Sociology 971: Seminar on the Demography of Fertility, Families, and Households

Mondays 3:30-5:25pm
151 Education Building

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In this seminar, we will read, discuss, and evaluate recent work on a range of substantive issues central to the social demography of fertility, families, and households. We will place particular emphasis on developing a solid understanding of trends and associated explanations as well as individual-level correlates of a range of family behaviors. Because the “demography of fertility, families, and households” encompasses a body of research that is far too vast to be covered completely in a single semester, we will not be able to read deeply on any one subject but will summarize the broader literature while reading representative work on a wide range of topics. In the process of writing a research paper, you will have the opportunity to read more deeply on a substantive area of interest. A weekly schedule for the semester is as follows:

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<td>January 23</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview (including Recent Social and Economic Trends)</td>
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<td>Theoretical Perspectives on Family Life</td>
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<td>11</td>
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The readings focus almost exclusively on the contemporary U.S. with a few readings about industrialized countries more generally. This is not for lack of interest in other places but simply the need to cover a wide range of topics in a single semester and, therefore, the inability to consider the notable variation across country contexts. I encourage you to contribute insights from your own knowledge, research or readings about other countries. Also, we will not focus
explicitly on methodological issues or techniques, much of which is covered in the demographic techniques sequence and advanced statistics courses.

**Requirements**

This class will keep you busy! Requirements are: (1) come to class prepared to discuss the required readings; (2) send discussion questions Friday before the class sessions where we will have guided discussions; (3) work with classmates to collaboratively prepare brief presentations and lead discussion (see below for details); (4) write and present a research paper; (5) provide written feedback on a colleague’s research paper.

This course has two main objectives: the first is for everyone to develop a high level of comfort with recent research in the broad field of family demography. The second is to write the first draft of an empirical research paper that, with revision, could be submitted to a professional journal such as *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Family Issues*, or *Demography*.

Class time will take two formats, and half of the classes will be of each format (but not necessarily alternating each week):

1) **Guided Discussion** (abbreviated as ‘GD’ below). Each GD week, every class member is (of course) expected to read the assigned readings carefully and then to send 3 thoughtful discussion questions to the class. Discussion questions should address important substantive, theoretical, data, and methodological issues about the topic for that week. Each question can be on a single reading or can address broader issues across multiple readings. Students should email their discussion questions to the class via the course email list (soc971-1-s12@lists.wisc.edu) no later than 9am on Friday (earlier if possible). Two students for each GD class will be responsible for combining and organizing the questions into one document and sending this to all of us by 9am Monday (i.e., the same day as the class). These two students will also be responsible for facilitating class discussion during class, drawing on (but certainly not limited to) the questions they distributed.

2) **Presentations and Discussion** (abbreviated as ‘P+D’ below). Each P+D week, the first hour of class will be comprised of three presentations of roughly 20 minutes each. The first will provide an overview of trends and differentials in the family behavior(s) of interest that week (e.g., marriage and cohabitation). The second will provide an overview of the big questions and related theories (covering both the classic works and more recent developments). The third will provide an overview of key issues related to data, measurement, and methods. For each segment, 15 minutes will be devoted to the presentation and 5 minutes to Q&A/discussion. These presentations should, of course, emphasize content rather than form. Students are expected to consult additional information about their assignment as needed (e.g., Census data for trends, other research articles for ideas about theory and data/measurement). After a short break, we will reconvene for a discussion of the assigned readings that, again, everyone will have read carefully. I will use the final 10-15 minutes of class to summarize and address issues that were not covered.
Each week, four groups of two students (i.e., eight students) will be responsible for preparing and leading each of the four class segments. Two students will work together to prepare and present the 15-minute overview of trends and differentials, another two will present on big questions and themes, another two on data/methods, and another two will produce a list of questions in advance and then lead the discussion (I will also contribute some questions). All presentations should have accompanying handouts or Powerpoint. I will be available throughout the week to meet or discuss via email reading strategies and preparing for these presentations.

There are currently 12 students enrolled in the class. The GD weeks involve 2 students leading discussion, and the PD weeks involve 8 students – 6 for presentations and 2 for leading discussion. There are, therefore, a total of 60 ‘slots’ over the 12 weeks of the course (not including the first class and the last two classes for student presentations of papers). Each student should sign up to lead in one of these capacities 5 times over the semester, i.e., once in each of the 5 roles.

We will spend the final two class sessions presenting and discussing your research papers. As in most graduate seminars, the standard for papers is that they will eventually be submittable for review at a professional journal such as *Demography* or *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Because this is no easy task, I recommend that you get started on your papers as soon as possible. Hopefully, most of you are already engaged in work that could form the basis of this paper. This paper does not need to be something entirely new. It can be a write-up of preliminary results of research that you are currently involved doing (perhaps something you will be presenting at the Population Association of America annual meetings?). It can also be a substantially improved version of a paper that you have submitted for a previous class. Regardless, I would like to meet with everyone (if useful to you) sometime during the first few weeks of the semester to discuss what you would like to work on for your research paper.

I would like you to submit the paper in stages:

1. Submit a 1-2-paragraph summary of your proposed topic by February 6.
2. Submit a 2-4-page research proposal (including background, research question/hypothesis, proposed data and methods) by February 20.
4. Submit draft of full paper to assigned reviewer by April 16.
5. Submit reviews to author and to me on April 23.
6. Present papers in class and submit final version on April 30/May 7.

If you haven’t seen it, I encourage you to read a very good article by Lynn White about how to write an empirical journal article:


I am hoping that we can run the presentation of papers during the last two classes like a (very efficient!) conference. I think that we can allot a maximum of 15 minutes per person. Roughly 10-12 minutes to present the paper and 3-5 minutes for Q&A and constructive feedback.
Course Readings

Most assigned readings are journal articles (primarily from *Journal of Marriage and Family, Demography, Population Studies*, and *Population and Development Review*), as well as a few book chapters. I will post them all under the ‘Content’ tab of our course Learn@UW website. You could also easily find the articles via Google Scholar. Please note that the reading list is subject to change if I find new/better readings to add or exchange. Any changes I do make will leave time for adequate preparation (i.e., 2-3 weeks in advance).

Reading List by Week

**Week 1, January 23: Introduction and Overview (including Recent Social and Economic Trends)**


**Week 2, January 30: Theoretical Perspectives on Family Life (GD)**


**Week 3, February 6: Marriage and Cohabitation (P+D)**


**Week 4, February 13: Divorce, Remarriage and Stepfamilies (P+D)**


**Week 5, February 20: Family Structure and Child Wellbeing (GD)**


Week 6, February 27: Same-Sex Couples and Parents (P+D)


Week 7, March 5: Father Involvement and the Role of Men in Family Life (GD)


Week 8, March 12: Fertility in Industrialized Countries (P+D)


**Week 9, March 19: Nonmarital Childbearing (including Teen Childbearing) (P+D)**


**Week 10, March 26: Transition to Adulthood (GD)**


**Week 11, April 2: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**
Week 12, April 9: Family Complexity (P+D)


Week 13, April 16: Inequality in U.S. Family Life (GD)


Week 14, April 23: Work and Family (including Relevant Public Policies) (GD)


**Week 15, April 30: Presentation of student papers**

**Week 16, May 7: Presentation of student papers**

Revised: January 23, 2012