COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course considers the dynamic interplay between human lives and social institutions as both change over time. "Time" operates on four levels: as historical events, as role trajectories, as changing social norms, and as continuity and change in individual development.

The goal is to promote understanding of the changing nature of life-course development, roles and relationships of men and women over the latter half of the 20th century as well as projections of life-course patterns for the 21st century. The life course perspective addresses the dynamic interface between lives and social structures over time.

In this course we will examine the life course in terms of theory and research on institutional patterning (such as socially structured expectations, durations, and transitions), individual experiences (roles, behavior and relationships), and personality development (identity, personal control and beliefs). Special attention will be given to the gendered nature of life course processes.

We will focus on continuity and change in (1) institutional patterning in socially structured expectations and durations in experience, events, and resources (as well as variability by social class, gender, and ethnicity); and (2) adult personality development (identity and personal control) over the life span. Students will be encouraged to track their own content area or interests across the life course and/or across generations/cohorts.

Each week we will examine the concepts, theories, methods, and assumptions presented in or underlying the readings. In the empirically-based readings, we will focus on how the authors operationalize and test their hypotheses applying a life course formulation to our analysis of each study.

COURSE MATERIALS:


Course Pack of Readings (available at Campus Book Store)

Additional readings as assigned
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Weekly Critical Review Essays (40 percent). To facilitate classroom discussions, we require all students to write critical reviews of at least two of the assigned readings each week. These (maximum) 1-page (double-spaced) memos on each reading are due by noon Monday. Your memo should provide:

- A brief summary of the central points, arguments, or findings presented by the author of the assigned reading; and/or
- A brief evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the major findings or arguments of the authors. Students must demonstrate that they have read more than the introduction and conclusion of the assigned readings.

Class Participation (10 percent). Each week one-two students will serve as discussion leaders. Discussion leaders are responsible for asking questions, providing commentary on the assigned reading, and/or presenting additional material related to the topic of the week.

Proposal for Conceptual Paper or Empirical Research Applying Life Course Perspective (10 percent). Students will begin to analyze existing research on a narrowly defined topic to develop an understanding of how the topic might better reflect a life course approach. The preliminary paper proposal must be organized into four sections, drawing on at least 3 empirical paper studies.

- Statement of the issue/or question
- Existing definitions of a central concept (3)
- Existing theoretical models
- Existing methodologies

Attach a cover sheet with a title, your name, course number, and date. Excluding the cover sheet, this should consist of 2-3 type-written double-spaced pages of text or 2-3 charts summarizing the issue.

Annotated Research Bibliography (5 percent). Before completing their paper we require students to read and think about their selected topic of research. To this end, students must submit an annotated bibliography on their narrowly defined research topic (typically 8-10 citations).

- For each article or book, list the complete citation. Then briefly summarize the central points - theoretical arguments and/or empirical findings - of the author. Limit each summary to one paragraph of no more than 100-125 words.

Attach a cover sheet with a title, your name, course number, and date.

Conceptual Paper or Empirical Study Applying Life Course Approach (25 percent) Students should draw on course material as well as their readings (on their own topic). Excluding cover page, references and tables, we expect a 10-page paper (double-spaced, 1” margins, 10-12 pt type) with the following sections:

- Statement of the issue. Introduce the reader to your topic. State clearly and concisely the general focus of the paper, its relevance and importance.
- Literature review. Summarize the existing literature that you annotated above, including the gaps, and how it does or does not relate to a life course approach.
A Life Course model. Place the findings from previous research in a life course framework.

Methodology. To fully attempt a life course approach, describe the necessary data, how you would measure the variables, and how hypotheses should be tested.

These papers are due at the beginning of the last class on December 1st.

Research Project Presentation (5 percent) In the last three classes students will present their papers. Each student should prepare a 10-minute (maximum) presentation suitable for a professional meeting, with handouts or transparencies for overhead projector.

COURSE GRADES:

The relative weight of each assignment is the following:

Critical review essays - 40 percent  
Class participation - 5 percent  
Discussion leader - 10 percent  
Preliminary paper proposal - 10 percent  
Annotated research bibliography - 5 percent  
Conceptual paper - 25 percent  
Paper presentation - 5 percent

COURSE POLICIES

Honor Code. we encourage student to discuss course materials and projects outside of class time. This is part of professional development. However, you are not allowed to copy or paraphrase another student's work.

Attendance. we expect students to regularly attend class. Excessive absences will reduce your grade. You are responsible for all announcements made during class, whether or not you are present.

Written assignments. Except for the weekly memos on your reading, all written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the scheduled date. Late assignments will not be accepted unless there is a verifiable and legitimate reason that is discussed promptly (i.e., within 24 hours).
I. THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE


Recommended:


II. THE SOCIOLOGY OF AGE AND LIFE STAGE


Recommended:


III. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS


Recommended:


IV. ISSUES OF DATA, DESIGN, AND ANALYSIS


Recommended:


V. PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITIONS AND TRAJECTORIES


Recommended:


VI. SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES


Recommended:


VII. STRATEGIES FOR ANALYSIS


Recommended:


THE CHANGING LIFE COURSE
HD FS 655/Fall, 1998

BOOKS


