

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Department of Sociology-Anthropology
SOC 425: Sociology of Aging & The Life Course

Course Information

Credit Hours: 3
Semester/Year: Spring 2007
Location: 120 Old Main

Professor Information

Professor: Ms. Brenda Wiemann, LMSW
Phone: 753-2482
Office Hours: 12:30-3:00 Tuesdays

REQUIRED TEXTS

Moody, Harry R. 2006. Aging: Concepts and Controversies. 5th Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press

Delany, S. and Delany E. 1994. Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First One Hundred Years. New York: Dell Publishing

Article Handouts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The sociology of aging is the scientific study of the reciprocal relationship between society and those defined as aged by that society. Some of the most creative thought and scholarship within the sociology of aging is being accomplished within the life course perspective which has captured a solid position within the last two decades in the scientific study of aging. The discipline of sociology, along with elements from history and human development comprise the basis of the life course perspective which focuses on the dynamics of lives over time. Three guiding principles of this perspective are studying lives in historical time, lives as process and the connections between human development and social structure. In this course, we will focus on the vital area of social aging, utilizing the life course perspective.

We will take a social problems approach meaning that we will critically examine the social forces and the social debates that affect the aging process. Most particularly, we will focus on ageism, diversity in the aging experience, examining the effects of race, class and gender that produce distinct inequalities throughout the course of life into old age. We will also focus on sociocultural contexts of aging. Major policy issues affecting elders will be examined.

RESOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mills, C. Wright. 1959. The Sociological Imagination. London: Oxford University Press;
Newman, K. 2004. A Different Shade of Gray: Midlife and Beyond in the Inner City. New York, NY: The New Press; Bengtson, V.L., and K. Warner Schaie (Eds.) 1999. Handbook of Theories of Aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing; Quadagno, J. 2004. Aging and the Life Course. Boston: McGraw-Hill; Katz, S. 1996. Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Old Age. Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press; Willis, S. and James Reid. 1999. Life in the Middle: Social and Psychological Development in Middle Age. San Deigo, CA: Academic Press; Rubinstein, R. 2000. The Many Dimensions of Aging. New York, NY: Springer; Arber, S. and Maria Evandrou. 1997. Aging, Independence and the Life Course. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; Holstein, M. and M. Minkler. 1991. Critical Perspectives on Aging: The Political and Moral Economy of Growing Old. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing; Hazan, H. 1994. Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Fry, Christine, et.al. 1999. "Culture and the Meaning of a Good Old Age," In Joel Sokolovsky (Ed.) The Cultural Context of Aging. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, pp. 99-124; Sokolovsky, J. 1999. "Starting Points: A Global, Cross-Cultural View of Aging," In The Cultural Context of Aging. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, pp. xiii-xxvi; Schaie, W. and Jon Hendricks (Eds.) 2000. The Evolution of the Aging Self: The Societal Impact on the Aging Process. New York: NY: Springer; Blazer, D. 2000. "Illness Narratives and the Aging Self," in The Evolution of the Aging Self. New York, NY: Springer; Krause, N. 2000. "Are We Really Entering a New Era of Aging?" In The Evolution of the Aging Self; Calasanti, T. and Kathleen Slevin. 2001. Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press; Woodward, Kathleen. 1999. Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Learning is a process of self-improvement and self realization that requires us to open our minds by challenging our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. It is not a process of merely acquiring information. Given this, the course is designed to provide us with a common language that we can use to question our conventional notions of reality. Such questioning is most effective when we relate individual experiences, then discuss and debate how such experiences apply to the ideas and theories presented in the readings. In order for the learning process to be effective, it is necessary that we all have a certain amount of shared knowledge and understanding. This is where the course readings come in. If we all come to class knowing that we have read the same information, that information can serve as a basis for us to exchange ideas, relate experience, and broaden our perspectives.

COURSE ATTENDANCE POLICY

I expect that students will attend class on a regular basis, and actively participate in discussion. Excessive absence will result in a lowered grade. It has been my experience that students do very poorly and are lost if they are not in class. You are expected to have carefully thought about the assigned readings in advance of the date we discuss them in class. Be sure to bring your syllabus, book and assigned readings to class because you will use them in our discussions. Failure to take exams or complete assignments on the dates due will be excused **ONLY** in the event of illness, death in the family, etc. at the discretion of the instructor. If problems do arise, you must contact me **PRIOR** to your absence or the due date of an assignment.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

I view this class as a community of learners, and since this is an undergraduate/graduate class, there will be an emphasis on student contribution to the classroom discussion and engagement with the material, along with lecture. Because I will endeavor never to be impolite or inattentive to you, I will not abide rudeness, or inattention to me or to other students. When I am speaking, I expect your *total attention*, which I will also give you in return because I welcome and encourage your questions and comments. I value an openness in the classroom and give and take between professor and students. However, civility in the classroom and regard for others is paramount. As well, you should remain in the classroom (unless of course, you are feeling ill) for the duration of the period because it is extremely distracting when students step out for a drink of water or to use the restroom and **IS NOT ACCEPTABLE**. Take care of those matters ahead of time. Being prompt for class is also your responsibility; coming in after the class has begun is disruptive.

