

SOC 4204: Seminar in Aging and the Life Course Seminar
Course Syllabus

Class time: Tues. & Thurs., 1:00-2:15pm
Class location: State Hall (STAT), Room 323

Instructor: Patricia Morton, Ph.D.

Office: Faculty Administration Building (FAB), Room 2251

Office hours: Tues. & Thurs., 2:30-3:30pm; additional hours by appointment

Email: patricia.morton@wayne.edu

I usually respond within 1-2 business days. Please do not email me through Canvas.

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to important theories, concepts, and empirical findings in the study of aging, giving them a deeper understanding of the issues people encounter as they grow older. Aging is a biological phenomenon, but also a social process for both individuals and society at large. The extent to which aging processes are socially patterned, normatively regulated and/or historically determined are major issues forming the backdrop for this course. Specific topics covered include aging and life course, demography, family, retirement, caregiving, death and dying, and public policy. Students also will learn about centenarians (persons who live to be 100 years of age) and discuss the characteristics unique to this special population and what can be learned from them. Aging is a life-long process—one that students will study from multiple perspectives and domains in sociology to better understand this growing segment of the population.

Course Objectives

- To describe the nature and characteristics of people survive until old to age, noting the culture of aging including attitudes toward older adults.
- To identify the role of society on the life course of individuals; and what can individuals do to optimize their lives and experience a rewarding old age.
- To examine how personal, social, historical, and structural factors in early life affect the later course of individuals' lives.
- To understand how people's health, family, and economic situation in old age reflect their life course history rather than good or bad luck.
- To demonstrate how individuals' aging experiences are shaped over the life course by conducting an exploratory research project.
- To engage in critical thinking in order to gain a deeper and broader understanding of various aspects of aging—i.e., cultivate your gerontological imagination.

Required Materials

Weekly readings from reading list.

Canvas: There will be additional materials, including assignments, posted on Canvas throughout the semester. Please check Canvas regularly to access these materials.

Website: <https://canvas.wayne.edu/>

Attendance

Wayne State University (WSU) requires instructors to report student attendance for the first two weeks of class. If attendance is not confirmed, the registrar will drop the student from the class. Please refer to WSU's Go to Class! website for more information:

<http://reg.wayne.edu/gotoclass.php>

Due to this policy and the fact that this course relies heavily on student participation, there will be a daily sign-in sheet for attendance. The sheet will be passed around during class and it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it. Students are allowed one unexcused absence. After that, each additional unexcused absence will result in losing 5 participation points (out of 100). Students also are graded on their in-class participation, which requires attendance. Thus, attendance is highly recommended.

Make-up Policy

In general, late work is not accepted. If you plan on missing a class the day an assignment is due, you must arrange a time to turn in the assignment to the instructor before class begins on the due date to receive full credit. There are no make-ups for exams or in-class assignments except for medical/familial emergencies; WSU excused absences (e.g., religious observances; University-related sports travel); and academic engagements (e.g., conference presentations). In the latter cases, you will need to inform me of the excused absence at least a week in advance to arrange for you to make-up work and submit any assignments per the policy mentioned above (i.e., before class due date).

Classroom Conduct

I expect everyone, including myself, to respect everyone, actively listen to each other during class discussions, and facilitate an environment conducive for inclusion, equity, and learning. To maximize the learning capabilities of all students, please do not hesitate to ask questions at any time during the class to clarify concepts, ideas, or any other course material. Your participation is always welcomed, and I encourage students to share any relevant information. I also ask that distracting behavior, such as texting, web surfing, and talking to fellow students about material unrelated to the course, be avoided during class. Therefore, cell phone use is not allowed, and cell phones should be kept off or on silent. Laptops may be used for academic purposes only that relate to the course.

Respect

Throughout the course of this class, you will be challenged to think critically about your viewpoints and those of others. While discussions may produce topics or viewpoints you might not necessarily agree with, respectful and cordial behavior is expected from all students. Disrespectful behavior towards any group or individual will not be tolerated. Any student who does not abide by this policy may be asked to leave class, and violations of this policy may be dealt with in accordance with WSU policies. I also ask that any sensitive information shared during our class stays within our classroom's walls. As a final note, I will also adhere to these guidelines.

