Course Description

Life course studies is a relatively new and emerging field which seeks to understand how forces of time, context, and individual agency influence human development across the life span in a rapidly changing world. A life course approach explores how an individual’s life trajectory is shaped by age and developmental stage, historical period, generation, and social institutions (the family, education, marriage, work). Conversely, this perspective examines how individuals and generational groups change their social environments and the society at large over time, through their own actions.

Across the life cycle from childhood to old age, social institutions, relationships and environments are structured in important ways along gender lines. Confronted by different social expectations and life opportunities, men and women may experience the same life transition (e.g. – marriage, parenting) or pass through the same social institutions (e.g. – work, family) in unique and contrasting ways. Given these social facts, it is surprising that the field of life course studies has paid little attention to gender as a structured source of inequality and variation in the life span. Thus, this course is designed with two purposes in mind: 1) to provide an introduction to the field of life course studies, and 2) to expand students’ perspectives on how gendered inequalities shape the life pathways and development of people over time. Special attention will be given to the life cycle development of women. Inequalities of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality as they intersect with gender will also be examined as important lenses through which we will examine the life course.

The course will offer classic readings on key concepts and research in the field of life course studies which will be supplemented by readings from within and outside of the field (including gender and feminist theory as well as research on women’s lives) that will aid students in developing a critical gendered perspective on the life course.

Educational Objectives:
* Develop a basic understanding of the principals of the life course paradigm
* Apply gender and feminist theory to the paradigm, when necessary, to understand how gender, in interaction with inequalities of race, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality, shapes (and is shaped by) the life course
* Learn relevant methods for researching gender and the life course and apply them to the analysis of original life history data.
* Understand the following life course concepts and their inter-relationship with gender:
  - the effects of age, period, and generation on the life course
  - the significance of the timing and sequencing of life transitions (such as marriage,
parenting, leaving home) in the life course
- the impact of social change on lives across time
- dynamics of the life stages of adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age
- how social institutions of education, marriage, work, and family shape the life course

--This course has a LATTE page: http://latte.brandeis.edu.

Class Policies

Disability: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay, Director of Disabilities, Services and Support, in Academic Services at 6-3470, or brodgers@brandeis.edu. Letters of accommodations should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of the necessary adjustments. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity: You have a critical obligation as a student to credit the words and ideas of others in your written work. Please take care to cite those authors or persons whose ideas you draw upon in your written work, whether your paper includes verbatim quotes, paraphrased passages, or larger concepts or perspectives that you use creatively to advance your own original ideas. Sources that must be cited include not only print but web materials, ideas you learned in this or other classes, or from fellow students, friends, etc. There are serious consequences for plagiarism. Please make yourself familiar with and follow the university’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai). Brandeis faculty may refer any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing the assignment or the course.

Classroom Decorum: The classroom is a special space and time for learning and the creation of community. You have an important role in creating and maintaining this community by being fully present in class. This means refraining from disruptive talking, passing notes, eating, sleeping, texting, or doing work for other classes. It also means arriving on time to class. Engaging in activities which blatantly detract from the classroom experience will negatively affect your class participation grade.

Electronic Devices: No iPods, cell phones and other hand-held devices are to be used during class. They should be turned off and stowed. Laptops may be used in class only if students refrain from surfing the web or using them in any other ways that are not associated with classroom learning. I reserve the right to prohibit student’s use of laptops in the classroom, if this policy is not respected.

Grading and Course Requirements:

Class Participation: Student participation in class discussion is a critical feature of this seminar and will comprise a major part of your final grade (see grading criteria below). I expect students to attend each class, to have completed all assigned reading, and to be prepared
to make thoughtful contributions to class discussion that are directly relevant to the readings. Please come prepared to lend your voice to the discussion each week! Because this is a small seminar it will be obvious if you do not keep up with the readings or participate much in class. In order to prepare for class discussion, I highly recommend that you take a half to a full page of reading notes on all of the weekly readings. Although I will not be collecting them, I encourage you to bring these notes to class with you so you can refer to them in class discussion. I will be providing recommendations for writing reading notes in class. Some of you may already have a habit of taking notes on your course readings, but for those of you who don’t this handout may be helpful. I will also be providing you with a handout which provides “food for thought” questions to help guide your thinking and note-taking on each week’s readings.

**Attendance Policy:** Class attendance is an important part of your class participation grade. Very consistent attendance in this course is critical because of the emphasis I place on classroom discussion as a foundational method for learning. Class attendance is key also because classroom material and discussions will serve as a critical reference point for your assignments, and because this is a small seminar in which every student’s voice counts. Therefore, the attendance policy is as follows:

- One grade step (e.g. A- to A) will be added to the class participation grade if you attend all classes during the semester. One grade step will be deducted from the class participation grade for each class missed after the first two unexcused absences (e.g., A to A-). **Anyone missing more than half of scheduled classes automatically will fail the course.**
- It is important to miss class only if really necessary in order to not squander your two free class absences for use in true emergencies.
- Beyond the first two absences, you must provide a documented reason for missing class in order to avoid deductions on class participation.

**Oral Presentations:** You will be required to make two small group presentations of your research project. One will be a progress report given in the middle of the semester, and the other will be a final report given during the last class. Details will be explained in class.

