Demography of Health and Survival

Instructor: Miles Taylor, mtaylor3@fsu.edu (mailto:mtaylor3@fsu.edu)
Office Hours: Wed. 9-10:30 or by appointment (please feel free to stop by, but if you have important questions its best to email or call and make sure I’m not in a student meeting)
Time: Mon 2:00-4:30
Location: 517 BEL

OBJECTIVES: This seminar will introduce graduate students to the study of health and mortality from the point of view of social demography. This includes:

1. Understanding key issues, hypotheses and debates;
2. Recognizing and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of various methodological approaches and data sets;
3. Developing a basic familiarity and critical appreciation of research findings; and
4. Enhancing students’ conceptual, research, and presentation skills.

BACKGROUND: Studies in this area can be integrated around the theme of searching for whether/how social processes are associated with health and mortality differentials. The ways in which these interests are expressed are very wide ranging, crossing academic disciplines and diverse points of view.

The field is ultimately concerned with two variables, one key assumption, and a central positional hypothesis. The two variables are cause of death and age at death. What do people die from (or, more generally, what disease processes lead to death), and, as a consequence, at what age do they die?

The key assumption is that inequality in death reflects and reinforces inequalities in life. We presume that by looking empirically at how rates of death vary across population groups, we can isolate the operation of these causes and their interactions. This shifts our focus to differentials in odds or rates of death (including differentials over time), the immediate determinants of death (age & medical cause), and their more distant proximate or background determinants that can include a wide range of possible demographic, social, technological, behavioral, biological, genetic and other factors throughout life and even prenatal.

The central hypothesis of the field is that the most fundamental of these inequalities are inherently social. In other words, rather than originating with biological or other differences between groups, a sociological approach presumes social forces to be the “fundamental causes” of differential mortality. Of course, these processes are multi-factorial. Social forces must necessarily work through and in concert with biological, technological, behavioral, and other factors. These can be macro (e.g., societal), mid-level (e.g., household), or micro. In addition to a range of epidemiologic/demographic risk factors, we will consider so-called “external causes” and how institutional arrangements can affect survival, for instance in the case of natural disasters. We will also consider various conceptual emphases, including structural, risk-factor, life course, decision-making, biomarkers, and psychosocial pathways.
Course Requirements:

All students are expected to have completed the assigned readings before class in order to participate in class discussion and to make summary and citation easier in the future. Note that the required readings are **BOLDED**, the nonbolded, small font ones are optional/supplemental.

- Preparation for each class including all assigned readings and class participation and discussion (10%)
- Analysis of the **NUMBERED** weekly readings and responsibility for leading class discussion assigned to each student a few times during semester (10%)
- Completion of one take-home exam (15%)
- Completion of one Mini Research Proposal (10%)
- Completion of one research paper on the topic of your choice (pending approval). You have three options for a paper type described below (50%).
- Present an **8-10 minute** summary of your paper at the end of the semester (5%)

Important dates:

**February 25**: Take-home exam due

**March 11**: Mini research proposal due

**April 29**: Final papers due

Analysis of Weekly Reading Assignments

Weekly readings are a mix of journal articles and book chapters. All students are responsible for the **BOLDED** assigned readings each week, and they should be ready to discuss them. It is recommended that you have some system of taking notes about or on the article while you read it to facilitate discussion (and citation) later. Notes/things to think about should include the main research question/s of the article, the theory and/or perspective and its fit to the question/s, the data and methodology and their appropriateness, the contribution to the literature, and the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

When you are the discussion leader in a given week, you're goal is to engage the class in discussion of the topic of the assigned piece. You should prepare a brief summary of the topic, theory, research question or hypotheses, data and methodology, findings, limitations, and contribution. You should also prepare discussion questions about the reading in the context of the other readings and the field in general. Things you should think about:

1. Which theory or perspective is the article/chapter based on and which theory might also be used to couch the research?
2. What are the main concepts of the reading and how do you think they rank in importance to the overall field?
3. What are the data and methods used and are they appropriate for the question? Are there others that might do a better job?
4. What limitations have the authors discussed and which ones have they missed?
5. Are the findings compelling and what are some alternate explanations?
6. What is the largest contribution and what are future research areas on this topic?
Take-Home Exam
Serving as a rough “midterm” exam, I will give you a take-home exam to be completed within a week focusing on the topics and discussions covered in class. There will be two required questions (you will have a choice of at least two within each section) and each answer should be roughly 4 pages double spaced with a short bibliography. You should use readings from class but should also draw from other scholarly work. The exam is intended as preparation for your comprehensive exams.

Mini Research Proposal
Students are required to complete 1 brief essay (roughly 3-5 pages) focused on future research for a given life course/aging topic. You should use class readings as the basis of the proposal, supplemented by a brief literature review. In your essays, you will summarize the knowledge on a topic and identify a gap in the theoretical or empirical contributions. You will then translate this into a testable research question and describe a research project that could resolve the question. This assignment is intended to be a basis for your final paper.

Final Course Paper
Students are required to write a 15 to 20 page research paper on a topic relevant to the course and based on the readings or related readings. This assignment is due on April 29th and should be one of the types listed below.

