SOCI 904: SEMINAR IN FAMILY — ADOLESCENCE

Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Fall 2017

Course Information
Instructor: Dr. Tara D. Warner       Lecture Times: Monday 2:00pm-4:30pm
Office: 705 Oldfather Hall       Lecture Room: 707 Oldfather Hall
Email: twarner2@unl.edu       Prerequisites: None
Office hours: Monday & Wednesday 10:00am – 11:00am, or by appointment

INTRODUCTION:

This seminar examines theory, methods, and empirical research related to the sociological study of adolescence and the transition to adulthood. We will draw largely on life course and social ecological perspectives to examine this developmental stage within social, historical, and spatial contexts. Course readings will cover contemporary topics in the study of adolescence, including peer and romantic relationships; the changing roles of parent, family, and peer influences; school, neighborhood, and community contexts; physical health/mental health; delinquency, crime, and violence; exposure to violence, parental incarceration, and the changing nature of the transition to adulthood. The course emphasizes the experiences of adolescents in the United States.

COURSE FORMAT:

The course will follow a discussion-based graduate seminar format. I may start sessions with some very brief comments that aim to place the readings in a larger context but the majority of our time will be devoted to student-led discussions of the readings and related issues. The purpose of student-lead discussions is to facilitate the development of effective communication skills—that is, to get you comfortable talking about ideas in front of others. As such, it is essential that you complete and reflect on each week’s readings prior to class.

REQUIRED READINGS:

This is a doctoral seminar and requires in-depth analysis of empirical research articles. It is a reading- and discussion-intensive course.

Students are required to read around five to eight (5 - 8) scientific articles and/or book chapters each week as specified in the Course Outline and Schedule (below). Students are responsible for acquiring the articles—all journal articles can be found on-line through the library’s full-text journal article access system (or through Google Scholar if on campus [if off-campus, access Google Scholar through the library’s link]). Requiring students to locate articles will enhance basic literature searching skills but can also expose students to additional research of interest (e.g., by following “explore similar articles” or “cited by” links). Any readings not available online will be posted in the Readings area of the course Canvas Site. Please notify me as soon as possible if you have any difficulty obtaining an assigned reading.

1 Information in this document is subject to change throughout the course of the semester; please consult Canvas for the most current version of the course syllabus.
COURSE COMPONENTS:

(1) Discussion Questions and Class Participation (30% of final grade)—

Students are required to submit discussion questions on Canvas (via the “Discussion” link on the course homepage) for each set of readings. You should submit at least one (1) question per journal article or three (3) questions per book assigned for that day. You are welcomed and encouraged to submit more than 1 question/reading. In the Canvas Discussion page, Discussion Forums will be created for each week. The deadline for question posts is 12:00pm the day of class.

Discussion leaders (described below) should consolidate submitted questions for the day and bring a copy for themselves to facilitate discussion. Students who are not discussion leaders that week should (1) bring their own questions to class and (2) review the full set of questions posted by their classmates. Discussion leaders are exempt from submitting questions online that week (instead, leaders’ will integrate their questions into their presentation of the material).

Submission of questions is only a portion of this grade; you must also participate in discussion each week. Students can volunteer their questions as we discuss each reading in class, or I may call on you at random if feel that you have not been actively participating.

Questions should be based on critical reflection of the readings and can address any of the following: strengths/weaknesses of the reading; data or variables; research methods or analytical design; hypothesis testing; theoretical conceptualization; policy implications; or directions for future research. Below are some sample questions that are applicable to almost any reading:

- How does the main concept improve our understanding of adolescence?
- Are the main concepts adequately measured or operationalized?
- To what extent are the findings generalizable to other situations, subgroups, times, etc.?
- How might the associations vary (i.e., moderators) when applied to subgroups of the population, or other contexts?
- What important factors have the authors not considered in this study? omitted variables?
- Are their alternative explanations, or lurking variables, that might otherwise account for the findings reported?
- With what alternative theoretical perspectives are the findings (in)consistent?
- Is the author(s) main argument logical and clear? In what ways is it problematic?
- What are the policy implications, if any, of the findings?
- What additional information might we need to understand better the associations presented (e.g., mechanisms, moderators)?
- What are some “future directions” researchers could take based on the methods/findings of the study? (this could be a useful angle if you post questions late and other students have already raised the “good questions”)

Note on the logistics of Canvas Discussions: There is 1 discussion forum for each week. Within each forum, I have posted a “reply” for each individual article. Students may post their question(s) by either replying to my original reply [author (year)] or by replying to another student within a thread (if applicable). Please be mindful of the post to which you are replying in order to avoid excessive indentation of successive threads (which will be difficult for all of us to follow).

You may miss 1 week of class discussion questions during the semester with no penalty; if you miss more than one day, it will adversely affect your course grade.
(2) Discussion Leadership (10% of final grade)—

Each student is required, along with one other student (I will randomly assign pairs) to help lead discussion on 2 separate weekly topics. Each week is a reading topic, and it is up to the student pair to decide how to divide presentation duties.

