UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOCI 4550: SOCIOLOGY OF AGING

Spring 2020

Assistant Professor: Gül Seçkin, Ph.D. Class Date: Tuesday & Thursday

Office: Sycamore Hall 288H Class Time: 2:00 p.m-3:20 p.m.

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Office Hours: T & TR 3:30-5:00 pm or by appointment

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

Aging is an individual experience on many levels (e.g., economic, cultural), but it is also an experience that is heavily influenced by social processes. Sociology of aging emerged, as a field, in response to the need to understand how social change intersects with the aging process. In this course, we will not only examine how aging-related experiences unfold, but will also consider how they are a product of a particular place and time. Students will learn about diverse experiences in aging in several ways, including health disparities, cumulative advantage and disadvantage across the life course, access to government services and programs, and how learning about and living in a diverse society can enrich the lives of both older and younger adults. We will put an emphasis on:

1. The importance of context and how individuals experience context differently as they age,

2. How individuals experience events differently depending on their place in the life course,

3. How lives are linked together through social relationships

This is a course that draws on the rich contributions of several disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology, demography, and public policy) as they help shed light on the origins, scope, and dynamics of the social issues of older adults. Key concepts, current research findings, and important policies concerning older adults will be discussed within socio-historical context. The course will challenge students to consider complex issues of aging and their unique impact on diverse older populations. Social conflict will remain a consistent theme throughout the course, with particular attention given to the stark disparities within older adults - as well as between generations - and their relation to physical health, mental health, and access to other resources (e.g., Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid).

The course will entail a substantial amount of reading. Although an overview of each week's readings is provided in lecture, much instruction will take place in the context of guided discussions, and exchanges focused on the readings. Thus, while I do lecture and cover particular points each class, I often use the question/answer format to draw students into the discussion and to get the points across. Students are expected to read assigned book chapters and contribute to the class discussion. If you are not prepared, discussion is impossible. Come prepared. I do ask questions about particular examples in the text. If students are unprepared you will be unable to respond, and that never makes for a productive teaching/learning environment. In particular, I would like students to come with notes from the reading, including and summaries of the reading. We will also have online classes, which will require to complete online exercises and participate in online discussion forums.

Throughout this course, you will be introduced to a broad spectrum of topics and issues related to aging. This course will entail a substantial amount of reading. You are expected to have completed the readings prior to the start of class. Class sessions will be a combination of lecture and discussion and all students should be prepared to participate. Each week, each student is responsible for bringing to class: (1) a reaction paper on an article of their own choice listed on the course syllabus specific to that week’s topic and (2) two questions, in writing, based on the chapter of your choice.

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Identify ways in which the socio-historical context and personal life experiences shape the perspectives of older adults.

2. Identify the ways in which changing social demographics, emerging social trends and scientific and technological advancements influence the development of social policies and services for older adults.

3. Critically consider the distinct challenges facing many older adults of minority backgrounds

(e.g., racial/ethnic, sexual identity, gender, religious, non-traditional, family, etc.).

4. Identify age-related sources of social conflict, their historical consequences, and current issues resulting from historical trends.

**COUSE BOOKS**

Dannefer, D. & Phillipson, C. (2013). The Handbook of Social Gerontology. Springer: Thousand Oaks, CA.

George, L. & Ferraro, K. (2016). Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences. Academic Press. San Diego, CA.

Settersten, R.A. & Angel, J.L. (2012). Handbook of Sociology of Aging. Springer: New York, N.Y.

Stoller, E. P. & Gibson, R.C. (2000). Worlds of Difference. Pine Forge: Thousand Oaks, CA.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Week 1:January 14 & 16

**Topics: Fundamental and Disciplinary Perspectives on Sociology of Aging**

**Required readings (choose 3):**

1. The Impact of Disasters: Implications for the Well-Being of Older Adults (G&F. pp. 357-374)

2. Responses of the Long-Term Care Systems to Natural Disasters (S& A. pp. 399-411)

3. Global Aging (D&P. pp.117-127)

4. The New Ageing Enterprise (D&P. pp. 483-493)

5. Agency and Social Structure in Ageing and Life Course Research (D&P. pp. 294-302)

6. Aging and the Social Sciences: Progress and Prospects (G&F. pp. 3-22)

Week 2:January 21 & 23

**Topics: Theories and Methods in the Sociology of Aging**

**Required readings (choose 3):**

1. Theoretical Perspectives on the Sociology of Aging (S&A. pp. 17-29)

2. Aging Individuals, Families, and Societies: Micro-Meso-Macro Linkages in the Life Course (S&A. pp. 35-47).

3. Widening the View: Capturing Unobserved Heterogeneity in Studies of Age and the Life Course (pp.51-64).

4. The Study of the Life Course: Implications for Social Gerontology (D&P. pp.3-15)

5. The Sociology of Aging and the Life Course Comes of Age (S&A. pp. 627-632)

6. Biodemography: Adding Biological Insight into Social, Economic, and Psychological Models of Population and Individual Health Change with Age (G&F. pp. 55-75)

