Social Work 616: Adulthood and Aging
Winter 2005

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Mon. 11-2 (SEB3003) 
Office Hours: 
Mon. 2:00-4:30 P.M.
Or by appointment

URL: http://ctools.umich.edu/

**Course Description:**

This course will examine psychosocial development and change across the adult lifespan. The focus will be on how various psychological factors influence development and change, as well as the impact of social factors on development and change in family and work roles from adulthood through old age. Special attention will be placed on similarities and differences in adult development and change related to an individual's position in society, including factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

**Course Content:**

This course will address the influence of social and psychological factors on adult development and change. The psychological issues that will be covered include: 1) cognitive development (e.g., memory, problem solving, wisdom, and dementing illnesses such as Alzheimer's Disease); 2) psychological well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, stress, and coping); and 3) adjusting to death, dying, and bereavement. The social factors that will be covered include: 1) demography of aging (e.g., mortality, morbidity, and general health status); 2) family relationships and social support (e.g., intergenerational relationships, grandparenthood, caregiving, and fictive kin); 3) marital status and family structure (e.g., courtship, marriage, cohabitation, divorce, separation, widowhood, remarriage, and single-parent families); 4) work status, such as employment, unemployment, retirement, and the interrelationship between work and family roles; and 5) other social issues, such as migration among the elderly, religion and aging, and violence as well as other traumas.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe and critique major theories of adult development (e.g., life-span, life course).

2. Describe and analyze research on major aspects of psychological functioning across the adult life span and the impact on aging individuals and their families (e.g., normal cognitive development, dementing illnesses such as Alzheimer's Disease, self-esteem, subjective well-being, and stress and coping).
3. Describe the current trends in marital status and family composition (e.g., marriage, divorce, separation, cohabitation, remarriage, reconciliation, widowhood, and single-parent families) and national demographic trends of the aging population, as well as analyze the implications for social work practice and social welfare policies.

4. Describe and analyze research on the role of informal social support networks in caring for aging individuals, including current research on issues such as intergenerational relationships, grandparenthood, and successes and failures of caregiving to frail elders.

5. Identify the major ways in which an individual's position in society affects adult development and change.

Relation of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

- **Multiculturalism and Diversity** will be addressed throughout the course through the analysis of differences and similarities across groups on issues such as intergenerational relationships, caregiving, marital status, coping, and psychological well-being.

- **Social Change and Social Justice** will be addressed by investigating topics, such as the impact of income inequality and ageism on retirement and psychological well-being.

- **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation** will be addressed through discussion of how social workers can help bolster informal social support networks to assist individuals and families and enhance psychological well-being across the adult life span.

- **Behavioral and Social Science Research** will be addressed by the inclusion of theoretical frameworks for the understanding of adult development and change. The findings of research on both psychological and structural factors that influence individual functioning will be emphasized.

Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

Values and ethics will be addressed throughout this course. In particular, this will include ethical conduct in research on psychological issues and social factors related to adulthood and aging, as well as an examination of the inequalities linked to social positions in society. Also included will be content on variations in values related to family and work roles among different subgroups in society.

Class Design and Expectations for Students:

Class sessions will include lectures, small group and class discussions, student presentations, audiovisuals, and guest speakers. These activities will be integrated at critical points in the semester to facilitate understanding of course content. Students are expected to attend all classes, complete assigned readings for each week, participate actively in class discussion, and complete all course requirements on time.

Accommodations / Special Needs:

If you have a disability or impairment that requires an accommodation, please contact the instructor within two weeks after the class starts to discuss what modifications are necessary.

Assignments (see description of assignments for details):

1. Reaction paper (*Tuesdays with Morrie*) (5%)
2. On-line quiz (15%)
3. Mid-term essay (20%)
4. Group project presentation (15%)
5. Term paper (40%)
6. Participation and attendance (5%)

