



SOCIOLOGY 9258, Inequality over the Life Course Fall 2026

Thursday mornings, 930-1230, 5335

Professor Anders Holm

Office Hours: Wednesday, noon-2pm

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Enrollment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Sociology. Graduate students from other programs may enroll with permission of the course instructor and the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) in the student's home program.

Instructor Information

Professor Anders Holm is responsible for all course instruction and coordination. Office: SSC 5316.
Email: aholm@uwo.ca. Office hours: Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00 p.m., or by appointment.

Course Description

This graduate seminar examines how social inequalities emerge, accumulate, persist, spill across life domains, and sometimes become reversible over the life course. Using the core life-course principles of timing, trajectories and transitions, linked lives, human agency, and historical and institutional context, the course considers inequalities in education, health, family life, employment, care, wealth, and aging. Particular attention is paid to how class, gender, race and ethnicity, family background, and social policy shape multidomain and intergenerational trajectories.

The course treats the life-course perspective as an explanatory framework rather than simply as the study of longitudinal data. Across the term, students will ask when inequalities first emerge, which mechanisms carry them forward, whether observed differences represent persistence or cumulative divergence, and what kinds of evidence would distinguish competing explanations.

Course Organization and Learning Outcomes

The course is organized as a face-to-face, discussion-based graduate seminar. Short framing lectures will be combined with student-led discussion, close analysis of empirical research, research-design exercises, and peer feedback. During the first week, each student will select an inequality puzzle to revisit throughout the term. The four biweekly Kritik activities progressively develop that puzzle into a final paper or research proposal.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain and apply central life-course concepts, including trajectories, transitions, turning points, timing, duration, linked lives, agency, cumulative advantage and disadvantage, and historical time and place.
- Distinguish descriptive persistence from mechanisms of accumulation, divergence, compensation, and reversal.

- Evaluate how institutions, social policy, and intersecting inequalities structure individual and intergenerational life courses.
- Critically assess longitudinal evidence, including the treatment of selection, age-period-cohort processes, observation windows, attrition, temporal ordering, and causal claims.
- Synthesize theoretical and empirical literatures to formulate an original, tractable life-course research question.
- Provide, evaluate, and use constructive scholarly feedback in revising academic work.

Recurring Analytical Questions

Students should use the following questions when preparing every assigned reading:

- What inequality is being explained, and when does it first emerge?
- What mechanism connects earlier conditions to later outcomes?
- Does the evidence demonstrate accumulation or merely persistence?
- What could interrupt, compensate for, or reverse the trajectory?
- Whose linked lives and which institutions shape the outcome?
- What evidence would distinguish the authors' explanation from plausible alternatives?

Course Timeline and Format

The course meets in person on Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Each meeting will normally include an introductory lecture, discussions of the readings, and an application or research-design workshop. The instructor may make minor adjustments to the order of activities while retaining the stated face-to-face format and evaluation scheme.

Course Materials

There is no required textbook. Required and recommended readings will be available through Western Libraries, course reserves, or the course site in OWL Brightspace. Students will also require access to Kritik for the four peer-learning activities; access instructions will be provided through the course site.

Methods of Evaluation

Assessment	Weight	Due
Kritik learning portfolio	20%	Sept. 24-Nov. 26
Integrative synthesis memo	20%	Oct. 22
Seminar preparation, leadership, and contribution	10%	Throughout
Research proposal presentation and workshop	25%	Nov. 19-Dec. 3
Final research paper or research proposal	25%	Dec. 17 (tentative)
Total	100%	

Kritik Learning Portfolio (25%)

Kritik activities are designed as scholarly apprenticeship rather than as isolated reflection papers. Each activity has Create, Evaluate, and Feedback stages. Unless otherwise indicated in the activity rubric, 50%

of an activity score is based on the creation, 35% on the quality and calibration of the peer evaluation, and 15% on engagement with feedback. The instructor will monitor and, where necessary, moderate peer assessment. The four activities contribute 5%, respectively, to the final course grade.

