SYA 6933: Health and the Life Course
Spring 2016
M 12:30-3:15pm
Bellamy 519

PROFESSOR
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COURSE CONTENT
This course is intended to provide an in-depth introduction to the major conceptual frameworks and empirical research examining distal and proximate social factors influencing adult health. The underlying question is – “Does the body forget insults and exposures from adverse social conditions over the life course?” In grappling with this question, we will pay close attention to the intersection between the etiology of adult health conditions and the major life-course trajectories of socioeconomic status and family. Of major importance will be the assessment of key social and biological pathways linking social conditions at particular points in the life course with adult health outcomes.

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.

REQUIREMENTS
The course is organized as a seminar. Although I will provide overviews and/or supplemental material in lecture, much instruction takes place in the context of guided discussion and exchanges focused on the readings. Students are expected to attend each class and to have read all of the assigned material thoroughly and critically before the class meeting. Reading critically means not only being able to describe the content of an assigned piece, but also to evaluate the scientific issues motivating the research question, the conceptual/theoretical strengths of the research, the adequacy of the study’s methods, the scientific implications of the study’s findings, and the study’s relationship to other course material. Students are strongly encouraged to contribute to the discussion both their insights and/or questions from the readings and their own experiences. The readings represent a mixture of seminal studies, conceptual overviews, and contemporary empirical investigations.

There are three major tasks to be accomplished in this graduate seminar:

1) The first task involves preparation of the reading for class presentation and facilitating discussion. Class discussions will be oriented around informal student presentations based on the
assigned readings. For each class meeting, one (or more) student(s) will informally present an overview of that week’s readings. These overviews should include: the key gaps in knowledge being addressed, the major findings, and the conceptual/methodological strengths and weaknesses of the study (for empirical papers). Presenters should make sure to introduce key questions, concepts, critiques, or ideas that will serve as a springboard for class discussions. An outline of the presentation’s key points (1 page) along with discussion questions should be uploaded to blackboard the day before class. On the day you facilitate, come prepared with several questions to facilitate conversation for about 20 minutes per article. Each student should sign up as a facilitator for two class periods. Having two facilitators is encouraged but students should collaborate to ensure there’s no redundancy in the presentation/discussion.

2) Students are expected to submit eight one-page papers in reaction to the weekly readings. These papers should not be a summary of the reading but rather an honest and critical reaction to them. For example you could describe the strengths/weaknesses of key conceptual models or describe the broader implications of a study. My intention is for students to have a lot of latitude in these papers as long as they are not simply a summary of the readings. You do not need to discuss all of the weekly readings in the paper. Reaction papers are due at the beginning of class each Monday.

3) The third task is an empirical study on a topic that is relevant to the course’s overall aim. Three assignments are required in accomplishing this task: a proposal abstract, a Powerpoint presentation, and a term paper. The empirical study may overlap with research being done either as part of a student’s thesis/dissertation research, in conjunction with work being done in another course (with the professor’s permission), or as part of a student’s RA assignment (with the professor’s permission). The study should be original research, with the aims of making a scientific contribution to the literature and publication in a scientific outlet. A detailed research proposal may be submitted for students that do yet not have the analytical background to conduct their own investigation (with instructor approval).

Given the time constraints imposed by the semester, I recommend that students rely on publicly accessible datasets (e.g., the Health and Retirement Survey, the National Health Interview Surveys, MIDUS, the National Longitudinal Surveys, Americans’ Changing Lives, and Aging, Status, Sense of Control). Other rich datasets are available from NACDA and ICPSR, two major electronic data archives.

Students are required to discuss their topic with me before moving forward. Students should submit 1-page abstracts on March 14th. I will use the abstract to gauge the paper’s topic relevance to the course aims, and as a basis to provide critical feedback to refine conceptual ideas and focus the analysis.

I have scheduled presentations for April 18th. These sessions will give students a chance to present their work to their colleagues, to field comments, and to refine their ideas and analysis prior to submitting the term paper. Presentations should follow the format that one would use if presenting the results at a major scientific meetings such as the Population Association of America.
Term paper (Due April 29): the term paper should aim to be a publishable scientific work suitable for submission to a scientific journal such as Demography. Students should review articles in Demography or other major journals for guidance on presentation styles and organizational format.

**EVALUATION**
Empirical Research Paper or Proposal 30%
Project Proposal 5%
Presentation 15%
Student facilitator (twice) 20%
Reaction papers and class participation 30%

**GRADING SCALE**
Grading will be according to a standard scale and plus/minus grading will be used for final grades. FSU does not allow a final grade of “A+.” The specific ranges are below.

**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.

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 (850) 644-9566 (voice) (850) 644-8504 (TDD) ssrc@admin.fsu.edu [http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/](http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/)

**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.](http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy.))

**SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY**
Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.
COURSE READINGS (Subject to change)

January 11th
Class Organization Meeting

January 18th---No Class MLK

January 25th
Introduction: Conceptual Frameworks of the Life Course and Population Health


February 1
Health and Mortality across Time and Place


February 8th
*Early Life and Later Health and Wellbeing: Conceptual Frameworks*


(Optional background reading)


February 15th
Consequences of Childhood Health for Later Health and Wellbeing


February 22
Consequences of Childhood Socioeconomic Resources and Later Health and Well Being


February 29th
Personality, Agency, and Health


March 7---No Class Spring Break

March 14
Health Behaviors and the Life Course


March 21
Mental Health


George, L. K. 2007. Life course perspectives on social factors and mental illness. In *Mental Health, Social Mirror* (pp. 191-218). Springer US.


March 28th
Gender and Life Course Influences on Health


April 4th
Genetically Informed Models of Health and Complex Social Behaviors


**April 11th**
*Individual Meetings*

**April 18th**
*Presentations*

**April 29th**
*Final Research Papers Due*