

Department of Sociology
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

SOCIOLOGY OF AGE, AGING, AND THE LIFE COURSE

Spring 2010

Course Information:

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| Course Number: | SOCI 469 | Instructor: | Professor David Warner |
| Credits: | 3 Hours | Office: | Mather Memorial 223C |
| Seminar Times: | M 2:00-4:30 pm | Phone: | 216.368.2697 |
| Seminar Room: | Mather Memorial 222 | E-mail: | david[dot]warner[at]case[dot]edu |
| Prerequisites: | Graduate Standing & Permission of Instructor | Office Hours: | T 9:30–11:00 am & 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 United States, 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, in further development of 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., Merril Silverstein, Daphna Gans, and Norella M. Putney (Eds.). 2009. [*Handbook of Theories of Aging \(Second edition\)*](#). New York: Springer Publishing company, LLC. ISBN: 978-082616251-9.
 - b) Binstock, Robert H. and Linda K. George, Eds. 2006. [*Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences \(6th edition\)*](#). Burlington, MA: Academic Press. ISBN: 978-012088388-2
 - 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: 978-089503269-4
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 \(Fifth Edition\)*](#) (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 (except for those selected for examination by discussion co-leaders each week, as described below). 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 (1986/2007) [*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:

Class meetings will be primarily discussion based. This seminar 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 of this course and the fact that it meets once a week, attendance at each class session is mandatory: **students who miss a class meeting will have their final grade penalized 10% (per absence).** I may grant exceptions to this policy in the case of documented illness, death, or athletic/extra-curricular activities (e.g., attendance at a *national* conference), as well as for religious holidays. For an exception to be granted, you must notify me in advance of your absence for one of the aforementioned reasons and turn any assignment due beforehand. *Note that prior notification and early submission of an assignment in no way guarantees that your absence will be excused.*

Please note that students are **not** permitted to take notes using a laptop computer or other personal computing device in this course unless it is medically necessary and the student is registered with the Coordinator of Disability Services.

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."

This is a required graduate seminar in the Department of Sociology. This course is **NOT** offered at the Undergraduate level. Undergraduate students may be admitted to course based on their academic record and interest in pursuing a minor in Gerontological Studies. Any undergraduate

students enrolled in the course are expected to complete all of the course requirements and will be evaluated on the same standard as the graduate students.

This is a reading, writing, and discussion intensive course. 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 approximately six to eight (6-8) 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. Proficiency means that (1) you should be able to speak about all aspects (e.g., theory, analysis, findings) of an assigned reading and (2) you should have questions about each assigned reading. If you find that you do not have questions—points of clarification, application to other related research areas, issues of methodology, and the like—about each reading, this is a clear sign that you have not devoted sufficient time and attention to the material. To facilitate the highest level of participation, please **complete the assigned readings no later than the afternoon before** we are scheduled to cover the material, as this timeframe will allow adequate rumination.

Please note that in the interest of maintaining classroom discussion and equitable “airtime” among participants, I will call on students in class. Students who fail to respond or otherwise demonstrate that they have not devoted sufficient time to preparing for class will be penalized.

Students will earn 10% of their final grade based on their Class Participation. Students who do not demonstrate regular and relevant participation will earn a grade no higher than a B in this course (and indeed may earn a lower grade).

2) **Discussion Co-Leader**

Each week a seminar participant will be assigned to serve as discussion co-leader. The discussion co-leader has two responsibilities. The first, as might be expected, is to help facilitate discussion of the week’s material by coming to class with questions prepared for each of the assigned readings. The discussion co-leader is expected to email me their questions by 7pm the day before the class meets. The second responsibility of the discussion co-leader is to select one of the Recommend Readings for that week (in consultation with me), read it, prepare a summary of this reading (no more than 1 page, single-spaced) to be distributed to the other seminar participants, and to draw connections to the assigned readings.

Students will earn 5% of their final grade based on their performance as a discussion co-leader. Students who are unprepared when they are assigned to be a discussion co-leader, who fail to provide their classmates with an appropriate summary of the additional reading selection, or who otherwise perform at a subpar level will receive no credit toward their efforts. Students that fail to attend class on the day (or days) they are scheduled to be a discussion co-leader will not be excused for their absence under any circumstances and the attendance policy outlined above will be enforced.

3) **Weekly Critical Analysis Papers**

Students will prepare 13 short essays critically analyzing the readings, to be turned in **at the beginning** of class sessions 2-14. 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 grammatical 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 (*see Writing Guidelines below*). 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 show 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).

Students will earn 40% of their final grade based on these Critical Analysis Papers.

