

# **WORLD POPULATION PROBLEMS GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY (GES 303)**

Summer 2024, May 8<sup>th</sup> – June 12<sup>th</sup>, 3 units  
Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays, 1:00PM – 3:00PM EDT  
Sync Online, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to population studies with a specific focus on exploring the ways in which demographic trends, including population growth and decline, are connected to social and climate justice. The purpose of this course is to understand the causes and consequences of population growth at global, regional, and local scales, and to effectively assess where and under what conditions population change has positive and negative effects. The course uses a justice framework to explore the complex relationships between bodily autonomy, climate vulnerability, sustainable development, gender equality, planetary health, and women's empowerment. Factors like fertility, migration, population structure, and population characteristics will be considered within the context of cultural change and economic development and sustainability. The course will include a review and analysis of current events and population trends and their relationships to sustainable development, inequality, and environmental change, including climate change.

## **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After satisfactorily completing this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the causes and effects of population changes throughout history
- Comprehend and demonstrate familiarity with conceptual frameworks and important issues within the discipline of demography and population studies
- Explain how population influences and is affected by global health and economic inequalities
- Understand how mortality and fertility have changed over the past 200 years and vary across countries and within countries (e.g. rural vs. urban)
- Identify the links between global population growth, access to social and natural resources, and environmental sustainability
- Critically analyze and evaluate the concept of climate justice as it relates to global population dynamics and trends
- Understand the roles that health and education play in expanding human rights, adapting to climate change, and fostering sustainable development

**Required Texts:** Weeks, J. (2021). *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*. 13<sup>th</sup> Ed. Cengage. ISBN 978-0357360576. It is available for rent or purchase here: <https://www.cengage.com/c/population-an-introduction-to-concepts-and-issues-13e-weeks/9780357360576/>

**Email and Canvas:** It is your responsibility to maintain your UNCG email because I regularly email the class through Canvas. Make sure that your account does not reject my email. You should also back up all your work using a free cloud file service (Box, Dropbox, OneDrive, iCloud, etc.).

## **EVALUATION**

This is an online summer course. All classes will be held virtually, and attendance will be taken at each class session. If you miss more than one session, your final grade will be negatively affected, and you may receive an F if you miss too many classes. Attendance is not optional; it is required! If you have a legitimate reason for missing more than one class session, please discuss this with me as soon as possible. If you are planning to miss classes for sports teams or religious reasons, you must send me a list of dates during the first week of class. Lateness or leaving early from class will also negatively affect your final grade. You are expected to be at class on time and stay until the end.

### **5% Participation**

This includes participating in class discussions, group activities, and Canvas discussion boards. Attendance (both “showing up” and presence) is crucial. “Good” class participation does not necessarily mean talking the most. There are many ways to promote dialogue in class, including asking questions, noticing if others are silent and making space for those voices, allowing silences to just “be” for a few moments (often silence is not emptiness but rather intense thinking), talking to each other and not just to the instructor, reminding yourself that the goal is not to be “right,” but to collaboratively work through issues and problems.

You are expected to come to class sessions with discussion questions from the readings, interesting articles, and online blog postings about population in the media, and to participate in group activities. You may also participate by commenting on discussion boards on Canvas.

### **5% Introductory Essay (due May 9<sup>th</sup>)**

In this 1-2-page essay, you will share what you know about the topic of global population studies (demography, population growth, population, and the environment) and how you came to know it (previous coursework, media, independent reading, experience with social science, etc.) Be sure to clarify whether and why you believe (or do not believe) that population growth is an important driver of ecological decline and climate change. Please also answer these questions: 1) What are two ways in which population growth affects the environment? 2) Is the current world population of 8 billion people unsustainable? Why or why not? 3) Is solving climate change possible without curbing global population growth? Why or why not?

### ***20% Canvas Journal***

You will use this online journal (discussion board on Canvas) to reflect on current events related to the intersecting topics of population, development, health, women's empowerment, gender equality, and the environment. The purpose of this exercise is to identify and understand how population relates to, affects, and is affected by other social, economic, political, and environmental issues. You should include a link to the primary material on which you are reflecting. You should cite course readings, films, guest speakers, or lectures in your reflection. You must post at least five (5) entries before Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, at midnight (12AM EDT). By the end of the course, you must have at least eight (8) entries. You must have the same number of comments (5 before May 22<sup>nd</sup> and 8 by the end of the course). The final 3 entries and comments are due on the final day of class, Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, before 1PM EDT. You will be graded based on the substance and relevance of your reflections and comments. Further guidelines will be explained in class.

### ***5% Journal Presentation***

You will present one of your articles during the semester. This will count as 5% of your overall grade. During the first week of class, you will elect to present on one day during the course. It is your responsibility to make sure you're signed up, prepare your presentation, and remember which day you are presenting. Presentations should last about 10 minutes and include discussion prompts to explore as a class.

