

**Soc1 342-702: Aging in Society**  
**Western Kentucky University**  
**Spring 2021**

Dr. Krull

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\*When e-mailing please include your full name and course/section number to which you are referring.

Office Hours: Wednesday 9:00-10:00 am or by appointment. All office hours will be virtual:

<https://wku.zoom.us/j/7109009950>

This course satisfies the following requirements:

- 1.) An elective in the Sociology major
- 2.) A primary elective in the Gerontology minor
- 3.) A “Systems” elective in the “Connections category” of the Colonnade program

**Course Description:**

The United States' population is aging at a rapid rate. A variety of social circumstances are causing this rapid aging, the result will be a society structured like we have never in history seen before. This course will utilize a sociological perspective to examine the causes and consequences of this change at macro and micro levels of analysis.

**Course Goals:**

<b>Connections Student Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>How does the course meet these learning outcomes?</b>
1. Analyze how systems evolve.	Students will analyze the basis and evolution of social policies and programs which care for the needs of an aging society. Specifically the economic systems (surplus deferral), medical system (healthcare), family system (caregiving) and political system (regulation). Students will analyze how and why these systems began and how they have impacted and changed over time and how these systems might continue to change.
2. Compare the study of individual components to the analysis of entire systems.	In this course students will analyze the macro social systems and how they impact the individual. For example, social security and employer based retirement plans plus Medicare, allow for widespread retirement in the United States. Widespread retirement though, has to be understood within the context of cultural attitudes about the skills and abilities of aging people. Within that context, an examination of individual decisions to retire can be examined along with how those policies impact social inequality across minority groups in our society.
3. Evaluate how system-level thinking informs decision-making, public policy, and/or the sustainability of the system itself.	Students will evaluate how the existence and maintenance of social systems creates and sustains cultural patterns and policies in the United States. For example, a nuclear family system with one adult who has reduced economic power increases the reliance on family caregiving to meet the needs of aging members of that family. This then, reduces public pressure on government responsibility to pay

	for long term caregiving for the elderly. Likewise, the social security financing was based upon expectations that a population would consist of a large group of working aged people who had strong wages and a small group of elderly. The unanticipated aging of society has put that system in economic peril. Proposed solutions vary in the consequences
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Latent goal: Although I do not assess this goal, I find informally that this class turns many student's attention to their own or their aging loved one's future in a positive way.

**Text:** *Aging Concepts and Controversies 9<sup>th</sup> edition*. Harry R. Moody and Jennifer R. Sasser. Sage, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5063-2800-3

### **Blackboard**

**<http://wku.blackboard.com>**

You will find it necessary to use blackboard to be successful in this course. All quizzes and writing assignments are submitted through blackboard. Additional required reading is also posted on blackboard. All scores will be posted on blackboard as well.

### **Course Requirements:**

**Discussion board or Flipgrid—choose one format on which you will interact with your classmates.**

One thing I love about this course is the discussion of the topics at hand. This discussion deepens our understanding of the topics, but also can enlighten us to viewpoints and experiences different than our own, thus helping us grow intellectually. In a web based class, this discussion usually takes place on the “discussion board.” You may choose this as your option for this requirement. Or, you may choose an app called “Flipgrid.” Flipgrid is a video “discussion board” instead of typing your discussion, you will record a brief video of yourself talking about a topic. You will then watch several of your classmate's videos and interact with that content.

- 1.) You must choose by Sunday January 24 whether you will use flipgrid or the discussion board. You will let me know which you choose by filling out a google form posted in the “Begin here” section.
- 2.) Once you pick you are committed to that format for the entire semester. No switching.
- 3.) If you are new to flipgrid, there will be a zero point activity to let you try it out.

The points and time on task requirement is equivalent between the two formats and will address the exact same discussion questions.

