

**The University of Calgary  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Department of Sociology  
Sociology 373, Summer 2011**

**SOCIOLOGY OF AGING**

Instructor: Jessica A. Gish

Lectures: SA 147, Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00-1:50pm

Office Hours: Thursday, 2:15-3:15pm, or by appointment

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Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the sociology of aging, a field sometimes referred to as social gerontology. It is interwoven around the question: How is aging in contemporary Canada a social process? The intent is to think sociologically about the impact of aging for individuals and societies and explore the variegated complexities that make aging a social process. Another objective is the examination of social and cultural constructions of aging and old age as a problem, and the implications of this commonly held point of view for scholars, policy makers, families, and older people themselves. A variety of topics are explored: popular imagery, social age theory, individual biography, life course, generational identity, gender, ethnicity, health care, caregiving, dementia, population aging, work and retirement, and anti-aging.

Course Objectives

The goals for students in this course are:

- To gain understanding of aging as a social process.
- To explore the problem of aging as a social construction.
- To learn about prominent sociological theories and research methods in the field of aging.
- To become familiar with a range of themes and topics that sociologists with an interest in aging study.
- To develop an expansive and critical understanding of the challenges and promises of aging for individuals, society, health systems, and families.

Course Texts and Other Readings

There are two assigned books for this course:

- 1) McPherson, B.A., & Wister, A. (2008). *Aging as a Social Process: Canadian Perspectives. Fifth Edition*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Graham, J.E., & Stephenson, P.H. (Eds.) (2010). *Contesting Aging & Loss*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 3) Supplementary readings are posted on Blackboard.

Readings must be completed before the class in which they are assigned. Readings are designed to complement and inform lectures; they will be used as a starting point for more advanced discussion. In other words, assigned readings should not be considered a facsimile of what will be discussed in class. You will benefit the most from lecture and do better in this class if you come to class and do the readings in advance.

### Course Requirements

**Examinations:** You will write two exams in this course: one midterm and a final. Your midterm will be written during class hours. Your final exam is a registrar-scheduled exam. These exams will include a variety of question types. These may include multiple-choice, true/false, short answer, and long answer questions. You are responsible for all course materials, including assigned readings, lecture notes, videos, and in-class exercises and discussions. Exams are not cumulative but some of the written answers on the final exam may require you to draw upon materials from earlier sections of the course.

Midterm	July 28
Final Exam	TBD by registrar (exam period is between August 19-20)

**On-line Discussions:** You will participate in on-line discussion groups on Blackboard. The class will be divided into groups of about 10-12 people and you will be assigned to a discussion group. The course material is broken into three discussion units of which you will be expected to regularly participate. Discussion topics will be posted as we progress through the course material but you are also strongly encouraged to post topics of your own on lecture and reading materials. In your discussion forum you should reflect in sociological terms on course materials. You should aim to post at least 2 or 3 postings during each discussion unit. Please refer to the extended rules and guidelines as part of this course outline.

Discussion Forum #1	July 7 (opens after class) – July 18 (closes at midnight)
Discussion Forum #2	July 19 (opens after class) – August 8 (closes at midnight)
Discussion Forum #3	August 9 (opens after class) – August 17 (closes at midnight)

**Written Assignment:** You are required to write an essay about what it means to say that *aging is a social process*. You should identify an issue or a set of issues in order to develop a thesis statement that explains aging as a social process. In your essay you should provide evidence in support of your argument in *all* of the following ways:

- You should reference one local or national newspaper article.
- You should reference course materials (at least 2 in-text citations).
- You should reference at least 3-4 additional, external materials that are not part of your course readings.
- You should reflect on your personal learning experience in this course.

When reflecting on your personal experience, you should consider how your assumptions about older persons and the aging process have been challenged or confirmed in light of taking this class. Explain how you are thinking differently about age and the aging process now. Be careful when discussing personal experience; you should treat personal notations as evidence in support of your argument to explain the sociological relevance of the point that you are trying to make.

You should use proper citations throughout your paper. This assignment should be no longer than 5-6 pages. Assessment will be based on the extent to which you construct an argument or thesis statement about what it means to say that aging is a social process and the extent to which you provide evidence from variegated materials to support it. Further guidelines will be handed out in class on July 21.

Due Date: August 11 (in class)\*

**\* Important note – Late Assignments:** Your assignment must be handed in during class hours on the day that it is due. There will be a 5% per day penalty for any late assignments. If you anticipate that your assignment is going to be handed in late, you should notify me immediately regardless of the reason. I will not accept emailed or electronic assignments unless I have given you explicit permission to do so. Hard copy submissions placed under my office door will be considered late. If you are unable to hand in an assignment due to illness, I will need to see valid documentation before marking your work.

