***Family Law Policy Seminar: Children (LAW 6936)(2 credits)***

*Professor Nancy E. Dowd*

*Spring semester 2019*

*Tuesday 3:00-4:50, HH355D*

*Contact information:* [*dowd@law.ufl.edu*](mailto:dowd@law.ufl.edu)*; 352-273-0930; office HH 317*

***Office hours*** *Wednesday 2-5:30 (please feel free to stop by or email for an appointment at other times)*

***Course website:*** *on TWEN*

***Required text:*** *All readings for the course will be available on TWEN*

***Seminar Description, Purpose, and Goals:***

The focus of this seminar this semester is public policy with respect to children, and children’s rights, interests, and needs.

This broad and developmentally changing group (birth to 18) implicates a range of systems and policies, as well as a lack of policy, or need for policy.

Among the questions we will consider are whether all families and children are equally supported under existing law and policy to maximize each child’s individual equality and opportunity. This implicates a range of issues, including identity characteristics like race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and other identifiers or their multidimensional manifestations, such as immigration status, disabilities, family structure and class status. It includes substantive rights or entitlements, needs or vulnerabilities.

The areas of law we may touch on include constitutional law, human rights, family law, tax law, and health care law; so any legal category that touches and impacts the lives of children. The contributions of other disciplines also are critical to framing policy, especially psychology, neuroscience, economics, and sociology. Finally, comparative perspectives impact policy and law; and they are helpful to consider what policies and practices best support children or children at particular stages.

The reading weeks of the class will be devoted to reading the manuscript of the forthcoming book by a leading family law and children’s rights scholar (and emeritus member of the UF faculty, now at Emory) Professor Barbara Bennett Woodhouse, *The Ecology of Childhood: Small Worlds in Peril* (forthcoming 2019 NYU Press)(with permission from the author and the press). All chapters are posted on TWEN. You will be asked to reflect on the reading prior to class and propose a discussion question for the class, due in a journal entry prior to the start of class. Each member of the class will be responsible for signing up for a week when they will start the discussion of the reading with their question. The purpose of this reading is to focus broadly on issues of children, in addition to exploring complex research by a leading scholar in the field.

Concurrent with the reading you will select a paper topic for an in-depth research paper. The last several sessions of the seminar will be devoted to presentations of the papers, and critical feedback from the other members of the seminar.

Your paper may focus on any aspect of law or policy that affects children. You should select a topic and methodology that interests you and is relevant to policy in the area that you choose. The goal of the seminar is to give you an opportunity to seriously reflect upon and consider the relationship and actual functioning of law and public policy with respect to children. Your discussions with others as well as your research are vehicles to achieve that goal. I encourage you if possible to identify an organization that might benefit from your research. This paper may also be a writing sample that can be used to demonstrate the sophistication of your research skills and your analytic capabilities.

Finally, the form of your paper is not limited to a traditional research paper. It might, for example, be a brief, an advocacy paper, or some other construction of your project that reflects the thorough research expected and careful analysis.

A background in family law is useful but not required for this seminar. If you want suggestions about further reading in family law, please come see me.

***Learning Outcomes:*** By the end of this course students will have (1) explored the range of issues relating to children and families that occupy public policy, through reading and discussion; (2) engaged in discussion and problem solving discussions typical of legal practice and policy work; (3) identified a topic for in-depth research for a substantial paper; (4) received additional research instruction in legal research tools for complex research; and (5) drafted, received input and feedback, and finalized a substantial research paper

***Instructional Methods***: The course is structured as a participatory seminar, where every student is engaged in the learning process. This includes shared responsibility for raising key questions about the reading or during presentations, contributing critique and suggestions. Differences in potential policies and problem solving will be explored. In addition, each student will meet one-on-one with the instructor to produce the best possible seminar paper in both substance and writing, which might in addition be useful to a real-world client or organization, or be used as a writing sample.

