Syllabus
Seminar on Aging (SOCI 7450)
Fall 2005 • Tuesdays, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Dr. Diane Shinberg
Office: Clement Hall 305
Office hours: Wednesday 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Email: dshinbrg@memphis.edu
Office phone: 901-678-3031
http://webct.memphis.edu

Course Description

This graduate seminar explores sociological understandings of aging and the life course. We will consider aging at multiple levels and dimensions. We will understand aging as sociological phenomenon and study contemporary topics in aging and gerontology. We will become acquainted with computer based tools for studying the research literature on aging.

Required Reading and Course Materials

You will need the following books and the CD-ROM listed below. Selected readings will be available as handouts, on reserve in McWherter Library, and/or on the internet as web-linked documents [W].


This course will utilize web enhancements via WebCT, http://webct.memphis.edu . Therefore, you must have an active UM email account (UUID & password) for this course. As graduate students, you are strongly encouraged to activate your UMDrive, http://umdrive.memphis.edu , for electronic storage.
Course Guidelines

1. Show up, and show up on time. Your regular and punctual attendance in class meetings for this course is required. I expect everyone to be here at the beginning of class and stay through until the end. There are very few legitimate excuses for missing a graduate-level course (even once). Poor attendance will hurt your grade.

2. It is critical that you keep up with the assignments and the readings. Late assignments will be penalized for each day that they are late. No assignment will be accepted after a week’s time (seven days) without an extenuating circumstance (e.g., thermonuclear war, planets collide, or similar catastrophe).

3. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities. Please contact Student Disability Services (110 Wilder, Voice/TDD: 901-678-2880) for more information.

4. Students are expected to conform to the university’s policies on academic integrity. That means no cheating, copying or plagiarism. The assignments you submit to me should be your original work. You should provide full and clear acknowledgement of referenced sources in your work. Plagiarized assignments will be summarily graded “F”.

5. I designed this course to be analogous to the professional research process. To that end, there are no shortcuts to success. Students will be held to the ethics of the discipline both with regard to human subjects and to standards of authorship. Students will learn to appreciate research as an iterative and social process.

6. This course is a graduate seminar. I will lecture as rarely and as little as possible. Class meetings will primarily be comprised of discussion, argument and debate. This means that we will each be responsible, active participants in the progress of the course.

7. You will find that I am a reasonable person who designs straightforward assignments. I am not interested in tricking you or confusing you or having you do “busy work” for no reason. Please see me if you have any questions or encounter any difficulties regarding the course.

Assignments and Grading

A. Discussion Questions: For each class meeting with assigned reading from me, you will submit a set of discussion questions to me at the beginning of class. Your questions should be based on the assigned readings. For each assignment some questions should pertain to individual readings, but some questions must also draw connections among multiple readings. You may relate current events and other sociological topics to your questions. Your questions should be designed to foster discussion. Factual questions and questions of clarification are appropriate for class, but will not be credited for these assignments. The questions you submit should be typed, double-spaced, and with reasonable font size and margins; one page should be sufficient. As we will use these questions during class, you may be asked to initiate the discussion of your questions. Thus, you should bring a second copy for your personal use to class. Occasionally, to foster thoughtful seminar discussion, we may do some informal in-class writing related to these questions. (20 points, total)
B. **Research Project: A 20-page Research Proposal or Research Paper (not an essay; not a theoretical paper):** The research assignment is designed to encourage students to investigate a topic in detail. Students may choose to write either a research proposal or a research paper. Essays and theoretical papers are not acceptable for this assignment. The final assignment will be the result of a multi-step process, about 20 pages in length (type-written, double-spaced, and with reasonable font size (no larger than 12-point) and margins (no larger than 1 ¼ inches)) and including the following sections and elements, which roughly correspond to standard sections in a sociological journal article:

- **a.** An *Introduction*, with a brief description of the current or proposed study;
- **b.** A discussion and summary of *Previous Research* (or literature review);
- **c.** A description *Methods* (including the research *Data, Measures* and *Analytic Techniques*);
- **d.** The *Results* (for the research paper) or *Expected Findings* based on previous research (for the research proposal) of the study;
- **e.** A *Discussion* of your findings, including their implications for the field and future research and the limitations of your study;
- **f.** And a *Conclusion* section which is directly relevant to your research.

Students should approach the assignment as an opportunity to advance their own (and the instructor’s) understanding of a particular topic. Appropriate topics may focus on any aspect of aging and the life course, for example: meanings of “age” and “old age”; a disorderly lifecourse trajectory; retirement planning; post-retirement work; menopause; mid-life/elderly health; mid-life crisis; transitions to adulthood; nursing homes/elder care; Medicare; migration in later life; caregiver stress; the oldest old; the sandwich generation; Alzheimer’s/cognitive problems; aging and transportation issues; aging institutions or organizations; specific cross-cultural aspects of aging. All topics must meet with my approval. You are required to meet with me one-on-one during my office hours to discuss your own research assignment in detail. This will give me an opportunity to advise you on your topic.

