

# A Brief Guide and Tip Sheet for the Demography Program

DRAFT

Stephen A. Matthews

August 2014

This document focuses on:

1. The requirements for the Demography MA and PhD.
2. Flexibility in the Program
3. Matters relevant to AY 2014-2015

## 1. Course Requirements

The course requirements are VERY important as I can only sign-off on the Grad School checklist forms (in advance of graduation ceremonies) if the Demography course requirements have been met. Please note that all of this information has been relatively stable for several years and it is all online at the main Demography Program website

<http://www.pop.psu.edu/sites/pri/files/PRIDemBroch.pdf>

As well as at the new website <http://sites.psu.edu/demography> (under the Graduate Student menu tab).

Here is a **brief summary** of requirements for the MA, for continuing PhDs, and for PhDs who arrived with an MA.

### MA: 12 demography-related course credits

- 3-credits in a survey course (one of the following is required:  
Anth 408, Econ 463, or Soc 463)
- 3-credits in a methods course (Demographic Techniques (Soc 573) is required)
- 3-credits in a seminar in demographic processes
- 3-credits in a seminar in population studies

*Waivers* can be granted for either or both of the two required courses if the arriving graduate student has taken a similar course elsewhere, and they can provide a syllabus and transcript (confirming a passing grade). This waiver from a required course DOES NOT provide 3-credits towards the Demography degree. *A total of 12-credits are needed to fulfill the course requirements of the program.*

PhD: 24 demography-related course credits

Assuming a continuing MA then by default both the survey course and Dem Tech requirements will have been taken (6 credits) plus two other courses (6 credits). So, 12 additional credits are required. These 12 credits can come from any section of the program. A typical distribution might look like

3 credits or one additional methods course  
9 credits or three additional courses from the listing of seminars in demographic processes population and seminars in population studies.

Note that **Demography 596** is an independent study option with a Demography faculty member (a once-only option for 3-credits in the Demography program).

The student must be registered for Dem 596 and the course/work proposal needs to be approved by me (or if it was completed in the recent past approved by Gordon). A record of this approval must be on file.

PhD graduate students with an MA on arrival:

Typically this group must take the two required courses: a survey course and Dem Tech.

If it is the case that prior coursework in courses equivalent to what is offered in the Demography program at Penn State can be 'counted' towards credit towards the 8-course (24-credit) requirement. *Requests for this 'credit' are typically handled on admission to the program and must be accompanied by syllabi and transcript materials.* All graduate students in this situation will know where they stand *vis-a-vis* credits to be earned at Penn State as they will have received a notification from my predecessor, Dr. Gordon DeJong, or myself and the information would be held on file.

Note that in all of the above categories - MA, PhD continuing, PhD (with MA) - the required Demography 590 (1-credit course) does NOT count towards the required credits for an MA or a PhD in Demography. That is, you are required to take 3-credit courses to make up the necessary 12 or 24 credits (15 for the Demography Minor).

## 2. Flexibility in the Program

It is important to note that the Demography Curriculum has evolved over 30 years and we currently offer up to 30 courses related to demographic theories, methods, data and topics. Each permanent course number has been approved by different units and departments in the University and all have been approved by the Demography Faculty Advisory Committee. That is, a lot of thought and reviewing of syllabi has gone in to the development of the total curriculum package on offer. Of course, not everyone will agree to all designations of a demography course and not all cohorts in the program will feel that there are enough options for them.

Below is information on how I think about 'flexibility' in the program; some of it borrowing from guidelines developed by Dr. DeJong. These are worth bearing in mind as you think about navigating your path through the Demography program and its requirements. **This is arguably the most practical section of this document.** This material will be posted in some form on a new website and ANGEL as soon as possible.

Background: The Demography Program was designed as a multiple-choice course curriculum (with two required courses) and not as a fixed-course curriculum. We retain a categorization based on four main pedagogic course typologies (i.e. discipline survey courses, methods courses, demographic process seminars, and elective population studies seminars). The intent was that the design provides flexibility in the curriculum to help *multi-discipline* graduate students achieve their academic goals in *both their home field and in Demography*. In an ideal world graduate students will be able to find the eight courses they want to take and have no problems doing so. However, this is not the experience of everyone, especially those outside of Sociology.<sup>1</sup>

There are many different ways in which flexibility can be added to ease the journey through the program. These are often necessary because of course cancellations, faculty departure/arrivals, sabbaticals, and course buyouts. Regardless of reason there are, as I see it, at least *nine* ways that individual graduate student flexibility can be promoted/enhanced. Some require the work of faculty and the faculty advisory committee but some pertain to you all as individuals or perhaps as groups within departments or core interest areas. All of the examples below have been requested at least once in recent years. It is also worth noting that rarely will a student be able to take advantage of more than 1-2 of these options. We still want graduate students to adhere to the goals and requirements of the Penn State demography training program as defined in the Handbook.

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note that while Sociology students can explore some of the options below, historically this group has the easiest route through the program and certainly have the most home department course offerings and thus double-counting options compared to graduate student colleagues in the other departments. As such, sociology graduate student use of some of the options below would need to be very clearly justified.

