Western University
SOC9258: SOCIOLOGY OF THE LIFE COURSE
A theoretical and methodological approach to the study of inequality and aging

Fall 2020, Draft
Instructor: Dr. Kim Shuey

Thursdays 1:30 – 4:30, first class September 17
Virtual class meetings via Zoom plus asynchronous learning via OWL
See OWL ‘Zoom’ tab for Zoom meeting links.

Office hours: by appointment through Zoom, or following class via Zoom breakout rooms

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Course Description

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 patterns of experience and trajectories across individual’s lives and the way those patterns differ across groups, 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.

This class is designed to introduce you to the Life Course Perspective as a way of viewing sociological issues. A life course perspective can be applied to a wide range of substantive questions related to health, work, family, education, migration, political attitudes, and criminal careers 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 different 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 Organization

Details regarding the logistics of virtual class meetings will be discussed on the first day of class. See OWL for necessary details for each week and Zoom links to class meetings.
Course Materials

Required articles and chapters are available electronically through the library or OWL. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Participation, discussion, article selection, weekly reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Paper proposal due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 14</td>
<td>Term paper due</td>
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Evaluation breakdown

- Participation in class discussion: 20%
- Leading seminar discussions: 20%
- Weekly reflections: 20%
- Term paper: 40%

Participation

Students are expected to participate in class, providing their thoughts and opinions on the day’s topics and drawing connections across the readings and the weeks. Involvement will be promoted through seminar presentations that discuss important concepts from selected readings, raise questions, and encourage discussion of ideas. It is critical that everyone read all the assigned readings each week and 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. Also be prepared to discuss the contribution of the additional article of interest that you have chosen to read each week.

Webcam use is expected during class meetings. Please talk to me if you have a situation that makes the use of video challenging beyond the occasional technological hiccups we are all experiencing.

Leading seminar discussions

In the first week of class students will sign up for a class session. The leader (or leaders depending on enrolment in the course) will carefully study the assigned readings and assist the class with understanding key concepts and topics. Leading the class also involves preparing questions to stimulate discussion, and assisting with keeping the dialogue moving during that session’s discussion. Leaders are welcome to prepare supporting slides to be shared ahead of time via OWL. The purpose is not merely 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.
Weekly reflections

With the exception of the discussion leader, each week students will submit a roughly 2 page (double-spaced) reflection on the articles and material covered that week. This is not meant to be a summary of the articles, but a forum for processing the topic of the day and for relating the material to your own interests. Here you can also discuss the additional academic article or popular media/current events article or video you have chosen as a way to work through the material. You are encouraged to critically engage with the readings and consider how the topics/reading can contribute to your own research. You may also pose questions/topics you would like to raise during class discussion. Everyone will be permitted to miss/skip one week (in addition to week as discussion leader) without penalty.

Term paper

Proposal: Before finalizing their paper topic, students must submit a two-page paper proposal for approval, due October 29. Proposals should demonstrate that you have selected a relevant topic and have started conducting some preliminary research, providing a brief outline of your plans.

Paper: A term paper of 20 to 25 pages in length is due on December 14. 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. All papers should be submitted via OWL. You must also submit your paper to TURNITIN through OWL located in the “assignments” tab.

Important Policies

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
Accommodation

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counseling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. For more information, see http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/.

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

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/

Health and Wellness

We encourage you to check out the Digital Student Experience website to manage your academics and well-being, as well as additional Western resources to support students on and off campus, found at https://www.uwo.ca/health/

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: https://www.uwo.ca/health/wec/index.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