Discussion board: A minimum of two posts are required. The first post must be completed by Thursday at Noon CST of the assigned week, the final post is required by Sunday night at 11:59 pm CST of the assigned week. Your posts may be an original post to a thread or they may be replies. All of your posts must demonstrate that you have engaged with the assigned material and that you are reading the posts of your classmates. Therefore, posts that are repetitive of previously posted comments, replies to posts that simply indicate agreement with the original poster and do not extend the conversation will not receive credit. (It is fine to post a reply that essentially says “ditto” as encouragement and reinforcement of the original poster—a sort of “like” button—but it will not earn points.) As far as word count, think of about 200 words, however, I am most interested in the quality and content of your posts more than how wordy/succinctly you make your point.

Flipgrid: Flipgrid can be used as an app on a smartphone or from a computer. Flipgrid enables students to post comments in brief video segments, reply with video segments or write out written comments. A minimum of two posts are required. The first post must be completed by Thursday at Noon CST of the assigned week, the

final post is required by Sunday night at 11:59 pm CST of the assigned week. Your posts may be an original post to a thread or they may be replies. All of your posts must demonstrate that you have engaged with the assigned material and that you are watching the posts of your classmates. “Liking” videos (pressing the heart icon) does not count as a response or a post as I can see how many “likes” and views a video receives, I can’t determine who hit the “like” button. Video length is limited to two minutes so it is most likely that you will have to think about what you want to say prior to recording your response so that you are using the time carefully. Same guidelines as for the discussion board, you must demonstrate you have read/engaged with the material. “Talking off the top of your head” will not receive points.

Scoring: There are 9 discussion board forums/flipgrid topics available this semester. Each forum/topic will be worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. I will count 35 points towards your final grade, so essentially, you can miss two of these assignments, or score poorly on a couple before you begin to hurt your grade. Should you earn more than 35 points, those points will simply be extra credit.

**Lifecourse Assignment:** This assignment is located in Unit 1, Basic Concepts 1 folder. It is worth 10 points and due Sunday January 31, 11:59 pm CST. No late papers accepted.

**Writing Assignments:** The textbook seeks to increase the student’s understanding of gerontology through the presentation of controversial topics. In order to fully utilize the approach of the text, students must engage in the controversies, not simply understanding the two sides of the controversies, but also critically engaging the controversies. To that end, there will be 9 opportunities to complete a writing assignment, from these 9 opportunities, **2** writing assignments must be completed. These writing assignments will usually be based upon assigned questions from the end of each chapter, or the question will be indicated on the syllabus or blackboard.

Each answer should be in essay format: thorough, well thought out, word processed, a minimum of one and one half page double spaced in length, 10 or 12 pt font, one inch margins, use proper grammar, spelling etc. You must utilize information from your text, lecture, or outside sources as evidence to support your argument in each answer. You must use proper citation (APA style is preferred); this is to be sure that you are clear when you are expressing your ideas versus repeating the text ideas. Each writing assignment is worth 10 points. There are 9 of these writing assignments listed on the syllabus, you must complete **two** of the nine. Choose the assignments that interest you, or that you feel you can successfully answer. **You must complete at least one writing assignment prior to the second exam.** Please plan out your writing assignment schedule so that you can meet these expectations! All assignments should be submitted through the assignment feature on blackboard. Please note the only document formats which I can open are: .pdf .doc .docx .rtf or .txt. (This list does not include the word processing format of “Word perfect” (.wps) or the “Pages” word processing format nor can I open google docs! Documents that cannot be opened will not be graded.) No late papers will be accepted. All due dates will be Sundays at 11:59 pm CST.

### **Quizzes**

In order to think critically like a sociologist, you must read and learn the material from the textbook. To illustrate you are reading deeply enough, you will have a quiz for every controversy covered in the textbook. While any material is “fair game” for a quiz, the quizzes will especially focus on the “readings” portion of the textbook chapters. These are the assigned readings that present both sides of the controversy under consideration in a particular chapter. You will be given timed, 5 point, 5 question quizzes. You will be allowed to use your text and your reading notes to aid in the completion of the quiz, however, because the quiz is timed (10 minutes), if you have not read thoroughly, or taken notes, you will not have time to “look up” the correct answers.

