Course Overview

This graduate-level seminar will cover a wide range of research topics and theoretical frameworks at the intersection of population dynamics and environmental change. How does the human population—its size, growth rate, age composition, and geographic distribution—influence problems of resources, environment, development and the prospects for solving them? How many people can the world support? How do structures of inequality influence which groups of people are most vulnerable to the harms associated with environmental change? Population variables interact with economic and technological ones in generating pressures on resources and environment. How do social, political and economic forces shape all of these variables and their interactions? This course explores what is known, supposed, contended, and contested about the relationship between population and the environment, bringing to bear historical data, scenarios of future possibilities, and a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. Given practical limitations, it is impossible to examine the breadth and depth of work in the area of population and environment, so the goal is to provide an overview of the most foundational and trailblazing social science theory and research relating human population to environmental context. The readings represent classic and recent academic research from multiple social science disciplines including sociology, geography, economics, and political science.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. Summarize and critically evaluate alternate theoretical social science perspectives that are used to examine interactions between population and the environment.
2. Provide specific examples of recent social science research on the social dimensions of environmental context, including the social distribution (inequality) of risk.
3. Provide specific examples of recent social science research on the environmental implications of population dynamics.
4. Articulate specific examples of the reciprocal effect of environmental factors on demographic processes.
5. Discuss the role of mediating factors (e.g., technology, policy, culture) in shaping the relationship between population and the environment.
6. Identify the many resources available to researchers examining human-environment interaction.

Course Format
The class meets in a seminar format once per week. The majority of class time will be spent considering and critically examining the assigned readings. Students will prepare written reactions to the readings each week, and students will be assigned to lead discussion during one or more weeks, depending on course enrollment.

Course Expectations
This will be a highly interactive course, emphasizing discussion and engaged student feedback. It is therefore essential that you prepare for each class meeting by reading the required materials and making your own notes summarizing the main arguments contained in the readings to ready you for classroom interaction. In addition to completing the required readings and discussion activities, please note the following expectations for this class:

1. **Attend all class sessions**: I do not take attendance, but part of your final grade is based on class participation. Missing class will negatively affect your grade.
2. **Arrive on time**: Arriving to class late is inconsiderate and distracting to your instructors and classmates. Therefore, plan to arrive early so that you can ensure you are in your seat at the time the class begins. Plan for extra time to get to class during the first couple of weeks when traffic is heavy and parking on campus is difficult.
3. **No cell phone use**: Do not text, check your email, use social networking sites, or take phone calls during class. If it is absolutely essential that you take a phone call (an emergency), please be respectful and leave the room before answering the call.
4. **Maintain classroom decorum**: We will be discussing complex issues in this class. As such, they often touch on strongly held beliefs and emotions. It is imperative that we maintain an attitude of cooperation, constructive criticism and politeness in our dealings with other seminar participants.
5. **You earn your own grade**: I do not “give” you a grade. You earn your grade by successfully completing the course requirements. I will provide in depth feedback on all assignments and return grades to you in a timely matter. I will be available during office hours to help you with class materials and discuss assignments with you. You should keep track of your grade throughout the semester so that you know where you stand. I do not curve, and I will not provide extra credit. Simply showing up for class and doing the work does not automatically equate to an ‘A’. Before you submit an assignment, ask yourself: “Is this the best I can possibly do?” If the answer is no, then do not expect me to award that work with the best grade.
Requirements and Evaluation

Discussion “Guide”: 15%
Weekly Article Reactions and Class Participation: 25%
Midterm Exam 20%
Research Project Concept Paper 10%
Research Project Final Draft: 20%
Research Project Presentation: 10%

100%

Discussion “Guide”
At least two students will be responsible for guiding discussion each week. The two (or more) students assigned for each week will work together to determine how to split up the assigned readings. The students will briefly summarize the readings for the week and lead discussion on the topic of the week by preparing questions for the class. The summaries should include an overview of the primary arguments and key research findings (if applicable), your reactions to the arguments made, including strengths and limitations of the readings, a discussion of what you think the readings add to our understanding of the topic, how they complement or diverge from each other, what they neglect, and how they can be applied to what we have already covered in the course. The questions that you prepare to guide the class discussion should illicit responses that stimulate engagement among the other students in the class. The guide may post discussion questions in advance of the class on Angel if desired. Due to the class size, you will likely be assigned as a discussion guide for three (or more) weeks. This is worth 15% of your grade.

