THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Department of Sociology
Sociology 451/557:A1
Sociology of Human Fertility
Wednesdays: 2:00 – 4:50 p.m. Tory Basement, Room 125

(“Policy about course outlines can be found in Course Requirements, Evaluation Procedures and Grading of the University Calendar.”)

Professor Frank Trovato
4-27 Tory
T: 780-492-5934
E-mail: ftrovato@ualberta.ca

Office hours: Tuesdays 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Other times by appointment

Policy on Electronic Recording of Lectures
Section 23.4(4) of the University of Alberta Academic Calendar stipulates:

“Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).”

Brief Description of the Course
This seminar examines theoretical (classical and contemporary) and empirical perspectives on the social demographic, biosocial, psychological, and economic factors in human fertility and their interactions. The course entails a fair amount of reading of works published in varied professional venues (e.g., demographic, sociological, medical, epidemiological, etc.). The course is open to senior undergraduate and graduate students. It is assumed that students are familiar with the basic concepts and theoretical perspectives of demography and population studies.

Course requirements:
- Class presentations (weight 35%)
- Term paper (weight 35%)
- Presentation of term paper (15%)
- Class participation (15%)

Course Structure
2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. (lecture and discussion)
3:00 p.m. - 3:15 p.m. (break)
3:15 p.m. – 4:50 p.m. (student presentations and discussion)
Class Presentations
At the beginning of each class, a number of students will be assigned readings for presentation at the subsequent class meeting. Each presentation should be approximately 15 minutes, with an additional 5 minutes for questions and discussion. Students are responsible for locating the assigned reading materials for these presentations. These items should be easily accessible electronically through the University Library System. Presentations will be evaluated in accordance with the following criteria, each scored out of 20:

- **Comprehensiveness**: does the student cover the main point(s) inherent in the reading?
- **Understanding**: does the student show a clear understanding of the material?
- **Clarity**: does the student explain himself/herself clearly?
- **Ability to raise and stimulate questions for discussion**: does the student raise important questions based on the assigned material?
- **Overall judgment of the quality of presentation**.

Term Paper
Students will prepare a term paper on a topic of their choice, as long as it is in some way related to human fertility and its interaction with any aspect of society. Some *suggested* topics will be presented and discussed at the beginning of the course. Students are encouraged to discuss their term paper ideas early in the term. Draft term papers will be presented on the second last day of classes, and submitted on the final meeting of the course.

Required Readings
Students will read required readings in preparation for each class (see list below). Most required readings are articles from professional journals, and a few will be book chapters. The articles can be downloaded electronically from the internet through the University Library System. The book chapters will be posted on E-Class.

Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sept. 7</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course and Basic Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sept. 14</td>
<td>Natural Fertility and the Proximate Determinants of Fertility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sept. 21</td>
<td>Biodemographic Aspects of Human Fertility: (A). Seasonal and Environmental Factors; (B). Evolutionary Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sept. 28</td>
<td>Population, Nuptiality, and Fertility: Historical Transitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oct. 5</td>
<td>Fertility and Nuptiality Transitions in Developing Countries</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Second Demographic Transition: Theory and Research</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Oct. 19</td>
<td>Second Demographic Transition: Gender Equity, Family and Fertility</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Nov. 2</td>
<td>Economic Theory of Fertility: Cyclical, Countercyclical, and Synthesis Perspectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nov. 9</td>
<td><strong>Fall Break, November 7 - 11</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov. 16</td>
<td>Social Psychological Theory of Fertility</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Nov. 23</td>
<td>Sociocultural Differentials in Fertility</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nov. 30</td>
<td>Presentation of Term Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dec. 7</td>
<td>Conclusion to the course</td>
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Submission of Term Papers (Late will not be accepted)
Grading
Performance on the grade components for this class will be summed and a percentage score calculated at the end of the term. Grades will be then be converted to the four-point scale and letter grade in accordance with the following schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Term score %</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Grade on 4-point scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>91-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86-90</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82-85</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>78-81</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74-77</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70-73</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>66-69</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62-65</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58-61</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>54-57</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Pass</td>
<td>50-53</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: If a final term grade is on the margin of a cut-off point, it will be raised to the next higher category. For example, if overall term score is 90.5, the final grade will be 91 and will therefore receive A+ and 4.0 as a final grade; if overall term grade is 90.4, the score assigned will be 90, and will therefore receive a final grade of A and 4.0.