Academic Dishonesty

I have a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. Any academic dishonesty will result in a zero for related coursework, and may be reported to the dean and/or lead to failing the course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, copying another student's answers, using unapproved notes during an examination, and communication with other students during an examination. For further information, please refer to the WSU handbook and Undergraduate Bulletin: https://www.wsc.edu/info/20028/student_handbook/69/selected_academic_policies/2

<http://www.bulletins.wayne.edu/ubk-output/index.html>

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations, first you will need to register with Student Disability Services for coordination of your academic accommodations. The Student Disability Services office is located at 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library in the Student Academic Success Services department. The Student Disability Services telephone number is 313-577-1851 or 313-202-4216 for videophone use. Once you have met with your disability specialist, I will be glad to meet with you privately during my office hours to discuss your accommodations. Student Disability Services' mission is to assist the university in creating an accessible community where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in their educational experience at Wayne State University. You can learn more about the disability office at www.studentdisability.wayne.edu.

Student Disability Services

Location: David Adamany Undergraduate Library, Room 1600

Phone: 313-577- 1851; 313-202-4216 for videophone use

Online registration form: https://wayne-accommodate.symplicity.com/public_accommodation/

Website: <https://studentdisability.wayne.edu/>

Writing Resources

Critical thinking and writing is an important component of this course. Students are encouraged to email me or visit my office hours with concerns. WSU also offers resources for writing through their WRT Zone, including WSU's Writing Center:

<http://clas.wayne.edu/WRITING/>

<http://www.clas.wayne.edu/Sociology/Writing-Resources>

Emergency Preparedness

In the event that an emergency arises, please familiarize yourself with the University's emergency procedures. For details, please refer to WSU's Emergency and Safety Procedures:

<https://police.wayne.edu/procedures.php>

Drop/Withdraw

Sept. 12, Wed.: Last day to drop course with 100% tuition cancellation

Nov. 11, Sun.: Last day to request withdraw with approval (current grade reported)

Note: I will not sign off on a withdraw for a student who committed academic dishonestly, such as cheating and/or plagiarism.

Grades

Final grade will be determined by the following:

Class participation	20%
Weekly questions	15%
Weekly tweets	15%
Lead discussion	20%
Reflection essay	10%
Aging project	20%

Grading scale:

A: 94 and above

A-: 90-93
B+: 87-89
B: 84-86
B-: 80-83
C+: 77-79
C: 74-76
C-: 70-73
D+: 67-69
D: 64-66
D-: 60-63
F: below 60

Final grades with a decimal point of 0.5 or above will be rounded up (e.g., 89.5, will be rounded up to a 90). Any final grades with a decimal point below 0.5, will be rounded down.

If your grade has been entered into Canvas incorrectly, please let me know ASAP. If you have a question about the grade you received, students must contact me within **1 week** of the grade being issued.

Early Academic Assessment (EAA) requires me to enter your grade during week seven of the semester. You will receive an email notification if the grade entered is a C or lower. I will not enter your grade if you have a C or better. You can track your grades on Canvas.

Description of Graded Work

Weekly work

Class Participation

Participation is assessed by your attendance (see attendance policy above) and your contribution to class discussions. This is a seminar course, which means that it revolves around student discussion based on the weekly readings. Therefore, all weekly readings must be read before class begins and participation in class discussions is required. Regarding class discussions, please make well-thought-out and appropriate comments related to the course material; quality is better than quantity.

Old-School Weekly Tweets

Each week we discuss readings, students who are not leading class discussions will write at least one “old-school” tweet (i.e., 140 characters or less) related to the weekly readings. These will follow tweet formats, so students can use shorthand, hashtags, or other acceptable ways of communication in the “Twitterverse” (minus trolling or anything else that violates the respect policy). Have fun with this! Tweets can focus on findings, theory, methods, or other ideas related to the readings. Students will type tweets before class meets to discuss the readings, have the option to share in-class, and will submit tweets to instructor at the end of the discussion. Tweets must be typed using reasonable and legible font choices (e.g., 12pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced). The purpose of this activity is to practice summarizing academic articles. Each tweet is worth 10 points.