These presentations should briefly summarize each of the readings for the day, diagram the theoretical arguments or conceptual models, and critically evaluate the readings for issues that include (but are not limited to): major themes, limitations (conceptual and/or methodological), policy implications, and directions for future research. Discussion Leaders should (a) identify common themes across the readings and (b) spend time engaging the class with your critical assessment and questions (rather than simply summarizing each reading, which we all have already read).

To facilitate discussion, Discussion Leaders may prepare and distribute a brief (approx. ½ page per reading) summary of day’s readings—this is optional. These summaries would identify the critical need addressed by the paper and its key finding(s)—e.g., “who cares?” and “what did we learn?”

(3) Assignment: “Kids these days…” (10% of final grade)—

You have likely heard some variation of the critique “…kids these days have it too easy. In my day [insert some assumed historical hardship]…” For this assignment, students (working either solo or in groups of 2-3) will support or refute this sentiment by compiling peer-reviewed and publicly-available information on a topic of their choice. Detailed instructions for the assignment will be posted on Canvas. Assignments will be submitted via Canvas by the 10th week of class—students will also briefly share their arguments with the class at the start of Week 10’s meeting (10/23).

(4) Research Project (Paper or Proposal) and Presentation (50% of final grade)—

Students are required to write a research paper which they will present to the class at the end of the semester (during the last week). The written paper will be approximately 15-25 (depending on selected paper option) double-spaced, all-inclusive) pages, addressing a core research question (or set of questions) related to the sociological study of adolescence (broadly defined). Depending on students’ stage in the graduate program, interests, and access to appropriate data, this paper may take one of the following forms: (1) empirical research paper, (2) literature review [MA students only], or (3) research proposal. Detailed information on the paper options, additional information about dovetailing course papers and student co-authoring, and key due dates are listed on Canvas (click the link for “Final Course Paper” from the course homepage).

Grading Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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These percentage cut-offs are absolute. Please note, the Department of Sociology policy is that the minimum acceptable grade in a course at the 800- or 900- level is a “B” and thus students must earn an average weighted performance of at least 85% on the course requirements.

Students with Disabilities:

In accordance with the University policy, if a student has a documented disability and requires accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, he/she should contact the instructor at the
beginning of the semester and make this need known. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate fully in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, you must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY. Please contact the Service for Students Disabilities (SSD) office as soon as possible to have them advance the paperwork to the instructor in a timely manner.

**Academic Misconduct:**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. It includes, but is not limited to, any form of cheating or unapproved help on an exam or academic exercise/assignment, copying someone else’s written work without citation, presenting fabricated information as legitimate, or any unauthorized collaboration among students. A student who is uncertain about whether or not something constitutes academic dishonesty has the obligation to see the instructor, an academic advisor, and/or refer to their UNL Student Handbook for clarification (for more information see: http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml)

In this class, academic dishonesty will be handled on a case-by-case basis. The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty in any form is determined by the instructor, and may consist of a reduced grade (including F or zero) for the assignment; a reduced grade (including F) for the entire course, or other options as stipulated in the UNL Student Code of Conduct. Also, the incident will be reported in writing to UNL’s Judicial Affairs.

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**Course Outline & Schedule**

The following is a tentative reading list and schedule for the course. It is subject to change as the course progresses based on our movement through the material. Any changes will be announced via email and a revised syllabus posted on Canvas.

The reading list contains an extensive list of readings—it is intended to be a resource for students. **You are only required to read those cites marked with an ***.** You are expected to complete the assigned reading prior to the class for which it is assigned.

Students are advised to manage their time, reading, and assignments accordingly. Failure to complete the assigned readings on time will quickly lead you to fall behind.

**Week 1 (8/21) – Conceptualizing Adolescence & Adolescent Development**


Week 2 (8/28) – Adolescence in a Life Course/Ecological Perspective


Week 3 (9/4) – Labor Day; no class meeting
**PROCESS AND CHOICE IN ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT**

Week 4 (9/11) – The Experience of Adolescence: Developmental Timing and Progression


Week 5 (9/18) – Personality, Agency, and Planfulness


THE CONTEXT(S) OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Week 6 (9/25) – Families


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**Week 7 (10/2) – Friends, Peers, and Social Networks**


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**Week 8 (10/9) – Education and Schools**


**Week 9 (10/16) – Fall Break; no class meeting**

**Week 10 (10/23) – Neighborhoods & Communities**


Week 12 (11/6) – Sexual Identities, Romantic Relationships, & Sexual Activity (part 2)


Week 13 (11/13) – The Culture of Sexual Activity


Week 14 (11/20) – Deviance, Violence, & Violent Victimization


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**Week 15 (11/27) – The Transition(s) to Adulthood**


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**Week 16 (12/4) – Student Presentations**

***Final papers due (uploaded to Canvas) by 11:59pm 12/13***