The aging of industrialized and developing nations is likely the most important trend of our time. Extensions in life expectancy have changed the way we think about disease, disability, and death. In the U.S. we can expect to live more years in school, work, in unions, and as part of families than ever before. However, these trends do not translate universally across all demographic and social groups. The framework of the life course allows us to not only make sense of trends and differences between groups, it provides a roadmap of thinking about health, relationships, socioeconomic status, etc. over time and life stages. In this course, we will begin by focusing on life course data and methods, examining characteristics of life course research and addressing major ongoing methodological debates. We will shift to demographic topics in aging which set the stage of population trends for social research. Finally we will discuss health processes and family across the life course, with a focus on older adulthood in the United States.

**Course Requirements:**

All students are expected to have completed the assigned readings before class in order to participate in class discussion and to make summary and citation easier in the future. Note that the required readings are **BOLDED**, the nonbolded, small font ones are optional/supplemental.

1. Preparation for each class including all assigned readings and class participation and discussion (10%)
2. Analysis of the **HIGHLIGHTED** weekly readings and responsibility for leading class discussion assigned to each student a few times during semester (10%)
3. Completion of one take-home exam (15%)
4. Completion of one Mini Research Proposal (10%)
5. Completion of one research paper on the topic of your choice (pending approval). You have three options for a paper type described below (50%).
   6. Present an **8-10 minute** summary of your paper at the end of the semester (5%)

**Important dates:**

- February 23rd: Take-home exam due
- March 23rd: Mini research proposal due
- April 27th: Final papers due
Analysis of Weekly Reading Assignments

Weekly readings are a mix of journal articles and book chapters. All students are responsible for the BOLDED assigned readings each week, and they should be ready to discuss them. It is recommended that you have some system of taking notes about or on the article while you read it to facilitate discussion (and citation) later. Notes/things to think about should include the main research question/s of the article, the theory and/or perspective and its fit to the question/s, the data and methodology and their appropriateness, the contribution to the literature, and the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

When you are the discussion leader in a given week, you’re goal is to engage the class in discussion of the topic of the assigned piece. You should prepare a brief summary of the topic, theory, research question or hypotheses, data and methodology, findings, limitations, and contribution. You should also prepare discussion questions about the reading in the context of the other readings and the field in general. Things you should think about:

1. Which theory or perspective is the article/chapter based on and which theory might also be used to couch the research?
2. What are the main concepts of the reading and how do you think they rank in importance to the overall field?
3. What are the data and methods used and are they appropriate for the question? Are there others that might do a better job?
4. What limitations have the authors discussed and which ones have they missed?
5. Are the findings compelling and what are some alternate explanations?
6. What is the largest contribution and what are future research areas on this topic?

Take-Home Exam

Serving as a rough “midterm” exam, I will give you a take-home exam to be completed within a week focusing on the topics and discussions covered in class. There will be two required questions (you will have a choice of at least two within each section) and each answer should be roughly 4 pages double spaced with a short bibliography. You should use readings from class but should also draw from other scholarly work. The exam is intended as preparation for your comprehensive exams.

Mini Research Proposal

Students are required to complete 1 brief essay (roughly 3-5 pages) focused on future research for a given life course/aging topic. You should use class readings as the basis of the proposal, supplemented by a brief literature review. In your essays, you will summarize the knowledge on a topic and identify a gap in the theoretical or empirical contributions. You will then translate this into a testable research question and describe a research project that could resolve the question. This assignment is intended to be a basis for your final paper.
Final Course Paper

Students are required to write a 15 to 20 page research paper on a topic relevant to the course and based on the readings. This assignment is due on April 27th and should be one of the types listed below.

Option 1: Research Proposal

Using your mini research proposal as a starting point, write a full research proposal. The proposal should be composed of three parts:
I. Literature review: extend the review of your mini proposal and add other relevant citations. This should comprise roughly 2/3 of the paper.
II. Identify a research question: the idea here is to locate a gap in the current knowledge and to address it in a testable way. This can include a theoretical debate or the introduction of a new theoretical perspective to a substantive topic, a challenge to an author’s findings and interpretations, or a substantive issue where there is little empirical evidence. Remember that the question must be testable either with existing or collected data. Remember that this is a proposal for research that you will hypothetically conduct.
III. Describing the Method: How will you go about answering your question? What data would you need to do so and how would you go about finding the population of interest in either existing or collected data? What type of analytic plan would you use (quantitative/qualitative) and how would this lead to a contribution to the field? Remember, a proposal is all about finding an interesting gap in the literature and presenting a strategy to fill it.