Weekly Questions

Each week, students who are not leading class discussions must email two questions regarding the weekly readings to the instructor by Monday before 5pm. Each question must come from a different reading (i.e., students cannot submit two questions about the same paper). Discussion leaders will compile all questions and present them the best way they see fit on discussion day. Each set of questions is worth 10 points (5 points per question). Email: patricia.morton@wayne.edu

Throughout the semester

Lead Discussion

Most weeks, we will discuss weekly readings together as a class. During these discussions, two students will lead the discussion. The class size dictates how many times students will lead discussions. There will be a sign-up sheet for students to choose what topics they will lead the discussion. I also provide each pair with class time to meet and prepare how to organize the class. I will provide additional instructions and details, including a grading rubric, in class.

Reflection Essay

Throughout the semester, we will thoughtfully reflect on the weekly readings together as a class. Toward the end of the semester, you will do this on your own for the reflection essay. The reflection essay will cover the readings and video assigned for work and retirement (week 12), and class time will be allocated for students to work on this. Overall, this essay should indicate that you possess capable knowledge and understanding of the material and have thought deeply about the issues presented in the readings and video. You are welcome to comment on any of the material that you wish. For example, essays can cover your personal thoughts, experiences, and reactions; strengths and/or limitations of the readings; or how they might tie into previous class readings and discussions.

Important: you should not provide a summary of the readings; rather each reflection paper should demonstrate that you have thought critically about the issues at hand. The essay is due Tuesday, Nov. 20.

I will provide additional instructions and a grading rubric, but, in general, the essay should be approximately 2-3 pages, double-spaced, and typed using a common font (e.g., Times New Roman). Remember, quality is better than quantity. **Essays that have been plagiarized will be graded as zero and may lead to failing the course.** If you use another's ideas, please provide a correct citation (and use quotes if using another's direct words). Most likely, you will need to cite at least the weekly retirement readings and/or video. You may use any citation format you choose to use.

Aging Project—life history interview

The aging project applies what you have learned in class to the outside world. Students will interview two adults age 65 or older and prepare a presentation of the interviews to the class. The project is divided into three parts: (I) identifying two participants and getting informed consent; (II) interviewing participants; and (III) presentation of results. The due dates for each part are listed below in the schedule. I will provide additional details, including a grading rubric, after we discuss the project in class.

Schedule*

Date	Topic	Assignments**
Week 1 8/30	Introduction	
Week 2 9/4 & 6	Perceptions of Aging and Age Identity	Tues: Sign up for discussion leader (DL) Thurs: Class discussions begins
Week 3 9/11 & 13	Centenarians	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 4 9/18 & 20	Demography of aging	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due; Aging Project Part I due
Week 5 9/25 & 27	The Life Course Perspective	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 6 10/2 & 4	Key Concepts in the Life Course: Transitions and Historical Context	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 7 10/9 & 11	The Family	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 8 10/16 & 18	Childhood: A sensitive or critical period in the life course?	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 9 10/23 & 25	Marital Relationships	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 10 10/30, 11/1	Caregiving	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due; Aging Project Part II due
Week 11 11/8	Death and Dying	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm DL meet (mtg. day/time will be discussed) Thurs: Tweet due
Week 12 Nov. 13/15	Retirement	GSA conference: Class does not meet in person this week. Students will read articles; watch retirement video; and <u>write reflection essay</u> .
Week 13 Nov. 20	Mental Health	Tues: Retirement Reflection Essay Due Thurs: Nov. 22—No Class
Week 14 Nov. 27/29	Public Policy & Practice	Mon: Email instructor 2 questions by 5pm Tues: DL meet Thurs: Tweet due
Week 15 Dec. 4/6	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS	Present on assigned day; Aging Project Part III due

*This schedule is tentative and subject to change at the instructor's discretion and pace of the class. Please check **Canvas** and attend class for in-class announcements regarding changes made to course.

