HDFS 3423: Families, Schools, and Communities
Fall 2026

Rebekah.Sears@unt.edu
Office: Matthews 322P
Hours: In person (Tuesdays, 9:00a-11:30a) & virtual (Thursdays, (9:00a-11:30a; Fridays, 1:00p-2:00p) or by appointment.

Instructor: Rebekah Sears, M.S. (she/her/hers)

Course Description, Structure, and Objectives

Analyzing family, school, and community resources and needs as related to the family life cycle; child welfare and education, ecological approach; and exploration of careers related to children and families. Strategies to improve communication and collaboration are emphasized with a focus on family types, cultures, economic conditions, school systems, community services, political forces, advocacy groups, and other factors that impact young children and their families. **Fifteen (15) hours a semester in fieldwork arranged by students. Estimated average 10-12 clock hours per week for class attendance-on-line reading/study, mail/announcements, discussion, assignments, quizzes, and fieldwork. 3 semester credit hours.**

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course is offered asynchronously and 100% online through Canvas. Content will mainly be delivered through assigned readings and other online materials. This delivery allows students to have greater flexibility in approaching and processing the material.

COURSE GOALS/STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Describe the human condition across cultures and diverse situations.
2. Apply communication skills to family, school, and community (FSC) partnerships. **(Journals)**
3. Develop personal responsibility. **(Field Work/Ethics Case Study)**
4. Develop social responsibility. **(Journals)**
5. Describe the various practices, programs and policies that relate to FSC Partnerships.
6. Develop critical thinking skills. **(Action Plan)**
7. Analyze issues, principles, values, relationships, and cultural perspectives using ethical decision-making strategies and steps. **(Ethics Case Study)**

Required/Recommended Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. However, there will be readings and other materials that will be used over the course of the semester. These are listed in the Canvas shell that tie to each module. Students will be required to read the assigned article(s) for each week to prepare for discussions, quizzes, and other assignments.

Technology requirements for courses with digital materials:
This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on how to be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at Learn Anywhere (https://online.unt.edu/learn).

How to Succeed in this Course

The instructor will be involved in the course through discussions and feedback will be provided to you via announcements and comments on assignments. Everything in this course has a purpose. This course was designed

to start with the course objectives and then assignments were created to fulfill those objectives. Below you will see each assignment and what objectives align with the assignment.

For you to be successful, the following items are important:

1. BE a part of class. Engage with your peers and me. If you are asked a question, answer it.

2. READ! Above all else, you need to read the material and the shell to understand what to do.

3. BE involved. Just because we do not meet face-to-face does not mean you will not get to know your classmates. You will get to know how they think, what they believe, and how they communicate.

4. Check your email often. Communication will come to you via email through Canvas.

5. Work together. You will be asked to work together in this course. Some people do not like that. There is a specific reason for this. ANY job or organization that you have will require you to communicate with others. Much of today's communication takes place by email, phone, IM, voice chat, Zoom or some other form of electronic communication. This can be more difficult and challenging for many people. I am not asking you to meet face-to-face or together online. Just communicate with one another.

How to Communicate with Your Instructor

My preferred method of communication is using EagleMail (i.e., unt.edu). Emails sent via Canvas email will likely have a slower response time or may not receive a response. When emailing, please include the class title and course number (HDFS 3423 or HDFS 3423.420) in the subject line. This will help me to spot and respond to any emails you send regarding the class in a timely manner. For emails sent during the week (i.e., Monday-Friday), you should expect a response from me within 24 hours. Emails received after 5:00pm on Friday will have a slower response time. ***If you email me, and I have not responded within two business days, please reach out and send a follow up email.*** There are times in which I may be busy, or my inbox becomes full, so a gentle reminder is always appreciated.

Office hours are another way to communicate with me. Office hours will be held in-person and via Zoom. Days, times, office location, and a Zoom link will be provided in Canvas.