Over the course of the semester, there will be 11 quizzes times 5 points each equals a possible 55 points from quizzes. Due dates will be Sundays at 11:59 pm CST. No late quizzes/make up quizzes will be allowed. I will not reset a quiz if you go over the time limit or if your computer crashes during the quiz. However, instead of a messed up quiz counting as 0, I simply have adjusted the points possible from quizzes to account for the fact that occasional trouble can occur with the on-line quizzes. 45 points will be counted toward your final grade from quizzes. This means that you can “mess up” two quizzes and it will not hurt your grade. Any points you earn in excess of 45 will count as **extra credit**.

It is considered cheating if you take the quiz with assistance from a friend, a website, or allow a friend to “watch” you complete the quiz. Instances of cheating will be referred to the University office of judicial affairs.

### **Exams:**

There will be three exams for this course. Each exam will be worth 50 points. Exams will be multiple-choice format, consisting of 50 questions, each worth one point.

#### **Make-up exams**

Make-up exams are unfair to all persons involved in this course. Therefore, make-up exams are discouraged. Should you miss a scheduled exam, you are required to alert the instructor as soon after the missed exam as possible in order to schedule a make-up exam. The make-up exam for this course will consist of a 50 point comprehensive (cumulative) exam that will be given at the time of the regularly scheduled final. Only one make up exam will be allowed, should a student miss two exams, the second missed exam will receive a “zero.”

If you have a scheduled or university excused absence, this policy does not apply to you. Instead, you may make accommodations with the instructor ahead of time to make up the test.

### **Final Essay**

The assessment of your learning of the “systems” component of this course is a final essay. This final essay assignment is located in Unit 3. It does not count as one of the two writing assignments you are to do over the course of the semester. Rather, you might think of it as a “take home final exam essay.” Complete guidelines are in Unit 3 on blackboard. The due date is due Sunday April 11, 11:59 pm CST. No late papers accepted.

### **Grade Distribution:**

Flipgrid/discussion	35 pts
Life course assignment	10 pts
2 Writing assignments @ 10 pts each	20 pts
Quizzes	45 pts
Required Final essay	15 pts
Exams 3 @ 50 pts each	150 pts
Total	275 pts

A=90% or 247-275

B=80% or 220-246

C=70% or 192-219

D=60% or 165-191

### **Disability services**

“In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC). Please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from SARC.”

### **Title IX Misconduct/Assault Statement**

*Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at <https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf> and*

*Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at [https://wku.edu/policies/hr\\_policies/2040\\_discrimination\\_harassment\\_policy.pdf](https://wku.edu/policies/hr_policies/2040_discrimination_harassment_policy.pdf).*

*Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.*

*Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and **MUST** report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.*

## **Course Schedule:**

It can be difficult to predict the pace of any given course. I reserve the right to alter due dates/assignments/exams as necessary for the benefit of the course.

➔ This symbol indicates material that will be quizzed and a writing assignment option is available.

Review of syllabus and Introductions

## **Prologue**

Chapter goal: 1.) Utilize the demographic transition theory to explain population aging.

2.) Illustrate why our society should be concerned about population aging.

Reading Assignment: Pages xxiii-xxxi in your assigned textbook. Also read Controversy 11, pps 443-455 in your assigned textbook.

Vocabulary: Baby boom generation, Population Aging, birth cohorts, demographic transition theory, population pyramid.

## **Basic Concepts I: The life course perspective**

Chapter Goals: 1.) Discuss the approach to aging in American society.

2.) Compare and contrast theories of aging.

3.) Describe the mechanisms of physical aging.

➔ Reading Assignment: Basic Concepts I, pps 1-27 in your assigned textbook.

Important vocabulary: Be sure to learn the definitions of all the bolded terms in the assigned reading.

## **Controversy 2: Why do our bodies grow old?**

Chapter goal(s) 1.) determine the difference between usual and inevitable biological changes with age.

2.) Classify the various theories regarding why the body changes.

3.) Describe age related changes to the body and predict how these biological changes will impact our society.

4.) Describe changes in life expectancy over the past 100 years. 5.) Articulate the compression of morbidity debate.

