

SC 096: Aging and Society Fall 2009

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 12:00-12:50 pm
102 Carney Hall

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Office hours: Mondays 1:00-3:00 pm or by appointment

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About the Course

"Age doesn't matter unless you're a cheese," quipped actress Billie Burke (the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*). Nevertheless, age does matter within societies. This class will cover specific topics in four general areas of sociological study: roles and relationships (e.g., within the family), inequalities (e.g., ageism), institutions (e.g., health care), and social change (e.g., the aging of the population). By the end of the course, you will have acquired a new approach to thinking about how you and others age in the social world and the ways in which age is portrayed in the media.

Aging and Society as a Core Course

Core courses at Boston College: (a) help students to ask and answer the "perennial questions," (b) present culturally diverse material, (c) present an historical view of the subject, (d) demonstrate the methodology of the discipline, (e) include a significant writing component, and (f) challenge students to create a personal philosophy of life.

Aging and Society addresses longstanding questions such as "How does a society enable and constrain the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people within it?" "How do individuals change a society?" and "How should society be structured?" In order to think about these questions, students must compare and contrast cultures both contemporary and historical to see how they have met (or failed to meet) the needs of persons of all ages. Students will learn about methodology so they have a scholarly basis from which they can evaluate concepts such as "needs," and they will record their critical thinking as researchers do. Finally, students will develop a perspective on aging, both in their own lives ("What would I need to do to feel I have lived a good life?") and the lives of others ("What can I do to improve the quality of life of older persons?").

Academic Honesty

Your work must be *your* words and ideas. When writing papers, use quotation marks around someone else's exact words and identify whose words they are. If you come across a good idea, by all means use it in your writing, but be sure to acknowledge whose idea it is. When taking exams, do not copy another student's answers, and do not allow another student to copy yours. Failure to comply will result in (a) automatic failure of the assignment, and (b) a report to the Dean and the Committee on Academic Integrity. For further information, please review the College's policies on academic integrity here: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity>

Required Textbook

Quadagno, Jill. 2008. *Aging and the Life Course*. 4th ed. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill. (ISBN 9780073528168)

Other Required Reading

ONE of:

- Bayley, John. 1999. *Elegy for Iris*. New York: Picador. (ISBN 0312253826)
- Delany, Sarah L. and A. Elizabeth Delany. 1993. *Having Our Say*. New York: Random House. (ISBN 0440220424) and Delany, Sarah L. 1997. *On My Own at 107*. New York: Harper Collins. (ISBN 0062514865)
- Ellis, Neenah. 2002. *If I Live To Be 100*. New York: Crown Publishers. (ISBN 0609608428)
- Juska, Jane. 2003. *A Round-Heeled Woman*. New York: Villard. (ISBN 0812967879)
- Sarton, May. 1973. *As We Are Now*. New York: W. W. Norton. (ISBN 9780393309577)
- Winakur, Jerald. 2009. *Memory Lessons*. New York: Hyperion. (ISBN 9781401303020)

Assessment**Grading scale**

A+	none at Boston College	A	93 – 100%	A-	90 – 92%
B+	87 – 89%	B	83 – 86%	B-	80 – 82%
C+	77 – 79%	C	73 – 76%	C-	70 – 72%
D+	67 – 69%	D	63 – 66%	D-	60 – 62%
F	below 60%				

Task	Due date	Percentage of grade
Life history interview	October 2	20%
Aging in the news	October 19	20%
Midterm exam	October 19	20%
Final exam	December 11	20%
Book review	December 11	20%

Please find further information about each task below.

There will be opportunities for extra credit during the semester.

Submitting Papers

On time: Bring a hard copy of your paper to class on the date it is due. If for some reason this is not possible (e.g., cannot attend class that day; printer failure) I will accept papers in .pdf form via e-mail until 11:59 pm.

Late: Papers submitted after 11:59 pm on the due date are late and will lose a letter grade a day. That is, a paper submitted on time is worth, at best, an A. A paper submitted between midnight and 11:59 pm of the day following the due date is worth, at best, a B. If you are submitting work late but wish to avoid the late penalty, you must make arrangements with me in advance, or you must provide proof of extenuating circumstances (e.g., doctor's note, funeral program).

If you cannot give me your work in person, you should submit it in .pdf form via e-mail so that there is a timestamp on it. Otherwise, the paper counts as "submitted" at the time I receive it: If you slid it under my office door at 11 pm on the due date but I do not find it until I arrive at my office the next morning, it's late. If you e-mail me a paper, I will respond confirming that I received it, can open the attached file, and am grading it. If you haven't received confirmation, then I do not have your paper.

Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading
1	September 9	Introduction to the course	pp. 2-10, 15-21
	September 11	Ways of learning about aging (Gerontological methods)	pp. 53-56
2	September 14	Theories of aging	Chapter 2
	September 16	Theories of aging <i>cont'd</i>	
	September 18	Theories of aging <i>cont'd</i>	
3	September 21	Aging now and in history (Demographic methods)	Chapters 4 and 5
	September 23	Aging now and in history (Demographic methods) <i>cont'd</i>	
	September 25	Aging now and in history (Demographic methods) <i>cont'd</i>	
4	September 28	Age stratification and discrimination	pp. 10-15, 56-60
	September 30	Age stratification and discrimination <i>cont'd</i>	
	October 2	Age stratification and discrimination <i>cont'd</i> , LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW DUE	

