

Department of Sociology
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

SOCIOLOGY OF AGE, AGING, AND THE LIFE COURSE

Spring 2008

Course Information:

Course Number:	SOCI 469 (#53652)	Instructor:	Professor David Warner
Credits:	3 Hours	Office:	Mather Memorial 223C
Seminar Times:	T 1:15-3:45 pm	Phone:	216.368.2697
Seminar Room:	Mather Memorial 222	E-mail:	david.warner@case.edu
Prerequisites:	Graduate Standing & Permission of Instructor	Office Hours:	T 10:00 am- 12 Noon, and by appointment

“Changing lives – aging and the succession of cohorts – are in continuing interplay with changes in society and its structures. Neither can be understood conceptually without the other.”

--Matilda White Riley

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We are witness to an unprecedented period in human history, as almost every society is experiencing a rapid growth in the size of its aged population. In the U.S., the proportion of the population over age 65 is projected to be approximately equal to the proportion under age 18 by mid-century; in much of Western and Northern Europe this parity will occur even earlier. A great deal is unknown about how societies will deal such a dramatic shift in the age composition of the population. The tension over the implications of the growth of the aged population and the attending shift in the age structure has led population aging to be characterized as a major social problem. However, at the same time that politicians and cultural commentators are focusing on the age structure “problem,” there is increasing recognition that the experience of growing old is not the same for everyone. Aging is a developmental process, characterized by chronological, biological, and psychological change; yet individual aging does not occur in isolation. Rather, aging occurs in a social context—and this context itself changes across time.

Throughout this course, we will apply the Life Course Perspective to understand how the variation in opportunities, choices, and experiences of old age are the product of the dynamic interaction of individuals’ biographical experiences and their position in the social structure as defined by gender, race and class. Moreover, we will consider how the configuration of these social structures and linked institutions is also changing and what effect this has on individuals aging experiences. We will examine in-depth the issues of retirement, health and family relations, three of the major challenges for both aging individuals and aging societies. We begin with a detailed examination of the underlying cause for political and academic attention—population aging.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The primary objective of this course is for students to develop a foundation for mastery of the diverse field(s) of the sociology of age, aging and the life course. To this end, students successfully completing this course will:

- Analyze and describe the social trends and forces that are changing the size, composition and location of the older adult population in the United States, including population aging, migration and improved longevity;
- Critically evaluate the potential consequences of these population trends for governments, communities and families;
- Summarize the basic theoretical and methodological perspectives that guide scientific inquiry in the field(s) of the sociology of age, aging and the life course;
- Describe the life course perspective and illustrate the means by which lives display change and continuity over time, with specific attention to gender, race/ethnicity and social class;
- Analyze and discuss the major trends in the work/retirement behavior, family relations, and the economic and health status of older adults, including the sources of heterogeneity in these domains;
- Outline and explain the major economic security and health care policies for the aged;
- Use the written word to synthesize and critically evaluate course material, creating knowledge and conveying information about topics in the sociology of age, aging and the life course, further developing general writing ability.

REQUIRED READINGS:

1. Three texts are required for this course and are available from the Case Western Reserve Bookstore (Thwing Center, 11111 Euclid Ave.), as well as various other retailers.
 - a) Bengtson, Vern L. and K. Warner Schaie, Eds. 1999. *Handbook of Theories of Aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc. ISBN: 978-0826112347.
 - b) Binstock, Robert H. and Linda K. George, Eds. 2006. *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences, 6th Ed.* Burlington, MA: Academic Press. ISBN: 978-0120883882
 - c) Settersten, Richard A., Jr., Ed. 2003. *Invitation to the Life Course: Towards New Understandings of Later Life*. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. ISBN: 978-0895032690
2. Also required are select scientific articles and book chapters as specified in the Topic Plan that follows. These readings are available in the Required Readings area of the Course Blackboard Site. Many of these readings come from the *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences, 5th Edition* (2001); I strongly encourage you to acquire a new or used copy of this text, as it covers a number of topics that are not captured in the 6th edition and that, if not already assigned in this course, are recommended readings (see below).

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

In addition to the required readings for each topic, I have also included a number of other citations that are recommended for further reading on a topic. You are not expected to be familiar with these readings for this course. However, these sources will undoubtedly be valuable as you pursue further graduate study, including in your preparation for your comprehensive examinations and the development of your dissertation proposal. *All required readings are denoted by an * in the accompanying Topic Plan.*

I also recommend that you read Howard Becker's (1986) *Writing for Social Scientists*. This is an excellent text by a renowned sociologist and prolific author on some of the common stumbling blocks that graduate students (and their professors) face in scholarly writing and practical solutions to avoiding these. Although I will not be assigning material explicitly, I encourage you to purchase a copy and (re)read it at your leisure. I promise that it will help you to more clearly express your thoughts, critically evaluate scholarly texts, and produce well-written, compelling assignments in this course (and in your careers).

COURSE FORMAT:

This is a required graduate seminar in the Department of Sociology and class meetings will be primarily discussion based. However, this format is successful only in so far as participants take the opportunity to read assigned readings carefully and critically, and come prepared to discuss them along with their own ideas, reactions, and questions about those readings. I may lecture on occasion to explore the logic and details of the required readings in more detail or to raise relevant material from suggested readings and other sources. Given the seminar format, attendance at each class session is mandatory: **students who miss a class meeting will receive a failing grade in the course.** I *may* grant exceptions to this policy in the case of documented illness (including that of a family member), death, or athletic/extra-curricular activities, as well as for religious holidays. For an exception to be granted, you must notify me in advance of your absence and turn any assignment due beforehand.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students successfully completing this course will critically analyze the readings, carefully integrate the sometimes disparate course material, and apply this material in novel ways. Students are expected and will be required to do more than simply memorize "facts." The following methods of evaluation will be used to measure careful analysis, integration and application of the course material.

