Course Description

“People like you and I, though mortal of course like everyone else, do not grow old no matter how long we live...[We] never cease to stand like curious children before the great mystery into which we were born” ~ Albert Einstein in a letter to German psychiatrist, Otto Juliusburger.

At age 76, with a ruptured aortic aneurysm, Albert Einstein was brought to a Princeton, New Jersey hospital, carrying with him a draft of a speech he was preparing for a TV appearance commemorating the State of Israel's 7th anniversary, but he didn’t live long enough to complete it. Einstein refused surgery, saying, "I want to go when I want. It is tasteless to prolong life artificially. I have done my share, it is time to go. I will do it elegantly."

Because people are living longer than ever before, many of us are concerned about aging – for ourselves, our family and friends, and society as a whole. While there are many aspects of aging we should be concerned about, a great deal of unnecessary fear also exists and further mystifies the aging process. This course is designed to give you insight into the social construction of age and the aging process. We will explore social and cultural factors influencing the (largely negative) views of aging that are prevalent in our society and the implications of these dominant views for individuals and society as a whole. We also will examine how social factors, like gender, race, and social class, shape the experience of aging and create great diversity among elderly persons.

The primary “lessons” that students will hopefully take away from this course are that experiences in later life are a result of life-long processes shaped by systems of social inequality, that aging is not something to be feared, and that many of the "negatives" that we associate with aging can be addressed – and even changed – by individuals working collectively.

We will use texts, articles, film and theater, and experiential learning is a major component of the class.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete the weekly readings prior to class, to attend all classes and to participate in discussion. The course grades are based on:

Class attendance/participation (missing more than 2 classes will affect your grade): 15%
Field notes from participant observation (ADD THIS???: – maybe 5% and reduce class att to 10%?)
Two class facilitations/presentations based on course readings (5% each): 10%
Two response/reflection papers based on course readings (5% each): 10%
Mid-course presentation on field research progress: 5%
10-page mid-term paper (either research methods paper based on field research placement or library-based research paper): 30%
Final paper based on field research: 30%
Required Readings


This course has a LATTE page. Articles with an asterisk (*) may be found there.

Academic Accommodations
If you are a student who needs academic accommodation because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. Undergraduates and graduate students with questions about documenting a disability should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay, Director of Disabilities Services and Support Office of Academic Services, 6-3470, brodgers@brandeis.edu. Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use words or ideas of another without proper acknowledgment of the source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or ideas in published volumes, on the Internet, or created by another student. Violations of university policies on academic integrity, available at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/ai/index.html, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, be sure to ask for clarification.

Course Outline

I. Framing an Understanding of Aging in Society

Week 1: Social Construction of Aging

Tuesday, January 17: Course Overview

Thursday, January 19: The Meaning of Old Age, and Field Research Set-Up
* The Meaning of Old Age, Moody, pp. 27-51

Guest: Brandeis Experiential Learning Program
Week 2: Demography/Theories of Aging

Tuesday, January 24: Demography
Quadagno, Ch. 1 and 4
Preparation for theater project on aging

Thursday, January 26: Theories of Aging
Quadagno, Ch. 3

Play reading: “Memory Garden,” by Becka Richie

Note: Students “play the roles” of the characters, reading this play aloud, and then using social theories of aging in a discussion of the characters and their interactions. (See one-pager theories of aging brief on LATTE.)

Week 3: Social Theories of Aging continued… and Preparing for Field Research

Tuesday, January 31: Theories of Aging/Discussion in context of Richie play
Gubrium/Holstein; pp. 40-46 (Rose); and pp. 47-61 (Atchley)

Thursday, February 2: Social Research Methods: Preparing for Field Research
One-hour assignment – Conduct participant observation in the field, and come to following class (2/7) with written notes, ready to discuss your observations. Observation should incorporate lens of age, gender, race/ethnicity, class.
Read: http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=16783&area=All

Week 4: Culture, Aging and Personal Self-Identity

Tuesday, February 7: Media, Culture and Aging
Discuss participant observations and submit copy of field notes from participant observation

The Fountain of Age by Friedan, pp. 35-103
Film clips: TBA

Thursday, February 9: Aging and Personal Self-Identity
* The Ageless Self by Kaufman
* Gubrium/Holstein pp. 103-111 (Kaufman)

Week 5: Experience of Aging Through Spectrum of Lenses: Class, Gender, Race and Ethnicity

Tuesday, February 14: Aging in Urban America
A Different Shade of Gray by Newman (Chapters TBA)

Thursday, February 16: Aging in Urban America
A Different Shade of Gray by Newman (Chapters TBA)

Film: TBA
February 20-24 Winter Vacation
**Week 6: Aging and Work (Paid and Unpaid)**