GRADING

Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Exam 3	20%
Question Response Assignments (2-3)	15%
Film Analysis	15%
Class Participation	<u>10%</u>
(asking/answering questions)	100%

Question Response Assignments

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to answer two (2) questions from several of the “Questions for Writing, Reflection and Debate” which follows the readings in the Text: Aging: Concepts and Controversies. The purpose for these two written assignments is threefold: 1) to help you keep current with the readings and therefore engaged with the class, 2) to challenge you to think critically about the course material, 3) and to increase your understanding of the subject matter. There will be two (2) such assignments. The due dates on each of the assignments are included in the course schedule that follows. Since everyone will be called upon to answer sometime during the semester, you should be prepared to discuss, in class anytime, the answer to the question you chose.

General Explanation of Letter Grades:

“A”= This grade indicates a student has mastered the material as proved by their written work and performance on exams. It shows an excellent ability to analyze material, integrate concepts, and apply them to issues, especially independently of explanation provided by the instructor. Usually, this grade also reflects better understanding than most of one’s peers.

“B”= This grade suggests a student, while not mastering the material has shown a very good, better than average understanding of the most important concepts and issues. Generally, the student needs to improve her/his ability to tie things together, i.e., how the parts relate to the whole in the discipline.

“C”= This grade indicates adequate understanding of the essential concepts and theories necessary to claim minimal competency regarding the material. Somewhat lacking is the ability to generalize or apply concepts and theory to new situations on ones’ own.

“D”= This grade indicates that while the student has understood some material, there are important, substantial gaps in ones’ understanding.

I see this class as being a lively combination of part lecture, discussion, student exchange, group work and , hopefully, a stimulating experience for all. Because of the length of the class, we will have a short break of in the middle. Most evenings we will have different experiences in the first half of the class and the second half, with a combination of lecture/discussion in the first half, and a group project, video, student-led discussion, or a possible guest speaker in the second half of the evening.

Please note that the instructor reserves the right to change the readings on the syllabus as needed to accommodate guest speakers, videos and class discussions.

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| <b>CLASS SCHEDULE</b> |
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**1/22 Overview of The Class**

**A. Introduction of instructor and students**

**B. What is “old”?**

**Class exercise—Ask students candidly to say what comes to their mind when they think of an old person. What do we associate with “old”?**

**C. The Longevity Revolution: What is it?**

**Social change and the implications of the demographic transition**

**Sociological Perspectives on Longer Life**

**Under what conditions will people be LIVING longer?:**

**inequality, racism, sexism, ageism, health, care issues,  
(formal vs. informal), entitlements, financial support,  
and social policies**

**D. Palmore “Facts on Aging” Quiz**

**Discuss**

1/29 *Why Do We Grow Old?: Biology is Real But the Significance of Aging is Social*

*Biological Context:*

**READ: 1. Moody Text: Aging: Concepts and Controversies, pp. 15-19; 27-38**

**CONTROVERSIES: Why do we Grow Old? Be prepared to discuss!**

**2. Moody text:**

**Articles:**

**a. Hayflick, “Why do We Live as Long as We Do?” Pg. 41-42**

**b. Fries and Crapo, Vitality and Aging: Implications of the Rectangular Curve, pp. 43-50**

**c. Schneider and Brody: “Aging, Natural Death, and the Compression of Morbidity: Another View,” pp. 51-53**

**VIDEO : “The Science of Aging” from The National Institute on Aging**

2/5 *Life Course Perspective on Aging: Connecting individual lives with societal events*

- **ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE: Answer question #7 on pg 357 and select one additional question to answer (excluding #9). Everyone needs to be prepared to present their answer to #7 in class.**

