Social Work 616: Adulthood and Aging  
Winter 2002

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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, audiovisuals,
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) Facilitate a class discussion of the readings (10%)
With your assigned group, address how the required readings on theory and research findings relate to diversity issues. Your group should: a) select a diversity focus (e.g., a racial/ethnic/cultural group, gender, economic status, sexual orientation) for discussion; b) develop an annotated bibliography related to this focus to be distributed to class members; c) develop and distribute 2-3 questions that help class members apply the required reading to your diversity focus.

(2) Complete an Application Paper (40%)
Choose one of the questions of the week or develop another question that is of interest to you. Using information from 8 or more of the assigned and supplemental readings, address the question you have chosen in a 6-8 page paper (double spaced). In your bibliography, place one asterisk next to each required reading and two asterisks next to each supplemental reading.

(3) Complete an Integration Paper (50%)
This paper integrates the literature and your “fresh observations” based upon one or more interviews. It consists of three main parts: literature review, interview, and integration of the literature and interview. Choose a topic that is of interest to you (e.g., physical changes, work and retirement, caregiving) and narrow your topic to a specific question. Questions that involve an examination of diversity issues (e.g., differences between racial/ethnic/cultural groups, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientations etc.) are particularly encouraged. Once you have a question, conduct bibliographic research on the topic you have chosen and identify gaps or inconsistencies in the literature that might be addressed by your interview.

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 the literature. Accordingly, the interviewee(s) need to be people who have knowledge or experience in your area of investigation. The interview plan should include a description of the interviewee(s) and explain why they were chosen. The resulting paper should be 10-15 pages double-spaced with the following sections:
INTRODUCTION: (a) Provide a statement of the problem or question. 
(b) Justify the selection of the problem/question, referencing the literature and/or your interests. (c) Provide a brief overview of the various parts of your paper through which the problem will be addressed.

LITERATURE REVIEW: (a) Summarize the existing literature relevant to your topic and research question. (b) Outline the gaps and inconsistencies in the literature. (Note that sub-headings help to organize the literature review). Link your literature to the interview(s) by describing how you expect the interview(s) to address gaps in the literature and clarify inconsistencies.

INTERVIEW: Briefly discuss your interview(s). Describe the interviewee(s), explain 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(s). Specifically, outline the fit and misfit between the literature and your interview(s). Assess the relevancy of the literature based on the interview information. To what extent did the interview(s) fill gaps and clarify inconsistencies? What do you conclude about your research question, based on the literature and your “fresh observation”?

IMPLICATIONS: Based on your literature review and interview(s), provide implications for the field of social work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Readings:

Required Coursepack: Available from Excel Coursepacks & Copies, 1117 South University, (734) 996-1500.

Supplementary Readings: These readings are recommended but not required. They are not included in the coursepack but are available through the School of Social Work Library, the Graduate Library, the Undergraduate Library, or the Taubman Library.
**Course Outline**

**SESSION 1. JAN. 8**

**Introduction to Course**

Demography of Aging

Stereotypes and Ageism

**Required Reading**


**SESSIONS 2 & 3. JAN. 15 & 22**

**Theoretical Issues**

Diversity within the 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 this is the case and what strategies would you suggest to increase the number of ethnic minority elders who use your service?

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


**SESSION 4. JAN. 29**

### 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 summarize the points that oppose your side of the issue.

**Required Reading**


Supplementary Reading


**SESSION 5. FEB. 5**

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

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

Required Reading


Supplementary Reading


**SESSION 6. FEB. 12**

**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 concepts of midlife crisis and rigid older adults be applicable to the aging process?

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


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**


**Supplementary Reading**


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 are the costs and benefits of encouraging or discouraging early retirement?

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


**SESSIONS 9 & 10. MARCH 12 & 19**

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

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

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


**SESSION 11. MARCH 26 **

**Health and Disease**

- Mortality and morbidity
- Influences on health
- Maintaining and improving health
- Meeting the health care needs of the elderly

Question of the week: Research has shown that ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged with respect to 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**


**Supplementary Reading**


**SESSION 12. APRIL 2**

**Kinship**

- Intergenerational relationships
- Caregiving
- Grandparenthood

Question for the week: Some argue that in order to support family caregivers, and to provide greater choice to elders in the selection of their caregivers, the government should pay for the care provided by family members. What are the reasons for encouraging or 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 mistake.

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


SESSION 13. APRIL 9

Death and Bereavement

- Facing death
- Facing bereavement
- Hospice care
- Assisted suicide

Question of the week: Assume that you have been asked by your employer, the director 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, provide guidance to doctors, nurses and social workers on how they should respond when they come in contact with such a situation.

Required Reading


**Supplementary Reading**


**SESSION 14. MARCH 16**

**Semester Summation**

**Meaning of Aging**

Question of the week: Assume that you are the social work director of a nursing home that prides itself on promoting the quality of life of residents. Write a memorandum for the nursing home director outlining a range of programs and services with accompanying rationale that would help enhance the residents’ sense of meaning.

**Required Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**