***Readings: all readings are on TWEN. No texts must be purchased for this seminar.***

***Assignments/seminar meetings (all readings are on TWEN on the course website)***

January 8: Introductory readings (excerpts from several articles)

January 15: Woodhouse, preface, chapter 1 and chapter 2

January 22: Woodhouse, chapter 3 and 4

January 29: Woodhouse, chapter 5 and 6

February 5: Woodhouse chapter 7 and 8

February 12: Woodhouse chapter 9

February 19: Woodhouse chapter 10

February 26: Woodhouse, chapter 11

(March 5—no class, spring break)

March 12: Woodhouse chapter 12

March 19: Woodhouse chapter 13

March 26: Research week (meet with Professor Dowd this week or during the week of March 12 or 19)

April 2: presentations (reminder: rough draft due of paper on the date of your presentation)

April 9: presentations

April 16: presentations

*(April 22: last day of classes)*

**Final paper due on or before April 29 (if this creates a problem for you due to competing deadlines, please see me well in advance of the deadline for an accommodation)**

***Seminar grade***

Your final grade in the seminar will be determined based on your research paper.

You are also required to: (1) submit your journals during the reading weeks as described below, and (2) participate in the class as described below. These are ungraded assignments. If your journals are not satisfactory or if you do not participate as described below, then this may result in a deduction of up to one grade (eg, from an A to an A-) in your final grade.

***Journal***

During the reading weeks, please submit a weekly journal entry *prior to each seminar meeting* reflecting on the reading and including at least one question for discussion that you will bring to the class. Your journal entry should be submitted on TWEN, in the dropbox, under the heading “Journal”. Please do not describe the reading; rather, critically evaluate and respond to the reading. There is no minimum or maximum page requirement; as a guideline, 1-2 pages is fine (double spaced). You will receive feedback on your journal.

***Class Participation***

Class participation during reading weeks will involve leading and/or participating in the discussion of the reading and other subjects for discussion in the seminar. During the reading weeks, we will rotate the student who will begin our discussion of the reading, and also rotate the responsibility for one person to be the community notetaker for the class. Notes should be emailed to the class as a group through TWEN.

During the class presentation weeks, when each student presents their project, we will be discussing the projects and every class member will be expected to provide constructive feedback to the presenter and copied to Professor Dowd, which can be done through the email function on TWEN.

***Paper***

The paper will be an in-depth research paper, a critical examination of a topic related to the seminar. A rough guideline is 20-25 pages, with 20-25 sources, but this is not a rigid requirement; it depends very much on the project you choose.

Each student will submit a topic proposal, bibliography, a rough draft and a final paper. You must meet with me to discuss each phase prior to the final paper.

Every phase should be submitted in writing on TWEN under the box titled “Paper”. All deadlines for the paper are on or before 5 pm on the dates below:

Topic approval: February 5

Research bibliography: February 19

Rough draft (as close to a final paper as possible including draft citations): due on the date of your presentation

Final paper: April 29

Research guidance: Professor Christopher Vallandingham is available to provide additional research guidance.

***Preparation time/workload*:** It is anticipated that you will spend approximately 2 hours out of class reading and/or preparing for in class assignments for every 1 hour in class. In addition, you will spend approximately an equivalent amount of time researching and writing your paper over a similar time period to the readings.

***Attendance and Absence Policy***

Attendance will be taken at each class meeting by sign in sheet. Students are allowed 2 absences during the course of the semester. An absence is counted if you are not present for the full class. Students are responsible for ensuring that they are not recorded as absent if they come in late. A student who fails to meet the attendance requirement will be dropped from the course.

***You may have no more than two absences from the seminar. If you exceed two absences you will be dropped from the course.***

***Laptop policy:*** In past semesters, I have found in-class laptop use distracting, for me and for students (including both those who were using laptops and those who were not). Accordingly, I am asking you **not** to turn on your laptops during class (and please turn off your cellphone and any other device unless you must be available for an emergency call), with the exception of the person taking notes for the seminar.

***College of Law Policies:***

## Academic honesty:

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>.

## Grading scale:

The Levin College of Law’s mean and mandatory distributions are posted on the College’s website and this class adheres to that posted grading policy. The following chart describes the specific letter grade/grade point equivalent in place:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Letter Grade | Point Equivalent |
| A (Excellent) | 4.0 |
| A- | 3.67 |
| B+ | 3.33 |
| B | 3.0 |
| B- | 2.67 |
| C+ | 2.33 |
| C (Satisfactory) | 2.0 |
| C- | 1.67 |
| D+ | 1.33 |
| D (Poor) | 1.0 |
| D- | 0.67 |
| E (Failure) | 0.0 |

The law school grading policy is available at: <http://www.law.ufl.edu/student-affairs/current-students/academic-policies#9>.

## Accommodations:

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (Dean Mitchell) when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.