

Sociology 319: Aging & Society

Fall 2016

General Education: D1

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Introduction and Description

Recently, and for the first time in human history, the older population in America has come to outnumber the population of younger individuals. As a result, aging is impacting every facet of our social lives: our government and its policies, our healthcare and social services systems, employment sectors and the job market, the housing and financial markets, neighborhoods, and families. These “public issues” are what C. Wright Mills argued were inextricably linked to our “private troubles.” A sociological perspective examines problems or experiences that transcend our “private troubles” and incorporates larger social groups and processes to focus on “public issues.” This is the perspective we take in this class to better understand the contemporary aging experience. Of course, aging *is* an individual experience on many levels, but it is also an experience that is largely influenced by larger social institutions and processes. Demographic trends and public policy—forces that are outside the everyday control of individuals—are critical factors influencing the aging experience, often in uneven ways, for everyone in society. This course provides an overview of the significant sociological perspectives, social issues, and social science research pertaining to aging.

General Education Area D (Individual & Society) Requirement

Sociology 319 is an Area D (Individual & Society) course. As noted in the SSU Catalog: “Courses in this area examine the diversity, variety and complexity of human life at every scale from the individual to the global. Courses instill an appreciation of the multiple perspectives and methodologies that social science disciplines offer for understanding the human experience.” Sociology 319 accomplishes this goal through an emphasis on the analysis of aging in everyday life and how our perspectives on aging are formed by social institutions and society.

Learning Objectives

The goals of this course are to:

- Consider the demographic and historical factors that underlie the phenomenon of an “aging” society.
- Examine the major theories of social aging.
- Assess ways that social status characteristics (gender, race, and social class) interact with institutions (politics, economy, family, education, and health care) and social policies to shape the experience of aging and the distribution of social resources by age.
- Describe how the broader societal context affects the nature of family relationships, community involvement, and the experiences of retirement and widowhood among the elderly.
- Examine the current issues in health and social services for care of the elderly.
- Identify the social aspects of the life-long process of aging and the meaning and experience of “old age.”

Readings

There is no required text for the course. However, there are three types of readings which you are responsible for reading each week *prior to lecture*: (1) overview articles on older adults in a general context, (2) short, topical articles from media and major research centers, and (3) short research articles on aging mostly based on qualitative research. Links and files for readings will be posted to Moodle.

Assignments and Evaluation

Evaluation will take place through class participation, multiple choice/short answer midterm and final exams, the final presentation, and an assessment of the life history and social status assignments:

Midterm Exam	20%
Social Status Assignment	20%
Life History Assignment	15%
Final Exam	20%
Presentation	5%
Attendance and Participation	<u>20%</u>
	100%

You must complete all assignments to receive a grade for the course.

NOTE: Late assignments are not accepted. Late papers make record keeping and class logistics difficult; therefore, please be responsible and plan ahead for issues that may arise. Final course grades will follow a standard (+/-) scale and MAY be curved depending on the overall class. Rest assured, any possible curve will benefit you rather than place you at any disadvantage.

Important Information: Check the syllabus **weekly** for corrections, updates, and added information. Detailed and up-to-date information (e.g., instructions for assignments and/or revisions to due dates and discussion topics) will be posted to Moodle. Familiarize yourself with the contents of the Moodle page and consult it often. If you fail to follow these directions, you may not have receive credit for assignments.

This description may be modified.