READINGS

**Denotes that article is available on Canvas. Otherwise, please access articles using <https://library.wayne.edu/> and/or <https://scholar.google.com/>. WSU library homepage has a direct quick search bar in addition to several digital databases such as JSTOR that you can access and search within for articles. Articles that were a bit more difficult to locate include links below them.

Week 1: Introductions

Young@Heart, Stephen Walker (director), Sally George (producer), Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2007.

Week 2: Perceptions of Aging and Age Identity

Young@Heart - continued

"The Living Dead? The Construction of People with Alzheimer's Disease as Zombies," Susan M. Behuniak, *Ageing and Society*, 2011.

"Changing Negative Views of Aging: Implications for Intervention and Translational Research," Dana Kotter-Gruhn, *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 2015.

Optional: "Mind Matters: Cognitive and Physical Effects of Aging Self-Stereotypes," Becca R. Levy, *The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 2003.

Week 3: Centenarians

"Morbidity Profiles of Centenarians: Survivors, Delayers, and Escapers," Jessica Evert, Elizabeth Lawler, Hazel Bogan, and Thomas Perls, *The Journals of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, 2003.

"Getting to 100 and Life Actually Doesn't Feel so Bad," Phyllis Korkki, *New York Times*, 2014.
Website: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/15/business/retirementspecial/get-to-100-and-life-actually-doesnt-feel-so-bad.html?_r=1

Optional: "Centenarians: The Older You Get, the Healthier You Have Been," Rachel Hitt et al., *The Lancet*, 1999.

Week 4: Demography of Aging

**"Trends in Mortality, Disease, and Physiological Status in the Older Population," Eileen Crimmins, 2018 (in *Future Directions for the Demography of Aging*, The National Academy Press).

Note: Read pp. 3-8 and look at Figure 1-7 on p. 15 (rest of chapter is optional)

**"Racial/Ethnic and Nativity Disparities in the Health of Older U.S. Men and Women," Robert A. Hummer and Iliya Gutin, 2018 (in *Future Directions for the Demography of Aging*, The National Academy Press).

Optional: "The Likelihood of Poverty Across the American Adult Life Span," Mark R. Rank and Thomas A. Hirschl, *Social Work*, 1999.

Week 5: The Life Course Perspective

“The Life Course as Developmental Theory,” Glen H. Elder, *Child Development*, 1998.

“Stress and the Life Course: A Paradigmatic Alliance,” By Leonard I. Pearlin and Marilyn McKean Skaff, *The Gerontologist*, 1996.

Optional: “A Life Course Approach to Chronic Disease Epidemiology: Conceptual Models, Empirical Challenges and Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” by Yoav Ben-Shlomo and Diana Kuh, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 2002.

Optional: “The Biological Embedding of Early Experience and Its Effects on Health in Adulthood,” Clyde Hertzman, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1999.

Week 6: Key Concepts in the Life Course: Transitions and Historical Context

Life Course Transitions

“Sociological Perspectives on Life Transitions,” Linda K. George, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1993.

Historical Context

“German Unification as a Turning Point in East German Women’s Life Course: Biographical Changes in Work and Family Roles,” Marina A. Adler, *Sex Roles*, 2002.

Optional: “Prenatal Exposure to the Dutch Famine and Disease in Later Life: An Overview,” Rebecca C. Painter, Tessa J. Roseboom, Otto P. Bleker, *Reproductive Toxicology*, 2005.

Week 7: The Family

“Effects of Life Course Transitions on the Quality of Relationships between Adult Children and Their Parents,” Gayle Kaufman and Peter Uhlenberg, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1998.

“The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children,” Paul R. Amato, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2000.

Optional: For a more in-depth article, see Amato’s (2010) “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children” in *Drustvena Istrazivanja, Zargreb*.

Optional: “The long-reach of divorce: divorce and child well-being across three generations,” Paul R. Amato and Jacob Cheadle, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2005.

Optional: “Financially Set, Grandparents Help Keep Families Afloat, Too,” Tamar Lewin, *New York Times*, 2005.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/14/us/financially-set-grandparentshelp-keep-families-afloat-too.html>

Week 8: Childhood: A sensitive or critical period in the life course?

