THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Social Work 616: Adulthood and Aging
Fall 2001

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Office Hours: Thurs. 1:00 to 3:00 P.M.
Or by Appointment

Coursetool Site:
http://coursetools.ummu.umich.edu/2001/fall/hb/616/001.nsf or
http://coursetools.ummu.umich.edu/mycourses

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), 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, such as 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 mother only 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 and 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, 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 one-parent families), national demographic trends of the aging population, and analyze the implications for social work practice and social welfare policies.

4. Describe and analyze research on the role of informal social support networks and failures in social support in caring for individuals, including current research on issues such as intergenerational relationships, grandparenthood, and 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 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 on 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 members 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 tied to social position 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 a range of activities, lectures, discussions, audiovisuais, and guest speakers. The above activities will be integrated at critical points in the semester to facilitate a better understanding of the 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 of the start of the class to discuss what modifications are necessary.

Assignments:

(1) Six response papers (36%)
You are required to write well-thought-out response papers for 6 of the class sessions. However, you can choose to respond to the required reading or discussion question of the week. If you are writing in response to the required reading, the following areas should be covered:
(i) Summarize the main points, arguments, or findings of the assigned readings.
(ii) Your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the major findings or arguments of the authors. You should demonstrate that you have read more than the introduction and conclusion of the readings.
(iii) Describe the implications for social work that you draw from the readings.
If you are writing in response to the question of the week, the question itself should give you direction. IMPORTANT: The response paper has a maximum limit of three double-spaced pages (can be less), and to be turned in at the end of the class session.

(3) Attendance and class participation (14%)
You are expected to attend, be on time, and stay through all classes. However, I understand that there are situations that are out of your control and you may not be able to attend every class. Therefore, you have the allowance to miss two classes without penalty. Those who attend regularly will receive extra credit in cases of borderline grades at the end of the term.

This course is organized as a seminar. The quality of the class depends greatly on your preparation and participation. Opportunities for participation include asking questions, commenting on reading assignment, contributing to class discussion, and participating in small group discussion. Active class participation will improve your final grade.

(3) Integration paper (50%)
The major project of this course is a paper that integrates the literature and your “fresh observations.” It consists of three parts: literature review, interview, and integration of the literature and interview.

You can choose a topic from the course outline or objectives. My advice is to narrow your topic on a specific question. Questions that involve an examination of diversity issues (e.g., differences between racial/ethnic/cultural groups, gender, people with different socioeconomic status, sexual orientation etc.) are particularly encouraged. Once you have a question, search the literature for evaluative discussion on the topic. Next prepare a proposal of the integration paper, due by Oct. 4 (Session 5). The proposal should include the following:
• Statement of the problem or question
• Definition and description of central concepts
• Annotated bibliography on your research topic. I expect at least 6 citations, 4 should be empirically based research articles. For each article or book, list the complete citation, then briefly summarize the central points – theoretical arguments and/or empirical findings – of the author(s). Limit each summary to one paragraph of no more than 100-125 words. Attach a cover sheet with a title, your name, and date.

Based on what you learned from the literature review, sharpen the focus of the paper and prepare an interview plan. The purpose of the interview is to investigate the relevance of the central concepts drawn from literature. Accordingly, interviewees need to be persons that have knowledge or experience in your area of investigation. The interview plan should include a description of the interviewees and explain why they were chosen. To broaden your learning experience, I suggest that you interview a non-relative. A progress paper of about 6-8 double-spaced pages is due on **Oct. 25 (Session 8)**. The following areas should be covered in this paper:

- Statement of the problem or question. State clearly and concisely the focus of the paper, its relevance and importance.
- Literature review. Summarize the existing literature by outlining gaps and inconsistencies.
- Interview plan. Who are the interviewees? On what basis they are chosen? Describe the progress of the interview arrangement.

The next step is to conduct your interviews. Before setting out for an interview, you should be aware of some basic principles and ethical issues and we will go over these in the class. The final integration paper is due on **Nov. 29 (Session 12)**. I expect a 10-15 pages double-spaced paper with the following sections:

- **INTRODUCTION**: (1) Statement of the problem or question. (2) Justification of selection of problem/question, referencing the literature and/or your interests. (3) A brief identification and description of the various parts of the paper through which the problem will be addressed.
- **LITERATURE REVIEW**: Summarize the existing literature relevant to your topic and research question. Outline the gaps and inconsistencies. You may want to use sub-headings to organize the literature review. Link your literature to the interviews by describing how you expect the interviews to fill literature gaps and clarify inconsistencies.
- **INTERVIEW**: Briefly report your interview. Describe the interviewees, explain why they were chosen, when and where the interview took place, the interview format, and the topics covered.
- **INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSION**: The most important section of the paper is where you integrate the literature with your interview. Specifically, outline the fit and misfit between the literature and your interview. Assess the relevancy of the literature based on the interview information. To what extent did the interview fill gaps and clarify inconsistencies? What do you conclude about your
research question, based on the literature and your “fresh observation?”

- DISCUSSION: Based on your literature review and interview, describe implications for the field of social work. You may also want to comment on the limitations imposed by the literature and the interview, and what would you do differently next time.

Notice that I break up the integration paper assignment into 3 parts, due at different times. The intent is to allow me to provide feedback at each interval so that you can improve the quality of the final paper. Grades will be based on the final integration paper only. However, turning in any part of the assignment late will result in deduction of points. Your final paper will be judged on the following criteria: completeness and thoroughness, organization and clarity, referencing (APA style), originality and creativity. A reference on how to write a research paper is included in your coursepack.