**Tuesday, February 28: Aging and Work**
Employment and Retirement Quadagno Ch. 10
* Gubrium/Holstein pp. 115-136

**Speaker:** Elyssa Besen, Boston College Center on Aging and Work
http://bc.edu/research/agingandwork/about/bios/besen.html

**Thursday, March 1:** Process check-in regarding field and/or library research

Draft of paper due

**Week 7: Health Care**

**Tuesday, March 6: Health Care**
* Quadagno, Ch. 11

**Thursday, March 8: Health Care Policy**
* Rationing Health Care: Moody, pp. 163-193

**Week 8: Health Care Policy cont’d and Engaged Aging**

**Tuesday, March 13: Speaker**
Sarita Malik Bhalotra, MD, MHA, PhD, Brandeis Heller School for Social Policy and Management: Health Care Policy from a global perspective

**Thursday March 15: Engaged Aging**
* Aging Well, Vaillant

Mid-Term 10-page papers due

**Week 9: Caregiving**

**Tuesday, March 20: Families and Aging**
Family Relationships and Social Support, Quadagno, Ch. 8

**Thursday, March 22: Adult Children and Caregiving**
* Climo, Ch. 3
* Gubrium/Holstein pp. 193-213 (Finch/Mason)
Film clip: The Savages
Week 10/11: Caregiving cont’d and Housing and Community

Tuesday, March 27: Family Caregiving
* Merrill, Ch. 1, 2 and 5
Student panel on family caregiving issues

Thursday, March 29: Community of Kindred Spirits
Film: Sunset Story

Tuesday, April 3: Spectrum of care: From independent living to institutionalized care
Gubrium/Holstein pp. 231-254 (Hochschild)

Dr. Susan Lanspery, Brandeis University (date may change)

Tuesday, April 5: Nursing Homes
Gubrium/Holstein pp. 401-412 (Diamond)
Living and Dying at Murray Manor
1-pager progress report on final paper due; we'll discuss questions/issues you need help w/

Spring break: April 6-13

Week 12: Care for Frail Elders

Thursday, April 17: Living with Alzheimer's
Living in the Labyrinth
Film clip: Away From Her

Thursday, April 19: Who Pays: Navigating the Systems of Elder Care
* Kingson, “Social Security and Aging Baby Boomers”, pp. 430-441 (in Markson and Hollis-Sawyer)
* Medicare:
Blog on Medicare:

Week 13: Politics and Aging

Tuesday, April 24: Being Political
* Moody, pp. 357-390
Quadagno, Ch. 16

 Speakers: TBA (Massachusetts Senior Action Council activists/leaders?)

Thursday, April 26: Student presentations/Wrap up
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

• **Attendance and Participation**
The success of this course is dependent on ongoing, active student participation. I will usually lecture at the beginning of each class to provide a framework for understanding the topic and the readings, but the class will revolve around student presentations and interaction, and not lectures.

Because of the centrality of active class participation, you are expected to attend every class period. Attendance is taken into consideration in figuring your Class Participation grade. (Participation accounts for 15% of your grade. Excessive absences – missing more than two classes – will negatively affect your overall grade.)

**Note on texting in class:** While it is not the norm in this class, there is an occasional texter. This REALLY bugs me, because it indicates the student isn’t paying attention to me or her/his classmates. Puh-leeese do NOT text in class!

• **Class facilitations/presentations**
For two class days during the semester you will serve, along with one or two other students, as a “facilitator/presenter.” You will prepare a brief (one- to two-page, typewritten, double-spaced) analysis of a central issue or argument in that day’s reading. In addition, you will prepare two questions for class discussion, based on that reading. While the instructor will assume the major responsibility for framing the class discussion, you will present your written analysis and your questions, and they will be used as part of the basis for class discussion. (Each facilitation/presentation accounts for 5% of your grade, or 10% total.)

• **One-page reaction papers**
On two of the weeks that you are not the official “facilitator/presenter,” you will send a one-page “reaction paper” to that person (or persons) who is the facilitator/presenter, which should be your thoughtful reaction to the week’s readings. Please also send a copy to the instructor. The purpose of these reaction papers is to help you process what you have read, as well as to support your classmates who are the “facilitators/presenters” in the discussion of that week. I will read your reaction papers and return them the following week. I will also ask the “facilitators/presenters” of the week to incorporate your thinking/questions in their facilitation of the discussion. The content of these reaction papers will **not** be graded, although completing them thoughtfully will contribute to your participation grade.

• **Mid-term 10-page paper, either research process/methods paper based on field research placement or library-based research paper**
This paper can (will!) be fun to write! You can work on this paper alone or in pairs; it’s your choice. If you have a field research placement with others, you may want to work together (or not, again your choice!).