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 10:00 am-12 Noon on **Wednesday, February 17th** and Preliminary Examination #2 from 10:00 am-12:00 Noon on **Wednesday, March 31st**; 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 of 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 **Monday, May 3, 2010** in the Department of Sociology Computer Lab (223A Mather Memorial).

Students will earn the remaining 20% of their Final Grade based on their performance on the Final Examination.

GRADING SCHEMA:

All assignments in this course will be evaluated using a letter based grading-schema. These letter grades and their corresponding percentages are as follows: A=95%; B=85%; C=75%; D=65%; and F=50%. Plus/minus designations will also be used. A designation of + adds 3.5 percentage points to the above and a designation of – subtracts 3.5 percentage points. For example, a score of B+ corresponds to 88.5%, while a score of B- corresponds to 81.5%. Truly exceptional assignments, those that demonstrate a depth of knowledge and integration of material at the highest level and otherwise free from error, may be awarded a grade of A++ and scored at 100%. Other letter grade combinations may also be used and will correspond to the percentage midway between the constituent letter grades (e.g., A-/B+ is equivalent to 90%).

Students will earn their final grade in this course based on their total weighted performance on each of the course requirements described above. Final grades in this course will be assigned as straight letter grades, the system used at Case Western Reserve University, as follows:

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| To earn a(n) | A | students need a total weighted performance of at least | 90% |
| | B | | 80% |
| | C | | 70% |
| | D | | 65% |

These percentage cut-offs are absolute. Students must earn the minimum percentage listed for each grade; I will not “round-up” final grades. A student who accumulates 89.99% of the highest point total has earned a B. *No Exceptions.*

Please note that I **DO NOT** utilize the Gradebook tool in Blackboard during the semester. It is each student’s responsibility to save their graded assignments and monitor their progress based on the Course Requirements and Grading Schema outlined above. I will not respond to inquiries about a student’s progress. Final grades will be uploaded to Blackboard prior to submission to the Registrar at the end of the course.

Unless there has been a demonstrable error in recording a grade, all final grades are non-negotiable. Students should have put in the necessary work during the semester to earn their desired grade in this course.

WRITING GUIDELINES:

On all written assignments for this course you should use a scholarly writing style: coherent and well-reasoned, integrative, and with a minimum of spelling and grammatical errors. All work submitted for evaluation should be a polished demonstration of your writing ability, not an unedited “rough” draft (see Becker 1986/2007: “Chapter 4: Editing By Ear.”).

Formatting: Please format all written assignments according to the following specifications:

- *Double-space* with 1” margins on all sides;
- Use a 12 point *Times New Roman*, Calibri, or similar font (No Arial or Courier New);
- There should be no additional spacing before and after paragraphs (i.e., format settings should be set to 0 pt);
- Number the bottom right-hand corner of each page;
- Staple the pages together in the upper left-hand corner;
- Print on a single-side of the page;
- A title page is not necessary—simply list your name, assignment title and number, and due date on separate left-justified *single-spaced* lines at the top of the first page (and only on the first page).

Citations: Please use in-text citations to reference the source for everything that is not an original idea. As a professional sociologist in-training you should use ASA format. A copy of the *ASA Style Guide* (3rd Edition) is available through the *KSL Course Reserves* under SOCI 469 (3-Hour in library use *only*) or you can purchase your own copy directly from the ASA [website](#).

Again, you will not be penalized for drawing on outside or recommended readings, but must exhibit sufficient familiarity with **ALL** of the relevant required readings. As the semester progresses, you are expected to demonstrate successful integration of the course material by citing relevant readings previously assigned in the course. For cited materials not listed on this syllabus please provide a full reference at the end of your exercise.

Submission: All written work will be collected at the end of the class period. Students that do not submit an assignment in class on the day that it is due will receive a score of **ZERO** (0) on that assignment. *Late papers will NOT be accepted under any circumstances*. Electronic submissions will **NOT** be accepted. This policy applies to all written work in this course and no exceptions will be granted.

Although some of the preceding may seem arbitrary to you, consistency across papers facilitates grading and greatly improves the odds that I can evaluate the content of your arguments without distraction. Written assignments that fail to follow these guidelines, including improperly formatted citations, will be penalized 10% for the first offense, 25% for the second offense, and 50% thereafter.

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.

RIGHT OF REVISION:

I reserve the right to modify any aspect of this course syllabus, including the Course Requirements and Grading Schema, at any time as need be. All such changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

TOPIC PLAN & ASSIGNED READINGS (Distributed in-Class)