Sociology 389k.1 - General Approaches to the Study of Population

Spring, 2011 Semester
Unique Number: 46270
Meeting Time: 3-6 T
Meeting Place: BUR 480

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Course web page is available through the UT blackboard (courses.utexas.edu).

GENERAL STATEMENT

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the field of demography. We cover the basic processes of the field—mortality, fertility, migration, and population distribution, along with several sub-fields. The two main goals of this course are to 1) introduce students to both classic and current literature in the field of social demography, 2) teach students to critically assess the major theories associated with population change. By the end of the semester, students should also know general trends in global population development and have an appreciation of the inter-related nature of migration, fertility, mortality, and age structure. Note that, for those of you who plan a career in social demography, this course provides only a starting point. Students should keep abreast of developments in the literature by reading the leading journals (Demography, Population and Development Review, Population Studies, Population Bulletin, Population Research and Policy Review, and Demographic Research).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course meets once a week (Tuesday afternoons), and attendance is expected. I also expect that you will have read the assigned reading for that week and will actively participate in class discussions. Note that I may slightly change the reading list for some section of the course later. You will know the required readings no later than a week before the class they will be discussed.

There will be a mid-term exam administered in class on Tuesday March 22 and a take home, cumulative final due at noon on Wednesday May 11. Grades are calculated by the following formula: an in class midterm exam – 30%; class participation - 40 %; take-home cumulative final 30 - %.

Class participation is a core portion of the course. Attendance is mandatory, but not sufficient. Each class session we will discuss 4-6 related readings on a core topic. This discussion will begin with a summary by a student discussion leader. For the discussion leaders and the rest of the class it is a good idea to take notes while you read so that you are prepared for this discussion. After identifying the main points of each article, class members should discuss its strengths, weaknesses, and contributions – and discuss ways in which it may or may not stimulate further research. Again, student preparation and active contribution will be the key to making this work. It is not simply the discussion leader’s responsibility to do all the talking. The class participation portion of your grade will be determined by attendance, the sessions you lead, and your participation in the discussion during sessions you do not lead.

Examinations will have you answer several questions that ask you to synthesize literature in the area, as well as summarize and evaluate some of the key theories/findings of the field. These exams will also aid in your preparation for the comprehensive examination in demography, if that is your specialization. For the take-home final, your answers must be word-processed. Late examinations will result in a one-letter-grade penalty for each day beyond the due date.
Notes on UT Policies

Note on Students with Disabilities. The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Judicial Services website at: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

INTRODUCTION

January 18: Introduction to the course

January 25: An Introductory Overview of Demography


! This is a handy overview of population trends that may be especially useful for those new to population research.

* indicates required reading

** Assignment: Everyone prepares a 1-page single-space summary of Preston to submit by email prior to class January 25th.
February 1: Basic Demographic Data and Techniques.


* Required Reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

! This is a good article, containing essential knowledge for those anticipating a career in population research, but requires a solid background in statistical analysis.

Assignment: Prepare and submits answers to this week’s study questions prior to class meeting February 1.
MORTALITY (and Health)

February 8: Epidemiological Transition

*Olshansky et al. (1997): "Infectious Diseases -- New and Ancient Threats to World Health."
  Population Bulletin 52(2).


Cameron, L. and J. Williams. (2009). “Is the Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Health Stronger for Older Children in Developing Countries?” Demography, 46 (2): 303-324.


! Necessary background for those new to the study of population trends in Health and Mortality

* Required reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles
February 15: Racial and Ethnic Variation in Birth Outcomes


* Required reading
** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

February 22: Race, Gender and Marital Status Differences in morbidity and life expectancy


Antecol, Heather and Bedard, Kelly. 2006 Unhealthy Assimilation: Why Do Immigrants Converge to American Health Status Levels? Demography. 43 (2): 337-360


* Required reading
** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

March 1: Review
March 8: Mid Term
March 15: Spring Break

FERTILITY

March 22: The Fertility Transition: Theory and History


* Required reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

March 29: Fertility Transitions in Developing Countries and Low Fertility Regimes


* Required reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles
April 5: Families and Fertility


This is a useful article both for its description of long-term fertility trends as well as for its consideration of different ways to analyze fertility trends.

* Required reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

April 12: International Migration and Immigrant Adaptation


* Required reading

** Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

! A good overview, but Brown and Bean provide a more concise review.
April 19: Segregation


Required reading

Required reading. Discussion leaders should prepare and share a written 1-page summary of these articles

April 26: Poverty & Inequality


May 3: Review