**READ: Moody text:**

**Articles:**

**a. Garber and Goldman: “The changing Face of Health Care,” pp. 58-65**

**b. De Grey: “We will be Able to Live to 1,000,” pp. 66-67.**

**c. Olshansky: “Don’t Fall for the Cult of Immortality,” pp. 68-69**

**Begin Life Course Perspective and Power of Ageism in American Society**

**READ:**

**1. Moody TEXT: A Life Course Perspective on Aging, pp. 1-14; 20-24**

2/12 *Life Course Perspective (continued)*

**Ten Principles of the Life Course Perspective**

**Part I-V: Having Our Say: The Delany Sister’s First 100 years.**

**Discuss and demonstrate analysis of the book through life course perspective.**

**VIDEO: Morrie Schwartz: Lessons on Living (1<sup>st</sup> half)**

**Review for Exam**

2/19

**\*\*\*\*\* EXAM\*\*\*\*\***

2/26 *Social/Economic Outlook for an Aging Society: The Varieties of Aging Experience- Class, Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Age*

**READ:**

1. Part VI-VII : Having Our Say: The Delany Sister's First 100 Years. (complete)
2. Moody Text: Aging: Concepts and Controversies, pp. 133-

➤ **Guest Speaker/Discussant:** Dr. Donna Dempster-McClain, Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center, Cornell University

**\*\*Note: Information from guest speakers' lectures will be on exams\*\***

3/5 *Social Security Debate and the Ethics of Entitlements: Political Economy and Aging  
Lecture on Social Security*

**READ:** Controversy 5 : What is the Future for Social Security?

1. Moody Text: Aging Concepts and Controversies, pp. 199-210.
2. HANDOUT: Chapt. 2, pp. 43-63-Longevity Revolution

➤ **Guest Speaker/Discussant:** Dr. Jamie Dangler, Dept. of Sociology-Anthropology, SUNY Cortland

**\*\*Note: Information from guest speakers' lectures will be on exams\*\***

\*\*\*\* \*\* SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS- 3/12 \*\*\*\*\*

3/19 *Aging, Health, and Society: Care Work*

**READ:**

1. *Moody Text: Aging, Health Care and Society, pp. 267-294*
2. *Controversy 7: Should We Ration Health Care for Older People ? pp. 299-310.  
(Be prepared to discuss)*

**VIDEO: PBS: “& Thou Shalt Honor”**

*Review for exam*

3/26

\*\*\*\*\*EXAM 2\*\*\*\*\*

4/2 *End of Life Issues: Sociology of Death and Dying*

**READ:**

1. *Moody Text: Controversy 10: Should People Have the Choice to End their Lives? pp. 389-396. (Be prepared to discuss!)*
2. *Moody Text: Read articles: Pg. 399-414.*

➤ **ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE: Answer any TWO questions beginning on pg. 416 (Moody text).**

**VIDEO: Living with Dying (PBS Award-winning documentary with Bill Moyers  
\*\*\*\*\*Film Critical Analysis due on MAY 7\*\*\*\*\***

4/9 *Does Old Age Have Meaning?*

**READ:**

1. *Moody text: Controversy #10—"Does Old Age Have Meaning?" pp. 109-116.*
2. *Moody text:  
Articles-- De Beauvoir, "The Coming of Age," pp. 119-120; Scott-Maxwell,  
"The Measure of My Days," pp. 125-127.*

➤ **Guest Speaker: Dr. John Krout, Director, Ithaca College Gerontology Institute, Ithaca, NY**

**\*\*Note: Information from guest speakers' lectures will be on exams\*\***

4/16 *Aspects of the Social, Physical and Personal Environment in Aging; Service Learning*

➤ **Guest Speaker: Dr. Nancy Wells, Department of Design and Environmental Analysis, Cornell University**

**\*\*Note: Information from guest speakers' lectures will be on exams\*\***

*Exam Review*

4/23

\*\*\*\*\* EXAM 3 \*\*\*\*\*

4/30 **Presentation by group of Older Citizens: "Intergenerational Dialogue"**

5/7 **The Future in an Aging World**

\*\*\*\*\* Critical Film Analysis Papers Due in class\*\*\*\*\*

**ALIGNMENT WITH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS**

The conceptual framework theme is “Liberal Learning.” Liberal learning emphasizes personal responsibility, social justice, and global understanding. This course covers many of the themes and objectives specified in the Conceptual Framework of SUNY Cortland’s Teacher Education Program. It covers liberal learning themes of social justice, personal responsibility, and global understanding and it focuses on Learning Outcomes # 1, 2, 7, 9 and 12.

**PLEASE NOTE: “If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services located in B-1 Van Hoesen Hall or call (607) 753-2066 for an appointment. Information regarding your disability will be treated in a confidential manner. Because many accommodations require early planning, requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible.” -Office of Student Disability Services**