This course begins from the premise that human reproductive events (conception, contraception, abortion, childbirth, fertility treatment, etc.) are not simply given by biological nature, but are made meaningful through cultural beliefs and shaped by social, medical, and political institutions. Through cross-cultural case studies, we will examine how reproductive experiences are impacted by health-related ideas and medical technologies, and by national and international population policies that are often implemented through controlling the bodies of women. We will explore how pregnancy, birth, and controlling fertility provide sites for gender formation, the reproduction of social inequalities, international “development” agendas, and state regulation of national populations.

Classes will combine lecture and discussion. Each class is keyed to a set of readings, and it is crucial that students keep up with the readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. Class participation — regular attendance and participation in discussion — will count strongly towards the final grade.

Requirements:

Participation. You must attend class and participate in discussions; this part of the course, including 4 Reading Responses (see below), will account for 20% of the final grade. Writing Reading Responses will help you feel prepared to speak up in class; if a student does not volunteer, she or he may be called upon to speak.

Reading Responses consist of a paragraph or two describing your reaction to one or more readings for a given session. Do not summarize, but rather give us your response to the reading. These should take no more than 30 minutes to write. Reading responses will be factored into the overall evaluation of your performance. You will be encouraged to post these on the course Stellar site (using the Forum function) prior to the class for which they are due to share your thoughts with your classmates.

Argumentative Essays. You will write 3 papers: 5 pgs (20% of final grade), 5 pgs (20% of final grade), 8-10 pages (40% of final grade). The first two essays will address a topic, to be handed out in class, based on course readings. The final paper, combining research and analysis, will give you an opportunity to explore in depth some aspect of reproductive health, experience, politics, and/or technology of your own choosing. It will be based on library research that you will conduct on a topic approved by the instructor.

Presentation. Students will give an oral presentation of the third paper, time limit to be determined on the basis of enrollment. Presentations are factored into the participation grade. Rehearsing is advisable.
Library Research

In researching your final paper, please consider making an appointment with the Anthropology Librarian, Michelle Baildon (balidon@mit.edu), MIT Humanities Library, Room 14S-222.

Writing Center

There is no writing tutor assigned to this course, but free, one-on-one, professional advice is available to you at the Writing and Communication Center (12-132). You can get advice about any issue — from thinking of a topic to revising a draft, from deepening your ideas to overcoming writer’s block, from punctuation to professionalism. Go to http://web.mit.edu/writing and click on the yellow sunburst. If you cannot find an open appointment slot, do not despair. There are always cancellations on the day of the appointment. Click on the Wait List (the blue strip that says "Is the time that you want already reserved?"). Whenever a cancellation occurs, you will be automatically notified by email. Because several people might receive that same message, go online ASAP to schedule that open spot; 96% of clients who want an appointment end up with one if they use the Wait List. Alternatively, you can try the Online Tutor at http://web.mit.edu/writing/Center/onlinetutor.html. The Center’s hours are Monday-Thursday, 9:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.; Friday 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; and Sundays, 5:00-9:00 p.m.

Required Books (available at the Coop):


The remainder of the readings will be found on the course Stellar site — http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/21A/sp07/21A.660/index.html — for you to download.

The readings assigned for a class session follow the date and title of the session.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

PART I: WAYS OF KNOWING REPRODUCTION

Sept. 5 Introduction

Sept. 10 Social Meaning and Lived Experience of Motherhood


Sept. 12 Medicalization of Childbirth


reading response due

Sept. 17 Authoritative versus Experiential Knowledge


Sept. 19 Pain, Pragmatism, and Birth “Choices” Cross-Culturally


Sept. 24 NO CLASS

Sept. 26 The Liminal State of Pregnancy


reading response due

Oct. 1 Fetal Imaginaries


Oct. 3 Prenatal Diagnostic Testing


Oct. 8 NO CLASS

Oct. 10 view in class: The Last Abortion Clinic [professor will be away]


Oct. 15 Moral Pioneers or Culture Brokers? situating agency and ethics in reproductive decision-making

finish reading Rapp (skipping chapter 8) and continue discussing amniocentesis in US alongside:

Tine M. Gammeltoft (2007) Prenatal Diagnosis in Postwar Vietnam: Power,


PART II: CONTROLLING BIRTHS, BODIES, FAMILY SIZE, AND POPULATIONS

Oct. 17 Histories of Birth Control and Eugenics


Oct. 22 Developing Contraceptives


view in class: The Pill

Oct. 24 Why Users Matter: Disciplining Subjects through Contraceptive Technologies


Oct. 29 Understanding Abortion Practice and Politics


take a look at “in the news” stories of recent Supreme Court decisions

reading response due

Oct. 31 Family Planning Ideal and Reality: The case study of Mexico


see “in the news” stories about Mexico City’s recent legalization of abortion

PART III: REPRODUCTION AS POLITICS

Nov. 5 Anthropology and Demography: Population Planning and its Limits


Nov. 7 The Population “Implosion” in Europe


Nov. 12  NO CLASS

Nov. 14  Toward a Political Economy of Fertility


SECOND PAPER DUE

Nov. 19  Poverty, Politics and Reproductive Agency


Nov. 21  Rationalizing Populations through National Family Planning Policies


view in class: Something Like a War

reading response due

Nov. 26  Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Women


FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE

Nov. 28  Searching for Motherhood: The Social Construction of Infertility


Dec. 3    Treating Childlessness: In Vitro Fertilization


Dec. 5    Implications for Identity and Kinship in Reproductive Technologies


NY Times articles on donor egg and sperm

Dec. 10    Reproductive Futures


Dec. 12    STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

FINAL PAPER DUE