Grading Procedure:
Each written assignment is given a letter grade. Grades will be determined based on the following criteria: (1) grades of A are reserved for student work that shows exceptional individual performance—good mastery of content, application of critical thinking, and clear and concise writing. “A” and “A-” distinguish the degree of superiority. “A+” is rarely given, if ever, and it signifies work that is beyond the expertise students are expected to master. (2) A grade of “B+” denotes performance just above the mastery level; (3) a grade of “B” is given to students who meet the basic requirement of the assignment; (4) a grade of “B-“ is used for student work that is less than adequate, reflecting only moderate grasp of the material. (5) Variations of the C grade are given to work that reflects a minimum grasp of the material and poor organization. Final grade will be determined by adding the grades and scores from all assignments. The comparability of letter grades and scores is shown below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100% - 96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>95% - 91%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>90% - 86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>72% - 70%</td>
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Honor Code and Writing Guide:
Academic integrity should not be taken lightly. In particular, be aware of plagiarism which can result in severe penalties. APA editorial style is required for all written assignments. Refer to “Process of Writing a Research Paper” in Ctools (click Resources) for information about academic integrity and APA style. If you have any questions or comments regarding the class or assignments, please feel free to contact the instructor.

Reading: (All of the following can be accessed from SSW library.)

(2) Recommended book: Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man, and life’s greatest lesson. NY: Doubleday. (For reaction paper, assignment #1 above.)

(3) Required coursepack: An electronic version is accessible from library reserves (can get there from Ctools). Coursepack is available from Excel Coursepacks & Copies.

(4) Supplemental reading: There are four sets of supplemental reading. Each student is assigned a set to read and report to the class. All supplemental readings are electronically accessible via Ctools (click Resources).

*Additional reading may be assigned during the semester.
Course Outline

**WEEK 1. JAN 10**

**Introduction to Course**
- Life-Span development perspective
- Overview of social theories in aging

**Required Reading**


(WEEK 2. JAN 17, MLK Day, no class)

**WEEK 3. JAN 24**

**Demography of Aging**
- Biological Changes
  - Why do we age? Theories
  - Age-related changes

**Due: Reaction Paper**

**Required Reading**


NIA (n.d.). Physiological clues. In *Aging under the microscope: A biological quest* (pp. 30-42).


**Supplemental Reading**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 4. JAN 31</th>
<th>Health and Disease</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life course perspective</td>
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<td>Health disparity</td>
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<td>Health prevention</td>
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<td>Disease management</td>
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**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 5. FEB 7</th>
<th>Cognitive Changes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memory and learning</td>
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<td>Intelligence, creativity, and wisdom</td>
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Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia

**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


**WEEK 6. FEB 14**

**Intimacy and Sexuality**

- Sexuality in old age
- Illness, disability and intimacy
- Sexual orientation

DUE: GROUP PROJECT TITLE

**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


### WEEK 7. FEB 21  Social Relations

- Social networks and social support
- Positive and negative social support
- Social support and well-being

#### Required Reading


#### Supplemental Reading


(WEEK 8. FEB 28, Spring Break, no class)

### WEEK 9. MAR 7  Intergenerational Relations

- Parent-child relationship in adulthood
- Caregiving
- Grandparenthood
DUE: MID-TERM ESSAY

DUE: TERM PAPER TOPIC AND INTERVIEWEE

**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


(2) Scharlach, A., Kaye, L. (1997). Does the provision of formal services lead to families relinquishing their caregiving for relatives? In *Controversial issues in aging*. Boston, Allyn & Bacon.


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**WEEK 10. MAR 14**

**Work and Retirement**

- Paid and nonpaid roles
- Income security
- Productive aging

**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


**WEEK 11. MAR 21**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personality and Mental Health</strong></th>
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<td>➢ Personality: Stability or change?</td>
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<td>➢ Stress, coping, and adaptation</td>
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<td>➢ Mental disorders in later life</td>
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**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


**WEEK 12. MAR 28**

<table>
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<th><strong>Death and Bereavement</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Bereavement</td>
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<td>➢ End-of-life decision making</td>
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<td>➢ Elder suicide</td>
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<td>➢ Hospice care</td>
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**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


**WEEK 13. APR 4**

**Religion, Spirituality, and Meaning**
- Does old age have meaning?
- Successful aging

DUE: TERM PAPER

**Required Reading**


**Supplemental Reading**


**WEEK 14. APR 11**

Group Project Presentation (I)

**WEEK 15. APR 18**

Group Project Presentation (II)
Description of Assignments:

1. Reaction paper (5%) – Due Jan 24 (page limit: 3)

“`Aging is not just decay, you know. It’s growth. It’s more than the negative that you’re going to die, it’s also the positive that you understand you’re going to die, and that you live a better life because of it.”` (Morrie Schwartz)

After getting to know the unique and powerful story of a dying man named Morrie Schwartz through the eyes of Mitch Albom, you’ll no doubt have personal reactions that raise questions about life, aging, and death. Write a reaction paper to the book that demonstrates the ways you have been influenced by this man’s life and philosophy, and how you plan to use these ideas in your personal and professional lives. Possible reflection topics could include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following: What are the most important concepts Morrie has to teach about aging, dependency, and dying? How do these ideas fit or not fit with contemporary US beliefs and attitudes about life and death? In what ways did Morrie’s ideas influence your personal thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about your own aging and views of death?