Students who write a research proposal may use the assignment as a vehicle to write a thesis proposal, a fellowship application or a grant proposal, for example. Students writing the research paper may use the assignment as vehicle to write a thesis draft, dissertation chapter, conference paper or journal article. (50 points, final paper)

For either assignment, students must consider the ethical treatment of human subjects of research. We will discuss human subjects and the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) process as applicable. All assignments must conform to the norms of scholarship and include appropriate citations and references. Plagiarism is a crime with serious academic consequences.

As a class we will spend some weeks focusing on refining your research papers/proposals. This will require several steps including writing a short prospectus on your topic (due September 27th), selecting key readings for the class to aid your in-class presentation of your in-progress project for comments and discussion (beginning October 25th, the week after Fall Break). Also, you will write a draft (due November 15th) which you will share with me and two other students and thus receive three sets of comments on your work (see below). Your final paper is due **in class** Wednesday, December 6th, 2005. (60 points)
Student Presentations and Discussions
The week before you are scheduled to present, you will select and assign readings for the class. This will help form the basis of a discussion on your paper/proposal topic. These readings should total no more than 30-35 pages in length. You may select scholarly material (e.g., journal articles and book chapters) as well as popular material (e.g., newspaper/magazine articles, advertisements, informational pamphlets, web sites, and government reports). Please discuss your potential selections with me ahead of time.

The class will spend about 40 minutes on each student’s topic. Each student should plan to spend the first 5-10 minutes of his/her time orally introducing her/his topic to the class. Student presenters should prepare a one-page handout for the class which will include an outline of the topic and a list of discussion questions. (10 points)

C. **Project participation:** In addition to writing your own paper, you will also be responsible for reading and writing comments on two paper drafts (due to me and the students Monday, November 24th) written by your fellow students. Additional guidelines, including specifics on format, on reading papers and commenting on them will be provided. I expect you to treat your role in this process seriously. (20 points)

Total Grade:
A. Discussion Questions.................................20 points
B. Research Project..............................................60 points
   (Class Presentation..........................10 points)
   (Final Paper..........................50 points)
C. Project participation.................................20 points
TOTAL......................................................................100 points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>99-100</td>
<td></td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-98</td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td></td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
<td></td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-87</td>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>65-67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Schedule

This outline provides a rough estimate of the time we will spend on each topic. Reading assignments should be completed prior to our class meeting. The actual schedule is subject to change as necessary during the semester (e.g., a library session is being scheduled for before Fall Break).

Week #1: August 30, 2005
Topic: Introduction
Read: None

Week #2: September 6, 2005
Topic: Aging and the Lifecourse
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 1, 4 & 5; [W] Riley (1987)

Week #3: September 13, 2005
Topic: Data and Methods
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 2 & 3; Population Bulletins: “Elderly Americans” and “Global Aging…”; [CD-ROM] Improving Data… (1996)

Week #4: September 20, 2005
Topic: Social Roles, the Self and History

Week #5: September 27, 2005
*** ONE-PAGE RESEARCH PROSPECTUS DUE: SEPTEMBER 27th ***
Topic: Work, Retirement, & Economic Well-being

Week #6: October 4, 2005
Topic: Family and Youth

Week #7: October 11, 2005
Topic: Stratification, Race & Ethnicity

Fall Break: October 18, 2005—NO CLASS

Week #8: October 25, 2005
Student Presentations and Discussions 40 minutes each
Topic: TBA – must be approved
Read: TBA – by students
Week #9: November 1, 2005

Student Presentations and Discussions 40 minutes each

Topic: TBA – must be approved
Read: TBA – by students

Week #10: November 8, 2005

Topic: Gender
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 10; [Newman] Ch. 7; TBA

Week #11: November 15, 2005

*** PAPER DRAFTS (3 COPIES) ARE DUE NOVEMBER 15\textsuperscript{th} ***

Topic: Cognition
Read: [CD-ROM] The Aging Mind... (2000); TBA

Week #12: November 22, 2005

*** COMMENTS ON DRAFTS DUE NOVEMBER 22\textsuperscript{nd} ***

Happy Thanksgiving (November 24\textsuperscript{th})
Topic: Health
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 12 & 21; [CD-ROM] New Horizons in Health... (2001)

Week #13: November 29, 2005

Topic: Caregiving
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 13 & 22; [CD-ROM] Elder Mistreatment... (2002)

Week #14: December 6, 2005—LAST DAY OF CLASSES

*** FINAL PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 6\textsuperscript{th} ***

Topic: Death & Dying
Read: [Handbook] Ch. 24; TBA