

Culture and Aging
ANT 3930/ANG 5464
Spring 2009

FLI Room 121
Wednesdays 3rd-5th period

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Course Overview

In this course we will examine anthropological perspectives on aging. Because this is a course in Anthropology, we will apply a cross-cultural and holistic perspective to the topic. That is, we will examine aging from a number of different angles, including: (1) biological and evolutionary approaches to the subject; (2) gender differences in aging; (3) the importance of cultural context in mediating the aging experience; (4) the impact of globalization and modernization on the aged; and (5) factors that influence whether a person ages well or poorly. Although many social science disciplines that study aging advocate a quantitative approach to the subject, in this course we will focus equally, if not more so, on qualitative approaches to the study of aging: what does it mean to age within a specific context? What methods can we use to adequately compare the aging experience in different cultural contexts?

This course examines “aging” as a phenomenon that is not limited to late life. We will be reading material about fertility, adolescence, and adulthood as we examine aging at all stages of the life course.

Textbooks and Reading Assignments

There are three assigned textbooks for the course, which are as follows:

Sokolovsky, J. (ed). 1997. *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Hashimoto, Akiko. 1996. *The Gift of Generations* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vesperi, Maria. 1985. *City of Green Benches: Growing Old in a New Downtown*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sokolovsky is a reader and will provide us a general overview and case material. Much of our reading will come from the primary literature, and so will be on reserve – you can either access through the library’s ereserve system or give me a USB drive to load the .pdfs directly from my files. Given the size of the class and volume of this reserve reading, we will make arrangements for how this reading will be distributed the first day of class.

Course Basics: Exams, Assignments, Grading, and Other Sundries

Grading and Exams

Participation. Because this is a seminar kind of class, I expect that students will direct much of the class discussion. For one thing, no one wants to listen to me talk for three hours. For another, there is nothing like leading a discussion to encourage learning the material and mastering a particular subject. We will divvy out responsibilities for particular weeks. In general, students will be responsible for leading a week's discussion. Essentially, this means providing an overview and critical analysis of the week's readings, followed by general discussion. I expect that students will bring their own academic backgrounds into the class with them: how does the anthropological perspective inform your own discipline? What does case x tell us about assumptions held by discipline y? Generally, I will provide a list of questions and discussion points that will help us through each week's readings. You will be graded on your ability and preparedness in leading discussions, as well as your ability to participate on the weeks when you are not directly responsible for leading discussions. Both of these endeavors fall under "participation", and you will receive a grade (100 pts total) that summarizes your contributions to the class.

Exams. There will be two exams, a mid-term and a final. Each is worth 100 points. Exams will consist of a combination of short answers and long essay questions. Both exams will be take-home and open book, due on the dates listed below.

Paper. No upper-division class is complete without a term paper. Undergraduate students are expected to write a 12-16 page paper on a topic based on "culture and aging." There is a great deal of leeway here, but topics should be approved beforehand; thus, paper proposals are due well ahead of the paper due date. The term paper is worth 100 points. Details will be forthcoming at our second class meeting. If 12-16 pages seems like a lot, consider that graduate student papers should be manuscript length (20+ pages).

Final Grades. Final grades are assigned out of 400 points (100 for participation, 100 for each exam, and 100 for the term paper). I expect that 360 points will be an A. I may lower this bar depending on how the class performs, but I will never raise it.

Attendance and Cheatin'

Attendance. I will call roll until I know all of your names, but I do not feel the need to assign a grade based on attendance. However, given the size of the class and my emphasis on discussion of the material, it will be difficult for you to participate if you are not here. You have a responsibility to both the class and yourself to be here. UF policy is that students will attend all classes. I will also note that class attendance is highly correlated with your performance on exams, and thus your grade in the course. I will not be inclined to do any favors for students who are borderline if they have shown a half-hearted commitment to being in class.

Cheatin'. As a UF student you are expected to display exemplary behavior with regard to all academic endeavors, as per the honor code. This means you are not allowed to cheat, lie, steal, or write bad checks. Aside from cheating being bad for your karma, students caught cheating on exams or plagiarizing papers will be confronted about their behavior and may fail the course. If you are unaware of what actually constitutes plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, Judicial Affairs also maintains the academic honesty guidelines on the web: www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm. If you are unsure whether your activities are legitimate regarding paper writing and exam taking, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Course Outline

The following course outline is approximate. We may spend more or less time on specific topics as class interest dictates. Exams and due dates, however, will occur as scheduled and are not subject to change.

Important Dates:

Paper Proposals Due: **January 28**

Mid-Term Exam: **Due February 25**

Papers Due: **December 8**

Final Exam: **Due April 28, noon**

1. January 14. Aging and the Anthropological Perspective

Readings: Sokolovsky (hereafter **S**) **1, 3, 5, 21**; Climo 1992; Keith 1985; Keith 1990; Kertzer 1981

2. January 21. Longevity, Biology, and Evolutionary Perspectives on Aging

Readings: Finch 1997; Hill 1993; Hill and Kaplan 1999; Weiss 1981

3. January 28. Sex and Gender Differences in Aging

Readings: **S 8, 10, 13, 19** Barer 1994; Cattell 1996; Gaulin 1980; Hawkes, O'Connell, Blurton-Jones, Alvarez, and Charnov 1998; Hazzard 1986

Paper Proposals Due

4. February 4. The Life Cycle and the Life Course

Readings: Elder 1985; Fortes 1984; Fry and Keith 1982; Hagestad 1990; Neugarten and Hagestad 1976; Riley 1986

5. February 11. Status, Family, and Aging, Part I

Readings: Brown 1982; Burton 1990; Draper and Keith 1992; Maxwell and Silverman 1982; Nydegger 1983; Uhlenberg 1980; Uhlenberg 1996

6. February 18. Status, Family, and Aging, Part II.

Readings: Achenbaum and Stearns 1978; Covey 1989; Cowgill 1974; Finley 1982; Palmore and Manton 1974; Tsai 1985

February 25. Mid-term Exams due. No Class.

7. March 4. Varieties of Aging Experience Part I: "Simple" societies

Readings: **S 2**, Amoss 1981; Collings 2001; Draper 1992; Guemple 1983; Kjellstrom 1974/1975; Sharp 1981; Weibel-Orlando 1990

8. March 18. Varieties of Aging Experience, Part II: Age Grading

Readings: **S 4** Cleveland 1989; Dowd 1975; Foner 1984; Glascock 1990; Habte-Gabr, Blum, and Smith 1987; Van Der Geest 2002

9. March 25. Varieties of Aging Experience, Part III: Complex Societies

Readings: **S** 11, 16, 18, Kohli 1986; Mayer and Muller 1986; Mayer and Schoepflin 1989; Street and Quadagno 1993; Townsend 1981

11. April 8. Nonwestern Complex Societies)

Readings: Hashimoto (all); **S** 6, 9, 24

Papers Due

10. April 1. Ethnicity

Readings: **S** 12, 13, 14, 15, 22, 23; Cool 1981; Hofferth 1984; Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990; Markides and Lee 1991.

12. April 15. Aging in the US

Readings: **S** 25, 26, 17, Vesperi (all).

Final Exams due at Noon, April 28