**Honor Code:**
You are encouraged to discuss and share reference materials with other students. However, you are not allowed to copy or paraphrase another student’s work. All the assignments you turn in should be for this class and your own work. Please be aware that plagiarism can result in severe penalties. If you have any questions or comments regarding the class or assignment, please feel free to contact the instructor.

**Readings:**

**Required Coursepack:** Available from Excel Coursepacks & Copies, 1117 South University, (734) 996-1500. A set is also on reserve in SSW Library.

**Recommended Reading:** These readings are recommended but not required. They are not included in the coursepack but are on reserve in SSW Library.

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

## Session 1. Sept. 6

**Introduction to Course**
- Demography of Aging
- Stereotypes and Ageism

### Required Reading


## Session 2. Sept. 13

**Theoretical Issues**
- Diversity in Aging Experience

### Question of the Week

You notice that different ethnic and cultural groups are residing in the community where your senior center is located. However, the majority of participants of your center are Whites. Why do you think it is the case and what strategies would you suggest to increase the number of ethnic minority elders to use your service?

### Required Reading


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 3, SEPT. 20**

School of Social Work 80th Anniversary

Class cancelled to allow you to attend the anniversary workshops. Please register beforehand.

**SESSION 4, SEPT. 27**

**Biological Changes**

- Why Do We Age? Theories
- Age-related changes
- Effects of physical changes

Question of the week: What are the arguments for and against the view that aging itself is a disease? Pick one side of this issue and then try listing the points that can rebut the opposing point of view.

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 5. OCT. 4**

**Cognitive Changes**
- Memory and age
- Intelligence, creativity and wisdom
- Individual difference in rate of change

***INTEGRATION PAPER PROPOSAL DUE***

Guest Speaker: Interviewing older adults or
Video: Older voices: Interviewing older adults (46min)

Question of the week: If we are designing classes or educational programs for older adults, how would you organize the learning activities? How would such an older adult educational program differ from what is offered in schools and colleges today?

**Required Reading**


Recommended Reading


**SESSION 6. OCT. 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health and Disease</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortality and morbidity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influences on health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining and improving health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the health care needs of the elderly</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question of the week: Research has shown that ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged in health. What do you think are the major factors that account for their disadvantages? Choose one particular ethnic group and suggest efforts to reduce or eliminate the health disparity. What obstacles do you foresee in these efforts?

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


**SESSION 7. OCT. 18**  
**Work and Retirement**
- Work over the life course
- The retirement process
- Effects of retirement
- Economic well-being

Video: Retirement and option for living (28 min)

**Question of the week:** Some people believe that if there are not enough jobs to go around for everyone, it makes sense to encourage older people to retire and ‘get out of the way’ to make room for the young. What are the arguments for and against this approach to older people in the labor force? What’s the costs and benefits of encouraging or discouraging early retirement?

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 8. OCT. 25**

Social Relationships

- Framework to study social relationships
- Marital and non-marital lifestyles
- Friendships

***PROGRESS PAPER DUE***

Video: For better or for worse / Late adulthood: The social convoy

Question of the week: Based on research evidence and your observation of family members or people you have known, what effects does social relationship have on their well-being? What type of relationship is more beneficial and what might have negative effects?

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


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**SESSION 9. NOV. 1**

**Kinship**

- Intergenerational relationships
- Caregiving
- Grandparenthood

Video: Complaints of a dutiful daughter (45min)

Question for the week: Many adult children are providing care to their frail parents. If not for the help of these adult children, many frail elders would have to rely on the government for their long term care. Some argue that in order to support these family caregivers, and to give the choice for elders to select their caregivers, the government should pay for the care provided by family members. Are there any valid reason for prohibiting the hiring of family members to perform home care services? Draft a letter to your congressional representative suggesting why you think this practice should be permitted or why you believe such a practice is a mistaken.

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 10. NOV. 8**

**Personality**

- Stability or change?
- Models of adult personality
- Personality and well-being

Question of the week: Based on current research evidence, is your personality likely to change drastically during adulthood or remain relatively stable? Are you likely to experience a “midlife crisis”? Should you expect to become more neurotic and introverted as you grow past middle age? Why might the ideas of midlife crisis and rigid older adults be supported?

**Required Reading**


Recommended Reading


**SESSION 11. NOV. 15**

**Mental Health and Mental Disorder**

- Stress and coping
- Mental disorder

Video: Depression in older adults: The right to feel better (30 min) or
Speaker: Working with older adults with psychiatric problems

Question of the week: Why is it difficult to diagnose and treat depression in older adults? Is an accurate diagnosis of depression important? Why?

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 12. NOV. 29**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Death and Bereavement</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facing death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing bereavement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assisted suicide</td>
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*** FINAL INTEGRATION PAPER DUE ***

Speaker: The role of social worker in terminal care/ Hospice care or Video: The dying person / Death, dying and bereavement

Question of the week: Assume that you have been asked by your employer, the chief of a nursing home, to draft a statement of policy expressing what the nursing home should do in cases where a resident says he or she no longer wants to go on living. In developing your policy statement, be sure to give guidance to doctors, nurses and social workers on how they should act when they come in contact with such a situation.

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**SESSION 13. DEC. 6**

**Semester Summation**

**Meaning of Aging**

Question of the week: Assuming that your are the activities director of a nursing home that prides itself on promoting the quality of life of residents. Write a memorandum for the nursing home director outlying a range of activities that would help enhance the residents’ sense of the meaning of life in the long-term care facility.

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**