Weekly Article Reactions and Class Participation
Each student will be responsible for a brief (e.g., one page, single spaced) weekly summary of and reaction to the assigned readings beginning in week 2. These reactions should synthesize the arguments, concepts, and research findings from all of the assigned readings for the week and identify the things you found to be most compelling, convincing, confusing, or debatable from one or more of the readings. Your reactions should be posted in the discussion board in Angel on the Tuesday night before the Wednesday class when the readings will be discussed. The discussion leader may wish to use these reactions to stimulate ideas about the questions to ask during the class. Accordingly, be sure to post promptly so that the discussion leader has time to read the posts. I recommend composing your posts in MS Word and running a spelling and grammar check prior to posting. Prepare these with the same rigor as you would a paper. You should write professionally, and proof read your post. You are also expected to contribute in meaningful ways to class discussion. This is worth 25% of your grade.

Midterm Exam
You will complete a midterm and final exam with short answer/essay format questions that are similar to those you might see on a comprehensive exam. This exam will be take-home, and you will have approximately one week to complete it. The exam is
worth 20% of your grade. The midterm will be passed on during Week 7 and will be due during Week 8. Late exams will not be accepted.

**Research Project**

You will complete a research paper on the topic of your choosing within the broad areas of population and environment. Papers can be either empirical research papers (in which you have conducted data analysis) or a paper proposal (similar to what you might complete for a master’s thesis or shortened version of a dissertation proposal). The paper must meet the following standards:

- 15-20 (double-spaced) pages in length, excluding references, tables, and figures
- Incorporate a considerable number of course readings and current articles from the top journals in demography and population studies
- Appropriate professional reference formatting (e.g., ASA)

The final paper is due during final exam week and is worth 20% of your grade. You will submit a 2 page “concept paper” with your final paper idea by Week 7 of the course. Your concept paper should identify your research question(s), motivation for and significance of this research, and proposed data and potential methods. I will provide feedback related to feasibility of your proposed topic and methods. This concept paper is due by Week 7 and will be worth 10% of your final grade.

**Presentation:** You will present your final project during the last week of class. You can present using the traditional PowerPoint/prezi method, or you can develop a professional poster and present that way instead. Your presentation should last 10-15 minutes, including 2-3 minutes for questions from the audience. The presentation is worth 10% of your final grade.

**Grading Scale**

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DETAILED TOPIC AND READING SCHEDULE

Week 1
August 27
Course Introduction and Overview
Review of Demographic Concepts and Trends
Introduction to Data Resources


Week 2
Sept. 3
Overview of Population and Environment Intersections


Recommended Reading:


Week 3
Sept. 10
Malthusian, Neo-Malthusian, Boserupian, and other Perspectives


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 4 Limits to Growth Sept. 17**

Week 5  Common Property/Pool Resources
Sept. 24


*Recommended Reading:*


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Week 6  Natural Resource Dependence: Opportunities and Risks
Oct. 1

Week 7  Urbanization and the Environment
Oct. 8  (Concept Papers Due)


**Recommended Reading:**


Week 8  Migration and the Environment
Oct. 15  (Midterm Exam Due)


**Recommended Reading:**

Weeks 9-12  Environment and Population Health: Inequality and Vulnerability

Week 9  Overview of Environment and Health Pathways
Oct. 22

### Week 10

**Disease**

**Oct. 29**


### Week 11

**Disasters and Weather Shocks**

**Nov. 5**


**Recommended Reading:**


Week 13  
Nov. 19


Week 14  
Dec. 3


Week 15  
Dec. 10

Wrapping Up and Final Project Presentations
University Policies

Statement of Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an educational objective of this institution. All Penn State University policies regarding academic integrity apply to this course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. For any material or ideas obtained from other sources, such as the text or things you see on the web, in the library, etc., a source reference must be given. Direct quotes from any source must be identified as such. All exam answers must be your own, and you must not provide any assistance to other students during exams. Any instances of academic dishonesty WILL be pursued under the University regulations concerning academic integrity.

Statement of Nondiscrimination
The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state of federal authorities. The Pennsylvania State University does not discriminate against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to:
Affirmative Action Director
The Pennsylvania State University
201 Willard Building
University Park, PA 16802-2801
Telephone: (814) 863-0471

Disability Access Statement:
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the campus disability liaison as soon as possible: (name, office, telephone, email). For additional information, check the university web site: http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/
NOTE: Accommodations require documentation.