“Childhood Socioeconomic Status and Adult Health,” Sheldon Cohen, Denise Janicki-Deverts, Edith Chen, and Karen A. Matthews, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2010.

“The Timing of the Influences of Cumulative Poverty on Children’s Cognitive Ability and Achievement,” Guang Guo, *Social Forces*, 1998.

“Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adult,” Felitti et al., *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 1998.

Optional: “Processes of Cumulative Adversity: Childhood Disadvantage and Increased Risk of Heart Attack Across the Life Course,” Angela M. O’Rand and Jenifer Hamil-Luker, *The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 2005.

Optional: “Brain on stress: How social environment gets under the skin,” Bruce S. McEwen, *PNAS*, 2013.

Week 9: Marital Relationships

“Marital Quality over the Life Course,” Terri L. Orbuch, James S. House, and Richard P. Mero, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1996.

“Marital Characteristics and the Sexual Relationships of U.S. Older Adults: An Analysis of National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project Data,” Samuel Stroope, Michael J. McFarland, and Jeremy E. Uecker, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2014.

Optional: “The Gray Divorce Revolution: Rising Divorce Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults, 1990-2010,” Susan L. Brown and I-Fen Lin, *The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 2012.

Week 10: Caregiving

“Assistance to Aging Parents and Parents-in-Law: Does Lineage Affect Family Allocation Decisions?” Kim Shuey and Melissa A. Hardy, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2003.

“‘But I Am Not Moving’: Residents’ Perspectives on Transitions within a Continuing Care Retirement Community,” Tetyana P. Shippee, *The Gerontologist*, 2009

Optional: “Consequences of Parental Divorce for Adult Children’s Support of their Frail Parents,” I-Fen Lin, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2008.

Optional: “Reimagining Nursing Homes: The Art of the Possible,” Robert L. Kane, *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, 2010.

Week 11: Death and Dying

“Historical and Cultural Variants on the Good Death,” Tony Walter, *British Medical Journal*, 2003.

“A ‘Good Death’ For Whom? Quality of Spouse’s Death and Psychological Distress among Older Widowed Persons,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2003.

“Gender Differences in the Depressive Effect of Widowhood in Later Life,” Gary R. Lee, Alfred DeMaris, Stefoni Bavin, and Rachel Sullivan, *The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 2001.

Optional: "Understanding Suicide Among Older Adults: A review of psychological and sociological theories of suicide," Ian H. Stanley et al., *Aging & Mental Health*, 2016.

Week 12: Retirement

**"Redefining Retirement," Phyllis Moen, *Contexts*, 2010.

"For Some, Retirement is Out of Reach. For Others, Boring." Abby Ellin, *New York Times*, 2014.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/business/when-retirement-seems-impossible-or-just-boring.html>

Video: *Can you Afford to Retire?* <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/retirement/>

Class does not meet in person this week due to annual *Gerontological Society of America* conference. Read articles and watch video on your own. Then, write reflection essay on articles and video.

Week 13: Mental Health

*******CLASS DISCUSSION ON TUESDAY DUE TO THANKSGIVING*******

"Age and Depression," John Mirowsky and Catherine Ross, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1992.

"Role Sequencing: Does Order Matter for Mental Health?" Pamela B. Jackson, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2004.

Optional: "Lifetime Traumas and Mental Health: The Significance of Cumulative Adversity," R. Jay Turner and Donald A. Lloyd, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1995.

Week 14: Public Policy and Practice

"'Beating the Odds' versus 'Changing the Odds': Poverty, resilience, and family policy," Karen Seccombe, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2002.

"Social Security Fix-It Book," Boston College Center for Retirement Research, 2014.

http://crr.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/SS-Fixit_9.4.14_WEB.pdf

"Family Medicine and the Life Course Paradigm." Timothy P. Daaleman and Glen H. Elder, Jr, *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, 2007.

<http://www.jabfm.org/content/20/1/85.full.pdf>

Optional: "Age Integration or Age Conflict as Society Ages?" Anne Foner, *The Gerontologist*, 2000.

Week 15: Students Presentations

Students present their aging project.