library. Some are also on the course website (®). I have also prepared a Course-Pak (©) that contains most articles for which Reading Reports are required (i.e., those marked with "@"), and a supply of Reading Report forms. A number of readings are available on the web through the electronic resources of Davis Library (e.g., JSTOR). Use the reserve collection for other items.

A course outline and schedule follow. Both are tentative at this point because this is an evolving course in an emerging field. If we deviate from the schedule, I will keep you informed as to where you ought to be.
Tentative Course Outline

I. Introduction: The Family as an Economic Unit (Aug 24, 26, 31, Sep 2) (Sep 7th: read Pickford-Santos & do reading report)
   A. Microeconomic Theory Review (No assigned reading; use this time to read in marriage section) (Sep 9, 14)
   B. Becker's "New Home Economics" (No assigned reading; use this time to read in marriage section) (Sep 16, 21)

II. Family Formation (Sep 28, Sep 30, Oct 5, Oct 7)
   A. The marriage decision as an economic decision
   B. The marriage market
   C. Cohabitation

III. Family Dissolution
   A. The decision to divorce and the role of the economic system in promoting and hindering divorce (Oct 12, 14, 19 26, 28)
   B. The economic consequences of divorce (Nov 2, 4)

IV. The Allocation of Income and Power Within Households (Nov 11, 16)
   A. Allocation of goods: the financial cost of children
   B. Allocation of time (sex roles)
   C. Parental time spent in child rearing

V. Reproductive Behavior (Nov 16)
   A. The demand for children
   B. The economics of contraceptive choice
   C. The black market for babies -- unintended consequences of Roe v. Wade

VI. Families in Poverty and the Distribution of Wealth (Nov 30)

VII. Family Policy (Dec 2, 7)

Final examination: Friday Dec 17th @ 4:00 p.m.
Economics 586: The Economics of The Family
Reading List

Professor Boone A. Turchi

1 Introduction


2 Family Formation


Cherlin (2009), Chapters 4-6.

2.1. Cohabitation


Cherlin (2009), Chapters 7-8.

2.2. Marriage


3 Divorce

3.1. Causes


3.2. Consequences


3.3. Alimony


4 Allocation of Income, Time & Power within the Household


5 Reproductive Behavior


6 Families in Poverty and the Distribution of Wealth


7 Family Policy
