

McMaster University
Health, Aging and Society
HLTH AGE 713
Critical Perspectives on Aging

Winter 2017, Wednesday 2:30-5:30 pm

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Office Hours: Please email for an appointment (KTH Room 228)

Course description

This course draws on perspectives in critical gerontology to explore issues related to the political, social, and cultural aspects of aging.

Over the years, the socio-cultural context, the meanings of aging, and public responses to older people have changed. Also changed is what it means to engage in critical scholarship with regards to aging. The study of aging now regularly reaches across inter-disciplinary boundaries to take account of social, cultural and economic perspectives, and regularly includes subjects ranging from identity, to the body, to social exclusion, space, and 'age' itself.

This course explores the foundations and developments in the fields of social and critical gerontology in order to understand current approaches to the study of aging and late life. It engages in a critical review in order to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions and expand the boundaries of our current research and practice. Part one begins with an exploration of the various paths and ideas in the development of critical gerontology, variations in cultural contexts and themes, and what could be considered the current state of knowledge in the field. Part two focuses on contemporary issues that challenge existing perspectives and present a new terrain for the reconsideration of aging. The themes of the second part of the course will be set according to student interests. Students will select a particular subject area and explore new developments in this area. They will demonstrate familiarity with the conceptual/theoretical issues, and incorporate subjective interpretations that are available through literary, cultural and new media sources.

Educational philosophy

The course is structured according to an experiential and collaborative learning model. Each class will be comprised of lecture and in-class tutorial time. The lecture will focus on the content of a particular area as outlined in the schedule. The in-class tutorial time will involve exercises and activities meant to help students integrate course content and stimulate thinking. Student involvement is very important. Self-reflection, open exchange of ideas, and critical analysis are encouraged.

Course objectives

By the end of the term, students should be able to:

- Critically appraise an area of aging (usually in accordance with their MRP or thesis)
- Identify key developments and trends within gerontology
- Situate scholarship and their work within the available critical traditions
- Highlight major tensions or contradictions in the field
- Identify emerging issues and contemporary challenges
- Appraise the available models for their capacity to respond to new forms of aging
- Demonstrate a critical approach in a subject area of their choice
- Reach across disciplines and approaches to explore alternate forms of knowledge
- Understand and discuss the implications for future planning
- Suggest change to a particular problem or practice

The study of aging from a critical perspective

The approach taken in this course draws on understandings of language, power, diverse social locations, and change over time. This includes the ways in which social and cultural forms of knowledge can impact older people in various ways. Using a critical perspective to explore the study of aging, one can begin to understand the connections and/or contradictions that exist in our research and practice—and in particular, between formal and informal knowledge.

The course offers students the opportunity to think critically about the study of aging contemporary issues, and new/emerging forms of aging. It allows students to develop a more complex understanding of the intersections between theory, research, practice and lived experience. It is a course that allows students to exercise their curiosity and question taken for granted language and practices in social and critical gerontology.

This course is open to graduate students at the Masters and PhD level from across McMaster. Learning takes place inside and outside the classroom and is facilitated by the instructor and students themselves. In-class learning takes place through active student involvement in facilitating discussions, participating in lectures and discussions, and peer feedback. Learning outside the classroom takes place through assigned readings, critical thinking about class material, and applying what we learn to a particular area of interest in oral and written assignments.

Weekly course plan

Part One: The foundations and development of critical perspectives on aging and late life

Week 1	January 4th	Introduction & Syllabus
Week 2	January 11th	Critical Perspectives on Aging
Week 3	January 18th	Development of Critical Approaches
Week 4	January 25th	‘The Cultural Turn’
Week 5	February 1st	Macro & Micro Analysis: The Life Course Perspective
Week 6	February 8th	Aging Studies & the Humanities

Part Two: Contemporary issues and debates (will be adjusted based on student areas of interest)

Week 7	February 15th	Amanda’s Example of Presentation & Writing Session
February 22nd	**MIDTERM RECESS**	
Week 8	March 1st	The Body, Aging and Care
Week 9	March 8th	Retirement and the “Extended Work Life”
Week 10	March 15th	Diversity and Inequality
Week 11	March 22nd	Globalisation and Care
Week 12	March 29th	Technology
Week 13	April 5th	Wrap-up and Discussion

Course Evaluation

1. Ten weekly summaries/blog and question (15%)

Weekly starting Jan 11th, 2017

All students are expected to complete the readings, attend classes, and take part in the discussion. On a weekly basis, each student will be required to turn in a one page summary of the readings and one question related to the readings (remember to include your name). These will be peer-reviewed in class and submitted to the instructor only at mid-term (**February 8**) and the end of the term (**April 5**). Questions will be used to facilitate class discussion and clarify material. Questions will be selected at random. Students are only required to submit 10 in total. One student per week may opt to write their entry as a blog for INCG. Students not present in class cannot submit their summaries and will not receive the points for that week (unless medical note is provided).

2. Synthesis (25%)

February 15th, 2017

Based on the readings and class material to date, please synthesize the development of critical gerontology and the key challenges to the field, as outlined in Part One. This paper should be no longer than 5 pages double spaced. You may wish to consult additional sources, although this is not necessary.

3. Guided review & Presentation of a Literary/Media Example (25%) March 1-Mar 29th, 2017

Each week in Part two will involve a student guiding the class through a literary or media text or case example that relates to their chosen theme. It is suggested that you select an area that you can pursue in this and assignment 4 (e.g., technology). In assignment three, you will present and analyze an excerpt from a film, poem, novel, or media source from a critical perspective. Presentations must include descriptive and analytical elements (e.g., what does this text reveal about aging; how does it challenge our current knowledge and practice in critical gerontology?) Students will select themes on **January 18th** at the latest. Two students per week will be permitted (although work will be independent and address a different source of knowledge). Presentations will be 15 minutes maximum with a discussion period of 30 minutes. Seminar members will assess the oral presentation according to a scale that we will develop in a class exercise. Materials will also be submitted for assessment by the instructor (your presentation slides, points of discussion, etc).

4. Academic Paper (35%)

April 12th, 2017

Please write an academic paper on the contemporary issue of your choice. The paper will draw on critical perspective in order to explore a contemporary issue in the field. The paper must present a clear argument and evidence for your point. It must include a clear theoretical perspective/standpoint, articulation of challenges/contradictions for the field, discussion of what this means both for understanding aging and the study of aging, and an incorporation of the voices or experiences of older people. The paper will be 15-18 double spaced pages. There will be classroom discussions and exercises to help guide you in the development of this paper.

Assignment Submission

Assignments must be submitted on the due date by the end of the class. A **2% reduction** will be applied each day after the due date. Assignments that are not submitted within a week after the due date will automatically receive a grade of zero. Late assignments submitted to the main office must have the date stamped on the front cover. In addition, please adhere to the following criteria for assignment preparation:

All assignments must include a title page with all relevant course information, adhere to the page limits specified, be formatted with 12 pt. font and standard margins, and be stapled.

The citations and references in all assignments (where applicable) must use **APA style**. Please consult an APA guide directly or your library e-resource.

Privacy Protection

Please submit all assignments in an envelope with your name written clearly on the front of the envelope. This will ensure your privacy when picking up the assignments. Should you wish to receive your final paper by mail please provide a self-addressed envelope with proper postage.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

At certain points in the course it may make good sense to modify the schedule outlined below. The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course and will notify students accordingly (in class and post any changes to the course website).

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES - E-MAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, they may not reply.

Email Forwarding in MUGSI:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html>

*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>

If you require this information in an alternate/accessible format, please contact the Department of Health, Aging & Society at 905-525-9140 ext. 27227.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.