Activity	Create	Evaluate	Feedback
1. Life-course mechanism map	Oct. 1	Oct. 5	Oct. 8
2. Competing explanations	Oct. 22	Oct. 26	Oct. 29
3. Longitudinal design audit	Nov. 12	Nov. 16	Nov. 19
4. Research proposal kernel	Nov. 26	Nov. 30	Dec. 3

Activity 1 asks students to map a life-course mechanism; Activity 2 compares cumulative disadvantage, selection, and agency or turning-point explanations; Activity 3 audits the temporal logic and research design of a published study; and Activity 4 develops the theoretical and methodological core of the final paper. A low-stakes calibration exercise will be completed before Activity 1.

Integrative Synthesis Memo (20%)

Due October 29. In approximately 1,800-2,200 words, students will explain one social inequality using at least three competing life-course mechanisms and identify the longitudinal evidence needed to distinguish among them. The memo is open-book. Assessment will emphasize theoretical precision, temporal reasoning, engagement with the readings, and the quality of the proposed evidentiary test.

Seminar Preparation, Leadership, and Contribution (10%)

Students are expected to complete the required readings before class, contribute substantively to discussion, and co-lead a segment of a seminar meeting. Evaluation will emphasize preparation, the ability to connect contributions to the readings, responsiveness to others, and contribution to collective learning rather than the sheer frequency of speaking. Leadership dates will be assigned during the first two weeks.

Research Proposal Presentation and Workshop (10%)

During November 26-December 3, each student will present the developing argument and design of the final paper in a concise research workshop. Presentations should identify the research puzzle, theoretical mechanism, rival explanation, temporal scope, and proposed evidence. Each presenter will also receive structured feedback from classmates.

Final Research Paper or Research Proposal (35%)

Due December 17 at 11:55 p.m. (tentative; to be confirmed on the course site). The final submission should be approximately 5,000-6,500 words, excluding references, and may take the form of a theoretically informed research paper or a fully developed research proposal. It must advance a sustained life-course explanation of inequality, engage relevant literature, specify competing mechanisms, and justify an appropriate empirical strategy. Students are expected to use and respond selectively to feedback received through Kritik and the research workshop.

Course-Specific Requirements

To pass the course, students must submit the final paper and complete the Create stage for at least three of the four Kritik activities. Because peer-learning deadlines affect classmates, a late Kritik submission may

require an alternative instructor-assigned review arrangement. Students who anticipate difficulty meeting a deadline should contact the instructor as early as possible.

Important Policies

A Note on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative AI is permitted in course assignments, provided that it is consistent with the requirements of the particular assignment and is clearly disclosed. AI may be used to support brainstorming, organization, revision, and editing, but it should not replace students' own critical engagement with the course readings, development of arguments, or evaluation of evidence. Students remain fully responsible for the accuracy, relevance, coherence, originality, and appropriate citation of everything they submit.

Kritik assignments

Kritik assignments will be completed using the VisibleAI editor, which records information about how a submission was produced, including typed, pasted, and AI-assisted content. The platform generates an Authenticity Score based on the parameters established for the assignment. For example, if the permitted threshold for pasted content is 25% and a submission exceeds that threshold, the Authenticity Score may decrease.

Students can view their Authenticity Score and related authorship information while preparing and submitting their work. During the Evaluate stage, students may also see relevant VisibleAI information associated with the submissions they review.

The Authenticity Score will not automatically determine a student's grade and will not, by itself, be treated as evidence of academic misconduct. It is an indicator that provides context about how the assignment was created. The rubric will include a criterion concerning compliance with the assignment's authorship and AI-use requirements. If a submission falls outside the stated parameters, I may review its writing history or ask the student to explain how the work was produced.

Integrative synthesis memo and final paper

The Integrative Synthesis Memo and final paper may be reviewed using text-similarity and AI-detection tools. Because automated detection results are imperfect, they will not be treated as conclusive evidence of inappropriate AI use.