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please send me an email or stop by my office to let me know. We will discuss our classroom's habits of engagement, and I also encourage you to review UNT's student code of conduct so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding (Code of Student Conduct) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct)

Assessing Your Work

Assignment Name	Points Possible
Service Learning (Field Work Assignments)	
Initial Placement Board	10
Final Reflection	100
Time Log	15
Journals (4 @ 20 points each)	80
Other Assignments	
Introduction Discussion	10
Introduction Reflection	25

Discussion Boards (4 @ 20 points each)	80
Ethics Case Study	100
Action Plan	50
Quizzes (5 @ 10 points each)	50
Total	**520**

Below are brief descriptions of the assignments that will be used to assess your progress in the course. A variety of assessments, both formative and summative in nature, will be experienced throughout the course. These assessments are aligned with the Student Learning Outcomes (listed on page 1) of this course in order to test your understanding of course materials and readings. Work will generally be due on Sundays at 11:59pm, and new modules will open on Mondays (see the course schedule below for more detail).

Introduction Discussion Board (10 pts)

In an effort to become a community of learners, please introduce yourself to your classmates and your instructor through Canvas during the first week of class. Please introduce yourself by including (but not limited to) the following: your name, year in school, major, reason for taking this course, and experience with service learning. Please keep all comments positive. It would be helpful if you added a photo of yourself to put a name with a face. Responses to classmates' posts are welcomed and encouraged to help foster a feeling of community for our online course.

Introductory Reflection (25 pts)

The introductory reflection is a way for you to share any preconceived bias, beliefs, or understandings you have regarding families and individuals in need. This reflection is an opportunity to identify and examine the biased beliefs and understandings you have. We all have biases, and when we do not take time to recognize them, we continue to allow them to interfere with truly seeing what need means. The introductory reflection should be well constructed, a true analysis of your beliefs, and needs to be reflective in nature. This reflection should be ***a minimum of one page, double-spaced, 12-point Times Roman or Calibri font***. You may write this in first person. There is a rubric on Canvas that you should use when completing this reflection. It will provide you with more specific information you will need to be successful.

Field Work - Course Objective 1 (205 total pts)

Initial Placement Confirmation (10 pts) + 4 Journals (20 pts each) + Final Reflection Paper (100 pts) + **Time Log (15 pts) ****see note on Time Log submissions below**

Over the course of the semester, you will complete a minimum of 15 volunteer hours in a Service-Learning experience, keep a journal, and reflect on collaboration strategies. This is ***not*** an optional activity for this course, and all 15 hours must be completed.

If you do not complete this assignment, you will not pass the course!

It is critical that you find your placement within the first three weeks of class. In the event that you are unable to find a placement within the first three weeks of class, please reach out to me for assistance. I do understand people are busy, have families, and work; however, these are the requirements of this course. Childcare issues, work schedules, etc. are not acceptable reasons for not completing the field work. Please drop the course if you cannot fulfill this requirement. More specific information can be found in Module 1 on Canvas.

*****All students are required to complete a minimum 15 hours of volunteer service BEFORE the end of the semester. All students must submit a signed Time Log by the end of the semester, which serves as verification that service learning was completed. Failure to complete the minimum 15 hours of volunteer service OR submit the signed Time Log will result in nullification of credit for all components of the Field Work Assignment.***

Discussion Boards – Course Objectives 1-7 (4 DBs × 20 pts = 80 total pts)

The discussion boards are a way for you to interact with your peers in a manner that allows you to grow and stretch your thinking. To be successful, there are a few items that need to be included in your initial post. There is a rubric that details those requirements. First and foremost, you must relate your post back to your readings. This is why it is extremely important to read the material. Your posts must be at least 150 words and should utilize information from the course readings to support your ideas. For participation, you must respond to 2 peers' posts before the due date. Submission deadlines listed on the calendar below as well as on Canvas. Initial posts are due on Sundays at 11:59 PM and Peer Responses are due on Wednesdays @ 11:59pm. **NOTE: Initial DB posts must be submitted first in order to receive credit for the assignment. If an initial post is made later than the 2-day period given for the late policy, you will NOT receive credit toward your grade for that DB.**

Ethics Case Study – Course Objective 5 (100 pts)

You will analyze a case study that presents a real-world ethical dilemma related to family, school, and/or community. A worksheet and grading rubric will be provided to guide you through the assignment and assist in organizing your analysis. More information can be found on Canvas.