### ***30% Reading Response Papers***

You will write three (3) short (1-2-page, single-spaced) response papers engaging with the assigned readings. Prompts for these assignments are posted on Canvas. Responses are due before the start of class (1PM) on May 16<sup>th</sup>, May 30<sup>th</sup>, and June 6<sup>th</sup>.

### ***End-of-Semester Final Thoughts Essay 5% (due June 11<sup>th</sup>)***

In this 1-2-page essay, you should re-read your introductory essay and reconsider your views and reflect on the course. You should answer the following: 1) What is the most important thing you have learned this semester? 2) Have any of your previous understandings of topics discussed in class changed and if so, how? 3) What did you enjoy most about this course and why? 4) What would you like to change about the course?

### ***30% Final Project (due June 12<sup>th</sup>)***

For your final project, you will choose one of the below prompts on which to write a research paper. Your research paper should be 10 pages double-spaced and include at least five (5) academic sources. It is your responsibility to confirm the prompt and focus of your research paper with the instructor prior to beginning work.

*Prompt #1:* Pick a country (must be confirmed with the instructor) to profile. Use the project to explore the country's current demographic situation and how it relates to the country's social, economic, environmental, and political systems and situations. In your country profile, you should include mention of whether the country is experiencing population growth or decline and why and discuss why and how that might influence its future. You should include information on the country's fertility rate, relevant population policies, and the connections between population

structure and the environment. What opportunities and challenges exist for the country in upcoming decades, and what solutions do you believe are possible, albeit not yet realized?

*Prompt #2:* Using a justice lens, list and briefly discuss the underlying drivers of the issues discussed in class. What are some of the systemic causes of rapid population growth, natural resource exploitation, and social injustices? What does it mean to say that the same systems of oppression that subjugate human populations also destroy the environment and accelerate climate change? Explore the ways in which social and environmental exploitation occurs simultaneously and is embedded into our current global economic world order (extractive capitalism). Then, list several potential solutions. What would a better world actually look like? Can you imagine the world's social, economic, and environmental systems working cohesively and complementarily? How might this work? This is a broad topic and there are no right or wrong answers here. This prompt is meant to help you to start envisioning the makeup of a more sustainable and equitable world order.

*Prompt #3:* Economists are typically at odds with environmentalists when it comes to population growth. On the one hand, economists worry that slower population growth and aging populations will adversely affect global and country-level economies, ostensibly causing instability and, potentially, collapse. On the other hand, environmentalists argue that slowing population growth is a necessary precursor for climate mitigation, natural resource conservation, and planetary health. Your task is to explore what opportunities exist that could allow for slower population growth to benefit *both* the economy and the environment. What changes would need to be made for slower population growth to become an indicator of economic progress and social, economic, and environmental prosperity? Supplement these concepts with current country-level examples. What can countries, societies, and individuals do to better prepare for and adapt to slower population growth and aging populations?

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### **Week 1: Intro to Demography**

*Wednesday, May 8<sup>th</sup>*

Course Introduction

The state of the world today: Where are we now?

*Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup>*

Social Demography

- Intro to demography
- Global patterns of population change: where are we, and how did we get here?
- History and future trajectory of global population growth

**Guest Speaker: Florence Blondel, Communications Officer at Population Matters**

*Readings:*

- Population and Climate Change: What are the Links? *Population Connection*.  
<https://populationconnection.org/resources/population-and-climate/> (PDF on Canvas)

### **Week 2: Population Processes**

*Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup>*

## Social Demography

- Intro to demography
- Global patterns of population change: where are we, and how did we get here?
- History and future trajectory of global population growth
- Implications of population growth and decline
- Geopolitics, political economy & economic transition
  - Globalization, migration, and immigration

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Roger Ibbotson, Yale University. Author of “The end of Darwinism: How humans are overriding evolution”**

### Readings:

- Ibbotson, R. and Closs, S. (2022). The end of Darwinism: How humans are overriding evolution. *Working Paper*. (PDF on Canvas)

### Supplemental Readings:

- *Weeks Ch. 1: Introduction to Demography*

## Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>

### Demographic Perspectives

- History about doomsters & boomsters, demographic transition theory
- Video & discussion about neo-Malthusianism, Paul Ehrlich: “The Population Bomb?” Retro Report, NY Times
- Video: [60 Minutes: Earth currently experiencing a sixth mass extinction](#)
- Global Footprint Network
- [“The truth about human population decline”](#) by Dr. Jennifer Sciubba

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Céline Delacroix, University of Ottawa. Director of the FP/Earth project with the Population Institute**

