Course Description:

Designed for School of Education and Social Policy students, Adulthood and Aging provides an introduction to social policy in an aging society and an interdisciplinary study of adult development and aging, incorporating perspectives from life-span developmental psychology, sociology, anthropology, history and other social sciences. The first part of the course explores societal aging, that is, a society where the proportion of older people relative to other age groups is growing rapidly and requires the rethinking of social policies and the reallocation of government resources. The second part focuses on individual aging, with an emphasis on cognitive and personality changes in adulthood and later life and on the subjective experience of being “old.” An appreciation of the common patterns as well as the enormous variation in individual aging, by gender, social class and ethnicity is emphasized. In combination, these two perspectives, societal and individual aging put a “human face” on the societal challenges that will soon face all of our graduates. Critical reading skills, class discussion and focused writing assignments are designed to engage students in the process of anticipating and reflecting on the challenges that they will encounter on a personal and societal level as more people are living longer than ever.

Content Objectives:

1. To introduce students to the contributions of various academic disciplines to our understanding of adult development and aging;

2. To engage students in the process of thinking about social policy issues related to an aging society and to individual aging that will impact their lives as adults;

3. To make students aware of the tremendous variation and diversity in aging and the experience of old age, by gender, social class, ethnicity, and historical cohort;

4. To acquaint students with the research methodologies as well as the major obstacles encountered in conducting research in adult development and aging;

5. To explain why the results of longitudinal and cross-sectional research on adult development vary so greatly, including the impact history, culture, cohort effects and time of testing have on each type of research;

6. To demonstrate familiarity with the research in the areas of cognitive functioning (intelligence, memory, every-day cognitive competence and wisdom), and personality changes (stage theories, trait theories, activity and disengagement perspectives, life review and gerotranscendence) in the second half of life.

Skills Objectives:

1. To demonstrate a command of basic qualitative interviewing technique needed for scholarly research including using an ethics protocol statement for interviews;

2. To prepare and submit a summary of interviews with a young, middle-aged and older adult;
3. To serve as a contributing class member of a research team by discussing one's own and others' experiences in the field, analyzing data gathered in all interviews, summarizing findings, and developing tentative generalizations based on the total sample.

Value Objectives:

1. To sensitize students to their own and others’ ageism at multiple levels (individual, institutional and societal);

2. To reduce the tendency to stereotype and objectify “old people” as a group separate and different from people of younger ages;

3. To explore the anxiety held about growing old, and death and the dying process in modern society.

Course Readings: (Required) Books may be purchased at Norris Bookstore.


3. A course packet containing selected readings in adult development and aging. The packet is purchased in the Student Affairs Office on the first floor of Annenberg Hall.

Course Requirements and Grading:

The written assignments for this course include three papers and three interviews. Attendance is taken and used as a proxy for participation (anyone can miss two classes for free, after that points are deducted). The final grades will be determined on a curve based on the number of points you earned out of a possible total of 140 points. In general, coming to class regularly, doing the readings and turning in your assignments on time will result in an A or B depending on the quality of the work and the improvement shown over the course of the term.

1. Class attendance and informed participation. 15 points

2. Two short (2-3 page) papers taking a position on selected policy controversies in an Aging Society:

   Paper 1: Age or Need Based Entitlements  January 22  15 points
   Paper 2: Memo to hire or retain an older employee  February 12  20 points

3. Interview 1: A 2 page written summary of a discussion/interview held with a young adult in his or her late 20’s or early 30’s on what was expected and unexpected about living this decade. February 17 10 points

4. Interview 2: A 2 page summary of a discussion/interview on “what’s it like to be middle-aged?” with a person between ages 40-60. February 24 15 points

5. Interview 3: A more formal 6-12 page summary of a tape-recorded research interview with a person 75 or older, concluding with reflections on the process of interviewing and aging. Questions and specific guidelines for this interview and paper will be provided. March 9 30 points

Adulthood and Aging SESP 225-303 Winter 2004
6. Final Paper 3: Using the readings in the second half of this course on cognitive functioning, personality development and the subjective experience of being old (including Tuesdays with Morrie, and your personal interview with an older person), support or challenge Lars Tornstam’s concept of gerotranscendence. In other words, do you think Tornstam’s theory has validity, i.e., fits reality? 6-8 pages with references. Hard copy is expected at the beginning of this class held at the official final exam period. No exceptions.