So here are the nine possible options ...

1. For PhD-level graduate students reiterate to the faculty that Graduate School policy permits one course (two by petition) to be taken in the semesters after comps have been completed. This provides students with more degrees of freedom allowing them to take courses in one additional semester.

2. For Masters' graduate students, particularly those graduate students where the department has a strict two-year funding rule for Masters' graduate students, there may be circumstances where they need a fall semester course to complete the Demography Program Masters' requirement. That is, they can complete and defend their Masters' thesis in the spring or summer but just NOT file with the Graduate School for graduation until the fall semester. That way the fall semester courses will "count" toward the Demography Program Masters' degree requirements and the home department is satisfied because the thesis has been completed and defended. Alternatively, for graduate students who are clearly going on for the Ph.D., I, as Program Director, can waive a specific course distribution requirement (i.e. no demographic process course) if the graduate student has four other Demography courses, on the assumption that they will fulfill the missing course requirement during their Ph.D. work.

3. A graduate student can work with a Demography Faculty member to develop a proposal for an independent studies course in Demography (The course number to be used should be Demography 596 and not the home discipline 596). The Graduate School checks things like this and asks me to verify; it is easier if courses (independent studies) are clearly identified as a Demography Program course (Hence use of Demography 596).

4. I (and graduate students) can encourage Demography Program faculty to develop and offer a home department 597 on a new demography-related topic that will/can be approved for the Demography Program curriculum by the Advisory Committee. This is essentially a strategy to expand the Demography Curriculum into new interdisciplinary (or even core Demography processes and methods) areas. This is the typical way in which new courses get added to the program: (Every year new courses are added; at least one this year, and I am in conversation with two other faculty to add new courses)

5. Faculty should encourage graduate students to consider selecting at least some courses that they might take based on a breadth in demographic knowledge and scholarship rather than the demography (or home department) courses more directly connected to their dissertation research focus. I know this is a double-edged sword as some graduate students feel forced into taking courses because they need them to count towards Demography credits rather than because they want to. The logical strategy from the perspective of the graduate students is to do what they want when they can and hopefully find the eight 3-credit courses they need. In some semesters graduate students have complained that they are forced in to taking courses they don't want (due to limited course offerings due to buyouts, sabbaticals, etc). Hence ... see 6 & 7.

6. A graduate student can request that a non-demography course count towards the demography program requirements. This is possible if the course offered is a near equivalent course to one in the program but hasn't been offered recently. Granting this waiver is at the discretion of the Program Director. The graduate student would need to make a request justifying the substitution, and include copies of syllabi from both courses if available and certainly from the non-demography course. The faculty advisory committee will be consulted to make a determination on a case-by-case basis.

and

7. For PhD-level students a one-time waiver of a current Demography Program rule. One-time!

8. Graduate students can petition to have courses that they have already completed at another institution count (typically this is a request around the demographic survey courses or Demographic Techniques). This allows the graduate student to waive these requirements but it DOES NOT provide credit (3 credits). This, in theory, provides a graduate student with more degrees of freedom when selecting courses.

And of course ...

9. Work with faculty to explore change the Demography Program guidelines and/or curriculum with the advice and consent of the Demography Program Advisory Committee. For example, explore ways that permit a Demography Program course to substitute for a home department requirement (thus creating another course which counts twice for an individual student). This has often been where the comparative ease for the Sociology graduate students lies but the Demography program has also had some success in this with HPA ... and perhaps is an option that can be explored in other departments.

### 3. Matters relevant to Academic Year 2014-2015

Over AY 2014-2015 there are up to eighteen 3-credit courses scheduled to be offered.

There are several important issues to bear in mind here:

You will notice that in Spring 2015 I have listed both Social Networks and Longitudinal Data Analysis (technically neither course has been approved in the Demography program).

-- In the case of Social Networks I am hoping to work with Dr. Diane Felmlee and others to change that by Spring 2015.

-- In the case of Longitudinal Data Analysis, the program has in the past provided waivers to several graduate students, thus allowing them to count Dr. David Johnson's class as 3 credits towards their Demography Program requirements (that is, the program can be 'flexible' within reason and allows a course not listed in the Demography program to count toward it; as a one-off situation). It is also the case that Dr. Johnson is likely to only teach Longitudinal Data Analysis one more time (Spring 2015). Any student taking the class during Spring 2015 and wishing to have it count towards their Demography requirements should direct such a request to me ASAP.

Note also that I am hoping that a new hire in Rural Sociology will offer a graduate-level demography class in Spring 2015. This hire is a departmental matter and we are still waiting to hear if it was successful.

Finally, in addition to Demography 590 (Demography Colloquium) there is talk of a 1-credit course offered by Jenny Van Hook and Mark Roberts on Data and the Research Data Center during Fall 2014. If this comes about, and for those who have already taken Demography 590 twice (Fall 2014 would be the beginning of your third year) this RDC course as an alternative option to taking Demography 590.