

The University of Western Ontario  
SOCIOLOGY 9258  
SOCIOLOGY OF THE LIFE COURSE:

A theoretical and methodological approach to the study of inequality and aging

Winter 2017

Thursdays, 1:30-4:30, SSC RM 5427

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### Course Description

This class is designed to introduce you to life course as a way of viewing sociological issues. Time, process, and context are key components of a life course perspective. A life course perspective focuses on the intersections of individual lives, social structure, and social change. It emphasizes the patterns or trajectories across individual's lives and the way those patterns are shaped by the broader social structure and historical time. This approach, particularly its emphasis on life dynamics and historical contexts, is often proposed as an alternative to more static conceptualizations that have traditionally dominated many domains of sociology.

A life course perspective can be applied to a wide range of substantive questions, such as political attitudes, criminal careers, education, work, family, and health, and course readings provide some examples of these applications. A single semester can only provide a sampling of the current range of life course theory and empirical work. A main goal of this course will be for each of you to apply some aspect of this perspective to your own substantive area of interest. The most important objective is to acquire a way of thinking which can offer a point of departure in sociological research.

### Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- Synthesize and critically evaluate theoretical arguments, current research and scholarship relating to life course sociology
- Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas clearly and articulately through effective oral and written communication.
- Demonstrate an ability to engage in scholarly discussion and debate

### Course Materials

- Required articles and chapters are available electronically through the library or in class. I have chosen each reading because it includes information, concepts, arguments, etc., that comprise the foundation of the sociology of the life course. Some readings also include technical information or mathematical equations that may not be accessible to you at this stage of your training, and for these readings you should focus on the conceptual argument that the authors make.

## Methods of Evaluation

### Schedule of assignments

Weekly	Article selection and discussion
March 2nd	Paper proposal due
April 6th	In-class term paper presentation
April 13 <sup>th</sup>	Term paper due

### Evaluation breakdown

Participation and article selections	20%
Leading seminar discussion(s)	20%
Term paper	50%
Term paper presentation	10%

### Participation

One advantage of graduate-level seminars is small numbers and the ability for discussion that involves all participants. Classes will usually open with comments by the professor followed by focused discussion. Involvement will be promoted through seminar presentations that are to provide critical summaries of selected readings. Class periods will be organized around student-led discussion. It is critical that everyone read all the assigned readings each week and come to class ready to actively participate in the discussion—to ask questions, speak to debates in the literature, challenge what class members have said, and relate the material to your own interests.

### Article selection

This is part of your class participation grade. To help us to better understand the material, each week (when noted in the outline) you will be responsible for finding and reading one additional article that illustrates the concepts we are discussing that week. This article should be an empirical application of the week's topic to a substantive area you are interested in. This may be an article that applies the life course principle we are studying that week, or one that you think SHOULD apply the principle (and your job would then be to discuss how this might improve our understanding). One place to start is to look through past issues of the journals *Advances in Life Course Research* (2000-present available through Western library) and *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* (2009-present available through Western library), although articles utilizing a life course perspective can now be found in most journals. A good strategy is to choose articles related to the topic of your final paper and incorporate them into your final term paper. We will be discussing these articles during class time.

### Leading seminar discussions

Depending on enrolment in the course, students will sign up to lead up to two class sessions. The leader will carefully study the assigned readings and assist the class with understanding key concepts and topics. Leading the class also involves preparing a set of questions to stimulate discussion, and assisting with keeping the dialogue moving during that session's discussion. The purpose of the presentation is not only to provide a summary of the readings to the class, but also to engage the class in a critical analysis that synthesizes, compares, critiques, and draws conclusions about what we know of the topic based on the readings. The issues should stimulate critical and evaluative discussion. Below I provide some examples for illustration purposes (these are general in character; they would need to be specified and elaborated for each topic):

In addressing the readings you might ask:

How does the concept in question (age norm, turning point etc.) enhance our understanding of social phenomena? Is the concept precise and clear/vague or ill-defined? How has it been measured or operationalized? How has it stimulated empirical research? How might it be extended or elaborated? Is the author's central argument well justified (logically, empirically etc.)? How does the reading help us to understand specific life course processes? How can the concepts be applied to life course phenomena other than those explicitly considered in the selection you read? Can the empirical findings be generalized to other phenomena? To other times and places? Are there gaps or unaddressed issues which should be considered? Does the selection raise questions amenable to future empirical investigation? How does the reading address your particular interests? How do the week's readings relate to each other and to other topics and readings we have looked at in this class?

## **Term paper**

A term paper of 20 to 25 pages in length is **due on April 13 (a hardcopy in my mailbox by 4:30)**. This paper should be on a substantive topic of interest to you but must incorporate and apply a life course perspective to the area of study. The paper should contain a critical literature review of both theoretical and empirical work related to your topic. A significant portion of the paper should incorporate sources beyond class readings. Please follow the ASA or APA Style Guidelines.

Before finalizing their paper topic, students must submit a two page paper proposal for approval, **due in class March 2**.

## **Paper presentation**

Students will briefly (approx. 10-15 min.) present an overview of their term paper to the class (relevant life course concepts, critical analysis and application to your substantive topic, unanswered questions, future directions).

## **Important Policies**

### **Policies for Assignment Deadlines**

A late penalty of 5% per day applies to term papers turned in after the deadline.

### **A Note on Plagiarism**

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. See Scholastic Offences (below) for the link to Scholastic Discipline regulations.

### **Plagiarism Checking**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting

plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com:

<http://www.turnitin.com>

## **Scholastic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals\\_discipline/index.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals_discipline/index.html)

## **Accommodation**

Only in exceptional circumstances may a student be provided special accommodation in the completion of a course requirement (i.e., exams, papers). To request a one-time accommodation (brief illness, family emergency), the student should inform the professor when they are able so accommodation can be made. To request other accommodation(s), the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to discuss options. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office.

## **Completion of Course Requirements**

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

[http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate\\_handbook/course\\_information.html](http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html)

## **Mental Health**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness Western for a complete list of options to obtain help: [http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)

## **Health and Wellness**

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The [Wellness Education Centre](#) (lower level UCC) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs: <http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html> Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Living Well website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information:

[http://grad.uwo.ca/current\\_students/living\\_well/index.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html)

Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in [Western's Campus Recreation Centre](#). Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>.