➔ Reading assignment: Controversy 2: Why do our Bodies Grow Old. pp 55-72. Readings 6 (pp 75-82) and 7 (pp 82-84) Quiz!

➔ Writing assignment: Answer ONE of the following questions:

A.) In your opinion, how much emphasis should be placed on promoting health versus curing diseases in old age? What are the benefits AND consequences of emphasizing one over the other? Think both of benefits and consequences at the individual level as well as at the societal level. Refer to the reading assignments for support for your answer. What if prevention/curing disease succeeded in significantly prolonging the human life span? (or life expectancy?) Is your guess that it will be simply extending years of life or might it be extending a healthy period of living? What might be the consequences at the individual and the societal level if either event occurs. Refer to the text to support your answer.

B) Write a science fiction or imaginary scenario of how the United States might look in 50-75 years if dramatic breakthroughs in the genetics of aging occur. In developing this scenario, be sure to state the key discoveries or inventions to occur and describe the likely social and individual consequences of those discoveries. Be sure to reference the text in terms of theories of why the body ages. You are also encouraged to use a resource from outside the course material--properly cite everything, of course!

### Controversy 3: Does intellectual function decline with age?

Chapter goals: 1.) Explain the different ways in which intelligence is measured as well as the difficulties in measuring intelligence.

2.) Describe how the different types of intelligence change with age.

3.) Extend the discussion of biological changes and intellectual changes with age to a discussion of driving capabilities of older Americans.

→ Reading assignment: Controversy 3: Does Intellectual Functioning Decline with Age? pp 97-108. Readings 11 and 12 (pp 109-118) Quiz!

→ Answer one of the following:

- A. Discuss Dennis's critique of Lehman's argument that creativity inevitably declines after middle age. Do you agree or disagree with Dennis's skepticism? Make sure you briefly overview the main points of each author and then discuss the points you find were strong or weak and how that overall sways your position about intelligence and age. Be sure to also add your own critiques of either Lehman or Dennis as they are relevant.
- B. Consider the issue of the elderly driving, you might want to begin by thinking about the value you place on driving in your own life, then consider the issue from a societal level and from that of an elderly person. What are the consequences to the individual if he or she can no longer drive (consider both urban and rural areas), what are the consequences to society if an elderly person cannot drive (or is no longer a safe driver)? In our society, what institution should be responsible for regulating drivers and why, particularly as they age--some examples might be the family, the government, the medical field. Should an older age be the criteria used to regulate driving? Why or why not? Be sure to cite evidence from your text when addressing these questions.

### EXAM 1

#### Basic Concepts III: Social and Economic Outlook.

Chapter goals: Understand sources of income in old age and illustrate how this varies among minority status groups.

→ → Reading Assignment: "Basic Concepts III: Social and Economic Outlook pp. 297-329. (Please note this is out of "order" in terms of the layout of your text)

### Controversy 9: What is the future for Social Security?

Chapter goals: 1.) Explain the funding of the Social Security Program and illustrate why there will be a funding shortage.

2.) Compare and contrast the benefits of Social Security across racial and class groups in the United States.

→ Readings Assignment: Controversy 9: What is the future of Social Security, pp 365-381. Readings 38-41, pp 382-399. Quiz!

→ Answer the following question:

What solution to social security would you most like to see implemented? What are the benefits and consequences (to individuals, to groups of individuals, to society) of implementing your

proposed solution? Be sure to compare and contrast your preferred solution against one other solution. Be sure to cite evidence to support your answer.

### **Controversy 10: Is Retirement Obsolete?**

Chapter goals. 1.) Describe the conditions that must exist in society for retirement to become a social institution.

2.) Describe trends in retirement in terms of age and gender.

→ Viewing Assignment: Go to the Con 10 folder in blackboard and watch the “Frontline documentary: Can you Afford to Retire?”

→ Reading Assignment: Controversy 10: Is retirement Obsolete? pp 401-420. Readings 43-46 pp 421-438. Quiz!

→ Answer the following question.