For your information, the average undergraduate performance is expected to vary by level of the course: C+ in 100 or 1st year courses, B- in 200 and 300 or 2nd year courses, and B in 400 or 4th year courses. At the undergraduate level, grades D and above are passing grades; at the graduate level, passing grades are C+ and above.

Note: Graduate students will be expected to perform at graduate level standards on all aspects of the course.

Academic Integrity
“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at [www.governance.ualberta.ca](http://www.governance.ualberta.ca)) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”
1. Introduction and Basic Concepts


2. Natural Fertility and the Proximate Determinants of Fertility


3a. Biodemographic Aspects of Human Fertility: Seasonal and Environmental Factors


3b. Biodemographic Aspects of Human Fertility: Evolutionary Perspectives


4. Population, Nuptiality, and Fertility: Historical Transitions


5. Fertility and Nuptiality Transitions in Developing Countries


6. Second Demographic Transition: Theory and Research


7. Second Demographic Transition: Gender Equity, Family and Fertility


9. Economic Theory: Cyclical, Countercyclical, and Synthesis Perspectives


10. Social Psychological Theory of Fertility


11. Sociocultural Differentials in Fertility: Religion, Ethnicity and Race


Example: Summary of an Assigned Reading for Presentation to the Class

Date of Presentation ___________________________

Name of Student and ID: _______________________


**Background:** Formal models of fertility, take specific childbearing distributions to indicate “natural fertility” where couples take no intentional action to manage their reproduction. The author argues that this traditional approach can only be valid when the cultural repertoires that mediate between intentions and actions are well-established, rather than making assumptions about a particular culture and misrepresenting them demographically. On a broader scope, she argues that there are flaws associated with inferring meaning from aggregate behavior.

**Objective:** To show how formal models of fertility do not consider the intentions and actions of individuals being studied and consequently, discrepancies result. The author uses data from 18 African countries and compares women’s self-reported intentions to those attributed to them, under standard demographic models to see if any incongruities exist.

**Data:** This article relies on data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) conducted in the late 1990’s in 18 sub-Saharan African countries, representing a wide range of economic, political, and social situations, and all regions of the sub-continent. The surveys are nationally representative samples of women aged 15-49. Sample sizes range from 5,501 to 15,367. This data come from women’s individual recode files, particularly the birth registers. The author interviewed women 40-44 years old who were ever married or currently married. Women who still wanted more children were considered to have natural fertility and those who did not want any more and were already using contraception were classified as having controlled fertility (2 groups of women).

**Main Findings:** In all 18 African countries, these 2 groups of women have nearly identical age-specific marital fertility rates indexed to marital fertility 20-24. The intention to stop bearing children in women in their 40’s indexes a history of particularly prolific childbearing. Thus intentional fertility limitation could be inferred not from levels of marital fertility, but from its shape over age.

Parity-specific birth intervals exhibited in 17th-19th century European populations does not appear in Africa – no difference between 2 groups of women. The interval between marriage and the first birth throughout sub-Saharan Africa is far longer than would be predicted by any model of natural fertility based on European and North American cases.
Conclusion: The social organization of reproduction in Africa requires us to rethink basic assumptions about what is natural about marriage, marital sexuality, and procreation. The assumed indexical relationship between specific patterns of birth rates and the intentional states and forms of reproductive action called natural fertility does not hold in contemporary Africa. Women who have sought to limit the number of children that they bear are largely indistinguishable from their natural fertility co-nationals on the measures designed to detect fertility control. This means that the cultural repertoires through which they organized their action, their schemas of action, differ so much from those built into the quantitative models that the models misattribute their intentions.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the limitations of traditional fertility studies?

2. What other methods of information gathering would give more insight into intentions and actions?

3. What is ‘natural’ about natural fertility?
Term Paper Evaluation Form

Student Name and ID: _________________________________

Title of Paper: _________________________________

1. Purpose/thesis/goal clearly stated at beginning of paper

2. Review of the relevant literature/theoretical framework

3. Effectiveness of the “argument”/evidence

4. Writing style

5. Conclusion provides a concise summary of the paper

6. Conclusion outlines suggestions for further study

7. Originality

8. Overall Comment