This course explores the changing nature of what it means to be a family from anthropological and cross-cultural perspectives. Topics of discussion include kinship, descent, marriage, our relationships to ancestors, gender and power relations, and the politics of kinship ties. In addition, the course considers the relevance of kinship to contemporary issues such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered families, the use of reproductive technologies, and international adoptions.

Course Description:

We will first explore the history of the traditional social anthropological theories and methodologies of the study of systems of kinship, family and social organization. This will include functionalism, structuralism, economic, exchange and alliance perspectives on kinship relationships. After that, there will be a focus on the more interpretive/culturalist approaches or “new kinship” that looks at kinship and other close human relationships in the context of change in the modern globalized world. Changes in traditional culture have resulted in new areas of inquiry for kinship such as trans-national families, migrant labour, immigration, same sex families, international adoption and new reproductive technologies. In addition to readings in the text, we will review other readings based on various ethnographic examples from anthropology and other disciplines. These materials will be placed on library reserve and/or on CourseLink.

Course Learning Objectives:

1. A review of the history and importance of kinship studies, systems and notation in anthropology.
2. Understanding the significance of kinship systems for family, power and social organization in differing societies past and present.
3. Explore contemporary changes in anthropology relating to the focus and application of kinship studies.
4. Understanding the limits of past and present anthropological approaches to kinship systems.

Required Text:

Parkin, Robert and Linda Stone
Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Evaluation:

Midterm 25%
Research Paper 30%
Final Exam 30%
Class/Online Forum Participation 15%