

**Sociology Department
University of California San Diego**

**SOCI 161
Sociology of the Life Course
Winter 2025**

When: Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30pm – 01:50pm

Where: Remote/Zoom Synchronous – Tuesdays (from Week 2)
Cognitive Science Building Room 004 – Thursdays

Teaching Assistant: Erik Tan
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Instructor: Dr. Maud Arnal, PhD, CPM, LM (she/her)
Lecturer, Sociology Department
University California San Diego
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursdays 09:00am-10:30am on Zoom or in person, and by appointment. Zoom Link: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/8674877411>
If you prefer to book an appointment outside the regular office hours or to meet in person, please contact our teaching assistant Erik Tan: y7tan@ucsd.edu

Course Credits: 4

Prerequisites: This is an upper-division elective course for undergraduate students in the Sociology department. Others require permission of the instructor to enroll.

Format: Lectures, discussion, case study, and small groups. Each class will provide an opportunity to discuss the key issue identified for that day through a combination of presentations and discussions. Students will also have the opportunity to earn extra credit by choosing an assignment of their choice.

Course Description:

Life course research is interdisciplinary by nature and design. This course introduces major key concepts of the life course theory from a sociological perspective. Various theoretical perspectives are also mobilized to understand and critically think about how our personal biographies are products of social structure as well as of our individual personalities and circumstances. Our lives progress through a sequence of socially constructed stages—childhood, adolescence, middle adulthood, and later adulthood. A life course perspective is particularly interested in the rules and

norms that govern transitions between these stages¹. This course provides an overview of selected topics such as childhood inequality, the transitions from adolescence to young adults, middle adulthood norms and intergenerational influences, end-of-life issues, and explore their sociocultural, political, and economic implications. The course operates at both a macroscopic level and a microscopic level in which students will be encouraged to cultivate what C. Wright Mills calls “the sociological imagination”². The objective is both to provide a foundation for further sociological study of life course theory, and to acquire a way of thinking which can offer a point of departure for one’s own research. A single semester can provide only a sampling of the current range of theory and empirical work on the life course. The course offers a series of lectures, panel discussions, and debates to inform students’ critical thinking on key sociological concepts and the life course perspective. The class sessions involve a variety of formats including small group work, lecture and discussion, activities, and debates.

The purpose of this course is to develop critical thinking through our engagement with the life course literature. According to Joanne G. Kurfiss³, critical thinking is “a rational response to questions that cannot be answered definitively and for which all the relevant information may not be available. It is defined here as an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that therefore can be convincingly justified. In critical thinking, all assumptions are open to question, divergent views are aggressively sought, and the inquiry is not biased in favor of a particular outcome.” By adopting a critical social science approach to exploring the sociology of the life course students will gain a comprehensive initiation to the life course theory, while taking a critical look at their own representations of selected topics.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, the students will be able to:

1. Identify key principles of the life course perspective;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of how sociological concepts, perspectives, and theories help to develop critical thinking about life course theory;
3. Understand how individual lives are structured in the collective life histories and generations, with an emphasis on underlying structural and social determinants;
4. Recognize the value of an interdisciplinary and intersectional understanding of the life course perspective;
5. Critically analyze and synthesize theoretical arguments, current research and scholarly work on the sociology of the life course;
6. Engage in scholarly discussion and debate with peers/others about topics covered in class;
7. Imagine, develop, and present a creative project on a selected life course theory topic and demonstrate skills to take a position on that topic;
8. Present and discuss ideas clearly and articulately through effective oral and written communication. Students should demonstrate awareness of ways in which the conceptual framework used in the assigned readings is developed to enlighten the complexity of their chosen topic.

¹ Based on Dr. Linus Huang’s Syllabus Sociology 111L, Spring 2020, Berkeley.

² Mills, C. W. 1959. The sociological imagination. Oxford University Press.

