

Population and Society

SOSC1860 (Sections 1 and 2)

Spring Term 2026

Credits: 3

No pre-requisites apart from some basic skills in MS Excel

Professor Stuart Gietel-Basten; Ka Yee Wong and Yixuan Zhang (TAs)

Email: egkayee@ust.hk & yzhangvd@connect.ust.hk (in first instance); sgb@ust.hk

Office Hours: Office hours by appointment

Course Description

To give students:

- an appreciation of the role of population issues in contemporary society*
- the ability to find and evaluate demographic information*
- an understanding of the main measurements of population*
- an appreciation of how we consider future changes in population*
- the opportunity to develop their skills in basic quantitative analysis, presentation and team-work*

The course is delivered in a **blended learning, flipped classroom format**. This means that students must watch video content before coming to class. These videos (which will include simple questions) will provide students with the materials required to perform the tasks which we will practice in class and which, ultimately, will be examined. In class, students will work in groups to work on a combination of calculations and research to explain their findings. In addition, guest lectures by leaders in the field will supplement students' understanding of the subject. Students will be assessed by a combination of mini-exams, and marks for attendance, watching/engaging with the videos and group participation.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

ILO1 Explain demographic concepts and methods in their own word

ILO2 Evaluate interrelationships between population and social and economic development based on provided demographic data

Explain demographic concepts in the context of wider social concerns and discuss their implications

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Dates/notes
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT		
Attendance in class	10%	Ongoing (final grade given in week 14)
Engagement with online videos (graded as completion of all questions in in-video quizzes)	15%	Ongoing (final grade given in week 14)
Peer review of group participation	10%	First exercise in Week 7; Second in Week 13.
Mini-exam 1	20%	March 24th Mini-exams will be split into two parts. Part I will cover core materials from the videos and the in-class activities. Part II will cover advanced materials, including from the set reading as well as more difficult questions designed to test advanced comprehension. Part I will be marked 'normally' while Part II will have 'negative marking' – i.e. marks will be taken away if the wrong answer is given (to penalize guessing)
Mini-exam 2	20%	May 7th
Final submission of group workbook (see below)	25%	May 8th See rubric posted on Canvas
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT		
Ongoing group workbook	0%	Students will generate a group workbook as part of their in-class activities. These will be regularly reviewed both in and out of class by the teaching team to provide ongoing feedback to foster students' development. Students will NOT be able to resubmit weekly entries based on feedback. Rather they should continuously improve their weekly entries based on feedback received.

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Attendance in class	ILO1-3	Showing up to class is an essential part of this course, where students are able to take what they have learned in the online videos and practice and apply (ILO5/6). In-class, students will be required to perform a series of

		calculations and research the underlying drivers and assess the validity of the data (ILO 1/2/3/4).
Engagement with online videos	ILO1-3	As this is a blended learning/flipped classroom course, it is essential that students come prepared to class having watched and engaged with the relevant set videos.
Peer review of group participation	ILO1-3	This will test the extent to which students are able to Demonstrate a higher degree of competence in working independently and in a team to deliver results
Mini-exam 1	ILO 1-3	This will be a combination of calculation questions to test student's ability to Perform basic calculations and visualization of overall changes in population size, structure and density as well as short written answers to explain and interpret their findings and evaluate the validity of the underpinning data
Mini-exam 2	ILO1-3	This will be a combination of calculation questions to test student's ability to Perform, and evaluate, basic calculations to produce core demographic measures relating to mortality, fertility and migration as well as short written answers to explain and interpret their findings and evaluate the validity of the underpinning data
Mini-exam 3	ILO 1-3	This will be a written essay-based exam which will primarily focus on assessing student's ability to Explain, and critically analyze, how and why population issues drive, and are driven by, changes in society, politics and the economy, and demonstrate how these issues are related to everyday lives as well as their ability to use pertinent data to support their arguments

Grading Rubrics

Detailed rubrics for the **mini-exams** will be provided. These rubrics clearly outline the criteria used for evaluation. Students can refer to these rubrics to understand how their work will be assessed. These rubrics, along with very clear instructions on the performance and content of the mini-exams will be made available on Canvas.

Attendance will be taken manually by the TA at various times within class. Students who consistently arrive late (or leave early) will be marked as absent.

Engagement with online videos will be graded according to whether students complete watching the video and whether they answer the questions embedded in the video. Students will not be graded on whether they answer the questions in the videos correctly. However, the extent to which they answer correctly may be used as evidence in the event of a grades appeal.

Working together as a group in the in-class exercises is critical (ILO6). However, free-riding exists as a major challenge. As such, students will be required to grade their fellow groupmates from 0-10 based on their perceived level of participation in the group. This will occur roughly half way through the term (in order to identify and deal with any freeriding issues) and then again in Week 13. At the end of the term, these scores will be aggregated to produce a **Peer review of group participation score**.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.

B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Course AI Policy

The mini exams will be performed under strict exam conditions. However, students may use AI (in tandem with other tools) to help prepare them for the exams.

For the in-class activities, students are welcome to use generative AI to support their learning in completing their group workbooks. However, this is only permitted under the following two circumstances:

1. Students may use AI to 'tidy up' their workbooks (e.g. grammar check etc.)
2. Students may use AI to help with idea generation and development, but they **MUST** then go on to develop these ideas themselves

Copy and pasting in AI-generated outputs to questions (unless from grammar check) will **not** be tolerated and will be marked as ZERO.

In every workbook assignment, students will need to write a statement of how they used AI. The prompts and their processes of idea generation should be kept and may be inspected in class.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include [specific details, e.g., strengths, areas for improvement]. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Resubmission Policy

Exam retakes will not be permitted. In a case of a medical or other emergency preventing students from taking an exam (and where evidence is provided), the other exams taken will be reweighted and applied to generate an overall mark out of 60. For example, if a student gets 14/20 in mini-exam 1 and 12/20 for mini-exam 2 and misses mini-exam 3 through a documented medical emergency, we assume an average of 13/20 and apply this to the final exam, this generating an overall score of 39/60.

Required Texts and Materials

There are no required texts for this course. However, students may find the following resources useful as they develop their learning in the course.

- [Population Analysis for Policies & Programmes](#) (UNFPA-IUSSP-LSHTM Online course)
- Weeks, J. [Population](#) (various versions). Library: HB871 .W43 2016
- Gietel-Basten, S.A. [Why Demography Matters](#). Library: HB871 .D67 2018
- Zhao and Hayes. [Handbook of Asian Demography](#).

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

To be clear, students caught cheating in any of the mini-exams will automatically receive a grade of zero in that assessment, and their behaviour will be reported to the Academic Integrity unity.