This seminar is a graduate-level introduction to the interdisciplinary study of aging across the life course, with a particular focus on sociological contributions to the area. We will examine the life course theoretical perspective and its major tenets, as well as research on different phases of the life course from cradle to grave and on intergenerational linkages. We will consider how age-related issues intersect with socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity. Many substantive areas of sociology that relate to the life course will be included in the readings, such as education, family, social psychology, criminology, work, health, and social stratification. While we will sometimes draw comparisons to other places and times, the main focus of the course is on the contemporary United States context. Readings will include theoretical, empirical, and policy-oriented research. This class focuses on multiple levels of analysis, from individuals to interpersonal interactions to nations. You will spend a substantial amount of time developing your own specific research interests in this field, culminating in a presentation of the relevant literature, a final paper, and a conference-style presentation of your work.

Course Materials: There are 4 required books for this course, all available at the bookstore:

All other readings are available in PDF format on the course website at http://culearn.colorado.edu (right-click on a file and choose Open). You are responsible for completing all readings before the class for which they are assigned.

This class will expose you to a variety of broad issues in aging across the life course. Not every reading represents my own perspective; rather, as a class we will critically evaluate the contributions and shortcomings of the readings. You do not need to focus on memorizing statistics or literature citations when you read; identify major points and think critically instead. For an overview of the empirical work that is going on in specific topics of this field, browsing recent issues of Advances in Life Course Research and various childhood, adolescence, and aging journals is a good starting point.

Course Format: This course requires attendance at each class session. The workload is designed to be spread out fairly consistently across the semester, rather than focused on a couple of high-pressure weeks. You must do the assigned readings on time and keep up with your assigned work. Part of every class will be devoted to lecture and discussion based on readings about the week’s topic. We will sometimes have guest speakers to complement our discussions. Many weeks, another portion of the class will be devoted to student-led discussions about their particular topics of interest.
Course Requirements (totaling 100% of your course grade):

Attendance, participation, and preparation = 10%
Discussion leading on your paper topic = 10%
Final presentation of your research = 10%
6 reading response memos = 20%
Research paper and working draft = 50%

Attendance, participation, and preparation
You should attend each class. Prior to each class, finish the assigned readings and be prepared to contribute questions and critical assessments of the readings' strengths and weaknesses during class. Think about how each reading relates to other readings and ideas from the course. You should be prepared to bring up ideas and findings from the readings you are doing for your research paper when they are relevant to the broader class discussion. Your participation in class discussions is essential, and the quality of comments is at least as important as quantity.

Discussion leading
Sometime between weeks 6 and 13, you will lead a 30-minute discussion of your research paper's topic. The schedule will be set early in the semester. A few days in advance, you should electronically distribute an article related to your topic that has been chosen in consultation with me (either in person or over email is fine) as an optional reading for the rest of the class to read if they are interested in your topic. During class, you will talk informally about what you propose to study, how the article relates to your paper, your critical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the literature you are reading for the paper, and areas related to your topic that need further research. You will lead an interactive class discussion of your topic. This experience should be good, low-key practice for your oral specialty comprehensive exam or your dissertation proposal defense. I do not expect you to become an expert on your topic, but rather to have intellectual curiosity and lead the class in exploring ideas related to it. I will take the first turn, using my research interests to demonstrate the format.

Reading response memos
Early in the semester, you will sign up to write 6 reading response memos (several people will be signed up to turn in these memos for each week of class). These memos should each be about 1 single-spaced page long and should reflect your critical thinking about each of the readings assigned for that week. Beyond making it implicitly clear that you have done the readings and understand their main points, you should bring in your own opinions or analysis. Good strategies include connecting to other readings from the course, making links to current events or sociological phenomena, taking issue with a point that you disagree with or found to be unclear, or expanding on a point you found to be interesting. Either an informal, reading journal-style tone or a more formal tone is fine, but your writing should be proofread and clear.

Research paper and presentation
The major course requirement is an approximately 15-page (for the main text, exclusive of the title page, abstract, references, and any tables, figures, or appendices) research paper. This paper must be related in some way to aging processes and/or the life course perspective, but otherwise you have a lot of freedom in deciding its format. I encourage this freedom so that you can make this paper useful to your progress through your graduate career beyond this course, either by learning an important skill such as critically reviewing literature or writing a research proposal, or by developing a dissertation idea or a research project towards eventual publication. It can be a qualitative or quantitative empirical paper, a meta-analysis or critical review of the literature on your topic, a research project proposal, an analysis of a life course concept, or development of theory. In the first few weeks of the semester, you should talk with me about
your plans. If you choose to collect your own data rather than using secondary sources, then I do not expect you to collect a lot of data—a pilot study would be fine. I am amenable to you combining this assignment with a past or concurrent course paper; consult with me in advance. You will turn in a one-paragraph paper proposal to me at the fourth class meeting, so start thinking right away about topics that interest you and (if applicable) possible sources of data. I am happy to consult with you about this in office hours.

