SYP 6933: Sociology of Successful Aging

Fall Semester, 2017

Class Time: Thurs, 9:30–12:00

Instructor: Dawn C. Carr

Room: Bellamy 519

Office: Pepper Center, 2nd Floor

Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

There has never been a better time in history to learn about aging. Research on aging uses multiple disciplinary perspectives to understand the factors that impact aging processes from birth to death. Worldwide, populations are getting much older, and in the United States there are now more people over 60 than under age 15, with the proportion of older people growing at the fastest rate in history. This means that there are significant challenges that lie ahead if we seek to help people arrive in old age healthy and have the ability to maintain a high quality of life.

The purpose of this course is to explore the factors that explain and facilitate outcomes related to aging well. Specifically, in this course, we will learn about:

1) theories related to aging successfully
2) the social construction of age-related norms and expectations
3) social policies/politics that influence these norms and expectations
4) inequality in the processes and outcomes associated with aging
5) health behaviors associated with successful aging

Course Requirements:

All students are expected to have completed the assigned readings and assignments on time, and be prepared to actively participate in class discussion. Class attendance is required. Missing a single class is equivalent to missing a full week of material.

In this course, students will be assessed in four ways:

- **The first assignment** will explore the need for new or a change to existing policies/programs/interventions that enhance opportunities for citizens to age more successfully. Students will argue for a new research project that will help inform the development of a solution that can improve the lives of older people. These proposals will be presented to the class. Students will use the feedback they receive from their peers to guide the goals of their research proposal. All students will provide presenters with questions/comments that can help guide them to improve their proposals. *The verbal presentation will count as 15% of the course grade, and the written feedback will count as 10% of the course grade.*

- **The second assignment** will involve development of a research proposal in which students are expected to explain what research is needed, why it is needed, what we know that leads us to believe this research is needed, and what study you can and will do to inform and address this need. Students are expected to explain the problem, provide rationale that is
supported by theory, describe the policy/practice implications, and explain how the study might enhance positive outcomes in later life. Students will share drafts of their papers with their colleagues, provide thoughtful feedback to their colleagues, and integrate the feedback they receive prior to submission of their final papers. The paper will count as 40% of the course grade, with 5% associated with provision of feedback to peers, 5% related to integration of feedback from peers, and 30% associated with the paper. Students will include a written copy of the feedback that they received from their peer(s), a document explaining their response to the feedback and how they integrated feedback into their paper, and their final paper.

- **The third assignment** includes leading one class discussion over the course of the semester. Students will choose, during the first class meeting, a class that they would like to lead, and they will be expected to guide discussions related to the readings, and provide a brief overview of the key ideas within each reading for that class period that you will turn in following the class. This assignment will count toward 20% of the course grade.

- **Class participation and engagement** will count toward 15% of the course grade. This grade will be based on uploading at least one questions/comment related to each reading and an overview question/comment across the combination of readings onto Canvas no later than 24 hours prior to the class meeting, and contributions made during the class discussions. It is expected that all students will participate, be respectful of their colleagues’ comments/ideas, and seek to support equal contributions among class members.

**Course Expectations**

As a seminar, class discussions peer-to-peer are at the centerpiece of what we will cover during the course of the semester. In this class, I expect all students to participate in meaningful conversations about the reading material and the
assignments. I expect all online and in-class discussions to be respectful, and welcoming of diverse viewpoints. The ultimate goal of the course is to explore factors that influence the chances that older people in this country arrive at old age in good health with the resources they need to live well.

**Class Participation and Class Structure:** During each class meeting, students are expected to arrive to class with at least one question/comment/observation for each study reading, uploaded to Canvas no later than 24 hours prior to the class meeting. The class will begin with an overview of key points made by the instructor, and by the leader for the class. Class leaders should provide key highlights for each reading one at a time, and then integrate the main ideas observed across all readings. This presentation should last approximately 30 minutes. I will assist the leader in highlighting important key points. Then, the leader will use the discussion questions provided by the class to return to the readings either individually or collectively by using the key comments/observations that the class provided. At the conclusion of the class, the class leader will take time to put together a summary of the key ideas that emerged, common themes, key differences across the readings, or key factors that should be identified for the purposes of guiding research on aging.

**Research Proposal Presentation:** This assignment will require students to consider existing programs/policies/interventions will explore the need for new or a change to existing policies/programs/interventions that enhance opportunities for citizens to age more successfully. Students will argue for a new research project that will help inform the development of a solution that can improve the lives of older people. These proposals will be presented to the class. Students will use the feedback they receive from their peers to guide the goals of their research proposal. All students will provide presenters with questions/comments that can help guide them to clarify their
project ideas. Students will identify a problem or opportunity with respect to health issues facing older people or influencing the process of aging in the United States. Each student will give a carefully crafted 5-minute Powerpoint Presentation, which introduces the problem needing to be solved and a proposed policy/program solution from the perspective of a professional researcher/scholar, a community activist, or a practitioner. The presentations should target a defined group of stakeholders, such as local, state, or federal policy makers or officials.

