

Gerontology for Educators (HRD 557)

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the field of educational gerontology. Key issues to be treated include demographic trends, theories of aging, problems and opportunities in later-life learning, productive retirement, and educational opportunities for elders. A major goal of the course is to invite professional educators to explore human aging with an eye toward improving teaching and/or program development with elder populations.

Goals of the Course

1. Introduce educators/HRD professionals to the foundation literature in the field of educational gerontology.
2. Invite educators to think about how the aging of America is affecting education today and will influence educational practices in the future.
3. Examine barriers to learning, motivation, participation patterns, creativity, and other issues related to older learners.
4. Study the phenomena of later-life work and retirement while exploring their implications for education.
5. Confront one's own personal attitudes toward human aging including the question, "What is successful aging?"

Key Questions Driving This Course of Study

1. What is the emerging field of educational gerontology? What issues does it address?
2. Why should teachers, educational administrators, adult educators, and HRD professionals concern themselves with gerontology? How might they serve or improve service to older audiences?
3. What are the specific attributes that characterize older adults as learners? What problems do elders encounter as student, clients, and/or patients?
4. What is a “Ulyssean” adult and how can educators and HRD professionals help foster a “Ulyssean spirit”?
5. What opportunities exist for continued work in the later years?
6. What is the future of retirement as an institution and “lifestyle?”
7. How have educational institutions responded to the needs and interests of older learners? How might we evaluate these interventions?
8. What are my own thoughts and feelings about growing older? Why? What images do I have for my own successful aging?

Core (Required) Reading

Cox, H. (Ed.) (2005). *Annual Editions: Aging 05/06 (17th Edition)*. Dubuque, IA.: McGraw Hill / Dushkin.

Fisher, J.C. and Wolf, M.A. (Eds.) (1998). *Using Learning to Meet the Challenge of Older Adulthood*. (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 77). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hilton, J. (1935). *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. New York: Penguin.

Selected journal articles and book chapters will supplement the above texts. These will be communicated to HRD 557 participants via “electronic reserve.”

Recommended Reading and Key Library Resources

Other books and articles will be recommended to participants in HRD 557 as the course progresses. These will be taken from educational gerontology and related literatures (e.g., social gerontology, geriatric nursing, social work, etc.)

A substantial number of academic journals, many with a research focus, are available at the University of Southern Maine, other university libraries, and in larger public libraries. Below is a partial listing of gerontology-related periodicals available at the University of Southern Maine with the specific campus noted where the journal is located. (Note: Many of the journals listed below are indexed and may be explored through online searches. However, while abstracts may be obtained not all of the articles published in these periodicals will be available in their entirety online.)

The Gerontologist (Portland)

The Journals of Gerontology (Portland)

The Journal of Gerontological Social Work (Portland)

The Journal of Gerontological Nursing (Portland)

The Journal of Aging and Human Development (Portland)

Educational Gerontology (Gorham)

Generations (Gorham)

Research on Aging (Gorham)

Geriatrics and Gerontology Education (Gorham)

Adult Education Quarterly (Gorham - while the major focus of this journal is adult education, occasionally articles about aging and/or older learners will appear)

Adult Learning Magazine (Gorham - ditto note above)

Culture of the Course

HRD 557 is intended to be a seminar. The principal spirit guiding our experience will be that of collaboration among colleagues, shared inquiry, and working to establish a community of learners. Although they may be a special challenge using an online (asynchronous) medium, it will be our goal to strive for such a spirit of community and collegueship.

Mike's roles are to provide guidance and a degree of structure to the seminar, be a resource for content, present a modicum of "facts and foundations," facilitate online discussions, and be an overall accompanist in the learning process engaged by seminar members.

Participants' roles are to critically read required and elective material, willingly share questions and points of view, and engage all of the course projects thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Required Work

1. Read the core books and articles (electronic reserve) in a timely fashion, such that you can participate in a meaningful way in online exercises and discussions.
Due Date: Ongoing
2. Make substantial and thoughtful contributions to "Discussion Board" on a regular basis, both contributing your own ideas and responding appropriately to ideas posted by classmates.
Due Date: Ongoing
3. *Older Learner Program Exploration:* Through use of the Internet, telephone or e-mail interview, library sources, and/or a personal site visit, explore an existing educational program for older learners. Examples include Elderhostel, the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement, one of Maine's 15 senior colleges, a local adult education program with special opportunities for older learners, and one of the myriad of international "University of the Third Age" programs. Provide an overview of that program, including a critique, by way of a detailed posting in Blackboard. (Specific guidelines for posting the results of your exploration will be discussed at a later time.)
Due Date: February 27

