SOCIOMETRY 226L:
THE DEMOGRAPHY OF AGING

Professor: Merril Silverstein
Room 411 Maxcy Hall
Office Hours: Friday, 10-12 and by appointment
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Course objectives:

This is a graduate-level introduction to the study of the social demography of aging. The course assumes no prior training in demography, although some knowledge of empirical techniques will be helpful. Advanced undergraduate students are welcome, but should speak to the instructor beforehand.

Students who cover the course requirements can expect to acquire a basic understanding of the causes and consequences of population aging. While, the focus will be on micro and macro aspects of contemporary aging in the United States, there will be some attention paid to historical and cross-national issues. In the course we will examine three basic themes: 1) trends in aging and health of populations, 2) demographic and health transitions experienced by older individuals and families, and 3) social and policy issues confronting an aging society.

Course structure

The class will meet thirteen times. The readings are designed to present both theoretical and empirical treatments of the topic for each week. Class time will be roughly divided into two parts. For approximately 1/2 of the class, I will present an overview of the subject for that week and lead a class discussion. The remainder of the class will be devoted to student presentations (see below) and discussion generated by the presentations.

Course Requirements

1. Students are expected to attend class, keep up with the readings and contribute to class discussions.

2. Six short (2–3 page) essays that briefly summarize and critique the readings for the assigned weeks. These essays will be presented to the class in short (10–15 minute)
presentations, which will provide the basis for class discussion. The essays are intended to give you an opportunity to react to the material, so be provocative and daring in your comments -- how do the ideas in the readings strike you? Take a point of view and defend it! Students may choose the class sessions for which they will be responsible and are encouraged to coordinate and collaborate with others presenting in the same session. Remember, that you are required to read the articles for all class sessions.

3. A final paper (15-20 pages) is due May 10th. The topic will be one of your choosing in the demography of aging. A very short (half page) proposal should be provided to me before you start. The final paper should review the relevant literature, discuss the major intellectual debates, come to a conclusion about the state of our knowledge in the area (what do we know, what do we need to know?) and suggest promising avenues for future research.

The weights for the final grade will be as follows:

10% class discussion
40% short essays
50% final paper
COURSE TOPICS

I. Causes of Populations Aging I (January 29)


II. Causes of Population Aging II (February 5)


III. Aging, Periods and Cohorts (February 12)


* Easterlin, R. C. MacDonald and D. Macunovich. 1990. "Retirement


IV. Mortality and Morbidity (February 19)


V. Family Structure and Intergenerational Relations (February 26)


VI. The Generational Equity Debate (March 5)


* Battin, Margaret P. "Age Rationing and the Just Distribution of Health Care: Is There a Duty to Die?" pp. 69-94 in Timothy M. Smeeding (Ed.). Should Medical Care Be Rationed By Age. New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.


VII. Living Arrangements and Marital Status (March 12)


VIII. Migration and Geographical Distribution (March 19)


IX Gender and Aging (March 26)


SPRING BREAK: APRIL 2

X. Historical Demography (April 9)


* Laslett, Peter. A Fresh Map of Life. (Chapters to be announced)


XI. Ethnic and Socioeconomic Dimensions (April 16)


XII. Social Epidemiology of Aging (April 23)


XIII Long-Term Care and Public Health Policy (April 30)