³ Kurfiss, J.G. 1988. Critical thinking: Theory, research, practice, and possibilities. Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

There will be a variety of assignments and graded projects for this course. The diversity in assignments is meant to ensure success for different kinds of learners and to offer many opportunities for accumulating points. The course requirements, on which student evaluation is based, are as follows:

1. Class Attendance and Participation	20%
2. Reflective discussion posts (7)	21%
3. Midterm Project	25%
4. Final Project	30%
5. Session Evaluation Survey	4%
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Total	100%

Course Requirements:

General requirement: Teaching and learning are interrelated. Instructors and students are expected to be active participants in this course and other student-led activities. The instructor's responsibility has been to develop a core Methods of Participant Observation course that addresses significant topics and concepts in the field and to prepare individual sessions, exercises and assignments that will facilitate students' learning. Please note that not all significant topics and concepts can be addressed by a one quarter core course. Topics have been chosen thoughtfully in order to give initial exposure to foundational concepts. The student's responsibility as a learner is to engage with the course ideas, to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions, exercises, and to learn to think critically as she/he/they listen/s, write/s and discuss/es.

Attendance: Attendance is highly recommended for both in-person and remote sessions. Student can earn up to one point per class for attendance and participation (one class on zoom or on campus = one point). The Sociology Department in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California San Diego expects students to attend class on time and to stay until the end. University of California believes that significant student learning occurs in the classrooms and recognizes the importance of in-class experiences, and if missed by a student even for legitimate reasons, cannot be fully recovered. Students are responsible for any missed content, announcements, due dates, homework assignments, date changes, etc. when they miss a class. To the extent possible, please inform the instructor if you know ahead of time that you will be absent or late for a class. In case of extraordinary circumstances (e.g. serious illness, death in the family, etc.), considerations will be made regarding any assignments that occur in the timeframe of the emergency. Please note that the extensions are not guaranteed and will be granted solely at the discretion of the instructor.

Class participation: Students are expected to participate in discussions, exercises, and group work to the best of their abilities. They are expected to read the articles and listen to the videos or audio files listed as “required” in advance of the session, so that they can use the information in class.

Required readings: All readings and resources will be available on Canvas. Complementary readings will be suggested from time to time for students who wish to pursue selected topics in depth. Students are encouraged to share other helpful resources with the class. Please come to class prepared to critically and actively engage with the assigned texts.

Reflective discussion post: The reflective discussion post represents a summary of critical thoughts in response to the required readings. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students a chance to process weekly class material and to help students to develop questions, comments, or critiques to discuss in class with their peers. It will also help the instructor assess students’ understanding of materials and readings. Students are invited to write one paragraph (3-4 sentences) that should include 1) a summary of the main argument and 2) students’ opinion of each assigned reading. These do not need to be perfectly written; the substance of ideas is more important than the presentation. Students will post a total of 7 times throughout the semester. Please post the reflexive discussion post on Canvas **by 11:59pm every Monday** (from January 14th to March 6th - Weeks 2 to 9).

Midterm & Final Projects: Students will imagine a creative piece (see below) providing an opportunity to study a topic of their choice by exploring their relationship to the life course perspective and by integrating lecture and readings on the sociology of the life course.

Students are invited to use a medium of their choice to represent their understanding of the sociology of the life course throughout one topic of their choice and to explore their relationship to it as a social being – e.g. as a person with their own biography but living within a certain history or sociohistorical context; as a person who has agency, but whose agency is conditioned by larger social structures and systems; as a person with intergenerational influences and/or individual social constraints to their agency that might be better or also understood as public issues.

Students can select a medium of their choice (e.g. photography, drawing, painting, mapping, videos, etc.) to represent the life course perspective through the topic they studied in the way they like. There is no right or wrong way to do so. The most important part of these projects is how students accurately explain their creative project in relation to the sociology of the life course.

These projects are designed to give students agency and control over their learning process, while also allowing them to explore sociology in creative and personal ways. The midterm and final projects are assigned to help students improve their creativity, analytical skills, critical thinking, and to become familiar with how their thoughts are shaped by their

assumptions and preconceived ideas. Students are expected to take a position, clearly argue their points (drawing on their own research, class readings and discussions).

