

**SYP 3730: Aging and the Life Course**

Dr. Anne Barrett  
Fall 2008



*The Old Woman and the Toad*  
Judy Somerville

Artist's Statement:

As generation after generation of the elderly remain "unseen" and youngness becomes the mode, I say let's change this image. Let's forget the calendar girls and bring on the elderly as images of old people suddenly appear over every mantle place in America. Visions of old people are the autobiography to be of every person on earth. The elderly are a beautiful part of the natural world, after all what is beauty? Like rivers flowing through the forest each wrinkle defines the infinite quality of life's textures and experiences. An idealistic monumental vision mysteriously transforms reality in surprising ways. In these portraits I hope to portray another kind of beauty, sensuality and a nouveau eroticism. This is truly a new generation, the elderly through my eyes.

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**Contact Information:**

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We encourage the use of the class discussion board for posting general administrative, technical, or substantive questions or comments at any time of the day or night. As the semester gets going, these postings should be your first point of reference when you have a question or concern. Questions and answers will be open for everyone to read and archived for later reference. Note that we do *not* monitor the discussion board or our email 24/7. You should reasonably expect a reply to your electronic communications within 48 hours, except for weekends and holidays.

**Course Description:**

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. Although there are aspects of aging we should be concerned about, many Americans have unnecessary fears and anxieties about aging. Our exaggerated concerns (particularly about our own aging!) illustrate the fact that the aging process is in many ways "socially constructed." In other words, although aging clearly involves changes in our physiological capacities, the way we view and react to these changes is determined by social and cultural forces.

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 I hope you 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 are able to be changed by individuals working collectively.

**Objectives:**

- To critically examine dominant views of age and aging in contemporary American society, understand their socio-historical development, and assess their implications for aging individuals and societies
- To analyze how social, cultural, economic, and political forces shape the experiences of aging adults
- To develop an appreciation for the diversity of aging experiences that exist and an understanding of how aging is shaped by various social factors, such as gender, race, and social class.
- To identify, explain, and apply major concepts and theories of aging
- To assess common assumptions about the aging process and elderly persons in light of research on these phenomena
- To gain an ability to identify and examine sociologically relevant issues for aging persons and societies

**Required Materials:**

*Aging and the Life Course* (4th edition; 2007) by Jill Quadagno.  
*Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom

**Software requirements:** You must be able to access the internet, read PDF documents, view streaming audio and video, as well as use basic word processing and spreadsheets. If you do not have a high-speed internet connection at home you need to set aside time in your schedule to access the online material from a computer with a sufficient

connection speed. Slow connection speeds at home are not a valid excuse for failing to complete a course requirement on time.

\*Please note that you are responsible for checking the course website at least once a week. We'll regularly post changes or updates under "Announcements."

### **Grading:**

Grades will be based on a 100 point scale. I've listed the points for each assignment below:

1. **Online bio (2 points)** – So that we can get to know a bit about one another, you're asked to create a short bio to post on the website.
2. **Midterm exam (15 points)** -- covering material from chapters 1-8 and all discussions up to this point in the semester.
3. **Final exam (20 points)** -- covering material from chapters 9-17 and all discussions since the midterm.
4. **Quizzes (20 points total; 4 points each)** -- The 5 quizzes will cover material from the chapters indicated on the syllabus
5. **Discussions (25 points total; 5 points each)** -- We'll have 5 online discussions over the course of the semester. Your posting should be about 1-2 paragraphs long and include the creative and relevant use of sociological concepts. It should also use good grammar. In addition to the original comment, each student must make a reasoned reply or reaction to at least one posting during each class discussion. Our class will be divided into 2 groups for the discussions (35-40 students each).
6. **Response to the book *Tuesdays with Morrie* (8 points)** -- You'll be writing a 2-3 page paper on your reaction to this book. I'll post more information on the paper under "Assignments".
7. **Life history project (10 points)** -- You'll be interviewing an elderly person (at least 60 years old) and writing a 4-5 page paper that uses the data collected in the interview to illustrate various concepts and theories you've learned about over the semester. I'll provide more details about this project under "Assignments".

Grading will be according to a standard scale, and plus/minus grading will be used for final semester grades. FSU does not allow a final grade of "A+." The specific grade ranges are below:

A =92-100	A- =90-91	B+ =88-89	B=82-87	B- =80-81	C+ = 78-79
C=72-77	C- =70-71	D+=68-69	D=62-67	D- =60-61	F=<59

Please note that incompletes (I) will not be given except under extenuating circumstances and at my discretion. Missing work is not sufficient reason for grade of I. The College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an incomplete be passing the course.

