

California State University Northridge
Department of Family & Consumer Sciences

Family Strengths: FCS 640

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Office Hours: Monday 3:00 pm-4:15 pm, Tuesday 5:00 pm-6:45 pm, and by appointment

Class Meetings: Monday 4:20 pm-6:50 pm
Location: 102 Sequoia Hall

Required Text: Boss, P. (2002). *Family stress management: A contextual approach (2nd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McKenry, P. C., & Price, S. J. (2005). *Families and change: Coping with stressful events (3rd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

You will also be required to read a collection of research articles...more on this later.

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

This course integrates theory, research and application to study family functioning and resiliency during times of normative and non-normative stress, with a particular emphasis on family risk and protective factors. The specific course objectives include the following:

- Examine the Contextual Model of Family Stress and resiliency, with a focus on terminology, constructs included in the model, and the theoretical perspectives from which the model is based (i.e., Family Systems Theory & Symbolic Interactionism).
- Apply this theoretical framework to family issues related to stress and resiliency (e.g., denial, family values, external social pressures), and also to future research and intervention considerations.
- Analyze a variety of normative and non-normative events that can impact family life using the Contextual Model of Family Stress.

- Evaluate existing resources (e.g., services, programs) available to families during times of change and formulate an agenda that would improve current family resources.
- Apply the family stress and resiliency literature to his or her own family experiences and past/present approaches to stress management.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & CLASS POLICIES

1. This class is structured in a seminar format, which means that **the majority of the class is led by the students**. My role is to help guide discussion and facilitate our comprehension of the core learning objectives stated above, so you must be prepared to actively participate in this course!
2. Attendance and ongoing participation are integral to this course. You are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to thoughtfully discuss the material when we meet as a group each week.
3. All course assignments must be completed on time and turned in at the end of the class period. *NO late assignments will be accepted.*
4. Any behavior that is disrespectful of other students will not be tolerated. We will address issues that may be controversial and we will discuss our own personal examples that are relevant to class material. It is important that we create and maintain a comfortable classroom environment in which you will be encouraged to share your individual family experiences and participate in healthy debate.

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS

EXAMS:

None...Yahoo!!

ARTICLE REVIEWS:

On four weeks that you select, you will write a brief, but thoughtful review paper on the assigned research article for that week (NOTE that the reviews will first be due only when we begin to read the McKenry & Price text and accompanying research articles—Weeks 5-14). The reviews should be critical and evaluative, and may include topics such as:

conceptualizations of family variables, methodological issues, and results presented from the research study; the overall approach to investigating a particular family issue; strengths and weaknesses of particular interventions/resources offered to families. More specifically, you may choose to discuss any of the following topics: Did the study measure/test what it was supposed to? How did the results support/not support the theory and how must the theory be revised to explain the findings that were found in the study? What improvements and/or additions could be made to the study (i.e., how would you redo/redesign the research study)? How well does the study's focus support/contradict/add to the information that we have covered in class (i.e., how is the study related to, or not related to, the Contextual Model of Family Stress Management)?

Your review **MUST** focus on one of the assigned RESEARCH ARTICLES for that week. Each review must be 2-3 pages in length, typed in 10-12 point font, and double-spaced. Weekly reviews will be turned in at the end of class so that you may integrate and refer to what you have written during our class discussion of the research study. Over the course of the semester, you are required to compose a total of four research article reviews, and each will be worth a total of 40 points. Since we address ten separate topics from the McKenry/Price text, you will be able to select which four research articles are of most interest to you.

PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS:

In addition to the FOUR research article reviews, you must complete all FOUR of these project assignments over the course of the semester, but you may only do each assignment once. In other words, you must complete four different assignments in addition to the four research article reviews, and you may choose when you would like to do so (i.e., you may select which weekly topics you want to write reviews for versus selecting one of the project assignments).

I would advise you to review the syllabus and the weekly topics very early in the semester so that you may plan ahead. Do not wait until the last few weeks to cram in all of your writing assignments!

The project assignments follow the same format and guidelines as the article reviews (each project assignment must be 2-3 pages in length, typed in 10-12 point font, double-spaced) and each will be worth a total of 10 points. For details about each of these exciting assignments, see the following descriptions...

- A. Family Stress, Coping, & Resiliency Issues in the Media: **First**, select a newspaper article that addresses a topic that we will be discussing in class, and summarize the article. **Second**, write a thoughtful review of the article, including your reaction to how the topic was presented in the media and how it can be related to or explained by the Contextual Model of Family Stress. For instance, how do the issues discussed in the article represent examples of (a) specific stressor characteristics, (b) a family or individual's perceptions of an event, (c) individual, family, or

community resources? YOU MUST ALSO TURN IN THE ARTICLE WITH YOUR PAPER TO RECEIVE ANY CREDIT FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT!!

