Course description

Something has happened to America over the past fifteen years. Large minorities of young adults, especially young men, are now celibate. Cohabitation has skyrocketed but marriage is disappearing, and the country’s birth rate is at an all-time low. Not surprisingly, loneliness has become epidemic. A similar story can be told for most other developed countries. The implications for political polarization, economic growth, social insurance programs, public health, military defense, even national survival are grim.

What is the cause of this loss of faith in the future? Can public policy reverse these trends? This course is an investigation into relations between the sexes in the developed world, the fate of children and the family, and government attempts to shape them. The course investigates family models in historical and comparative context; the family and the welfare state; the economics of sex, gender, marriage, and class inequality; the dramatic value and behavioral changes of Gen Z around sex, cohabitation, and parenthood; and state policies to encourage partnership/marriage and childbearing.

Readings

All readings for this course are collected into a multipart course reader and four books. The books are:

- Göran Therborn, Between Sex and Marriage (Routledge, 2004)
- Louise Perry, The Case Against the Sexual Revolution (Polity, 2022).
- Kathryn Edin, Promises I Can Keep (University of California Press, 2011)

The books are available for purchase at Water Street Books or from your favourite on-line retailer. The course reader is divided into two/three parts. Part One will be available soon from the packet room in the Class of ’37 House (51 Park St.). Subsequent parts will be available later in the semester.

*All students are expected to faithfully keep up with the readings during the semester.* Readings assigned for a particular class session will be the topic for that day’s lecture and discussion, and therefore should be completed prior to class. Come to each class prepared to learn and discuss.
Speech policy

With the aim of advancing and deepening everyone’s understanding of the issues addressed in this course, students are urged to speak their minds, explore ideas and arguments, play devil’s advocate, and engage in respectful but robust discussions. There is no thought or language policing. I expect students to do business in the proper currency of intellectual discourse—a currency consisting of reasons, evidence, and arguments—but no ideas or positions are out of bounds. If you have any concerns about classroom climate, please come to me to share your concern.

Honor code

You are free to consult with other students during the semester, organize study groups, etc., but remember that all written work should be the product of your own individual efforts. Please be especially vigorous in avoiding plagiarism. Use quotation marks where necessary and cite any sources clearly. Remember, all work in this course must be completed in accordance with the Honor Code.

Course requirements

1. Two essays

Out of five opportunities, you will write two essays (1500-2000 words; 1-in. margins; double-spacing; 11-pt. font min.) on course readings during the semester. You may choose any two based on your personal interests, work due in other courses, sports schedule, etc. Students may write more than two essays and have only the best two count toward the overall course grade. One of the two must be written before spring break. Themes and due dates are as follows:

- The history and social diversity of sex, marriage and family: Tuesday, February 28, 5pm
- Sex: Friday, March 17, 5pm
- Marriage and family: Tuesday, April 18, 5pm
- Fertility: Tuesday, May 2, 5pm
- Family policy: Tuesday, May 16, 5pm

You will not be given paper prompts, but will be expected to craft your own topic based on the readings for that section of the course. All students are strongly encouraged to discuss their papers plans with me before they begin writing!

2. Research paper

You will write one term research paper (4000-5000 words; 1-in. margins; double-spacing; 11-pt. font min.) on a topic of your choice in consultation with me. A 300-500 word prospectus is due May 4 in class. The final paper is due Saturday, May 20, 5pm.
3. Discussion questions

Prior to each class, each student will write and submit 1-2 discussion questions relevant to the day’s readings. These questions should be thoughtful engagements with the main ideas from the text(s) and thus go beyond a simple one-sentence query. Possible questions might explore unclear passages in the readings, point out notable gaps in an author’s discussion, or offer critiques of an author’s argument. The best questions will be framed by a brief (< 250 words) discussion. I will use these questions to guide class discussion each day, including calling on you in class based on your remarks. Use our course Glow page to submit them. Questions are due by 11am the day of class. Glow will lock automatically at that time and will not accept any questions submitted after the deadline. I will grade questions on a check-plus/check/check-minus scale.

4. Class participation

Regular attendance and constructive participation is necessary for this course to be successful and is therefore expected; unexcused absences and a failure to engage the material in class will be noted. More than one unexcused absence will result in a grade penalty.

Grades

Your grade in this course will be determined according to the following formula:

- Essay 1: 20%
- Essay 2: 20%
- Research paper: 30%
- Discussion questions: 20%
- Class participation: 10%
## Course Calendar

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic and Readings</th>
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<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
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**Wednesday**
Feb. 1

**Introduction to the course**
- no readings

**Monday**
Feb. 6

**What to expect when no one’s expecting**

**Thursday**
Feb. 9

**Sex, power and family structure**

**Monday**
Feb. 13

**Family**

**Thursday**
Feb. 16

**Sex and marriage**
- Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power*, Part II.

**Monday**
Feb. 20

**Fertility**
SEX

Thursday Feb. 23  
**Sex**

- Ashley K. Fansher and Sara Eckinger, “Tinder Tales: An exploratory study of online dating users and their most interesting stories,” *Deviant Behavior* 42 (2021), 1194-1208.

Monday Feb. 27  
**Love**


Thursday March 2  
**‘A wall between us’**

- Alice Aedy, “Disconnected” [video] (2020), [see link on Glow](#)

Monday March 6  
**The sexual counterrevolution I**


Thursday March 9  
**The sexual counterrevolution II**

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Monday
March 13

The rise and fall of marriage


Thursday
March 16

Family structure and child outcomes


SPRING BREAK

Monday
April 3

Single motherhood in America I


Thursday
April 6

Single motherhood in America II

Family structure and political/cultural outcomes


FERTILITY

Fertility decline


Differential fertility

Thursday April 20

**Lowest-low fertility**

- Albert Esteve and Rocío Treviño, “The main whys are wherefores of childlessness in Spain,” *Perspectives Demografiques* (Centre d’Estudis Demogràfics, Barcelona) 15 (April 2019).

Monday April 24

**Fertility and nationalism**


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**FAMILY POLICY**

Thursday April 27

**The family and welfare state types**


Monday May 1

**France, Germany and Japan**

Thursday  
May 4

Hungary and Poland


Monday  
May 8

The United States


CONCLUSION

Thursday  
May 11

Demographic fear