The authors of the assigned readings 43-46 present a variety of ideas regarding the use of a "retirement" period in the life course. Compare and contrast these perspectives. How do you perceive what the American cultural attitudes towards any of the ideas proposed by the authors. Further, do you believe there are generational differences in hopes/plans for retirement. For example, is what you hope and plan for in retirement what your parents/grandparents hope for/are doing? Are there changes that should be made at the societal level to accomplish any of the concepts/ideas proposed by the authors?

### **Basic Concepts II: Aging and Healthcare.**

Chapter goals: Understand the major causes of illness in old age, how healthcare is financed in the United States and how personal care is delivered to frail older people in the United States.

→ Reading Assignment: "Basic concepts II: Aging, Healthcare and society" pp 133-166

### **Controversy 4: Should we ration healthcare?**

Chapter goals: 1.) Describe lifestyle choices that negatively impact health.

2.) Describe the basis of and precedents to healthcare rationing.

3.) Compare and contrast the benefits and consequences of rationing healthcare.

→ Reading Assignment: Controversy 4: Should we ration health care for older people? pp 167-184. Readings 16, 18, and 19. pp185-191 and 192-196. Quiz!

→ Answer one of the following:

Is Callahan cruel and hard hearted or is he instead courageous and far sighted in his willingness to advocate a controversial idea? Do family members and older Americans themselves already make rationing decisions? For example, at the funeral of an older person, mourners will often comfort one another by remarking, "He had a good long, life." If this is so, how is what Callahan proposing any different? Cite evidence from your text when answer this question.

### **Controversy 5: Should families provide for their own?**

Chapter goals. 1.) Compare and contrast the gender differences in caregiving.

2.) Discuss the utilization and characteristics of high quality nursing homes.

3.) Discuss who bears the costs of caregiving to the elderly in terms of both individuals and society.



➔ Reading Assignments: Controversy 5: Should Families provide for their own? pp 201-213. Readings 21-25, pp 214-231. Quiz!

➔ Answer one of the following:

A. Is transfer of assets to qualify for Medicaid a form of "Middle class welfare" as asserted by Jane Bryant Quinn? Discuss both how it is and is not. Which groups in our society benefit and which groups are harmed by this transfer of assets. Cite evidence for your answer.

B) See blackboard for additional question options.

### **Controversy 6: Should older people be protected from bad choices?**

Chapter Goals: 1.) Define the various forms of elder abuse in the United States.

2.) Describe late life patterns of sexuality.

➔ Reading Assignment: Controversy 6: Should older people be protected from bad choices? pp 237-249. Readings 27, 28, 29 pp 252-261. Quiz!

➔ Answer the following:

At the beginning of your chapter you read about Uncle Bert. Was uncle Bert "self neglecting" or just living his life as he wanted to? When it comes to deciding on matters of personal liberty, the law is supposed to treat adults alike regardless of age. The only basis for civil commitment is the combination of danger plus mental incapacity. Do you think the law should be rewritten to make an exception for frail older people who are vulnerable to self neglect or mistreatment? Cite evidence from this chapter or the entirety of what you have learned this semester to support your answer.

### **Controversy 7: Should people have the choice to end their lives?**

Chapter goals: 1.) Discuss the implementation and utilization of Oregon's "Death with Dignity Act."

2.) Discuss the process of grief and mourning in the United States.

➔ Reading Assignment: Controversy 7: Should people have the choice to end their lives? pp 265-277. Readings 30, 31 and 33. (pp 278-286 and 288-294). Quiz! Be sure to also read the article by Sidney Hook located in the Con 7 blackboard folder.

➔ Answer the following:

Evaluate the Oregon Death with dignity act. Does it present the slippery slope that Leon Kass suggests in reading 33? Or does it have appropriate safeguards? Or perhaps the law is too restrictive? Consider the amount of power the physician holds in this act. Is this appropriate? Would a law such as this ever be passed in KY? Why or why not?

Final systems essay submitted through blackboard.

#### **Final Exam.**

This exam will not be cumulative.