### Readings:

- *Weeks Ch. 3: Demographic Perspectives and Theories, pp. 95-111*
- Ehrlich, P. (1978). *The Population Bomb*. Ballantine Books. pp. 1-26. <http://pinguet.free.fr/ehrllich68.pdf>
- Kahn, M. (2022, July 12). What the controversial 1972 ‘Limits to Growth’ report got right: Our choices today shape future conditions for life on Earth. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/what-the-controversial-1972-limits-to-growth-report-got-right-our-choices-today-shape-future-conditions-for-life-on-earth-184920>

## Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>

### The Health and Mortality Transition

- Industrial Revolution
- The Nutrition Transition
- The Green Revolution
- Video and discussion: [India’s Population Surpasses China, Shifting Global Order](#) – WSJ

### Readings:

- *Weeks Ch. 3: Demographic Perspectives and Theories: pp. 112-134*

### Supplemental Readings (in this case a podcast, not a reading):

- [Podcast: 8 billion humans and counting: What it means for the planet's future](#) – WBUR

### **Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup>**

The Health and Mortality Transition

- 8 Billion Milestone

**Guest Speaker: Sanghamitra Singh, Population Foundation India (PFI)**

*Readings:*

- Chandrashekhar, V. (2019, December 12). Why India is making progress in slowing its population growth. *Yale E360*. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-india-is-making-progress-in-slowing-its-population-growth>
- Oreskes, N. (2023, March 1). Eight Billion People in the World is a Crisis, Not an Achievement. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/eight-billion-people-in-the-world-is-a-crisis-not-an-achievement/>

*Supplemental Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 4: The Health and Mortality Transition pp. 139-149*

### **Week 3: Population and Society**

#### **Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup>**

The Health and Mortality Transition, cont'd. and the Fertility Transition

*Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 4: The Health and Mortality Transition pp. 179-184*
- *Weeks Ch. 5: The Fertility Transition pp. 187-197*

#### **Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>**

The Fertility Transition, cont'd. and the Migration Transition

- Defining Migration
- Global patterns of migration and climate change

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Justin Stoler, Department of Geography, University of Miami**

*Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 6: The Migration Transition pp. 241-268*

*Supplemental Readings:*

- Bloom, D. and Zucker, L. (2023, April 21). Ageing, the real population bomb. *DownToEarth*. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/world/ageing-the-real-population-bomb-88884>
- Lustgarten, A. (2020, July 23). The great climate migration has begun. *The New York Times Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>

#### **Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>**

The Age Transition and the Demographic Dividend

- Africa, the demographic dividend, and family planning
- Where are we now? State of the world and country profiles
- Video: "[Scaling the Mountain: Protecting Forests and Families in Nepal](#)"

**Guest Speaker: Monica Nyiraguhabwa from Girl Up Initiative Uganda (2PM)**

*Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 8: The Age Transition and the Life Course pp. 329-340*

*Supplemental Readings:*

- UNICEF. (2019). Population dynamics and the demographic dividend potential of eastern and southern Africa: A primer. *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Working Paper*. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/4961/file/UNICEF-ESA-Population-Dynamics-Demographic-Dividend-Potential-Nov-2019.pdf>

### ***Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>***

Population and Development

- Population policies
  - Case studies in China and India

Documentary screening: *One Child Nation*

Readings:

- Biswas, S. (2014, November 14). India's dark history of sterilisation. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30040790>
- McDonell, S. (2021, May 31). China allows three children in major policy shift. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57303592>

Supplemental Readings:

- *Weeks Ch. 5: The Fertility Transition pp. 198-214*

## **Week 4: Population and Environment**

### ***Monday, May 27<sup>th</sup>***

Memorial Day – no class

### ***Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>***

Population and climate change

- Intersections of gender equality, development, and climate change

**Guest Speaker: Kakenya Ntaiya, Founder and CEO of Kakenya's Dream**

Readings:

- *IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023. [Summary for Policymakers](#)*

Supplemental Readings:

- Debnath, R., & Bell, M.L. (2023). Lethal heatwaves are challenging India's sustainable development. *PLOS Climate*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000156>
- Jidovanu, N. and Otieno, B. (2019, March 7). The boarding school in Kenya that helps Maasai girls escape FGM. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2019/3/7/the-boarding-school-in-kenya-that-helps-maasai-girls-escape-fgm>

### ***Wednesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>***

Documentary screening of *2040*

Readings:

- *Living Planet Report 2022 (WWF). Executive Summary-Chapter 1. pp. 4-28.* [https://wwflpr.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/lpr\\_2022\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://wwflpr.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/lpr_2022_full_report.pdf)

### ***Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup>***

Human Impacts on the Environment

- Population and climate change cont'd.
- Agriculture and food systems
  - Food security and climate change: How to sustainably feed growing populations

*Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 10: Population, the Environment, and Global Sustainability* pp. 414-440

