

Social Gerontology: 920:303:01
Department of Sociology, Rutgers University
Spring 2022

Instructor: John Rand
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Office Hours: Wednesday 6:30 – 7:30 pm
(Location TBA)
Class Hours: Monday & Wednesday 7:30 – 8:50pm
Location: Tillett 258

Course Description:

This course explores the sociological aspects of aging – how do the elderly affect society and how does society affect the elderly. We examine the interaction of the elderly with society and with many of our social institutions such as religion, healthcare, government, and the economy. We look at the issues associated with our aging population and how those issues affect people of all ages. We examine controversies associated with our changing population structure. We might not reach a consensus on how to solve the problems, but we should all leave the course with a better understanding of our society and hopefully ways in which we can improve it.

Goals for this course:

Students will come away from this class with a deeper understanding of today's aging society, including how the changing demographics will influence public policy for years to come. Students will develop the conceptual skills to understand and analyze our aging population and be able to apply different perspectives to comprehend more fully the issues. Most importantly, students will be challenged to critically examine our changing society and develop the ability and willingness to be critical thinkers going forth.

Class Website:

The course website is on Canvas and is called 01:920:303:01 Social Gerontology. You should plan to check this website regularly as new readings will be added during the semester. Readings will be posted on the website under each module.

Course Assessments:

Exams: There will be three exams, and each will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. They will include material covered in class as well as the assigned readings whether or not those readings have been covered in the lectures. Please note that make-up exams will be permitted only if you meet the appropriate university requirements. You will be given the opportunity to make up work missed if you have a valid excuse from a doctor, police officer, or the obituary for the funeral you need to attend.

Informant & Papers: You will need to find someone who is 65 or older whom you are comfortable talking to – this can be a grandparent, neighbor, friend, etc. This person will be an informant for you throughout the semester, and you will be asked to write three short papers (3 to 4 pages) based on your informant’s responses to questions/topics.

Attendance/Participation: Attendance is expected at each class as we will cover issues not in the readings. Participation means speaking in class in response to my questions during lecture and contributing to discussions and group work. Note that there is no grade for attendance. If you attend every class but never contribute, you will not get points for participation. Participation points will also be granted for contributing test questions and participating in small group exercises in class. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website [Student Self-Reporting Absence Application | Rutgers University](#) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Frequent absences and persistent lateness will count against your participation grade.

Grades: Your grade in this course will be based on the following:

Exam 1	= 15%
Exam 2	= 20%
Final Exam	= 20%
Papers	= 30%
Participation	= 15%

Rutgers University uses a lettered grading system. Your final grade will be assigned in accordance with this system, shown here.

<i>Grade Range</i>	<i>Point</i>
A	90-100%
B+	86-89
B	80-85
C+	76-79
C	70-75
D	66-69

Extra Credit: Extra credit may be offered in this course at the instructor's discretion. I do not negotiate final grades.

Course Policies:

Readings: Assigned readings need to be completed **before** the lecture. Most of the readings are short topical articles. There is one required textbook for this course which is available on-line.

Moody, Harry R (2021). *Aging: Concepts and Controversies*. (10th Edition). California: Pine Forge Press (ISBN-9781544371696).

In addition to the textbook, there are additional readings posted on Canvas – either as URL links or as scanned articles. To access some of the URL links, you will need to be able to log onto Rutgers University Library.

E-mail Protocol: I do not want to delete your e-mails as “spam” so please include “SocGer” and your name in the subject line. If these do not show up, it is more than likely that I will delete the e-mail.

Due Dates: Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due by the next class day at 7:30 pm (see course schedule). These dates are primarily designed to pace the course rather than set strict deadlines. As such, there will be no grade penalties for late work. That said, I strongly recommend you make every effort to stay on track. Please email me if you feel you are falling behind.

Additional Information:

University Policy on Academic Integrity: Rutgers students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. The University Policy defines violations of academic integrity and outlines the potential penalties for such violations and the process for adjudicating alleged violations.

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

Learning resources:

Learning Centers: <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>

Academic Advising for SAS students:

<https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/advising/advising>

Online Learning Tools from Rutgers University Libraries including Rutgers RIOT, Searchpath and RefWorks <http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/tutorials>

Technology: Please visit the Rutgers Student Tech Guide page for resources available to all students. If you are facing financial hardships, please visit the Office of Financial Aid at <https://financialaid.rutgers.edu/>.

