Life-Span Development

Course Description

This class will provide an overview of developmental issues across the life span. One theme involves how we are all similar at different ages – what does it mean to be a 1-year-old, a 7-year-old, or a 42-year-old? And how do we change over time, what are the common human developmental trajectories that we travel during our lifetimes? Another major theme is how, despite our commonalities, we differ from one another beginning even in infancy. For example, some infants sleep through the night and are easy to soothe, while others are irritable and fussy almost from birth. A 3rd theme is whether these individual differences really matter in the long run. Does the fussy baby become an even-tempered toddler; does the aggressive preschooler just grow out of it? In more general terms, is development relatively continuous or discontinuous for most of us? Finally, we will discuss how gender, culture, class, and race/ethnicity influence all of these developmental themes.

Course Objectives/Goals

Upon completion of this class, students will be able to:

- Describe the major life stages and the developmental issues characteristic of these stages
- Be able to distinguish emerging individual differences from precursors to psychopathology
- Have an appreciation for developmental continuities and discontinuities
- Be able to describe some of the ways that gender, race & ethnicity, social class, and culture influence and direct the broad developmental trajectories described above

Course Processes

Class sessions will typically include a lecture during the first part of the class, followed by breakout discussion groups and ad-hoc group summaries of discussion themes. In addition to lectures and class discussions, we will also see several developmentally relevant movies and participate in one informal class experiment. During the last week, each student will give a brief oral summary of a theme related to his or her final research paper.

Course Requirements

1) An obvious one with only 12 sessions - consistent attendance & timely reading of assignments. Please let me know in advance if you have an anticipated conflict, and please email me if something unexpected happens.

2) The major written requirement is a 12-15 page term paper on a topic relevant to Life-
Span Psychology. The paper is due one week after the end of class and should be mailed to me at 335 Ridge Rd., Middletown, CT 06457. Please, no email attachments will be accepted. On-going feedback will be provided regarding possible topics, guidelines on how to write Psychology papers, how to use available library resources at Wesleyan, etc.

3) A brief oral summary (15 minutes) on a theme related to the term paper. More details will be provided in class.

Grading Policy

The class paper counts for 65% of your grade. You may get preliminary feedback on a draft of your paper (in this case submitted by email) if you send it to me within one week after the final class. Feedback will be limited to general aspects of your paper, including appropriate writing style, basic clarity, and depth/sophistication. The feedback phase is NOT required and is not graded. Oral reports will count for 20% of your grade and will be evaluated on clarity and informational content. Finally, classroom participation counts for 15% of your grade.

If possible, please complete the readings for the first week (Santrock, Chapters 1 & 2 in A Topical Approach to Life-Span Development. Boston: McGraw Hill) prior to attending the first class.

Required Text

NOTE – you must buy either the 6th or 7th edition of the Santrock book that starts with “A Topical Approach…” (He has more than one Life-span book.)


Other readings will be posted on Moodle.

Course Sequence

Week 1 - Class Overview- Readings, Assignments, & Major Themes


Movie “Short” – 7-Up

Week 2 - Attachment Across the Life Span


**Week 3 - Cognitive Development**


**Week 4 Emotions and Emotional Development – Basic Themes**


**Movie – Emotional Development**

**Week 5 Emotions – From Individual Differences to Psychopathology**


In-class experiment on Emotion Knowledge

**Week 6  The Self, Identity, and Personality**


**Week 7  – Economic Trends, Institutional Fairness, and Life-Span Development**


**Week 8  Parent-Child Interactions and the Family**


Week 9 Social Relations – Peers & Friends


Week 10 Social Relations – School, Work, & Achievement


**Class Oral Presentations**

**Week 11  Risk & Resilience: Developmental Psychopathology**


**Class Oral Presentations**

**Week 12  Late Adulthood: Aging, Living, & Dying**


**Class Oral Presentations**