AI-generated or AI-assisted content is not prohibited. However, all submitted work will be evaluated according to the same academic standards. Students are responsible for ensuring that AI-assisted material is accurate, properly cited where necessary, relevant to the argument, and meaningfully integrated into the paper. Material that is inaccurate, incoherent, generic, unsupported, fabricated, or unrelated to the paper's argument will negatively affect the grade, regardless of whether it was produced by AI or by the student.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the [Scholastic Offences policy](#), specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence.

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 for such checking 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 ([Turnitin website](#)).

Health/Wellness Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health Support at Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AE)

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 strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW 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 counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Western's Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Support services](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI tools may be used for preliminary brainstorming, organizing notes, generating alternative formulations, and copyediting, provided that their use is acknowledged in a brief statement appended to the submitted work. They may not substitute for completing the assigned readings, generate a Kritik peer evaluation, fabricate citations or evidence, or produce the substantive theoretical or empirical analysis

submitted for assessment. Students remain responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of all submitted work. Use that is inconsistent with these conditions or is not appropriately disclosed may constitute a scholastic offence.

Tentative Course Schedule

The required readings establish the common basis for seminar discussion. Recommended readings provide additional theoretical or empirical depth and are especially useful for students developing related final-paper topics.

September 17th - What Makes an Explanation Life-Course?

Core ideas: transitions, trajectories, timing, linked lives, agency, and historical time and place. In class, students will compare two contrasting life histories and select an inequality puzzle to carry through the semester.

Required: Elder, Glen H., Jr. 1994. "Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57(1):4-15.

Required: Bernardi, Laura, Johannes Huinink, and Richard A. Settersten, Jr. 2019. "The Life Course Cube: A Tool for Studying Lives." *Advances in Life Course Research* 41:100258.

Recommended: Elder, Glen H., Jr. 1998. "The Life Course as Developmental Theory." *Child Development* 69(1):1-12.

September 24th - Institutions, Cohorts, and Changing Transitions

Guiding puzzle: Are contemporary lives becoming less standardized, or are institutions organizing them in new and unequal ways? Kritik calibration exercise opens.

Required: Mayer, Karl Ulrich. 2009. "New Directions in Life Course Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:413-433.

Required: Shanahan, Michael J. 2000. "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:667-692.

October 1st - Cumulative Advantage, Disadvantage, and Health

Guiding puzzle: When do initial differences widen, remain stable, or narrow? Kritik Activity 1 Create stage due.

Required: DiPrete, Thomas A., and Gregory M. Eirich. 2006. "Cumulative Advantage as a Mechanism for Inequality: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Developments." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32:271-297.

Required: Foverskov, Else, Erik L. Mortensen, Anders Holm, Jacob L. M. Pedersen, Merete Osler, and Rikke Lund. 2019. "Socioeconomic Position across the Life Course and Cognitive Ability Later in Life: The Importance of Considering Early Cognitive Ability." *Journal of Aging and Health* 31(6):947-966.

Recommended: Ferraro, Kenneth F., and Tetyana Pylypiv Shippee. 2009. "Aging and Cumulative Inequality: How Does Inequality Get under the Skin?" *The Gerontologist* 49(3):333-343.

October 8th - Health Selection, Social Causation, and Embodiment

Guiding puzzle: Does socioeconomic inequality cause health differences, do health differences shape socioeconomic trajectories, or do both processes operate together? Kritik Activity 1 Feedback stage due.

Required: Foverskov, Else, and Anders Holm. 2016. "Socioeconomic Inequality in Health in the British Household Panel: Tests of the Social Causation, Health Selection and the Indirect Selection Hypothesis Using Dynamic Fixed Effects Panel Models." *Social Science & Medicine* 150:172-183.

Required: Willson, Andrea E., Kim M. Shuey, and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 2007. "Cumulative Advantage Processes as Mechanisms of Inequality in Life Course Health." *American Journal of Sociology* 112(6):1886-1924.

October 15th - Fall Reading Week

No class and no course deadlines.