Disability Services: (848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/getting-registered>.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS): (848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counselingservices/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community, and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Crisis Intervention: <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counselingservices/counseling/crisis-intervention/>

Report a Concern: <http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA) (848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 <http://www.vpva.rutgers.edu/>

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Most of the class discussions will be based upon the readings. Therefore, it is imperative that you read the assigned materials before class in order to be an informed participant during our discussions.

- Wed. Jan 19** **Introduction & Course Overview**
What is Social Gerontology? What is this course about? What will you get out of taking this course? What is expected of you?
- Mon. Jan 24**
(Lecture 1) **Life Course Perspective on Aging**
Aging is a lifelong experience that is multifaceted and shaped by the contexts in which individuals live. Social construction and historical factors influence our understanding of age, aging and later life.
- Read: Moody – Basic Concepts I
- Wed. Jan 26**
(Lecture 2) **Demography**
America, and the world, are “graying”. What do the numbers tell us? What does it mean for societies? And from a social perspective, what is happening to the quality of aging?
- Read: Peck - Population 2050
Demographic Transition Model
Remarkable Decline in Fertility Rates
Global Age Watch 2015 – Insight Report – pp. 1 - 11
- Mon. Jan 31**
(Lecture 3) **Generational Issues**
When you were born matters in your aging process. Different cohorts experience life in different ways which have lifelong effects. What might this mean for your generation?
- Read: Henig – What is it about 20-Somethings
Jesse Rosen Dear NY Times
Millennials Living with Parents
Young and Old Brains
Lehman Collapse Cohort Effect

Wed. Feb 2
(Lecture 4)

Religion, Spirituality and the Elderly

Religion is the first social institution we will examine. Religion and being elderly are commonly associated with each other. How does religion affect the elderly and how does the aging of society affect religion?

Read: Religion and Spirituality in Older Adults
‘Nones’ Now as Big as Evangelicals
Why Are Old People So Religious?
What Spirituality Means to Older People

Mon. Feb 7
(Lecture 5)

Does Old Age Have Meaning?

The first of our “controversies”. Does old age have a meaning for individuals? And for society? How do individuals experience their lives in a meaningful way in the last stages of life? What does that mean for society?

Read: Moody – Controversy I
Mining the Depths of Despair
Lonely Men Over 50
What Does It Feel Like to be Old and Alone (video)

Wed. Feb 9
(Lecture 6)

Aging, Healthcare & Society

Healthcare is the second social institution to receive our focus. How does America deliver healthcare to the elderly? What are some of the health challenges of longevity? What critical value dilemmas for health care policy do we face in an aging society?

Read: Moody – Basic Concepts II
Global Age Watch Insights 2018 – Executive Summary

Mon. Feb 14
(Lecture 7)

Why Do Our Bodies Grow Old?

Our second controversy looks not only at the biological aspects of our aging bodies but also at what social factors contribute to their decline.

Read: Moody – Controversy 2
Who Wants to Live Forever?
Is Aging a Disease

Optional Videos: Do You Want to Live Forever
The Epigenetic Clock

First Informant Paper Due

Wed. Feb 16
(Lecture 8)

CoVid-19 and the Elderly

What has it meant to be elderly in 2020 in view of the global pandemic? Has CoVid-19 changed our societal view of the elderly? Has it impacted our social policies, expectations, institutions?

Read: OECD Health at a Glance 2021– Executive Summary
(Click on “Read” – you do not need to purchase it.)
A Sociology of Covid-19
Who’s to Blame for 100,000 Covid Dead in Long-Term
Hidden in a Pandemic (video)

Mon. Feb 21
(Lecture 9)

Should We Ration Healthcare for Older People?

How much money are you willing to pay to keep an aging population alive longer and longer? Can society afford to continue to provide health care to an ever-aging population? When resources are scarce, rationing is one solution. Should it be applied to health care for the elderly?

Read: Moody – Controversy 4
Spend Less on Senior Health Care

Wed. Feb 23

Exam 1

Mon. Feb 28
(Lecture 10)

Elderly and Long-Term Care

Caring for the elderly is becoming an increasing demand on both families and society. It involves not just increased economic costs but also familial stresses.

Read: Long Term Care Costs – Genworth (Click on Title to load)
Long-term Care Insurance
Nursing Homes Flawed Business Model Worsens COVID Crisis

Optional Videos: Aging in America Crisis
Frontline – Emeritus

Wed. Mar 2
(Lecture 11)

Families and the Elderly

Our third social institution is the family. What constitutes a “family”? How is it changing? Does family structure influence how we age? What affect do the elderly have on the family?

Read: Husband as Caregiver
Personal Reflection Caring for Aging Parents
Millennials Are Causing Divorce Rates to Plummet

Mon. Mar 7
(Lecture 12)

Should Families Provide for Their Own?