Action Plan – Course Objective 4 (50 pts)

Students will have an opportunity to create an action plan for utilizing FSC partnerships to address real-world needs within the Denton community. This is a group project that requires reflective and critical thinking. Additional details and grading information can be found in Canvas.

Reading Quizzes – 5 quizzes × 10 pts = 50 total pts)

Quizzes are provided to assess students' understanding of the readings. If it becomes apparent that students are not completing the readings, more quizzes will be added to the course.

Late Work Policy: It is highly recommended that students submit assignments on time to give themselves the best chance to receive as many points as possible.** Late work will be accepted up to two (2) days after the submission deadline for written assignments (e.g., Journals, Reflections, etc.) with approval from the instructor **PRIOR** to an assignment deadline. A percentage of points will be deducted as follows: 0-24 hours late, 20%-point deduction; 24-48 hours late, 50%-point deduction. **Any assignment submissions made beyond this period will not be accepted unless there is an extenuating circumstance supported by documentation. The late work policy does not apply to quizzes.** Please contact me as soon as possible if you have an emergency or situation that will prevent you from submitting a quiz or assignment on time.

Grading

Total Points Possible for Semester = 520

469-520 = A
418-468 = B
367-417 = C
316-366 = D
≤315 = F

Course Requirements/Schedule

Due date times all follow central hours All assignments (with the exception of DB Peer responses) are due on Sundays. Module 1 is 1 week. Thereafter, each Module is 2 weeks long. Readings are listed in their respective modules. Articles for reading and other course materials can be found in Canvas.

Course Calendar | HDFS 3423.420 (Spring 2026)			
Week(s)	**Module**	**Required Reading(s)**	**Assignments/Discussions/Quizzes**
1 (Aug. 17-23)	**1 – Introduction to Service Learning** *What is Service Learning?*	• Service Learning – Introduction (PPT) • Felten & Clayton (2011)	Assignment: • None Discussion: • Introduce Yourself! (due by 8/23 @ 11:59pm) Quiz: • Syllabus Quiz (due by 8/23 @ 11:59pm)
2 & 3 (Aug 24 – Sept. 6)	**2 – The Importance of Service Learning**	• Mandell (1999) • Jacobson & Engelbrecht (2002) • Taylor & Pancer (2007)	Assignment: • Field Work Confirmation (due 9/6 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • DB 1 (initial posts due 8/30 @ 11:59pm) • Peer responses (due 9/2 @ 11:59pm) Quiz: • Quiz 1 (due 9/6 @ 11:59pm)
4 & 5 (Sept. 7 – Sept. 20)	**3 – Communication**	• Action Plan Materials (Canvas Module) • Communication PPT • Communication Toolbox • Swick (2003)	Assignment: • Journal 1 (due 9/13 @ 11:59pm) • Introduction Reflection (due 9/20 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • None Quiz: • Quiz 2 (due 9/20 @ 11:59pm)
6 & 7 (Sept. 21 – Oct. 4)	**4 – Community Partnerships**	• Easterling (2003) • Epstein (1995) • Lasker & Weiss (2003)	Assignment: • None Discussion: • DB 2 (initial posts due 9/27 @ 11:59pm) • Peer responses (due 9/30 @ 11:59pm) Quiz: • Quiz 3 (due 10/4 @ 11:59pm)
8 & 9 (Oct. 5 – Oct. 18)	**5 – Civic and Social Responsibility**	• Doherty et al. (2009) • Goldstein (2019) • Harry (2005)	Assignment: • Journal 2 (due 10/11 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • None Quiz: • Quiz 4 (due 10/18 @ 11:59pm)

