Demography 260: Special Topics in Demography

THE ERA OF MODERN POPULATION GROWTH REVISTED

Professor David Reher

The year 1800 marks the beginning of the first period in human history of sustained and simultaneous economic and demographic growth. It is a period in which population growth far surpassed anything experienced previously and has led to a very full world, with 7 billion inhabitants at present and possibly as many as 10 billion by the end of this present century. This course examines the factors that allowed humans to break free from the "Malthusian trap" that characterized all pre-modern human societies. We then trace the arc of economic and population growth into our own time. Our focus will be on the often under-appreciated role of the Demographic Transition in the development first of Europe, then Asia and now Africa. Its pervasive implications for social and economic modernization of the developed and the developing worlds are discussed in detail. We also examine some long-term implications of the Demographic Transition for human populations how these may differ in different world regions during the 21st Century.

We will address each of these themes in the light of recent research and implications for population issues today will be drawn whenever pertinent. This course will help students deepen their understanding of the key role population processes have played in the past for human development. In turn, an awareness of past population dynamics sheds light on many of the issues facing human populations now and in the future. This course should be attractive for students of History, the Social Sciences, Demography, Economics, Biology and Public Health, mainly because of the role population issues play in these disciplines and the importance of the issues central to these disciplines for the history of human populations. The technical demands of the course will be relatively low, though some knowledge of elementary statistics and of demographic analysis is useful.

The reading list for this course will include several recent papers that have done much to re-stimulate debate on many key issues affecting the past two centuries of population history. This material includes chapters from a special issue of Population and Development Review dedicated to The Long Term Implications of the Demographic Transition (2011), as well as unpublished or soon-to-be-published material bearing on different aspects of this topic. The scope of this course will be global, though much of our knowledge comes from developed countries which are further advanced in the process of demographic modernization than much of the rest of the world. The course will end up with sessions on the process of aging, the ultimate implication of the Demographic Transition.

This course is a seminar based on the presentation and discussion of recent research, much of which is included in the bibliography provided by the professor. Students are expected to participate actively in the course seminar both with presentations on different readings and in the discussions and debates held during the course. Students must also write a term paper based on a subject related to the course and approved by the professor. The final grade is based on the quality of seminar participation (including presentations) plus the final term paper. There will be no final exam.
A typical seminar will include a general presentation by the professor based on one or more texts, plus 3-4 presentations by students. These presentations will be based on assigned readings and will include a brief summary of contents (issues addressed, methods, conclusions, etc.) followed by a general discussion among all seminar participants. The duration of these presentations/discussions will be approximately 30 minutes per text. Presentations should make use of PowerPoint or similar software. All seminar participants should be familiar with texts presented in class, thus assuring lively discussion and debate. Each student will make about 4-5 presentations over the course of the semester, depending on the number of students enrolled in the seminar. If time permits, towards the end of the semester some seminar sessions (perhaps 2 or 3) will be dedicated to the presentation and discussion of student projects. The overall reading load for this course is approximately three (or perhaps four) papers per week.

**Important note.** Seminars will take place on Wednesdays, 2-5pm. The first session will take place on Wednesday, 3 February. This means that over the course of the semester, we will have to make up two sessions (20 and 27 January). The dates and times of these make-up classes will be decided by common agreement once instruction begins.

There will be seminar sessions on the following topics:

1. The origins of modern population growth. The escape from the ‘Malthusian trap’. The research of Robert Fogel on the escape from hunger.

   **Readings:**


2. Demographic transition theory. The European fertility project: achievements and limitations.


3. Health and infectious disease during Epidemiological Transition.


4. The Demographic Transition as a global process.


5. Reassessing the importance of mortality change for the Demographic Transition. The role of human agency during the early transitional period.


(10) Reher, David S., Glenn Sandström, Frans van Poppel & Alberto Sanz (under review) “Agency in Fertility Decisions in Western Europe during the Demographic Transition. A comparative perspective”.

6. Family systems throughout the world, past and present


7. The Baby Boom: traditional approaches and renewed interest.


8. The Second Demographic Transition.


9. The pace of demographic transition in the developing world.


10. From Baby Boom to Baby Bust: towards the threshold of aging. Continuities and cleavages in fertility patterns in the developed world.


11. Recent trends in mortality


12. Long-term implications of the Demographic Transition.