**Reaction Paper # 1 is due on January 23.**

Week 3: January 28 & 30

**Topics: Fundamental and Disciplinary Perspectives on Sociology of Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. The Economics of Aging (D&P. pp.33-44)

2. Early Origins of Adult Health and Aging (G&F. pp. 101-122)

3. The Demography of Aging (D&P. pp.61-74)

4. Environmental Perspectives on Ageing (D &P. pp. 111-121)

5. Studying Age across Borders (S&A. pp. 651-654)

6. Religion and Age (D&P. pp. 164-173)

**Reaction Paper # 2 is due on January 30.**

Week 4: February 4 (online class) & 6

**Topics:** The Life Course Perspective: Aging in Individual, Sociocultural, and Historical Contexts

**Required readings (read all):**

1. Racial and Ethnic Inequalities in Health (G&F. pp. 123-141)

2. Preface (S & G)

3. Introduction: Different Worlds in Aging: Gender, Race, and Culture (S&G. pp. 1-15)

4. Advantages of Using the Life Course Framework in Studying Aging (S&G pp. 19-32)

**Reaction Paper # 3 is due on February 6**

Week 5:February 11 & 13

**Topics: Social Relationships and Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Diversity and Family Relations in an Aging Society (S&A. pp. 103-113)

2. Social Relations and Aging (S&A. pp. 145-157)

3. Intergenerational Relations in Later-Life Families (S&A. pp.161-173)

4. The Midlife Financial Squeeze: Intergenerational Transfers of Financial Resources within Aging Families (S&A. pp.179-189).

5. The Demography of Unions among Older Americans, 1980-Present: A Family Change Approach (S&A, pp. 193-208)

6. Loneliness and Ageing: Comparative Perspectives (D&P. pp.317-325)

**Reaction Paper # 4 is due on September 28th**

Week 6: February 18 & 20 (online class)

**Topics: Topics: Social Relationships and Aging**

**Required readings (read all):**

1. Immigration, Aging, and the Life Course (G&F. pp. 143-161)

2. Changing Worlds of Family and Work (S& A. pp. 263-274)

3. Significance of Grandparents to Grandchildren: An International Perspective (D&P. pp. 447-456)

4. The Diversity of American Families (S&G. pp. 203-220)

**February 25: Movie/TV Show/Documentary paper due**

Week 7: March 3 & 5

**Topics: Social Diversity and Inequalities of Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Gender and Aging (S&A. pp. 71-79)

2. Race, Ethnicity, and Aging (S&A. pp. 83-97)

3. Immigration, Aging, and Health in the United States (S&A. pp. 103-113)

4. Age and Inequality in Global Context (D&P. pp.127-135).

5. Gender and Ageing in the Context of Globalization (D&P. pp.137-147).

6. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Ageing: Shattering Myths, Capturing Lives (D&P. pp. 226-235)

**Reaction Paper # 5 is due on March 3**

March 10-12: Spring Break

Week 9: March 17 & 19

**Topics: Ageing, Culture, and Development**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Migration and Age (D&P. pp. 389-402)

2. Global Ageing: Perspectives from Sub-Saharan Africa (D&P. pp.405-414)

3. Population Ageing and Old-Age Insurance in China (D&P. pp. 420-428)

4. Ageing in a Global Context: The Asia-Pacific Region (D&P. pp. 430-443)

5. Age, Self, and Identity in the Global Century (D&P. pp. 251-262)

6. Ageing and Quality of Life in Europe (D&P. pp. 573-583)

**March 19: Take-Home Midterm due**

Week 9:March 24 (online class) & 26

**Topics: Social & Psychological Contexts of Aging**

**Required readings (read all):**

1. Cultural Images of Old Age (S&G. pp. 75-88)

2. Globalization, Social Policy & Ageing: A North American Perspective (D&P. pp. 514-521)

3. Cross-National Trends in Work and Retirement (D&P. pp. 540-548)

4. The Politics of Ageing (D&P. pp. 641-648)

**Reaction Paper # 6 is due on March 26**

Week 10: March 31 & April 2

**Topics: Health and Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Health and Aging: Early Origins, Persistent Inequalities? (S&A. pp.465-472)

2. Mental Health and Aging: A Life-Course Perspective (S&A.pp.477-490)

3. Aging with HIV/AIDS (S&A. pp. 495-508)

4. Obesity: A Sociological Examination (S&A. pp.513-526)

5. Religious Involvement, Health Status, and Mortality Risk (S&A. pp. 533-542).

6. Ageing and Health among Hispanics/Latinos in the Americas (D&P. pp. 150-161)

**Reaction Paper # 7 is due on April 2**

Week 11:April 7 & 9

**Topics: Health Care Arrangements and Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Developing Age-Friendly Communities: New Approaches to Growing Old in Urban Environments (S&A. pp. 279-290)