Option 2: Overview of the Research

An alternative is to write an extended literature review of a topic of your choice that is relevant to the course. Topics might include race differences in morbidity, age-period-cohort effects and their analysis, the effects of marriage on health over the life course, or the impacts of early life conditions on later life health. This is a great option for first year students who want to develop expertise in an area or want to analyze a broad literature for a future empirical paper.

Option 3: Empirical Analysis

The third option is to write a paper using original data. The ultimate goal would be to present your findings at a conference and/or submit the paper to a journal. This option is appropriate for more advanced students with methodological training and a background in a substantive topic. The model for this paper is a journal article.

Notes about final papers: Papers should be emailed to me by the specified time and date. Please save papers in Word format. If you use another OS besides Microsoft, please send a second version of the paper in pdf (in case there are formatting slips). All papers should be
double spaced with 12 point font. Unless you have prior permission to turn in a paper late, late papers will be docked one half letter grade (i.e. A to A-, B+ to B) each day they are late.

Student Presentations

I have reserved the last class period for presentations of your final papers. You should prepare a 8-10 minute professional-style presentation of your paper. You may use, handouts, Powerpoint, etc. but these are not required. After each presentation we will have a 2 minute question period. These presentations are intended to prepare you for presenting your work at conferences and defenses.

Professionalism and Attendance: Participation is a small part of your grade (under Course Requirements) but this does not reflect the fact that this is a graduate seminar and thus I expect all students to attend class, participate in discussion, and behave professionally (arrive on time and show respect to your fellow classmates and to me). If you know you will miss a class, please let me know ahead of time. I will dock grades for missing more than 2 classes, regularly coming late, or unprofessional behavior during class. Students who miss more than 3 classes will receive a failing grade.

Course Schedule

Section 1: Data and Methods of Life Course Research

Week 1/January 8: Introduction


Week 2/January 15: Life Course and Longitudinal Data


**Week 3/January 22: Measurement and Substance of Transitions and Trajectories**


Kail, Benjamin L. and Miles G. Taylor. 2014. "Cumulative Inequality and Racial Disparities in Health: Private Insurance Coverage and Black/White Differences in Functional Limitations." *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*


**Week 4/January 29: Mortality and Meaningful Missingness**


**Section II: Demography of Aging**

**Week 5/February 5: Life Expectancy, Life Span, and Limits**


**Week 6/February 12: Disability, Healthy Life Expectancy, and the Compression of Morbidity**


Week 7/February 19: Cohort and Cohort Differences


*****Take-Home exam due Monday, February 23th sent to my email by 5 PM*****

Section II: Health and Disparities

Week 8/February 26: Theories of Cumulative Process


**Week 9/March 5: Race, Socioeconomic Status (SES), Gender, and Intersections**


**March 12: Spring Break**

**March 19: Class canceled**

****Mini Proposal due Monday, March 23rd sent to my email by 5 PM****

**Week 10/March 26: Life Course Implications of Military Service**


Section III: Gender, Family, and Intergenerational Relationships

Week 11/April 2: Gender, Work, and Health

Rieker, Patricia P. and Chloe E. Bird. 2005. “Rethinking Gender Differences in Health: Why We Need to Integrate Social and Biological Perspectives.” Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences 60B (Special Issue II): 40–47.


Tetyana Pudrovska1 and Amelia Karraker. 2014. Gender, Job Authority, and Depression Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Vol. 55(4) 424–441


Week 12/April 9: Social Relationships and Health

Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez. 2010. Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy. Journal of Health and Social Behavior 51(S) S54–S66

Valle, Giuseppina, Janet Weeks, Miles G. Taylor, and Isaac Eberstein. 2013. “Mental and Physical Health Consequences of Spousal Health Shocks Among Older Adults” Journal of Aging and Health 25: 1


**Week 13/April 16: Intergenerational Relationships**


**April 23: Research Presentations**

**Final Paper due Monday, April 27th** sent to my email by 5 PM
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:** Students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Policy of the Florida State University, including the statement on Values and Moral Standards published in The Florida State University General Bulletin. The Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of these expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty throughout the process. Please see the following website for a complete explanation of the Academic Honor Policy: http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor’s discretion. Any student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way may be reported to the university administration for further disciplinary action as specified in the Academic Honor Policy (http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/forms/honorpolicy.pdf).

**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.