Be aware that any empirical project using human subjects must be approved by CU’s Human Research Committee, and you need to complete the HRC tutorial, even if you are using secondary data (see http://www.colorado.edu/VCResearch/HRC/). If you may want to publish your paper eventually, you should submit your own application at the beginning of the semester. I can mentor you through this process if it is new to you. You will need to give me a hard copy of your HRC approval notice before you can collect or analyze any data. If you do not want to keep the publication option open, then I will request brief information from you and handle the simple approval request for course-related research. Projects not involving empirical data do not need HRC approval.

Between weeks 11 and 13, you will participate in a working group to develop your final paper. I will assign you to a group after I get your paper proposal. Each week one group member will turn in their working draft. Email your writing assignment to me and your group members by noon on Monday, three days before class. The other group members should come to class prepared to give verbal or written feedback.

During the last week of class, all students will summarize their completed projects in a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation. It should be in the style of a conference presentation (I will provide an example). You will also be responsible for providing informal written feedback on another student presentation. The whole class will spend 5 minutes giving feedback for each presentation, and you will have time to incorporate comments into your final paper before turning it in on Tuesday, December 14 by 5 p.m. (electronic copy emailed to me; make sure to get an email confirmation that I received it before considering it submitted).

Course Policies:

My responsibilities: I hope you will enjoy and learn from this class. I believe that my job is not just to teach you about aging across the life course, but also to help you acquire critical skills for finishing your Ph.D. It is important to me that you feel comfortable with the class environment and requirements, and I benefit from student feedback. If you become concerned about your performance in class or about the way I am handling anything, please see me as soon as possible.

Office hours/getting help: My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10-11:30 a.m. in Ketchum Room 210. Students who email me beforehand to set up an appointment during office hours will be given priority. I will also check course-related emails once each business day. I am happy to talk with you about issues related to sociology and graduate school that are unrelated to course material.

Email/web page: I will communicate important course information through the email address you have listed through the university. Make sure you check this email account regularly. The course web page is on CULearn, accessed at http://culearn.colorado.edu. Log in at this page and if needed, add SOCY 7171 to your list of courses. The syllabus, readings, schedule, handouts, examples, grades, and other information will be posted on the website. The most recent course information will be available here, as information that is on this syllabus may be changed over the course of the semester. Email updates will be sent out when important material is posted on the website. You must register on CULearn so that this important information can reach you.
Classroom behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to disciplinary measures. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities (a major part of this class). Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at: http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at: http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

Honor code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council and those students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member involved and non-academic sanctions given by the Honor Code Council (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Please refer to www.colorado.edu/honorcode to view the specific guidelines. If you have any questions related to this policy, please contact the Honor Code Council at honor@colorado.edu. Honor code violations will result in a 0 for the assignment at a minimum and may also result in failing this course, probation, or expulsion.

Discrimination and harassment: The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh.

Religious holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, you should notify me at least two weeks ahead of time to request special accommodation if you have a conflict. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

Students with disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter to me from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).
PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

**Note:** Reading assignments and scheduled items are subject to change. Reading assignments are available at culearn.colorado.edu except for the four books. Please complete all assignments before the listed class, except for the first week’s readings. See the end of the syllabus for supplemental readings that are not required for this class, but are included so that you can read more in-depth on topics that interest you and for your future reference.

WEEK 1
Aug. 26 Course introduction; constructions of age; the life course
What are the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of age?
How do they differ in different societies and subgroups of the U.S. population?
How can age be studied at the macro and micro levels?


WEEK 2
Sep. 2 The life course perspective
How does the life course perspective differ from the socialization perspective?
How do you think what we know about aging and the life course could be biased by specific historical events in the lives of the cohorts analyzed to develop the life course perspective?
Is stress the main mechanism through which roles, transitions, and historical events affect our lives—what else matters?


WEEK 3
Sep. 9 Life course principles: The importance of time and place
How do historical events affect different cohorts and people with different experiences in different ways?
In what ways are family adaptations a primary link between economic hardship and individuals?
How does place matter for the life course?


WEEK 4
Sep. 16 Life course principles: Life transitions and transition norms
**Turn in hard copy of one-paragraph paper proposal**
Has modern life made the life course more standardized, or less?
What are age norms, and how much do they shape individuals' behavior?
How bounded and clear are life events and transitions, and what are the implications of thinking of them as fixed or fluid?