Option 1: Research Proposal
Using your mini research proposal as a starting point, write a full research proposal. The proposal should be composed of three parts:
I. Literature review: extend the review of your mini proposal and add other relevant citations. This should comprise roughly 2/3 of the paper.
II. Identify a research question: the idea here is to locate a gap in the current knowledge and to address it in a testable way. This can include a theoretical debate or the introduction of a new theoretical perspective to a substantive topic, a challenge to an author’s findings and interpretations, or a substantive issue where there is little empirical evidence. Remember that the question must be testable either with existing or collected data. Remember that this is a proposal for research that you will hypothetically conduct.
III. Describing the Method: How will you go about answering your question? What data would you need to do so and how would you go about finding the population of interest in either existing or collected data? What type of analytic plan would you use (quantitative/qualitative) and how would this lead to a contribution to the field? Remember, a proposal is all about finding an interesting gap in the literature and presenting a strategy to fill it.

Option 2: Overview of the Research
An alternative is to write an extended literature review of a topic of your choice that is relevant to the course. Topics might include race differences in morbidity, age-period-cohort effects and their analysis, the effects of marriage on health over the life course, or the impacts of early life conditions on later life health. This is a great option for first year students who want to develop expertise in an area or want to analyze a broad literature for a future empirical paper.
Option 3: Empirical Analysis
The third option is to write a paper using original data. The ultimate goal would be to present your findings at a conference and/or submit the paper to a journal. This option is appropriate for more advanced students with methodological training and a background in a substantive topic. The model for this paper is a journal article.

Notes about final papers: Papers should be emailed to me by the specified time and date. Please save papers in Word format. If you use another OS besides Microsoft, please send a second version of the paper in pdf (in case there are formatting slips). All papers should be double spaced with 12 point font. Unless you have prior permission to turn in a paper late, late papers will be docked one half letter grade (i.e. A to A-, B+ to B) each day they are late.

Student Presentations
I have reserved the last class period for presentations of your final papers. You should prepare a 8-10 minute professional-style presentation of your paper. You may use, handouts, Powerpoint, etc. but these are not required. After each presentation we will have a 2 minute question period. These presentations are intended to prepare you for presenting your work at conferences and defenses.

Professionalism and Attendance: Participation is a small part of your grade (under Course Requirements) but this does not reflect the fact that this is a graduate seminar and thus I expect all students to attend class, participate in discussion, and behave professionally (arrive on time and show respect to your fellow classmates and to me). If you know you will miss a class, please let me know ahead of time. I will dock grades for missing more than 2 classes, regularly coming late, or unprofessional behavior during class. Students who miss more than 3 classes will receive a failing grade.

Course Schedule

Week 1/Jan 8: Introduction


Week 2/Jan 15: Martin Luther King Day - No Class

Week 3/Jan 22: Mortality Transitions


**Week 4/Jan 29: International Patterns**


**Week 5/Feb. 5: Infant/Child Health & Mortality**


Week 6/Feb 12: Social Class


**Week 7/Feb 19: Race/Nativity, Crossovers and Paradoxes**


*****Take-Home exam due Sunday, Feb 25 uploaded/sent to my email by Midnight*****

**Week 8/Feb 26: Sex/Gender**


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**Week 9/Mar 5: Social Relations; Marital Status & Religion; Psychosocial Processes**


Week 10/Mar 19: Life Course Effects


Week 11/Mar 26: Disability: Multiple causes of death


**Week 12/Apr 2: Health Behaviors**


**Week 13/ Apr 9: Biological and Genetic Factors**


**Week 14/Apr 16: External Factors: Violence, (Natural?) Disasters & System Failure**


### April 23: Research Presentations

**Final Paper due** Friday, April 29th uploaded/sent to my email by midnight

*In addition to my own policies for classroom comportment described above, you are expected to abide by the following policies that have been developed by the College of Social Sciences at Florida State University:*

**Academic Honor Policy:** Students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Policy of the Florida State University, including the statement on Values and Moral Standards published in The Florida State University General Bulletin. The Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of these expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty throughout the process. Please see the following website for a complete explanation of the Academic Honor Policy: [http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm](http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm)

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor’s discretion. Any student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way may be reported to the university administration for further disciplinary action as specified in the Academic Honor Policy ([http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/forms/honorpolicy.pdf](http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/forms/honorpolicy.pdf)).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) Bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. I am more than happy to make accommodations for you. Go to [http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability](http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability) for more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities or contact Student Disability Resource Center, 108 Student Services Bldg., Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, (850) 644-9566 (voice), (850) 644-8504 (TDD), e-mail: [SDRC@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:SDRC@admin.fsu.edu)
Classroom Courtesy: Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions. This means no cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the professor or discussion leader), reading newspapers, etc. during class. If you must have a cell phone to receive emergency calls about children or other family members, keep it on vibrate. http://www.e-soc.net/7/30/2006 Policy on Student Conduct Page 2 of 2.

Incomplete Grades: Missing work or uncompleted assignments are insufficient reasons for me to give a grade of Incomplete. Incompletes will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor’s discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an “I” must be passing the course.

Finally, students in the course will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or possibly an "F" for the course and may be reported to the University Judicial Office. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Course Summary:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>Mon Jan 15, 2018</td>
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