### **Academic Honor Policy:**

Students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Policy of the Florida State University, including the statement on Values and Moral Standards published in The Florida State University General Bulletin. The Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of these expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty throughout the process. Please see the following website for a complete explanation of the Academic Honor Policy: <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor's discretion. Any

student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way may be reported to the university administration for further disciplinary action as specified in the Academic Honor Policy.

Website: <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should do the following: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This must be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center, 108 Student Services Bldg., Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, (850)644-9566 (voice), (850)644-8504 (TDD)

E-mail: [SDRC@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:SDRC@admin.fsu.edu)

Website: <http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

### **Religious Holidays**

Students will be allowed to miss class due to observance of religious holidays but they are still responsible for all materials assigned outside and covered in class on the day(s) missed. You must talk with your instructor in advance of missing a class for religious holiday observance reasons.

### **Excused Absences**

The following and only the following absences are eligible to be excused: religious holidays, as specified in FSU policy; absences due to representing FSU at official functions, including intercollegiate debating or varsity sports events; verified emergencies and/or medical illness. Medical illness refers to conditions that are serious in nature and require treatment by medical professionals and/or surgical or other treatments. Documentation is required for an absence to be excused.

### **Incomplete Grades**

Missing work or uncompleted assignments are insufficient reasons for a grade of Incomplete. An Incomplete grade will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor's discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an "I" must be passing the course.

**Class Schedule** (Subject to minor change)

WEEK	TOPIC	THINGS TO READ	THINGS TO DO
August 25-29	Introduction to Social Gerontology	Chapter 1	Wed., Aug. 27 by 10pm EST -- have <b>online bio</b> posted, and <b>**THIS IS MANDATORY. IT WILL COUNT AS YOUR FIRST DAY ATTENDANCE.</b>
September 1-5	Theories of Aging	Chapter 2	Sept. 4-5: <b>Online Discussion</b> on Ageism *Have a post and at least 1 response submitted by 10pm EST on the 5 <sup>th</sup>
September 8-12	Life Course Transitions	Chapter 3	Sept. 11-12: <b>QUIZ 1</b> on Chapters 1-3 -- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 12 <sup>th</sup>
September 15-19	Demography of Aging	Chapter 4	Sept. 18-19: <b>Online Discussion</b> of Life Expectancy Exercise. Before the discussion, complete the online estimate of your life expectancy *Have a post and at least 1 response submitted by 10pm EST on 19 <sup>th</sup>
September 22-26	Historical Perspectives on Aging	Chapter 5	Sept. 25-26: <b>QUIZ 2</b> on Chapters 4 & 5 -- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 26 <sup>th</sup>
September 29-October 3	Biological Perspectives on Aging Psychological Perspectives on Aging	Chapter 6 Chapter 7	Oct. 2-3: <b>Midterm exam</b> (covers chapters 1-7)-- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on the 3 <sup>rd</sup>
October 6-10	Family Relationships & Social Support	Chapter 8	Oct. 9-10: <b>Online Discussion</b> of future trends in family support. Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 10 <sup>th</sup>
October 13-17	Living Arrangements Caregiving	Chapter 9 Chapter 10	Oct. 16-17: <b>QUIZ 3</b> on Chapters 8, 9 & 10 -- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 17 <sup>th</sup>
October 20-24	Old Age and the Welfare State	Chapter 11	Oct. 23-24: <b>Online Discussion</b> of Social Security Reform. Before the discussion, play the "Fix Social Security Game" at <a href="http://www.actuary.org/socialsecurity/">http://www.actuary.org/socialsecurity/</a> *Have a post and at least 1 response submitted by 10pm EST on the 24 <sup>th</sup>
October 27-31	Work & Retirement	Chapter 12	Oct. 30-31: <b>QUIZ 4</b> on Chapters 11-12 -- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 31 <sup>st</sup> .
November 3-7	Health and Health Care	Chapter 13	Nov. 6-7: <b>Online Discussion</b> *Have a post and at least 1 response submitted by 10pm EST on the 7 <sup>th</sup>
November 10-14	Death & Dying	Chapter 14	Nov. 13-14: <b>Papers</b> on <i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i> (2-3 pages) due by 10pm EST on 14 <sup>th</sup> <b>Optional:</b> Join an online discussion of the book

November 17-21	Economics of Aging	Chapter 15	Nov. 20-21: <b>QUIZ 5</b> on Chapters 13-15
November 24-28	Poverty & Inequality	Chapter 16	Have a happy Thanksgiving!!
December 1-5	Politics of Aging	Chapter 17	FRIDAY, December 5 10pm EST-- *Oral history papers are due (4-5 pages); also all extra credit papers must be turned in
December 8-12 EXAM WEEK	FINAL EXAM		<b>MONDAY &amp; TUESDAY December 8-9</b> <b>Final Exam</b> (covers chapters 8-17) -- Have it submitted by 10pm EST on 9th