4. *Learning Synthesis Letter:* At the half-way mark in HRD 557, write a letter (750 – 1000 words) to Mike Brady discussing the status of your learning to date in HRD 557. This letter is to be sent to Mike privately (via e-mail) and is not to be posted on the course discussion board.
Due Date: March 13
5. *Community Vision Project:* Choose a local community, the one in which you reside or one close by, and explore the existing programs that are available to older persons. These may include adult education, religious institutions, social service programs, long-term care, a senior center, and/or volunteer opportunities. Talk with one or more leaders in this community and at least two older persons (minimum age = 60) about these existing programs with an eye toward developing and improving opportunities for elders. Once these conversations and other preparations have been completed, create a vision statement that lays out a plan for improving services and opportunities for older persons in this community over the next 10 years. Key ideas/findings from your “Community Vision Project” will be posted on Blackboard and discussed by members of the class. Details will be forthcoming.
Due Date: May 1
6. *Letter to an Older Person:* Write a letter (750 – 1000 words) to an older person you know – a family member, neighbor, friend, or even someone you hardly know but with whom you would like to communicate – summarizing the “big ideas” about aging you have learned this semester in HRD 557. Send the original of your letter to that older person with a copy to Mike.
Due Date: May 1

Accommodations

If you have a learning disability and require special accommodation to succeed in this course, please contact Mike. All appropriate accommodations will be granted. In addition, please contact the Student Services Department of your campus or regional center. For information about how to contact your regional center’s Student Services Department please call 1-800-868-7000.

Grading

There are five measurable “products” in HRD 557, i.e. numbers 2 - 6 in the “Required Work” section above (item #1 is assumed and is intended to support and provide substance to the others.) Since each of these activities has more or less equal value vis-à-vis making HRD 557 a successful learning experience, each will count 20% toward the final grade.

Final Note

The field of educational gerontology is an expanding galaxy in the ever-widening universe of aging studies. It is my hope that HRD 557 will be an engaging and enjoyable exploration into this field. Let’s all work to contribute to its success as an adult education experience.

Course Content and Schedule

Week of 1/16 *Introductions, Orientation to HRD 557;*
 Personal Awareness of Aging

To do: Obtain textbooks; Become familiar with details of syllabus;
Log into “Blackboard” and join initial discussion threads.

Week of 1/23 & 1/30 *The Phenomenon of Aging*

To do: Read articles 1 – 15 in *Annual Edition: Aging*; Begin to explore an educational program for older learners (see #3 on p. 4 of syllabus); Participate in online discussions

Week of 2/6 & 2/13 *Theories of Aging*

To do: View brief lectures on streamed video; Read assigned texts in in HRD 557’s “electronic reserve;” Continue exploration of program for older learners; Participate in “Blackboard”

Week of 2/20 *Winter Break - No Online Discussions*

Week of 2/27 & 3/6 *Educational Programs for Older Learners*

To do: Read Fisher and Wolf book; Post “Older Learner Program Exploration” on Blackboard (see p. 4, #3); Read and comment on classmates’ program explorations

Note: Older Learner Program Exploration posting due Feb. 27

Week of 3/13 & 3/20 *Issues and Best Practices in Older Adult Education*

To do: Read assigned articles/chapters in “electronic reserve;” Submit mid-term “Learning Synthesis Letter” to Mike (see p.5, #4); Participate in online discussions

Note: Learning Synthesis Letter due March 13

Week of 3/26 *Spring Break - No Online Discussions*

Week of 4/3 & 4/10 *Creativity and the Concept of Ulyssean Adulthood*

To do: Read *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and assigned articles on Ulyssean Adulthood and related themes; View video-streamed presentation; Participate in online discussion board

Week of 4/17 & 4/24 *Issues in Retirement; Reminiscence and Life Review*

To do: Read articles 22 – 26 in *Aging: Annual Editions*; Read assigned articles/chapters in “electronic reserve;” Work on preparation of online posting of community vision statement (see p. 5, #5); Participate in online discussions

Week of 5/1 & 5/8 *The Experience of Dying; “Community Vision Statements;” Personal Letter; Conclusions*

To do: Read articles 27 – 30 in *Aging: Annual Editions*; Post “Community Vision Project” on Blackboard. Read and comment on classmates’ community vision projects. Submit copy of the letter written to an older person (see p. 5, #6) to Mike; Concluding discussions and course evaluation.

Note: Community Vision Project posting due May 1

Letter to older person (with copy to Mike) due May 1