5	October 5	Aging with family and friends	Chapter 8
	October 7	Aging with family and friends <i>cont'd</i>	
	October 9	Aging with family and friends <i>cont'd</i>	
6	October 12	NO CLASS: Columbus Day	
	October 14	Families giving care at home	pp. 229-241, 338-346
	October 16	Families giving care at home <i>cont'd</i>	
7	October 19	MIDTERM EXAM, AGING IN THE NEWS DUE	
	October 21	Receiving care outside the home	pp. 241-249, 334-338
	October 23	Receiving care outside the home <i>cont'd</i>	
8	October 26	The biology and psychology of health in later life	Chapter 6 and pp. 149-164
	October 28	The biology and psychology of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
	October 30	The biology and psychology of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
9	November 2	The sociology of health in later life	Chapter 13
	November 4	The sociology of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
	November 6	The sociology of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
10	November 9	The economics of health in later life	Chapter 11
	November 11	The economics of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
	November 13	The economics of health in later life <i>cont'd</i>	
11	November 16	Work, retirement, and poverty	Chapters 12 and 16
	November 18	Work, retirement, and poverty <i>cont'd</i>	
	November 20	Work, retirement, and poverty <i>cont'd</i>	
12	November 23	Work, retirement, and poverty <i>cont'd</i>	

	November 25	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holidays	
	November 27	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holidays	
13	November 30	Aging in the future	Chapters 15 and 17
	December 2	Aging in the future <i>cont'd</i>	
	December 4	Aging in the future <i>cont'd</i>	
14	December 7	Aging in the future <i>cont'd</i>	
	December 9	Aging well	None
	December 11	FINAL EXAM, BOOK REVIEW DUE	

Assessment, continued

We'll discuss all of these things in much greater detail as they approach. This information is for you to get a feeling for what we'll be doing this semester.

Exams: Your two exam scores will determine 40% of your grade. The exams will be half multiple choice, half essay, and will cover material from both the textbook and class time. The first exam will cover material from the first half of the course; the second exam will cover material from the second half of the course *only*. You will receive a study guide for both exams.

Papers: Scores on three writing assignments will determine the other 60% of your grade. Type papers (double-spaced, spell-checked, 1 inch margins on all sides, 12 point font). You need not include a cover page, but be sure that your name is on the paper—preferably on all pages in case pages get separated.

(1) Life History Interview. Obtain permission to interview someone aged 65 or older. I recommend interviewing in person, but you can do your interview over the phone if you wish. Take good notes so that you can write your paper. You can audio or videotape the interview if you have the equipment to do so, but make sure ahead of time that it is acceptable to the person you are interviewing. Respect your interviewee's right to refuse to answer any question.

Your interview should cover three themes: (i) Personal life events (e.g., childhood, education, work, marriage, children/grandchildren), (ii) Societal life events (e.g., war experience, inventions/technological changes, cultural trends, political events), and (iii) Life review (e.g., what would your interviewee do differently if s/he could? What is s/he most proud of? What advice does s/he have for a person who is young today?) To get you started, I will provide a list of possible questions you could ask.

After you've completed your interview, write a five page paper:

- (a) Describing your interviewee. Relevant information may include their age; race/ethnicity; religion; place of birth; educational attainment; main occupation; marital status; number of children.

- (b) Detailing your interviewee's responses regarding *personal life events* (use quotation marks where necessary) and your analysis (drawn from what you've learned in class and from the readings) of his or her responses.
- (c) Detailing your interviewee's responses regarding *societal life events* (use quotation marks where necessary) and your analysis (drawn from what you've learned in class and from the readings) of his or her responses.
- (d) Detailing your interviewee's responses regarding *life review* (use quotation marks where necessary) and your analysis (drawn from what you've learned in class and from the readings) of his or her responses.

(2) Aging in the News. Find an article about an aging-related issue in a reputable newspaper (e.g., Boston Globe, Wall Street Journal, "The New Old Age" blog on the New York Times website) and write a three page paper:

- (a) briefly summarizing the article's main points,
- (b) discussing how the article supports or counters the material we covered in class and/or the material in your textbook (you may need to look ahead in the text, if you're interested in a topic we haven't yet covered),
- (c) giving your opinions on the article's argument (an editorial might work well for this assignment, but do not use a letter to the editor as it will be too short).

Either turn in either a hard copy of the article or include the URL where I can find it in your paper. (The text of the article is not part of your three pages.)

(3) Book Review. Read one of the books listed under "Other Required Reading" on the first page of the syllabus, and write a five page paper answering:

- (a) What did the book have to say about aging?
- (b) What were your personal reactions to the book's messages about aging?
- (c) How did the book's messages about aging support or counter the material we covered in class and/or the material in your textbook?

An "A" paper will:

- (1) Include all sections of the assignment. The section on supporting and/or countering course and text material is especially thorough.
- (2) Use specific, rather than vague, language. For example: "Many young adults in the United States believe" rather than "Many people believe."
- (3) Indicate that the author fully understands the topic. In other words, the author has written to an audience who is bright but uneducated on the topic of aging.
- (4) Support opinions that are presented as factual with examples or sources. For example: "I hate Valentine's Day" is fine. "I, like most people in the United States, hate Valentine's Day" is a statement that needs to be supported with evidence.
- (5) Provide a sociological analysis, rather than (or in addition to) an analysis that is psychological, economic, etc. Characteristics of a sociological analysis:
 - (a) Uses the sociological imagination/perspective (if you've taken Introduction to Sociology, you know what this means. If you haven't, don't worry about it.)
 - (b) Addresses issues of power: Who has it? Who doesn't? Who wants it? Why?
 - (c) Evaluates societal-level explanations ("He lost his job because of the recession") in addition to individual-level explanations ("He lost his job because he wasn't productive enough.")
 - (d) Attends to factors that are contextual, or make individuals or groups different from one another, rather than factors that are universal, or common to all humans.