**WEEK 5**

**Sep. 23**

Life course principles: Linked lives

*Guest speaker:* Kelly Knight on partner selection

Stef demonstrates discussion leading

*How do partners select and influence each other at various stages in the life course?*

*How do social norms shape the linking of lives?*

*How much, and in what ways, does the principle of linked lives apply to weak ties between individuals?*


**WEEK 6**

**Sep. 30**

Life course principles: Social structure and human agency

1 student-led discussion

*How much do governments affect their citizens’ life courses?*

*How can we better understand human agency, which is often treated by sociologists as a “black box” or random error?*

*To what extent can individuals exercise agency given the structural constraints they face?*


WEEK 7
Oct. 7 Childhood
Guest speaker: Paula Fomby, CU-Denver, on instability in childhood
1 student-led discussion
How and why does social class shape children’s everyday lives and their interactions with adults and other children?
How are children’s educational experiences and outcomes shaped by the “concerted cultivation” and “natural growth” parenting styles?
What are the long-term life course consequences of growing up in families with different styles of raising children?


WEEK 8
Oct. 14 Adolescence
Guest speaker: Richard Jessor on problem behavior in adolescence
1 student-led discussion
How do risk and protective factors play out in adolescents’ lives, and how do they interact?
How do various spheres of influence (families, school, peers) interact to affect adolescents’ lives?
What factors shape adolescents’ early or late life transitions, and what are their consequences?


WEEK 9
Oct. 21 The transition to adulthood
Guest speaker (postponed by one week): Amy Wilkins on race in college
1 student-led discussion
Has a distinct life phase of “emerging adulthood” developed in U.S. society?
How do we know when an individual has reached adulthood?
How can we best define a successful transition to adulthood?


WEEK 10
Oct. 28 Middle adulthood
1 student-led discussion
Why is marriage so symbolically important to and prevalent among Americans?
What are the life course and intergenerational implications of American adults’ high rates of partnering and repartnering, job change, and geographic mobility?
How do adults exercise agency in shaping their own lives and in subjectively reinterpreting their life situations to better conform to their aspirations and goals?


**WEEK 11**
Nov. 4 Older adulthood
1 student-led discussion
Working groups: 1 member presents working draft
*How age-segregated or age-integrated is the adult life course in our society, and why?*
*When does older adulthood begin, and what roles, phases, and transitions does it contain?*
*How should we define successful aging?*

O’Rand, Angela and John C. Henretta. 1999. *Age and Inequality.* Westview. Chapters 1 and 3 only.

**WEEK 12**
Nov. 11 Aging and social policy
1 student-led discussion
Working groups: 1 member presents working draft
*What policies seem promising for dealing with the challenges of an aging population in the U.S., and why?*
*How could policies shape the process of retirement to create a successful transition and secure financial prospects in retirement?*
*If we manage to slow the process of human aging and extend life expectancies, what will the implications be for our society?*

O’Rand, Angela and John C. Henretta. 1999. *Age and Inequality.* Westview. Chapters 4 and 7 only.

**WEEK 13**
Nov. 18 Overarching lives
1 student-led discussion
Working groups: 1 member presents working draft
Why do earlier life conditions matter so much for later life outcomes?
How is the accumulation of advantage across the life course similar to or distinct from the accumulation of disadvantage?
Which “turning points” do you think are particularly important for understanding an individual’s life course, and how could we best study turning points and their consequences?


WEEK 14 FALL BREAK—NO CLASSES

WEEK 15

Dec. 2  Intergenerational linkages
Please complete FCQs online

Through what pathways are social (dis)advantage and health passed on to the next generation?
Under what circumstances are intergenerational linkages minimized or disrupted?
What kinds of policies and interventions can work to reduce intergenerational continuity in negative outcomes?

Thornberry, Terence P. 2009. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree (Or does it?): Intergenerational patterns of antisocial behavior. *Criminology* 47:297-325.
Mollborn, Stefanie and Jeff A. Dennis. “Explaining the Development and Health of Young Children with Young Parents.” Submitted to *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

WEEK 16

Dec. 9  Student presentations and feedback
Conclusions
No assigned readings

FINAL PAPER DUE  TUESDAY, DEC. 14, 5:00 P.M. (email electronic copy)
SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

This list is intended to help you identify helpful readings if you want to explore a topic in further depth beyond the assigned readings for that week. You may want to keep it for future reference.

BOOKS AND JOURNALS


ARTICLES, BY WEEK

**WEEK 2 (Life course perspective)**


**WEEK 3 (Time and place)**


WEEK 4 (Transitions and transition norms)

WEEK 5 (Linked lives)

WEEK 6 (Social/institutional contexts, human agency)

WEEK 7 (Childhood)
WEEK 8 (Adolescence)

WEEK 9 (Transition to adulthood)

WEEK 10 (Middle adulthood)

WEEK 11 (Older adulthood)
December 2009 issue of Sexuality Research and Social Policy, devoted to research on sexuality and aging.
WEEK 12 (Aging and social policy)

WEEK 13 (Overarching lives)

WEEK 15 (Intergenerational linkages)