2. Social Networks in Later Life (G&F. pp.181-201)

3. Population Ageing, Health Systems, and Equity: Shared Challenges for the United States & Canada (S&A. pp.563-578)

4. Long-Term Care: Tradition and Innovation (S&A. pp. 583-597)

5. Caregiving & the Life Course: Connecting the Personal & the Public End-of-Life Issues (S& A. pp. 563-578)

6. Stability, Change, and Complexity in Later Life Families (G&F. pp.205-226)

**Reaction Paper # 8 is due on April 9**

Week 12: April 14 & 16

**Topics: Health and Aging**

**Required readings (Choose 3):**

1. Organization and Financing of Health Care (G&F. pp.397-417)

2. Social Dimensions of Anti-Ageing Science and Medicine. (D&P. pp. 472-480)

3. Religion, Health and Aging (G&F. pp.251-270)

4. Health Inequalities among Older in Developed Countries (G&F. pp.483-501)

5. End of Life Planning and Health Care (G&F. pp.375-394)

6. Epidemiology of Aging (D& P. pp. 75-91)

**April 14: Current Event Paper due**

Week 13:April21 & 23 (online class)

**Topics: Health and Aging**

**Required readings (read all):**

1. Inequalities in Health and Mortality: Gender, Race, & Class (S&G. pp. 269-286)

2. Biosocial Interactions in the Construction of Late-Life Health Status (D&P. pp.329-340)

3. Sociocultural Perspectives on Ageing Bodies (D&P. pp. 357-364)

**Reaction Paper # 9 is due on April 21**

Week 14: April 28 & 30

**Topics: Future of the Sociology of Aging**

**Required readings (read all):**

1. Time and Ageing: Enduring and Emerging Issues (D&P. pp. 367-375)

2. Sociology of Aging in the Decade Ahead (S&A. pp. 661-672)

3. Expanding the Definition of Productivity in Old Age (S&G. pp. 123-141)

4. Technology and Older People (D&P. pp. 607-615)

**Reaction Paper # 10 is due on April 30**

**May 7: Take-Home Final Due by 1:30 p.m.**

**ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS & GRADING**

**I. Attendance & Class Participation** (10 attendances X 10 points = 100 points possible)

In order for you and your fellow classmates to benefit from this course, attendance and active participation are expected. All seminar participants are responsible for all of the assigned readings. Students should read carefully so that they come to class with both insightful comments and questions. The instructor will note your level of participation and you can earn up to 100 points for attending and actively participating in class discussions and activities. One’s participation grade reflects actual participation in discussion, the quality of the questions brought to class, and the individual article summaries brought to class each week. Group discussions will be an opportunity for you to begin connecting theory to the key concepts, and should serve as a foundation for your papers and exams.

**II. Reaction Papers** (10 papers X 25 points = 250 points possible)

In order to encourage critical thinking about the assigned readings and to stimulate classroom discussions, all students are expected to write reaction papers based on assigned readings. These papers are expected to show thought and critical engagement with the readings. Essentially, students will be asked to critically reflect on the course content. These papers are to be two to three pages in length. To facilitate discussion, you are to hand in hard copies of your paper. In your reaction papers, you should evaluate what you have read and respond by discussing the following:

1. What are the important points discussed in the chapter?
2. Can these important points be generalized to individuals of diverse backgrounds with respect to gender, ethnicity, culture, spirituality, or sexual orientation? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. What questions do you feel the reading should have addressed, but did not?
4. Overall, what do you believe are the implications for older adults?
5. What are the primary findings of the article and how did the author(s) come to these conclusions?
6. Given the data and methods, do you agree with the conclusions drawn by the author(s)?
7. Taking all of the above discussion into account, what actions are now called for?
8. If you were to complete a follow-up research project that built on the findings of this article, what would you study and how would you study it?
9. What contributions (if any) does this reading provide that the other required readings for the given week not cover?
10. Propose two questions based on your reading for class discussion.

**III. Current Event Paper** (1 paper X 50 points = 50 points possible)

The issues addressed in this class relate to contemporary social problems faced by older adults, and often appear as headlines in the local and national media. This course requires you to look critically at the ways in which issues impacting older adults are conceptualized, represented and addressed by society. To assist you in this process, you are required to write a current events paper in which you locate an article that relates to elderly people. News articles (*not* op-ed articles) may be selected from one of many state or national newspapers (e.g. New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, LA Times) or one of the following news magazines: Time Magazine, U.S. News & World Report, The Economist or Newsweek). You may use the online searchable archives of these publications to locate an article; however, your news article must be dated from January 1, 2015 up to the present day. The current events paper will be graded as follows:

1. Briefsummary of article. (No longer than one paragraph)

2. How are older adults and/or the issue under consideration portrayed by the author of this article?

3. Thinking back to what you have learned so far in course readings and lecture, what do you feel are the strengths of this article? Weaknesses?

