

Life Span Developmental Sociology for the Internet
University of Southern California
Andrus Gerontology Center
Thursdays (posted at noon) Fall 2006

Instructor:

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Office hours: Wednesdays 2-3 or by appointment

Required book:

Binstock R. H. & George, L.K. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of aging and the social sciences: Fifth Edition*, San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

The required text is available in the USC Bookstore. You may also order it online from amazon.com

Additional resource (not required): Richlin-Klonsky, J., & Strenski, E. (2001). *Guide to writing sociology papers, 5th edition*. New York: Worth Publishing.

Course Objectives and Organization

The world is undergoing a transformation in societal aging. In almost all countries, life expectancies are increasing rapidly, as is the proportion of the population that is elderly. In this course we examine the uniquely social aspects of old age and aging. We investigate how aging over the adult life course is shaped by our relationships in families, communities, cultural groups, and birth-cohorts, in conjunction with our individual characteristics. We also examine how the aging process is related to social institutions such as the family, the economy, the health care system, and the political system.

The course has several overarching themes. One theme centers on basic research and theory with special attention to theoretical and empirical strategies for assessing and explaining social processes in the later years and over the life-course. A second theme focuses on diversity of the aging experience as structured by gender, race, ethnicity, social class and age cohort. A third theme concerns the meanings of old age and how these meanings are socially constructed based on our mutually agreed upon expectations of people in the later stages of life. A fourth theme revolves around issues of social, cultural, and historical changes that have altered the nature of personal, family, and cohort relationships with the aged, and created challenges for public aging policy.

Course Requirements

Students enrolled for course credit should complete the following: (click on link for details on each assignment)

1. **Critical thinking assignments** are given each week at the end of each topic session. You are required to write on 3 of the 12 topics. Your assignment will consist of applying ideas or themes from relevant assigned readings and/or web-based material that allow you to address the assignment questions. An essential feature of this kind of writing to "compare and contrast." Each paper should be about 2-3 pages (double-spaced). These are due no later than the Wednesday following the online session for that topic. You will email your papers to:

putneyh@usc.edu. Late papers will not be accepted. If you cannot meet your deadline for that week, you will need to select a critical thinking assignment from another week's topic. There are 12 topic areas. To assure that each topic area is covered, please email me as soon as possible your 1st, 2nd and 3rd choice of topics for each of the 3 critical thinking assignments you will complete. I will confirm by return email your three topic areas. Please know that I take your writing and professional development seriously, and I encourage you to do so as well.

(10 points for 3 assignments = 30 points total)

2. **Interview paper:** Interview an older man and an older woman about his/her life today and in the past. A guide for this interview will be provided with details of the assignment. Your paper should be about 5 to 6 pages (double-spaced). You will be required to apply five aspects of the class material to your analysis of each subject's narrative. Again, remember to compare and contrast. Due on October 27.
(20 points)
3. **A paper** (12 to 15 pages, double spaced) reflecting an analysis of one of the 12 topics of the course, with the assigned readings and going beyond. This should be a review of the literature on a special topic related to a course theme. If appropriate, you should comment on your own interest or experience with this issue. Paper is due December 1. You may email the paper (putneyh@usc.edu) or put it in my office mailbox (GER building reception area, first floor).
(30 points)
4. Participation in weekly cyberclasses.
(20 points)

The final grade will be calculated on the basis of 100 points (sum of the above).