**Final Course Project:** All students must complete a final course project which will be due at the end of the semester. It will involve applying a gender and the life course perspective to the analysis of some form of life history data that is relevant to the themes developed in this course. The data may come from different types of sources, as follows:

- Interviews that you conduct with family members, friends, and/or relevant others (e.g. you could interview your grandmother, mother and sister about historical continuity and change in the transition to adulthood across three generations);
- Published memoirs, biographies or autobiographies that illustrate themes relevant to a gender and the life course perspective;
- Oral histories, personal diaries and/or letters of ordinary and extraordinary women’s lives that can be accessed through Harvard’s Schlesinger library on the history of women in America (access to this resource will be explained in class);
- Personal diaries or letters that you have access to (and permission to use) through family or friends;
• Relevant fiction.

The final paper on the project should be 15 pages in length. It must meaningfully incorporate at least 12 readings across seven different weeks of the class. Therefore you should design your topics to fit around some of the central conceptual frameworks in part two of the class (weeks 3-13). In addition, you must include secondary sources to be discussed in class.

Preliminary Proposal: In the sixth week of class, you will email me one or two preliminary ideas for a course project, and I will provide feedback on your proposed direction. More details on this will follow. The preliminary proposal will not be graded.

Final Course Project Proposal: In the eighth week of the class, a 4-5 page paper will be due in which you will outline your idea for the project, explain how it is relevant to some of the central themes of the class (using at least 6 course readings), identify a data source, and explain how you will analyze the data using a gender and the life course perspective. Further details will be provided in class.

Grading Guidelines:

• Weekly class attendance; weekly class participation – 30%
• Both oral presentations 10%
• Project proposal – 15%
• Final paper – 45%
Required Readings:


All readings outside of the above listed books can be found on Latte.

**Important Note:** This syllabus may be subject to revision during the semester. All changes to the syllabus will be discussed in class and/or communicated via group email, and revised readings will be posted on Moodle at least several days in advance.

*Please check your Brandeis email regularly for announcements about syllabus changes or other important course news and updates.*
Gender & the Life Course Syllabus

Part 1: Overview

A. Week 1: Introduction to the Life Course Paradigm

Tues. Jan. 15th
Introductions and Overview to the Course

Thurs. Jan. 17th

B. Week 2: Gender and the Life Course as an Emerging Perspective

Tues. Jan. 22nd

Thurs. Jan. 24th

Part 2: Conceptual & Methodological Frameworks of Gender and the Life Course

A. Week 3: Age and the timing and sequencing of life transitions
Tues. Jan. 29th
* A “Final Course Project Requirements Handout” will be distributed today
Wheaton, Blair & Ian Gottlieb. 2006. Excerpt from “Trajectories and Turning Points Over the Life Course: Concepts and Themes.” In Stress and Adversity Over the Life Course, edited by Blair Wheaton & Ian Gottlieb (pp. 1-14). Cambridge, UK:
The Cambridge University Press.

AND read either Hiromi or Malone below:
  Journal of Marriage and the Family. 61:1008-1019. (you may skip section beginning with heading, “Models’ on p 1013, to the discussion section on p. 1017.)
  British Journal of Criminology. 49: 305-325.

Thurs. Jan. 31

B. Week 4: Effects of Age, Period, and Cohort/Generation on the life course

Tues. Feb. 5th

Thurs. Feb. 7th
Screening: TBA
C. Week 5: Methodological Issues in Studying Gender and the Life Course

Tues. Feb. 12th


Thurs. Feb. 14th
**Research Methods Workshop

--BREAK -- Feb 18th – Feb. 24th

D. Gendered Life Stages and Transitions across Time and Place

I. Week 6: Gendered Adolescence through the lens of the body

Tues. Feb. 26th
*Must email me one or two preliminary ideas for final course project

Thurs. Feb. 28th
Brumberg, Joan. The Body Project. Read: Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 4.

II. Week 7: Gendered Adolescence through the lens of Sexuality

Tues. March 5th

Thurs. March 7th

III. Week 8: Debates about Emerging Adulthood

Tues. March 12th
Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. “Chapter 1: A Longer Road to Adulthood.” & “Chapter 10 – From Emerging Adulthood to Young Adulthood: What Does it Means to Become an Adult?” Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties.

Thurs. March 14th
**Final course project proposal due

IV. Week 9: Gender in Emerging Adulthood

Tues. March 19th

Thurs. March 21

BREAK -- March 25th – April 2nd

V. Week 10: Mid-life

Thurs. April 4th: Midlife
Screening: Excerpts from “49-Up”


VI. Week 11: Old age
Tues. April 9th: Old Age

** Oral Presentation Progress Reports on Research Projects
**Optional: Hand in One-Page Outline of Research Project for Feedback


E. Key Domains of the Life Course

I. Week 11 – cont-: Education

Thurs. April 11th

II. Week 12: Marriage and Family

Tues. April 16th
Screening: 51 Birch Street


Thurs. April 18th
III. Week 13: Work and Family

Tues. April 23rd


Thurs. April 25th

VII. Week 14: Course Wrap-Up

Tues. April 30
*Oral Presentations on Final Research Projects due*  
**Final Paper Due**