### Grading

Your final grade will be computed as follows:

Midterm exam	25%
On-line discussions	20%
Written assignment	30%
Final exam	25%
Total	100%

Grades for each course requirement will be added together at the end of the term. The final total will be translated into the following letter grade according to the grading system documented below:

A+	95-100%	B+	80-84%	C+	67-69%	D+	54-58%
A	90-94%*	B	75-79%	C	63-66%	D	50-53%
A-	85-89%	B-	70-74%	C-	59-62%	F	0-49%

### Instructor Class Policies

**Email:** I am happy to answer your emails, but will be less happy doing so if I have already provided you with the answer on the course outline, on documents posted on Blackboard, or during class hours. If you are having difficulty with any of the substantive course content, these questions are best handled during office hours or during a scheduled appointment. If you send me a substantive question via email, I may simply ask you in my response to come see me in person.

**Blackboard:** I will use Blackboard to post course announcements, grades, slides, assigned readings, and other course materials as needed. You will be required to access Blackboard

regularly to participate in your discussion forum. To access Blackboard go to [blackboard.ucalgary.ca](http://blackboard.ucalgary.ca) or [my.ucalgary.ca](http://my.ucalgary.ca).

**Computers and cell phones:** You are welcome to bring your laptops with you to class, but while in class you should only be using your word-processing program. Please keep *all* electronic social networking out of the classroom. This means no *twittering, texting, or facebooking during class time*. My concern lies in the potential that this behaviour has for disrupting the learning of others in the classroom that are not electing to participate in this behaviour.

**Videos:** As I mentioned previously, videos are considered testable course material. If you miss a video in class, you will be required to arrange viewing on your own time. It may be difficult for you to arrange viewing videos outside of class, so it is in your best interest to attend class when videos are being shown.

## GUIDELINES FOR ON-LINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

\* **Important Note – Grading of On-line Discussions:** There is a TA for this course. Her name is Amanda Herron and she will be doing the grading for this component of the course. As such, if you have questions about the grading of the on-line discussion forums, you should contact her first at [amheron@ucalgary.ca](mailto:amheron@ucalgary.ca).

You are expected to *regularly* participate in online discussions within your discussion forum. A **discussion forum** consists of the 10-12 students within your discussion group that you will communicate with throughout the semester. These discussion groups will be moderated by the instructor and the TA. The course material is divided into *three discussion units*. The start date and end date for each discussion unit is listed as follows:

Discussion Forum #1	July 5 (opens after class) – July 18 (closes at midnight)*
Discussion Forum #2	July 19 (opens after class) – August 8 (closes midnight)
Discussion Forum #3	August 9 (opens after class) – August 17 (closes at midnight)

\*A comment posted after midnight on the closing date will not be graded.

**Discussion topics** or threads will be posted as we progress through the course materials. The content of lectures will inform the discussion questions and topics posted. Each discussion forum will contain at least 2 discussion threads to be initiated by the course instructor.

You are expected to respond at least two or three times throughout the course of each discussion unit. During each discussion unity, you should participate by responding to the discussion question posted by the instructor, to the written comments of your fellow classmates, or by starting a discussion topic on your own.

*Before posting comments, please consider the following rules and guidelines which will help ensure that you succeed in this component of the course:*

- Your postings should be rooted in course content. A better posting is one that does not simply demonstrate knowledge of course content but engages with group members. Your response should show that you have read other group members' postings. Your postings should contribute to group discussion in a way that is sociological and relevant to the course material.
- Regular participation means posting **at least two or three times throughout each discussion unit**. You should also monitor whether group members have responded to a thread that you have initiated or to one of your postings. You should respond if a group member invites further discussion from you.
- Comments should be posted on an ongoing basis throughout the discussion unit rather than in the last few hours on the closing date. Each discussion topic is meant to be an evolving conversation that inspires debate and it is difficult for this to occur if everyone

posts within the last couple hours of each discussion unit simply for the sake of posting. Posting at the last minute will be taken into account during grading.