- B. You're the Expert!:** Engage in a thoughtful conversation with at least one other family member about a family stress, coping, or resiliency related issue that we will be covering in class. **First**, summarize the details of the conversation (who, what, where, when, how it began). **Second**, address the following questions: (a) How did the conversation confirm your opinion of the issue? (b) How did the conversation make you question what you had previously believed to be true about the topic? (c) How did the conversation relate to the Contextual Model of Family Stress? (d) How did the conversation change how you view your family member (e.g., what did you learn about your family member as a result of the conversation?).
- C. Website Review:** Locate and examine a website that addresses one of the topics that we will be addressing in the McKenry & Price text. **First**, summarize the information that is presented on the website. **Second**, give your opinion of how informative and helpful the website would be to an individual or family who is coping with the particular issue. *Specifically discuss*: (a) what was good about the website, (b) what areas could be improved, and (c) how would YOU design a website on the particular topic? (Be sure to dazzle me with your creativity and the profound insight that you have acquired in our class!!). Make sure to include the website address with your paper, please.
- D. Community Resources:** This is your chance to conduct research on community resources that are available to families. **First**, select one of the McKenry & Price text topics and tell me why this particular issue is of interest to you and why it is an important topic for our community to address. **Second**, conduct research to find out what types of community resources exist for families who are dealing with this family stressor, and summarize the family resources that are available. *Therefore*, it will be necessary for you to contact the agency/community source and obtain material about their available resources. In your paper, you must present a detailed account of the information that you obtained from the agency and/or supply me with copies of tangible information (e.g., pamphlets, fliers, phone numbers) that is offered to the community by the particular agency or community resource! **Third**, evaluate these resources and/or services by discussing: (a) what was good about the resources, (b) what areas could be improved, and (c) how would YOU design a community-based agency and/or collection of resources for families who are coping with the particular issue? (Again, I will be expecting to be overcome by your creativity and thoughtful ideas!!).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

You will also complete fourteen discussion question assignments, worth a total of ten points each. Each assignment must consist of SIX questions regarding the week's assigned readings, and you must pose at least two questions from EACH of the assigned readings (i.e., two questions from the book, and two questions from each of the research articles—when articles are assigned in weeks 5-14). Your questions should be thoughtful, creative, and should stimulate further analysis of the readings. You will use your questions during class to guide our analysis of weekly topics and I will collect these questions at the end of class. In other words, I will be expecting to hear you verbally ask the questions in class and then follow up on your classmates' responses! **Also, your questions must be typed, and please clearly separate and note which questions pertain to which readings.**

If you do not attend class, I will NOT accept your questions for that week.

CLASS LECTURE PRESENTATION:

You will select a partner and a topic that is of interest to you in the McKenry & Price book, and you will lead the class discussion for that day. I will supply you and the class with a copy of the notes that I have outlined for the chapter, and you will be asked to “teach” the topic by serving as the discussion facilitator. In addition to covering the notes and incorporating the students' discussion questions into the class lecture, you will also be expected to plan an extra class activity to supplement the discussion of the book notes. Class activities can be just about anything, as long as they are interesting, relevant, and able to encourage learning beyond class discussion. For instance, activities could include: group debates, presentations by invited outside speakers, film or television show clip analyses, etc. I am open to all suggestions, but make sure that you talk with me and get my approval first (this means well in advance, folks!).

Your class lecture presentations will be evaluated by yours truly and also by your classmates. I will provide the class with a standard evaluation instrument...more details on these evaluations will be forthcoming. In general, the main areas in which you will be evaluated include the following:

Presentation: Were the presenters knowledgeable about the topic, organized in their presentation, clear when discussing the topic with the class, and skilled at sustaining a lively class discussion?

Interest: Did the presenters give information beyond that which is included in the book and/or did they encourage you to apply the information in a thoughtful manner and engage you to consider the topic from a new perspective?

Creativity: Did the presenters use creative modes of engaging the class, a stimulating form of teaching, and did they plan a worthwhile class activity?

ATTENDANCE:

Due to the participatory nature of this course, weekly attendance is imperative. As previously stated, I will not accept class discussion questions from you during a week in which you are not present, so your ongoing attendance is very important and critical for receiving a decent grade in this class.

COURSE EVALUATION

Grades will be determined according to a point system. Each course requirement will have a point value as indicated below:

4 Article Reviews/40 points each	160 pts.
4 Project Assignments/10 points each	40 pts.
14 Discussion Question Assignments/10 points each	140 pts.
Class Lecture Presentation	60 pts.
TOTAL	400 pts.

Grading Scale:

A	400-370	C	305-291
A-	369-358	C-	290-278
B+	357-346	D+	277-266
B	345-330	D	265-251
B-	329-318	E	250 or below
C+	317-306		

CLASS SCHEDULE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENT</u>
Class #1 1/30 M	Class Introduction & The Contextual Model	Boss, Ch. 2
Class #2 2/6 M	Defining Stress Theory & Coping	Boss, Ch. 3-4
Class #3 2/13 M	Family Issues: Boundary Ambiguity, Denial, & Family Values	Boss, Ch. 5-8

Class #4 2/20 M	Social Pressures, Family Crisis, & Future Issues	Boss, Ch. 9-11
Class #5 2/27 M	Marital Distress	McKenry/Price, Ch 2
Class #6 3/6 M	Families with Children	McKenry/Price, Ch 3
3/13	NO CLASS	
Class #7 3/20 M	Economic Stress	McKenry/Price, Ch 11
3/27	NO CLASS	
Class #8 4/3 M	Mental Illness	McKenry/Price, Ch 10
Class #9 4/10 M	Aging & Adaptation	McKenry/Price, Ch 5
Class #10 Ch 6 4/17 M	Death, Dying, & Grief	McKenry/Price,
Class #11 4/24 M	Divorce	McKenry/Price, Ch 12
Class #12 5/1 M	Remarriage & Recoupling	McKenry/Price, Ch 13

Class #13 5/8 M	Immigration & Acculturation	McKenry/Price, Ch 15
Class #14 5/15 M	Violence, Abuse, & Neglect	McKenry/Price, Ch 8
5/22 M	<u>Final Exam</u>	