**Option I: Research Process paper based on field research placement**
The research process paper is the preferred paper option for those who are doing a field research placement. While you **CAN** choose Option II (a library research paper), it is strongly recommended that you write a research process paper. (If you choose to write a library research paper, I’d appreciate hearing why.)
The research process paper provides you with an opportunity to think and write about the following questions:

- What is your primary research question? (or questions)
- Why did you select this question (these questions)?
- What research methods did you select and why?
- What experience informed your approach to collecting data (e.g., interviews, participant observation, reviewing organizational materials)?
- What reading material are you reviewing?
- If you had any orientation at your field research site, please describe.
- How did you approach your interviewee(s)? And how did they respond?
- If you did participant observation, please describe what you did and how you did it (so far).
- What initial responses are you having about the experience? (e.g., the interviewees, the field research site, the organizational dynamics of the site, the roles and responsibilities of staff and residents)
- How is this experience affecting you thusfar?

You will undoubtedly have other questions to examine and that’s just fine to include in this paper.

**Option II: Library research paper option**
If you choose to do a library research paper, you can choose from a topic below or propose your own topic.

1. Select a social and/or economic policy or benefit that potentially supports healthy aging. Critically review the research in this area. What have you learned from the findings of these studies? What are the strengths and limitations of these studies (e.g., their methods)? Where are the gaps in information about the policy/benefit? If you were to design a study, what else would you want to know about the policy/benefit?

2. Examine a particular workplace policy (or series of workplace policies) that support older workers. Critically review the research done on these issues, to the best of your ability, bringing an age, gender, race and class lens.

3. Select one workplace policy in another country that offers a contrast to the U.S. Critically review the research done on this policy, to the best of your ability, bringing an age, gender, race and class lens in your analysis. Compare and contrast with policies and practices in the United States. Identify some of the reasons why the two countries’ policies are similar/different. Possible countries to explore include: Canada, Sweden, Germany, France, and the U.K.

4. Research a piece of legislation that is pending or has already passed that will affect older people. Describe the legislation, analyze it from an age, gender, race and class perspective. Describe the forces in favor and opposed to it, articulate their positions, and provide any insight regarding how their ideologies inform their stance on the legislation. Does the legislation go far enough? Does it go too far? Share your opinion about it. Finally, provide an analysis regarding the implications of this legislation.

A paper prospectus is due on (March 1). This prospectus should describe what you plan to write about and a general outline of your paper. The prospectus will not be graded! It is simply an opportunity for you to get feedback from the instructor about your ideas. I will give you written commentary, offering
you suggestions about how to proceed. You are welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss this paper as well.

**This paper is due (March 15). (This paper accounts for 30% of your grade.)**

- **Mid-course presentation on field research progress or library research paper**

**Option I:** Students will present their field research in progress. This presentation will be an opportunity for you to think out loud about your experience conducting research in the field, including what you’ve learned so far, challenges you’re facing, and how you plan to proceed with your research and writing. The class will provide a community of support to each student as you move forward. (This presentation and any evidence of your work thusfar accounts for 5% of your grade. “Evidence” of your work includes field notes, copies of materials you’ve read from the site, photos or brochures from the site, etc. Anything goes – as long as it reflects your work thusfar.)

**Option II:** Students doing library research papers will present what they have learned thusfar at this point. This presentation will be an opportunity for you to think out loud about your experience conducting research in the field, including what you’ve learned so far, challenges you’re facing, and how you plan to proceed with your research and writing. The class will provide a community of support to each student as you move forward. (This presentation accounts for 5% of your grade. “Evidence” of your work includes any notes or citations you’re using. Here too, anything goes – as long as it reflects your work thusfar.)

- **Final paper based on field research or library research (10-12 pages)**

**Option I: Field research paper**
The final paper will be the culmination of your field research! It will include an analysis of the data you collected in your field site, including interviews and participant observation. Depending on the nature of your field research, you will have a unique research question you're exploring. You will submit a one-pager describing your progress on the final paper on **April 5th**, which includes any questions or issues you'd like help with. The one-pager will not be graded! It is simply an opportunity for you to get feedback from the instructor about how you are presenting your findings. I will give you written commentary, offering you suggestions about how to proceed. You are welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss this paper as well.

On the final day of class, students will have an opportunity to present their field research papers. (This paper and presentation accounts for 30% of your grade.)

**Option II: Library research paper**
If you choose to do a library research paper, you may once again choose from the options presented or suggest another topic, which must be approved by the instructor. The final paper will be the culmination of your library research! You will submit a one-pager describing your progress on the final paper on **April 5th**, with any questions or issues you'd like some help with. The one-pager will not be graded! It is simply an opportunity for you to get feedback from the instructor about how you are presenting your findings. I will give you written commentary, offering you suggestions about how to proceed. You are welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss this paper as well.

On the final day of class, students will have an opportunity to present their library research papers. (This paper and presentation accounts for 30% of your grade.)

I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU THIS SEMESTER!