1) Class Participation

Each class session has a set of readings matched to it. Students are expected to demonstrate their proficiency with the readings through regular and relevant class participation, as determined by the instructor at the end of the course, consistent with the demands of a graduate level seminar.

Students will earn 10% of the final grade based on their Class Participation

2) Weekly Critical Analysis Papers

Students will prepare 12 short essays critically analyzing the readings, to be turned in **at the beginning** of class sessions 2-8, and 10-14. The analyses should address the Study Question(s) listed at the bottom of each week's reading assignment. These are **not** reaction

papers; they should reflect a scholarly writing style: coherent and well-reasoned, integrative, and with a minimum of spelling and grammar errors. These should be polished demonstrations of your writing ability, not rough drafts.

Analyses are to be a minimum of three but not more than five type-written pages (*double-spaced*, with 1" margins and 12 point *Times New Roman* or similar font). In preparing each analysis, students should list the question and then provide their answer. Students must support their answers with evidence, citing sources (in ASA format) for everything that is not an original idea. Students who provide opinions without supporting evidence will earn a failing grade. Students are encouraged to identify unresolved issues, evaluate the strength of the evidence, and incorporate new approaches. Students will not be penalized for drawing on outside or recommended readings, but must demonstrate sufficient familiarity with **all** of the required readings each week. As the semester progresses, in order to demonstrate successful integration of the course material, students are expected to draw on relevant readings previously assigned in the course. Note that students who cite material not listed on this syllabus must provide a full reference at the end of their paper (again, in ASA format).

Late papers will be deducted one letter grade per day and will not be accepted after Friday of the week they are due; electronic submissions will **not** be accepted.

Students will earn 25% of the final grade based on these Critical Analysis Papers.

3) **Academic Book Review and Presentation**

Students will read and critically review an academic book dealing with some aspect of Work, Retirement and Economic Security among the Aged. Each student in the course will read one of the texts listed in the Topic Outline for Tuesday, March 18th. On that day, students will turn in a review five to seven type-written pages in length and will also present a summary of their review to their colleagues in-class. Only one student will be permitted to review each text. Book assignments will be made in the second week of the course and detailed instructions will be distributed at that time.

Students will earn 15% of their final grade based on the Academic Book Review (10%) and Presentation (5%). Any student who misses class on the day of these presentations, for whatever reason, will receive a grade of zero on that portion of the assignment.

4) **Preliminary Examinations**

Students will complete two Preliminary Examinations designed to measure their integration and application of the course material. Each examination will be two-hours in length and will be administered outside of the regular class meeting time, with Preliminary Examination #1 scheduled from 2:00-4:00pm on **Thursday, February 14th** and Preliminary Examination #2 from 2:00-4:00pm on **Thursday, March 20th**; these examinations will not be cumulative. Students will complete their examinations in the Department of Sociology Computer Lab (223A Mather Memorial).

These examinations will be administered in a format consistent with the Comprehensive Examination procedures of the Department of Sociology, and will be evaluated accordingly—with grades of “High Pass” (A), “Pass” (B), “Low Pass” (C), “Remediation” (D) and “Fail” (F). Generally, a Remediation is earned when a student has insufficiently answered one, and only one, of their examination questions, but the Comprehensive Exam Committee feels that enough of the question has been sufficiently answered to merit a second

attempt. (Students with inadequate answers on more than one question receive a failing grade on the entire examination).

In this course, similar evaluative procedures will be followed and students identified as needing to remediate will have one-week from the date the exam is returned to reattempt to adequately answer the question (in take-home format), after which time their answer will be re-evaluated. The maximum score a student may receive on a remediated examination is Pass, although this would require all examination answers (including the Remediated Answer) to have demonstrated integration and application of the material warranting a grade of High Pass. *Students who do not complete their remediation within the time allotted will receive a failing grade on the entire examination.*

Students will earn 25% of their final grade based on their performance on Preliminary Examination #1 (10%) and Preliminary Examination #2 (15%).

5) **Final Examination**

Students will complete a cumulative Final Examination, in which they will have four hours to answer several questions designed to assess their mastery of the field(s) of Age, Aging and the Life Course. The examination will be evaluated in a manner similar to the Preliminary Examinations, although students who need remediation will **not** have the opportunity to re-attempt that question and it will instead receive a grade of D. Students with more than one question evaluated to require remediation will receive a failing grade, as on the Preliminary Examinations. The Final Exam is scheduled from 8:30 am -12:30pm on **Thursday, May 1st** in the Department of Sociology Computer Lab (223A Mather Memorial).

Students will earn the remaining 25% of their Final Grade based on their performance on the Final Examination.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

“The University's mission rests on the premise of intellectual honesty: in the classroom, the laboratory, the office, and the solitary examination desk. Without a prevailing ethic of honor and integrity not only in scientific pursuits but also in all scholarly activity, the very search for knowledge is impaired....[E]ach of us must therefore accept individual responsibility for our behavior and our work, and refrain from taking credit for the work of others.” (from the *CWRU Statement on Ethics*, <http://studentaffairs.case.edu/office/judicial/policies/ethics.html>).

I strongly encourage students to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the University's Academic Integrity Policy, including what constitutes an academic integrity violation (<http://studentaffairs.case.edu/office/judicial/policies/integrity.html>). It is my policy that any student found committing acts of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies and will receive a failing grade in this course at minimum. There are no exceptions to this policy.

TOPIC PLAN & ASSIGNED READINGS (Distributed in-Class)