10 & 11 (Oct. 19 – Nov. 1)	**6 – Policies and Programs**	• Bradshaw et al. (2012)	Assignment: • Action Plan (due 11/1 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • DB 3 (initial posts due 10/25 @ 11:59pm) • Peer responses (due 10/28 @ 11:59pm) Quiz: • None
12 & 13 (Nov. 2 – Nov. 15)	**7 – Problem Solving**	• Ethical Decision Making (PPT) • Feeney et al. (2022) • Wikoff & Rock (2024)	Assignment: • Journal 3 (11/15 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • None Quiz: • Quiz 5 (due 11/8 @ 11:59pm)
14, 15, & 16 (Nov. 16 – Dec. 6)	**8 – Ethical Decision Making**	• Hardina (2004) • Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2021)	Assignment: • Ethics Case Study (due 11/22 @ 11:59pm) • Journal 4 (due 11/29 @ 11:59 pm) • Final Reflection (due 12/6 @ 11:59pm) • Time Log (due 12/6 @ 11:59pm) Discussion: • DB 4 (initial posts due 11/29 @ 11:59pm) Quiz: • None

The instructor reserves the right to modify or change this schedule to best meet the needs of the students.

Fall 2026 Holidays and Key Dates

- **September 7 – Labor Day (no classes)**
- **October 9 – Semester Midpoint**
- **November 23-29 – Thanksgiving Break (no classes)**
- **December 7-11 – Finals Week**
- **December 11 – Last Day of Session**

Standards for Academic Integrity

Every student in this class can improve by doing their own work and trying their hardest with access to appropriate resources. Students who use other people's work without citations will be violating UNT's Academic Integrity Policy. Please read and follow this important set of guidelines for your academic success (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003). If you have questions about this, or any UNT policy, please email me or come discuss this with me during my office hours.

Students who are caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalties. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic

material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.

The term "plagiarism" includes but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

AI use: The use of AI to generate responses (i.e., generative AI, or AI that creates original content, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.) for any assignment will not be tolerated. To be clear, you may use AI to check grammar (e.g., Grammarly), to help brainstorm ideas, or discover research articles or articles of interest. **You may not use AI to generate any portion of an assignment (including references/citations, if applicable), paraphrase information used in part within your assignment, or revise assignments beyond basic grammar/spelling errors (e.g., Grammarly Pro, ChatGPT).** Trying to pass AI-generated ideas off as your own is plagiarism, which is a violation of university academic integrity policies. Depending on the severity, consequences vary from receiving a 0 for an assignment to referral to the Division of Academic Affairs. If you use AI to help with ideas, those ideas must be put into your own words. If you need additional help/pointers/suggestions, the Writing Center is a great resource for students.

Please review Academic Integrity Policy (PDF)

ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at http://deanofstudents.unt.edu.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

ADA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at http://disability.unt.edu. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates at the following link: http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/ferpa.html

SPOT Course Evaluation

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. SPOT is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available at the end of the semester (typically during the 13th, 14th, and 15th weeks) to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey, they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website (http://spot.unt.edu/) or email spot@unt.edu.

Attendance and Participation

This course will take place 100% online. Interactions will occur either on Canvas or via email. Students are expected to check Canvas regularly for course updates. All coursework will be completed via Canvas by the due dates that are listed in Canvas. While the course takes place completely online, you are still expected to participate and engage with the materials on Canvas. Please see the university policy on university excused absences such as active military service, a religious holy day, or an official university function: Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF) (https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.039_StudAttnandAuthAbsence.Pub2_.19.pdf). If you cannot attend a class or submit an assignment due to an emergency, please let me know as soon as you are able to do so. Your safety and well-being are important to me.

Technical Assistance

The Student Help Desk is available to assist you for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UIT Help Desk: UIT Student Help Desk site (http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm)
Email: helpdesk@unt.edu
Phone: 940-565-2324
In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130
Walk-In Availability: 8am-9pm
Telephone Availability:

- Sunday: noon-midnight
- Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 9am-5pm

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

Academic Support and Student Services

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- Student Health and Wellness Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- UNT Care Team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
- UNT Psychiatric Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
- Individual Counseling (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)