OBJECTIVES:

This graduate seminar examines changes in family behaviors and household relationships from a demographic perspective. Readings are drawn not only from the demographic literature on the family but also from sociology, economics, history, human development, even a little evolutionary theory. The major focus is on the post-World War II United States. Seminar discussion will consider explanations and classical debates about changing family forms and family variation, as well as assess implications for empirical research and public policy.

During the first few classes, we will discuss the demographic perspective on the family, review the broad trends in family transitions and structures, introduce theoretical perspectives on union formation and family change, and discuss data and the difficulty of making causal inference in family research.

Then we will turn to topics that dominate current research in family demography: young adult transitions, cohabitation and marriage; parenting and investment in children; intergenerational relationships and the intersection of work and family.

My interest and area of expertise is U.S. family demography and hence, my goal is to give you a comprehensive introduction to U.S. family demographic trends, theoretical perspectives, and issues. My current thinking about family change and variation is influenced by 1) editing the journal *Demography* (2005-2007) where I had the opportunity to review the latest family demographic research, and 2) participating in an interdisciplinary NIH-funded project where the goal is to design new models for explaining family change and variation. I have also recently co-authored a book on family demographic trends (Casper and Bianchi 2002), an edited volume on work, family, health and well being (Bianchi, Casper and King 2005), a new book on family time use patterns (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006) and have a forthcoming co-edited volume on intergenerational caring and exchange (Booth, Crouter, Bianchi and Seltzer Forthcoming). I want to bring some of the insights from this work to the classroom – and hope that you will find the topics as interesting as I do. Teaching this class is important to me, as it helps to keep me up-to-date in the field.

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:

The format of the course will consist of (limited) overview lectures and class discussion. Students will be expected to circulate a discussion question on the readings in advance of each class, prepare weekly one-page papers on the question that I provide, and come to class ready to discuss the readings.

Grades will be based on three components: class participation (30%), short weekly papers/discussion questions (30%), and a research paper (or proposal) (40%).

1) Class participation. We will discuss and evaluate the readings in class and class discussion constitutes an important part of the course grade. **Each week, every participant in the class should e-mail 1 discussion question based on the readings.** These questions can be on a single reading or on general issues that crosscut the readings for the week. Students should submit their discussion question electronically to all other participants in the seminar (via the coursemail list) **no later than 9am on Wednesday, the day of the seminar (earlier if possible!).** Each week, two students will be responsible for combining and organizing the questions into one document and sending this to all of us electronically by noon on Wednesday. The students responsible for organizing the list of questions in a given week should also be prepared to use the questions to facilitate class discussion that week.
3) Weekly Short Papers. Five times during the course, you are asked to turn in a short paper (no more than 1 single-spaced page (no smaller than 11 point font either!!)) on the question that appears at the bottom of the readings for that week. You should draw on class readings in answering the question but these are also “thought exercises” asking you to formulate and defend a perspective. You are welcome to draw on your past experiences, courses, and outside readings but it is not required that you read anything beyond that week’s readings. Hard copy of the paper should be given to me at the end of class and you should be prepared to discuss your perspective on the question in class. (No late papers accepted.)

3) Research paper/proposal. The major project for the course is an empirical research paper on a family topic. The goal is to develop a research question on a family topic, identify a data set with which to answer the question, and execute at least a preliminary analysis and write up the results by the end of the course. Ideally, the paper you complete in the class could serve as the basis for a PAA or an ASA submission when the class is over. (Deadlines for consideration for presentation at the 2008 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) is January 2008 and, for the 2009 annual meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA), the deadline is September 2008. For incoming Sociology graduate students, this paper could be the beginning of the required second year paper.

A one page statement of the family question you want to investigate will be due on Wednesday, September 26, 2007. I am looking for a page with four brief paragraphs: a paragraph that poses the question and justifies why it is important, one paragraph that begins to delineate what we know and don’t know about the topic, a paragraph that suggests what “new” this paper will contribute, and a final paragraph that suggests a possible data set that could be used to study the question. A second deadline is Wednesday, October 24 when I expect to receive a draft literature review with bibliography.

For students who do not feel prepared to execute an empirical analysis, I will allow the option of a research proposal. If you choose to write a proposal, you should follow NIH guidelines on the sections to include – Specific Aims, Background and Significance, Data and Analysis. It will be similar to writing the paper except that you will not actually execute the analysis. Everyone will give a short 10 minute presentation on your topic in one of the last two class meetings. The final research paper (or proposal) is due in my SOCY mailbox no later than noon on Monday, December 17, 2007 (sooner if possible!).