**March 18**  
35 points

**Read this carefully:**

**General guidelines for papers (not interviews):** All papers, whether short or long, should be well organized, with an introductory paragraph that states your general position and the points or ideas you will make in support of your position. Then follow that introductory outline exactly in the body of the paper. The tone of the paper should be academic (not folksy). Remember your name is on the paper so the reader knows that what you write is what you think, believe, or feel. In other words, avoid personal pronouns, “I” and “we” as much as possible.

**Formatting:** All papers, including interviews, should be formatted as follows: double-spaced, size 12 font, and at least one inch margins on all sides. Your first and last names must be in the upper right hand corner on each page along with the page number. Papers without correct headers in the top right corner will not be graded. So you must learn to use your header (and footer) function. All references must be cited in the text in American Psychological Association (APA) approved style and included in the reference list at the end of paper. Don’t obsess about this, just do it by following the format examples in the syllabus, the course packet and the APA guideline sheet that is handed out.

**Warning:** Take a few extra minutes to read in hard copy, not on screen for typos, sentence fragments, misspellings, singular and plural mismatches, repetitiveness and general lack of clarity. If you have a friend that is willing to read it, have s/he do so. Two sets of eyes are always better than one. The spell-check on your computer is helpful but does not replace proof-reading of hard copy. Careless errors in writing and presentation detract from good conceptual work and will be reflected in the grade awarded your paper.

**Note:** If a paper is due on a class date, come to class whether the paper is done or not! You may send the paper to me as an attachment to an e-mail preferably in MicroSoft Word any time until midnight the same day. No points will be deducted if the paper is received on the day it is due regardless of the time. The point is I want you to be in class whether your paper is done or not!

**Tentative Class Schedule**

**Guidelines for Reading:** In the following schedule the expectation is that you will have read the assigned readings below each date for that class.

**Class 1:**  
January 6  
Key concepts, overview of course, expectations.

**Part I: The Aging Society**

**Class 2:**  
January 8  
The Context for Societal Aging

Moody: Prologue (pp. xxi-xxviii)


The Older Population in the United States: March 2002. U.S. Census Bureau


**Class 3:** January 13

An Aging Society: Demographic Trends


**Class 4:** January 15

Should Age or Need be the Basis for Entitlements?

Moody: *Controversy #5: Should Age or Need be the Bases for Entitlements?*

**Class 5:** January 20

Social Security and Medicare as Age-based Entitlements


Class 6: January 22 Discussion on age versus need-based entitlements.

Due: Paper #1: 2-3 page paper on Should Age or Need be the Basis for Entitlements? with a focus on Social Security as an entitlement and the problems connected with it. You have to take one side or the other of the debate and use the readings to support and document your position. The references must be included and noted in APA style. (Note: just copy what I have done for articles. For excerpts from Moody, please cite the specific author, name of article, and pages in Moody, 4th ed.)

Class 7: January 27 Alzheimer’s Dementia: Societal and Individual Problem

Movie: Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter Meet in 3rd floor Learning Studio

Note: The readings below are found at the end of Volume I of the Course Packet.

Alzheimer’s Dementia


Handouts on Dementia, DSM-IV criteria for dementia and Alzheimer’s, Mini-mental examinations, Functional activities questionnaire


Class 8: January 29 Ageism: Positive and Negative


Class 9 February 3 Retirement: When and why?
Moody: *Controversy #7*  *Is Retirement Obsolete?* pp. 251-286


**Part II: The Aging Individual**

**Class 10:  February 5**  *Setting the context for individual aging*

Moody: *Basic Concept III: A Life Course Perspective on Aging.* pp. 289-316.