Of course, families should care for their elderly. But is that a realistic practice as the number of elderly grow disproportionately to the number of families?

Read: Moody – Controversy 5

Wed. Mar 9
(Lecture 13)

Should Older People be Protected from Bad Choices & Elder Abuse
Who should decide that the elderly can no longer make their own life choices? How should society protect the elderly from abuse?

Read: Moody – Controversy 6
Aging, Inhibition & Social Inappropriateness
Dealing with Elderly Parents' Bad Behavior
How the Elderly Lose Their Rights
Elder Abuse (video)

SPRING BREAK – March 12 - 20

Mon. Mar 21
(Lecture 14)

Should People Have the Choice to End Their Lives?

This controversy touches multiple social institutions – religion, healthcare, family, and economy. What is society's role in what is the most individualistic of all actions – death?

Read: Moody – Controversy 7
Why I Hope to Die at 75
Brittany Maynard (video)

Wed. Mar 23
(Lecture 15)

The Elderly and the Economy

The economy is the next social institution to be examined. What factors influence the economic well-being of the elderly? What roles do gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have on shaping the varieties of aging experience? What policy issues arise in the politics of aging?

Read: Moody – Basic Concepts III
Senior Debt Facts
FPL Explained (video)

Mon. Mar 28
(Lecture 16)

Should Age or Need be Basis of Entitlement?

America has dramatically reduced poverty among the elderly over the last 60 years thanks to entitlement programs. Can we afford to continue to do so? Is it fair to the younger generations that are paying for them?

Read: Moody – Controversy 8

Second Informant Paper Due

Wed. Mar 30
(Lecture 17)

What is the Future of Social Security?

Social Security is treated almost as sacrosanct by the majority of the US population. But is it still viable? Should the near-elderly count on it still being there when they retire?

Read: Moody – Controversy 9
Age Old Debate
How Much Longer Will Social Security be Around?

Mon. Apr 4

Exam 2

Wed. Apr 6
(Lecture 18)

The Elderly, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System

The elderly are generally considered to be the most vulnerable to crime. But do they actually experience the most crime? And how has the aging of the population impacted the criminal justice system?

Read: Fear of Crime
Elderly Inmates Burden State Prisons
Tempering Cost of Aging, Dying in Prison with Demands of Justice
Shawshank Redemption (video)

Mon. Apr 11
(Lecture 19)

Retirement Obsolete?

Retirement seems like a natural progression after decades of working. But is it really a natural stage of life? Is it a wise choice, or even a choice at all, for many individuals? And does it make sense for the economy or for the good of society as a whole?

Read: Moody – Controversy 10
4 Stages of Retirement
Ideal Retirement Age
Our Life in Three Stages

Wed. Apr 13
(Lecture 20)

Aging Boomers – Boom or Bust

What does it mean for society when a large population “bubble” begins to reach their elder years? Will this have a disproportionate influence on public policy?

Read: Moody – Controversy 11
Baby Boomers and Economic Growth

Mon. Apr 18
(Lecture 21)

The Oldest Old

As the number of octogenarians, nonagenarians and centenarians continues to grow, does society need to alter our expectations of what it means to be old? Does old age start at 90? 100?

Read: Brody – On Being Very Very Old
The Oldest Old Parts 1 & 2 (videos)

Wed. Apr 20
(Lecture 22)

Dementia & Alzheimer’s

Living longer does not always mean living with all of our mental capabilities. As our population ages, more families are faced with caring for family members with dementia. What does this mean for individuals and for society?

Read: Alzheimer’s Association– Understanding Alzheimer’s Disease
Can Technology Ease the Burden of Caring for People with
Dementia?
Brain Tour

Mon. Apr 25
(Lecture 23)

Global Perspective

America is by no means alone in having an aging population. What can we learn from other countries that have been experiencing the graying of their populations for an even longer period than America?

Read: TBA

Wed. Apr 27
(Lecture 24)

The New Aging Marketplace, Volunteering and Future of Aging

The growing elderly population presents opportunities as well as challenges. Can society reimagine what “elderly” means and capitalize on those opportunities?

Read: Moody – Controversy 12
Reinventing Aging Report – Report Highlights
Volunteering – Health Benefits

Third Informant Paper Due

**Mon. May 2
(Lecture 25)**

Final Review

Review of the semester and discussion of how we can all contribute to a better understanding of what the elderly bring to society and what we can do to influence public policy in regards to the elderly.

TBA

Final Exam