- Keep in mind that the *number* of postings that you log is less important than the *quality* of your individual postings. A better discussion unit grade will occur if you post regularly throughout the discussion unit in a way that responds meaningfully to a variety of topics and individual postings occurring within the discussion unit. Stating simply, “I agree with what Marisa said” does not helpfully contribute to the generation of discussion. Instead, think about and then explicate in your writing why what Marisa said is useful. In your writing, you should try to offer an additional point of insight. You might find personal experience, the course readings, or lecture material as resources you can draw upon to improve the richness of your posting. Please be mindful of chatter that is moving beyond the topic of discussion.
- If you start a discussion thread on your own, please make sure that it does not duplicate content that is already being explored by another thread. When beginning a discussion thread, think about the main topics, controversies, and concerns that have been raised in the course materials that beg for additional reflection. You can share your thoughts with others or simply ask for others’ thoughts. When writing a discussion question, try to write your question in a way that is not easily answerable but invites debate, thought, and reflection from your group members. Keep in mind that if you ask for agreement members of your discussion forum will likely state yes or no while not considering in-depth the issue that you have raised.
- It is extremely important that you strive to generate intellectually stimulating discussion in a way that is *moral* and *respectful*. Remember that your instructor and TA will be reading all comments and postings and will act accordingly if this guideline is not being followed. If you find the content of any discussion threads uncomfortable, contact the instructor or TA immediately.
- Please keep your postings to a reasonable length; a good guideline is **approximately 10 typewritten lines**. Adhering to this guideline will ensure that the amount of discussion forum reading stays manageable for yourself and your group. This guideline also means that you will have to make choices about what to say and how to say it. With careful thought and planning, you can say what needs to be said with depth.

### Grading of Online Participation

For each of the five discussion units, everyone will receive a participation score, as follows:

0 = no posts, no participation and/or does not follow guidelines for participation

5 = makes posts, but they are infrequent and/or do not meaningfully contribute to the conversation

8 = regularly participates and makes a substantive contribution to the conversation

10 = regularly participates, encourages exceptional level of discourse and engagement with the course content

## LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading Assignment</b>
July 5	Introduction	Graham & Stephenson, Introduction
July 7	Age Identities, Images of Aging, and Ageism	McPherson & Wister, CH1 McPherson & Wister, CH2
July 12	Theoretical Perspectives on Aging – The Need for Critical Gerontology	Graham & Stephenson, CH1 McPherson & Wister, CH5 (pps. 123-142)
July 14	Local Knowledges – How Seniors See and Experience It	Graham & Stephenson, CH2 & CH4 McPherson & Wister, CH3
July 19	Age Structures, the Life Course, and Moving Through Time	McPherson & Wister, CH5 (pps. 142-162), CH6
July 21	Gender and Aging	Graham & Stephenson, CH5 TBA
July 26	READING BREAK	
July 28	MIDTERM	
August 2	Later Life Home Care and Other ‘Caring’ Spaces	Graham & Stephenson, CH6 McPherson & Wister, CH8
August 4	The Construction and Reconstruction of Selfhood and Dementia Care	Graham & Stephenson, CH7, CH8 McPherson & Wister, CH7 (pps. 206-211)
August 9	The Gerontology of Caring and Dying Well – Personal Trouble or Public Issue	Graham & Stephenson, CH9 McPherson & Wister, CH7 (pps. 212-218), CH12
August 11	Population Aging, Intergenerational Politics, and Retirement ‘Security’ <b>DUE: Written Assignment</b>	McPherson & Wister, CH4, CH10
August 16	Growing Older Without Aging – The Postmodern Life Course	TBA

**\*Important Note – Lecture & Reading Schedule:** Lectures will be delivered in the order outlined in the course schedule. As the semester progresses, I may decide to revise or omit individual sections. If there are going to be any changes to the assigned readings, I will let you know well in advance.

## Mandatory Departmental and University Policies

**Emergency evacuations:** In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom/lab, please proceed to the assembly point by the Social Science Food Court.

**Deferrals:** If at all possible you must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take a test or pass in an assignment or essay on time. All requests for deferral of a course component due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferrals will be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferral. Deferrals will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

If you have missed a test for a legitimate reason, the instructor can require you to write a “make up” test as close in time to the original test as possible or can choose to transfer the percentage weight to another course component. If the instructor schedules a “make up” test for you, its date and location will be at the convenience of the Department of Sociology.

**Deferred Final Exam Form:** Please note that requests to defer a Registrar-scheduled final exam are dealt with through the Registrar’s Office. Further information about deadlines, and where paperwork should be taken, is available on the form, which can be found at:  
[http://ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/APP%20FOR%20DF%20EXAM\\_0.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/APP%20FOR%20DF%20EXAM_0.pdf)

**Deferred Term Work Form:** Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It’s available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf> Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

**Ethics Research:** Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation-- must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

**Academic Misconduct:** Plagiarism, cheating and other academic misconduct are regarded as serious academic offences. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor’s office or the Department main office. Written assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor’s office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his



assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

**Safewalk:** The University of Calgary provides a “safe walk” service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the “Help” phones located around Campus.

**Academic Accommodation:** Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, phone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. It is a student’s responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.

**Handing in papers outside of class, return of final papers, and release of final grades:**

1. When students are unable to submit papers in class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant. Papers will not be accepted in the main Sociology Department office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the main Sociology Department office. The Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place (i.e. outside an instructor’s office, the department office etc.) Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will be available for pick-up only during the instructor’s office hours at the end of this term or at the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are available only online.