Moody: *Overview of Cognition*  pp. 359-367.

*Cognitive Functioning: Can old dogs learn new tricks? Why does it matter?*
What is intelligence, how is it measured?  Do people become less intelligent as they age?  Are there distinct stages in intellectual development beyond adolescence?  What factors promote high levels of intellectual functioning in late life?  Are older people “wiser” than younger people?  Do practice effects withstand the aging process (expertise)?  Does creativity decline with age?

**Class 11:  February 10**  *Cognitive functioning across the life span*


Piaget’s Plant Problem:  An exercise in hypothetico-deductive thinking


Moody: *Controversy #9 Does Creativity Decline with Age?*  pp. 368-390.
Class 12: February 12 Discussion/debate on “older workers” and retirement policy

Due Paper #2: Either a 2-3 page memo on whether to hire an older job applicant or a memo to retain an older worker. Assume you are a top level executive and must make a decision about hiring or retaining a person for a specific job who is at least 45 or older. He/she has a good work record and appropriate professional training. However, on the basis of age alone, some of your colleagues argue that this person is “too old to learn new tricks”, that s/he is no longer capable of creative thinking and that should be passed over in favor of a much younger candidates and /or be “retired”. Defend your decision based on the readings and lectures cognitive functioning, retirement policy and ageism. Unlike memos in the “real” world, you are expected to demonstrate your familiarity with the research and so references must be included. I really want the same type of organization as the first paper, strong introduction backed up by several substantive points drawn from the literature. You may choose a specific industry or career, and give the candidate a short pertinent education and work experience resume.

Psycho-social Development: Do we improve with age?

Does personality become fixed in cement by age 30?
Are there predictable personality changes in middle-age?
Is there a mid-life crisis?
Do people become more rigid as they age?

Class 13: February 17 Developmental Theory across the Life-span

Due: A 1-2 page written summary of your interview with a person in his/her late 20’s or early 30’s on what s/he has learned in the past ten years, what was expected and unexpected from his or her point of view about this period of development.


Young Adulthood
Definitions of cohorts/generations


Class 14: February 19 Mid-life


Middle Age and Generativity:


Class 15: February 24 Late Life
Due: A 2-3 page written summary of the interview you had with a middle-aged person (age 45-60). Is the concept of “middle-age” relevant or meaningful?


Class 16: February 26 Gerotranscendence: The Theory


Class 17: March 2 Dying a Good Death: Hospice Care

Movie on hospice care: *To Live Until I Die*. Meet in 3rd Floor Learning Studio.

Class 18: March 4 The Subjective Experience of Being Old (1)


Note: Focus on Mitch’s development as well as Morrie’s.

Class 19: March 9 The Subjective Experience of Being Old (2)

Due: Complete interview package based on a face to face interview with a person 75 or older or someone who is younger but frail (transcript, tape, written summary, ethics protocol).

Note: Start the readings below.

Class 20: March 11 The Subjective Experience of Being Old (3)


Selected Poetry and Reflections:

Wislawa Szymborska  Nothing’s A Gift
Mary Oliver      When Death Comes
Margery William  Excerpt from The Velveteen Rabbit
Paul Tournier    Learning to Grow Old
Stanley Kunitz   Passing Through and Touch Me
William Carlos Williams  Wide Awake, Full of Love
Archibald MacLeish  The Old Grey Couple
Kathleen Raines   Old Age

Last Class/Final Exam Time  Thursday March 18 at 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM. Attendance is mandatory. We will discuss your views on the theory of gerotranscendence. In addition, you will be asked to summarize what you have learned about adulthood and aging as well as make suggestions for improving the course in the future. The final paper must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on this date. No exceptions without prior written approval from the instructor at least two weeks in advance of this date.