READINGS AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

The readings for the course are mostly journal articles with some book chapters that I will assist you in obtaining. There are no required texts and no books have been ordered. I will be using


to introduce topics. Graduate students who plan to take comprehensive examinations in either Demography or Gender, Work and Family may find this a useful reference on family demographic trends. However, there is no requirement to purchase this volume for this course and I have a couple of extra copies that I can lend to anyone who wants to review trends on a given topic.
OVERVIEW: TOPICS & SCHEDULE:

8/29/07  Introduction to the Course
9/5/07   Family Demography: Description and Causal Explanation
9/12/07  Theoretical Perspectives on Marriage and Family Change
9/19/07  Intergenerational Expectations and Young Adult Transitions
9/26/07  Education, Timing of Marriage and Childbearing
10/3/07  Heterosexual and Same Sex Cohabitation
10/10/07 Marriage, Economics and Well-being
10/17/07 NO CLASS – Readings on Choosing a Data Set/Writing an Empirical Paper on the Family
10/24/07 Family Structure, Single Parenting and Consequences for Children
10/31/07 Father Involvement in Families
11/7/07  Parental Investment in Families
11/14/07 Intra- and Intergenerational Linkages
11/21/07 (This is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. If we can agree to hold a last class on 12/12/07, the study day – NO CLASS)
11/28/07 Work and Family
12/5/07  Student Presentations
12/12/07 Student Presentations

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS/SHORT PAPER QUESTIONS

8/29/07  Introduction to the Course
9/5/07   Week 1: Family Demography: Description and Causal Explanation


9/12/07 Week 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Marriage and Family Change

Demographic/Ideational Perspective

Sociological Perspective

Historical Perspective

Evolutionary Perspective

Economic Perspective

NOTE: The trends discussion in these two articles is repetitive of Week 1 readings so I am asking you to skim/skip those pages and focus on the theory and factors economists use to explain family change.

Question: Take one of the above perspectives on the family/union formation and critique it. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What unique insights does the perspective provide? Comment on the “reach” of the perspective. For example, can it be equally well applied to different race-ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups of the U.S. population? Is it as useful for understanding family behaviors in non-Western settings as well as in Western countries?

9/19/07 Week 3: Intergenerational Expectations and Young Adult Transitions


Question: Suppose you had to organize the insights from the readings for this week into a lecture for an undergraduate family class. First, lay out the trends you would highlight. Then, use on or more of the the theoretical perspectives from week 2 to explain changes in family transitions in young adulthood?
9/26/07  Week 4: Education, Timing of Marriage and Childbearing


Reminder: One page describing the course paper you will do (see course requirements) due.

10/3/07- Week 5: Heterosexual and Same Sex Cohabitation


10/10/07  Week 6: Marriage, Economics and Well-Being


Question: What are the benefits of marriage and to they differ by gender, sexual orientation, and social class? Elaborate, supporting your position by drawing on the readings for this week and the previous week.
10/17/07  Week 7: How to Choose a Data Set and Write an Empirical Paper on the Family (NO IN CLASS MEETING)

Required reading:


Also recommended:

Note: I cannot meet class this week. Your take home assignment is to read these articles which provide information on data sets for studying the family and which should help you write your paper for this course (and perhaps other courses).

10/24/07  Week 8: Family Structure, Single Parenting, and Outcomes for Mothers and Children


Reminder: Literature review and bibliography for Paper/Proposal due.

10/31/07  Week 9: Father Involvement in Families


Question: Reflect on what this week’s and last week’s readings have to say about the ease or difficulty in achieving one of the current goals of welfare reform legislation: to promote marriage and parental responsibility among low-income parents. What stands in the way of achieving that goal?
11/7/07 -- Week 10: Parental Investment in Children


11/14/07- Week 11: Intra- and Intergenerational Linkages


Question: Bengtson argues that changes in the family in the contemporary U.S. are making intergenerational linkages ever more important for everyone. Many would argue that intergenerational ties are stronger in developing countries or among recent immigrant groups to the U.S. than among the native born U.S. population. What are the societal conditions that encourage strong intergenerational linkages and why might they be weaker in the West?

11/21/07 NO CLASS - Happy Thanksgiving!
11/28/07-- Week 12: Work and Family


12/5/07 Week 13: Student Presentations

12/12/07 Week 14: Student Presentations

FINAL COURSE PAPER DUE by 12:00 (Noon), December 17, 2007!!!