*Supplemental Readings:*

- Kummu, M., et al. (2021). Climate change risks pushing one-third of global food production outside the safe climactic space. *One Earth*, 4(5).  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.04.017>
- Zee, B. (2018, May 7). What is the true cost of eating meat? *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/07/true-cost-of-eating-meat-environment-health-animal-welfare>

**Guest Speaker: Brian Dixon and Rebecca Harrington, Population Connection Action Fund**

**Week 5: Population, Environment, and Economy**

***Monday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>***

Human Impacts on the Environment

- Food and energy production
- Globalized trade, consumerism
- Climate change: land, air, water
- Biodiversity loss, environmental deficits, and ecological tipping points

*Readings:*

- *Weeks Ch. 10: Population, the Environment, and Global Sustainability*, pp. 440-453
- 2022. Human impacts on the environment: A focus on climate change. *Population Connection*. <https://populationconnection.org/resources/human-activities-and-climate-change/>

*Supplemental Readings:*

- Kaplan, S. (2021, May 25). It's wrong to blame 'overpopulation' for climate change. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2021/05/25/slowing-population-growth-environment/>

**Guest Speaker: Karen Hardee**

***Tuesday, June 4<sup>th</sup>***

Why Health and Education Matter to Climate Change

- Gender equality as a climate solution
- Climate change as a social justice issue

*Readings:*

- Proctor, R. and Schiebinger, L. (2022, July 21). How preventing unwanted pregnancies can help on climate. *Yale E360*. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/unwanted-pregnancy-contraception-abortion-climate-change>
- 2016. Climate change: Time to "think family planning." *International Planned Parenthood Federation and Population & Sustainability Network*.  
<https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/Climate%20Change%20Time%20to%20Think%20Family%20Planning%20Advocacy%20Toolkit%20Final.pdf>

***Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>***

Linking Climate Solutions and Human Well-being



- Video: “[How empowering women and girls can help stop global warming](#)” - TED

*Readings:*

- Jameel, Y. et al. (2022). Climate-poverty connections: opportunities for synergistic solutions at the intersection of planetary and human well-being. *Project Drawdown*. [https://www.drawdown.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Drawdown%20Lift\\_Climate%20Poverty%20Connections%20Report\\_March%202022.2.pdf](https://www.drawdown.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Drawdown%20Lift_Climate%20Poverty%20Connections%20Report_March%202022.2.pdf)

**Thursday, June 6<sup>th</sup>**

Population and Economy

- Lower fertility and the green economy
- Aging societies
- Benefits of slower population growth
- Video: “[What China's Falling Population Means for Its Future](#)” – Bloomberg

**Guest Speaker: Nandita Bajaj, Executive Director of Population Balance**

*Readings:*

- Cohen, J. and Chamie, J. (2021, September 2). Slower population growth signals successes and benefits. *N-IUSSP*. <https://www.niussp.org/education-work-economy/slower-population-growth-signals-successes-and-benefits/>
- Feldstein, S. (2023, May 4). Population Decline Will Change the World for the Better. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/population-decline-will-change-the-world-for-the-better/>
- Hong, N. (2023, April 19). Why China’s shrinking population is a problem for everyone. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/19/world/asia/china-population-india.html>

**Week 6: Solutions for a More Sustainable Future**

**Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup>**

Population and Economy: Aging Populations cont’d.

- Aging populations, climate justice, and future economies
- Circular, regenerative economies & donut economics

*Readings:*

- Baker, D. (2023, February 13). Aging Populations and Great Power Politics: The Problem is for the Elites, not the Masses. *Center for Economic and Policy Research*. <https://cepr.net/aging-populations-and-great-power-politics-the-problem-is-for-the-elites-not-the-masses/>
- Brown, E.N. (June 2023). Storks don’t take orders from the state: Falling birthrates, pronatalist policies, and the limits of population control. *Reason Magazine*. <https://reason.com/2023/05/02/storks-dont-take-orders-from-the-state/>

*Supplemental Readings:*

- Scuibba, J. (7 May, 2023). Stop trying to make more babies. *The Hill Opinion*. <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/3986125-stop-trying-to-make-more-babies/>
- Hancocks, P. (4 December, 2022). South Korea spent \$200 billion, but it can’t pay people enough to have a baby. *CNN World*. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/03/asia/south-korea-worlds-lowest-fertility-rate-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>

**Tuesday, June 11<sup>th</sup>**

Integrated Developmental Solutions: A Focus on PHE

- Population, Health, Environment (PHE)
- Community-led, integrated development strategies

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Joan Castro, PATH Foundation Philippines (PFPI)**

*Readings:*

2022. Community-Led Solutions in Reproductive Health and Climate Adaptation. *Population Connection*. <https://populationconnection.org/resources/population-health-environment-philippines/>

***Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>***

Conclusions, wrap up class. Final project due.