4. How accurate is the author’s portrayal of the issue and why?

5. How does this article contribute to your understanding of the social context in which this issue is situated for older adults?

This paper is to be not less than two and not more than three pages in length (title and reference notincluded in page length). To assist you in your article search, students should consider signing up for the Current Awareness in Aging (CAAR) Report listserv, which sends daily listings of newspaper articles relevant to older adults: CAAR Report: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/cdha/caar.html>

**IV. Movie Paper** (1 paper X 50 points = 50 points possible)

My goal in assigning this paper is to engage the student in thinking sociologically beyond the text and the classroom. I believe it makes sociology more meaningful when students recognize that it is everywhere and appreciate that learning extends well beyond the academic environment. The paper should be 2-3 pages (title and reference notincluded in page length). Cite from your class materials where appropriate. Please use the following as your outline:

1. Summarize the film. (This should be one paragraph. Be succinct.)

2. What was the main theme of the film?

3. How was the particular sociological theme or concept (aging and family, social construction of age, etc.) addressed in the film?

4. Conclude with an evaluation of the film. Did you enjoy it? Why or why not

Make it evident that you identified themes/content from the movie that reflects key concepts from the course. Keep in mind that many of these films may reinforce, as well as question stereotypes or biases related to the experience of aging (sometimes one or the other, sometimes both).

**V. Online Exercises** (5 discussion exercises x 50 points = 250 points + 5 discussion forums X 20 = 100 points. Total 350 points possible).

In order to encourage critical thinking, you are required to respond to discussion questions presented in Stoller & Gibson book. These assignments require you to complete the readings presented as case stories/poems etc. in the book beyond what is listed as weekly readings (sometimes you also need to do additional research). Essentially, you will be asked to critically reflect on the course content. Your answers to discussion questions at the end of each assigned chapter in Stoller book should make up approximately three pages (total, nor per question). You will upload your answers on course blackboard. Each assignment will be 50 points. There will be five assignments, each of which is 50 points. This means that you will have a chance to earn 250 points (5x50). You will also be required to participate in online discussion boards. Each student will be asked (a) to post their answers for two discussions questions from the book and (b) respond to two peers who also posted their answers. You will participate in online discussion forums 5 times, each of which will be 20 points. This means that you will have a chance to earn 100 points (5x20).Because this is a 400 level course, we expect your responses to your peers to be meaningful, substantial and lengthy enough (not like-I agree with you!)

**VI. Exams-Midterm & Final** (Each exam is 100 points X 2 exams = 200 points possible)

There will be two exams during the course of the semester that will test your understanding of course content. A list of essay questions will be distributed to the class a week before the exam date. Students will be given a choice of essay questions to answer. Each answer should be roughly 2-4 pages long. Both exams will consist of essays that ask you to critically evaluate the materials that we have covered in class and in the assigned readings. The exams will cover material from the readings, class lectures, videos, and class discussion. The final examination will not be comprehensive. Detailed instructions about the exams will be provided ahead of time as the semester progresses.

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Missed Assignments**

Success in this class is measured by the degree to which students demonstrate effort, understanding, and critical analysis of the subject matter. All course assignments are to be submitted no later than due date specified on the course syllabus. Students who have a legitimate reason for submitting a late assignment should contact the instructor PRIOR to due date. The instructor reserves the right to determine whether a late assignment can be submitted without point penalty and/or whether you can make-up a missed in-class assignment. Unapproved late assignments will be marked down three points for each day they are late. The University attorney advises faculty members to notify students that the syllabus is not a contract and is therefore subject to change. We will try to adhere to the schedule provided, but it is important to note that changes may be necessary to meet unforeseen needs and events.

**Written Assignments**

Written assignments must be completed in APA format, including the following:

• Cover page including title, name, date submitted, course number, course title

• One-inch margins

• 1.5 spaced

• Times New Roman, 12-point font

**Grading Distribution**

Total points you can earn in this class is 1000. Points you earned throughout the semester will be added and converted to 100 metric system via Blackboard course grade calculation.

A: 90-100; B: 80-89; C: 70-79; D: 60-69; F: 59 or below

I also recommend you to refer to UNT Policies (regarding withdrawals, student accommodation with health challenges, absence due to athletic events, student misconduct, academic dishonesty and the services). Information can be found at the following websites:

<https://disability.unt.edu/>;

<http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>;

<http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/withdrawals>