October 22nd - Education, Expectations, and Early Trajectories

Guiding puzzle: When do educational expectations operate as agency, and when do they reproduce prior advantage? Kritik Activity 2 Create stage due.

Required: Buchmann, Claudia, and Thomas A. DiPrete. 2006. "The Growing Female Advantage in College Completion: The Role of Family Background and Academic Achievement." *American Sociological Review* 71(4):515-541.

Required: Domina, Thurston, AnneMarie Conley, and George Farkas. 2011. "The Link between Educational Expectations and Effort in the College-for-All Era." *Sociology of Education* 84(2):93-112.

October 29th - Agency, Adversity, and Turning Points

Guiding puzzle: Can agency redirect a disadvantaged trajectory, and how can we study agency without detaching it from social structure? Integrative synthesis memo and Kritik Activity 2 Feedback stage due.

Required: Schafer, Markus H., Kenneth F. Ferraro, and Sarah A. Mustillo. 2011. "Children of Misfortune: Early Adversity and Cumulative Inequality in Perceived Life Trajectories." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4):1053-1091.

Required: Hitlin, Steven, and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 2007. "Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency." *Sociological Theory* 25(2):170-191.

November 5th - Family Formation, Partnership, and Linked Lives

Guiding puzzle: How do family transitions generate different consequences across social groups, and when do advantages or disruptions spill between linked lives?

Required: McLanahan, Sara. 2004. "Diverging Destinies: How Children Are Faring under the Second Demographic Transition." *Demography* 41(4):607-627.

Required: Umberson, Debra, Kristi Williams, Daniel A. Powers, Meichu D. Chen, and Anna M. Campbell. 2005. "As Good as It Gets? A Life Course Perspective on Marital Quality." *Social Forces* 84(1):493-511.

November 12th - Employment, Precarity, and Health

Guiding puzzle: When is work a transition into adulthood, a source of cumulative advantage, or an exposure producing cumulative harm? Kritik Activity 3 Create stage due.

Required: Rauscher, Emily. 2011. "Producing Adulthood: Adolescent Employment, Fertility, and the Life Course." *Social Science Research* 40(2):552-571.

Required: Eisenberg-Guyot, Jerzy, Trevor Peckham, Sarah B. Andrea, Vanessa Oddo, Noah Seixas, and Anjum Hajat. 2020. "Life-Course Trajectories of Employment Quality and Health in the U.S.: A Multichannel Sequence Analysis." *Social Science & Medicine* 264:113327.

November 19th - Care and Intersectional, Multidomain Life Courses

Guiding puzzle: How do inequalities spill between work, family, care, and health, and why is that interdependence itself unequal? Kritik Activity 3 Feedback stage due.

Required: Fasang, Anette E., and Silke Aisenbrey. 2022. "Uncovering Social Stratification: Intersectional Inequalities in Work and Family Life Courses by Gender and Race." *Social Forces* 101(2):575-605.

Required: Keating, Norah, Jacquie Eales, Laura Funk, Janet Fast, and Joohong Min. 2019. "Life Course Trajectories of Family Care." *International Journal of Care and Caring* 3(2):147-163.

Recommended: Koehly, Laura M., and Jasmine A. Manalel. 2023. "Interconnected Social Convoys: Understanding Health and Well-Being through Linked Personal Networks." *Advances in Life Course Research* 56:100541.

November 26th - Wealth, Intergenerational Accumulation, and Research Workshops I

The first part of class considers wealth as a cumulative and intergenerational resource; research-proposal workshops follow. Kritik Activity 4 Create stage due.

Required: Hällsten, Martin, and Max Thaning. 2022. "Wealth as One of the 'Big Four' SES Dimensions in Intergenerational Transmissions." *Social Forces* 100(4):1533-1560.

December 3rd - Research Workshops II

Student research-proposal presentations and structured peer feedback. Kritik Activity 4 Feedback stage due.

Required: van de Rijt, Arnout, Fabrizio Bernardi, William Foley, and Lucas Sage. 2026. "Luck and Predictability in the Life Course." *Annual Review of Sociology* 52:319-339.