**Research Paper:** The final paper will describe a gap in current research that needs to be filled to improve the odds of aging well (e.g., decrease mortality, decrease disability, or enhance quality of life). These papers should describe the way the research would be completed, and if it involves testing an intervention to support adoption of this behavior by individuals. The paper should clearly delineate the reasons why this area of research matters, how to carry out the research, the barriers/facilitators facing individuals completing this research, and how these issues might lead to development of an intervention. The paper structure should include: 1) an introduction describing the problems with the current gap in research; 2) background research related to what we know that clarifies why this area of research is important; 3) the theoretical basis for what why we might complete the research and what we might expect to learn; 4) research questions to be addressed, with explanations for expected hypotheses and/or justification for why we might ask these questions; and 5) how you propose to carry out this research study. In total, this research proposal should be 8-12 pages long, double-spaced, not including references, and use APA style formatting for the references within the text and in the conclusion. Students will be paired with at least one other person in the class to share their paper with and provide careful feedback on the draft. Students will turn in the three documents to be graded: 1) the paper, 2) peer review they provide, and 3) a document describing how they
did or did not integrate peer suggestions (this document should look like a peer review response to an editor).

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 31: Course Introduction

September 7: History of Successful Aging in Gerontology

- (Johnson & Mutchler, 2014). The Emergence of a Positive Gerontology: From Disengagement to Social Involvement.
- (J. W. Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Successful Aging.

September 14: Age-Based Social Policy: An Overview

- Social Security:
  - Video: The History of Social Security
- Medicare:
  - The Political History of Medicare
  - Women & Medicare: An Unfinished Agenda
  - Medicare and Medicaid Partnership at Age 50
- Older American’s Act
- (Bass, 2000) Emergence of the Third Age: Toward a Productive Aging Society
September 21: Social Relationships and Social Roles

- (Riley & Riley, 1994). Age integration and the lives of older people.

September 28: Working and Volunteering

- (Carr, Fried, & Rowe, 2015). Productivity and engagement in an aging America: The role of volunteerism.
- (Fried et al., 2004). A social model for health promotion for an aging population: Initial evidence on the experience corps model.

October 5: Productive Engagement and Health Effects

- (Thomas, 2012). Trajectories of social engagement and mortality in late life.
- (Kim & Ferraro, 2014). Do productive activities reduce inflammation in later life? Multiple roles, frequency of activities, and C-reactive protein.
• (Kail & Carr, 2016). Successful aging in the context of the disablement process: Working and volunteering as moderators on the association between chronic conditions and subsequent functional limitations.
• (Matz-Costa, Carr, McNamara, & James, 2016). Physical, Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Mediators of Activity Involvement and Health in Later Life.

**October 12: Variations in Health Benefits of Productive Engagement**

• (Tavares, Burr, & Mutchler, 2013). Race differences in the relationship between formal volunteering and hypertension: Results from the health and retirement study.
• (Mejía, Ryan, Gonzalez, & Smith, 2017). Successful aging as the intersection of individual resources, age, environment, and experiences of well-being in daily activities.
• (Leggett et al., 2017). Recent Improvements in Cognitive Functioning Among Older U.S. Adults: How Much Does Increasing Educational Attainment Explain?
• (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). The relation of volunteering and subsequent changes in physical disability in older adults.

**October 19:**

*NO CLASS*

**October 26:**

*In Class Presentations and Feedback*
November 2: Successful Aging as “Resilience”

- (Lavretsky & Irwin, 2007). Resilience and aging.
- (Thoits, 2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health.
- (Manning, Carr, & Kail, 2016). Do higher levels of resilience buffer the deleterious impact of chronic illness on disability in later life?

November 9: Critical Perspectives of Successful Aging

- (Rossen, Knafl, & Flood, 2008). Older women’s perceptions of successful aging.
- (Katz & Calasanti, 2015). Critical perspectives on successful aging: Does it “appeal more than it illuminates”?

November 16: Successful Aging and Health Behaviors

- (Milaneschi et al., 2011). Mediterranean diet and mobility decline in older persons
- (Quach et al., 2017). Epigenetic clock analysis of diet exercise education and lifestyle factors.
- (Erickson et al., 2011). Exercise training increases size of hippocampus and improves memory
November 30: Future Policy and Research

Drafts of Papers Due to Peers

- (P. B. Baltes & Smith, 2003). New frontiers in the future of aging: From successful aging of the young old to the dilemmas of the fourth age.
- (Fried, 2016). Investing in health to create a third demographic dividend.
- (Lowsky, Olshansky, Bhattacharya, & Goldman, 2014). Heterogeneity in healthy aging.

December 7:

Reviews of Papers due back to peers

December 12:

Final Papers Due

In addition to my own policies for classroom comportment described above, you are expected to abide by the following policies that have been developed by the College of Social Sciences at Florida State University:

Academic Honor Policy:

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living
up to their pledge to “. . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy.)

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) Bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. I am more than happy to make accommodations for you. Go to http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability for more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities or contact Student Disability Resource Center, 108 Student Services Bldg., Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, (850) 644-9566 (voice), (850) 644-8504 (TDD), e-mail: SDRC@admin.fsu.edu

**Classroom Courtesy:** Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions. This means no cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the professor or discussion leader), reading newspapers, etc. during class. If you must have a cell phone to receive emergency calls about children or other family members, keep it on vibrate. http://www.e-soc.net/ 7/30/2006 Policy on Student Conduct Page 2 of 2.

**Incomplete Grades:** Missing work or uncompleted assignments are insufficient reasons for me to give a grade of Incomplete. Incompletes will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor’s discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an “I” must be passing the course.

Finally, students in the course will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for
that particular assignment or possibly an "F" for the course and may be reported to the University Judicial Office. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated.

**University Attendance Policy:**
Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

**Americans With Disabilities Act:**
Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:
(1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and
(2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
Free Tutoring from FSU:
On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services’ comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.