2. On-line quiz (15%)

Three on-line quiz will be given; each covers about three to four topic areas. The format includes multiple choice and true/false. The instructor will notify you when the exam can be accessed via ctools.

3. Mid-term essay (20%) – Due March 7 (page limit: 4).

The mid-term essay requires you to answer one question from a list of questions given by the instructor. You’ll receive the questions on Feb. 7 and are required to submit the essay by March 7.

3. Group project presentation (15%) – Due April 11 or April 18

The last two weeks of the class are devoted to group project presentations that focus on a minority group and a particular topic. Each presentation should be no more than 30 minutes and will be rated by the audience (10%) and the instructor (5%). All members of a group will receive the same grade. No written report required.

To complete this project successfully, you need to do the following:
(a) Form a group of 4-5 members.
(b) The group should choose a topic (or sub-topic) of shared interest from the syllabus (consult with the instructor if your topic is not in the syllabus), and identify a minority group (minority being broadly defined, e.g., by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, urban/rural residence, migration/refugee status, or, you may justify why the group is minority), which will serve as a lens to explore and analyze your topic.
(d) Your project is to examine the topic with a focus on the minority group you’ve chosen. Some examples are: stress and adaptation of older prisoners, health of Asian American elderly—advantages and disadvantages, caregiving in older gay and lesbian community, social support and well-being of rural elders, sexuality in nursing homes, antecedents and consequences of retirement for low-income elderly, death and dying in Native Americans, religion and well-being among older African Americans, cultural differences in perception,
attitude and behavior in caring for dementia patients, etc.
(e). Your presentation should include the following parts:
- A brief introduction of the minority group.
- What are the issues (questions) that you want to address?
- What does the research literature (or other sources) have to say about these issues? Utilize the literature to elucidate the issues you want to address, or identify gaps in the research in this regard.
- What are the implications for social work (you may pick a micro or macro level implication to explore, or engage a combination of both.)

(g) A good presentation requires preparation. Some suggestions for making it successful are as follows: First, as a group, you should outline the organization of your presentation and allocate time for different parts. Second, individuals responsible for presenting a particular part should identify the main points that they want to cover and have ideas formed before the presentation. Third, to feel comfortable with the materials to be presented, practice before the assigned time and ask for feedback from other group members or classmates. Fourth, consider using audio-visual aides (e.g., power point) to enhance your presentation. The evaluation of your presentation will be based on the content, as well as clarity and style.

Please submit your group project title and a brief outline of your presentation by Feb 14.

5. Term paper (40%) – Due April 4 (page limit: 8)

The term paper is designed to help you integrate theory and real life experience. You should start with a question that is of interest to you. For example, you may ask: What are the biggest gain and loss of aging? How to live to 100 years old and be happy? Why are people well over their retirement age still working? Why do African Americans have a shorter life expectancy than Whites? Who cares for the childless older adults? How to engage older persons in lifestyle change? What services are needed by family caregivers and why caregivers do not use services? Are older people more stubborn and rigid than younger people? Why are minority group members less likely to use hospice care? What is “aging well” and how to age well?

This assignment requires you to answer your question first from a theoretical perspective (i.e., use the literature, particularly theories and previous studies, to help you formulate theoretical propositions), and then from interview with at least one informant. Your paper should include a discussion of the theories, the findings from the interview, the fit and misfit between theories and your empirical findings, and the implications for social work.

Please submit your term paper topic by March 7.

6. Class participation and Attendance (5%)

You are expected to prepare for and participate actively in class. Each student is responsible for one supplemental reading article each week and responding to the instructor’s and students’ questions in class. Your response to the supplemental reading will be used as an important indicator of your participation.
You are required to attend all classes, be on time and stay throughout. Missing more than two classes will result in point deduction. Good attendance will help your final grade, particularly when it falls onto a margin.