φ Midterm assignment:

Students will submit one midterm writing presenting the topic they have selected and how they intend to study and develop it to create their final project. The midterm assignment is designed to help students to imagine and conceptualize their final project and to receive feedback.

- Considering the sociology of the life course, students will define a specific topic to develop their own research and critical analyses. The creative project represents an analysis of one topic of your choice related to the life course perspective.
- The writing must be organized as follows: 1) present the topic chosen, 2) justify its importance for the life course perspective, 3) evaluate evidence based on scientific literature, 4) discuss this evidence and establish a position on the topic.
- Paper length is **minimum 800 words, maximum 1200 words** (word count includes footnote/ endnotes, but excludes bibliography), single-spaced, fully justified, and with 1” margins on all four sides. The font must be Times Roman, and the font size must be 12.
- Please utilize the AMA Manual of Style when formatting references. Exact formats and citation styles for written assignments are based on What AJPH Authors Should Know from the *American Journal of Public Health*. I strongly encourage the adoption of an electronic citation system such as Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote or others.
<http://apps.lib.whu.edu.cn/ensci/editnew/upfile/ifora.pdf>
- The evidence base for this assignment consists of peer-reviewed articles, official reports by governmental agencies such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), etc., and official reports by international organizations such as the WHO and the UNICEF. Statistics and facts that appear in lay publications, even respected ones such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or their international equivalents, should be traced to their original sources and cited accordingly.
- Midterm assignment is due on **February 14th by 11:59pm**. Assignment must be submitted on Canvas. Assignment submitted late will lose points.

φ Final assignment:

Based on their midterm assignment and the feedback they have received; students will continue to develop and finalize their creative piece. Guidelines will be provided closer to the deadline. Students will have 5 minutes to present their final project. Students can choose to present their final project in person on campus, as a recorded presentation or as a written paper. In person presentation will take place during **Week 10**. All presentations (in person, recorded, and written paper) are due by **Tuesday, March 11th**.

During the presentation of their final project students must display:

- Why did they choose this topic?
- How is this topic related to the sociology of the life course?
- Analytical and critical reflections related to their chosen topic
- Clearly establish their personal position on the topic

A minimum of five scientific articles are required for the literature review to help you to develop and to support your main personal argument. The evidence base for this assignment consists of peer-reviewed articles, official reports by governmental agencies such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) or the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and official reports by international organizations such as the WHO and the UNICEF. Statistics and facts that appear in lay publications, even respected ones such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or their international equivalents, should be traced to their original sources and cited accordingly. Students are asked to add their references to the quick form on Canvas they need to submit by **Thursday, March 13th by 11:59pm** on Canvas with a picture or other evidence of their creative piece.

Students are invited to make an office hours appointment any time to discuss their midterm and/or final project before the due date.

Midterm Session Evaluation Survey: Your feedback helps to assess the effectiveness of individual sessions, provide feedback, and most importantly to keep improving this course in real time and for future quarters. Therefore, you are asked to complete a midterm evaluation survey to receive full credit for this portion of your grade. The evaluation is very brief and will be made available on Canvas on Week 5 from February 4th to February 11th. **Your submissions will be anonymous** – I will be able to see that you completed the evaluation, but the survey results will not be attached to your name. The evaluation will be open for completion for a week, after which point the evaluation will be closed. These evaluations are also an opportunity for you to provide general feedback to the instructor about how the class is going, not specific to a session. There will also be an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback through the Department (which will also be shared with the instructor) at the end of the quarter: <https://cape.ucsd.edu/>.

Extra credit opportunity

Students will have the opportunity to earn extra credit (up to 5 points – cumulative to their final grade) by choosing one assignment of their choice.

Option 1 – Written assignment: Students will submit an argumentative essay on a topic of their choice related to the sociology of the life course. Students are invited to take a position, clearly argue their points (drawing on class readings and discussions). The topic must be different than the midterm and final projects. Topic ideas may also be provided by the instructor to the students in need of assistance.

- Students will write an argumentative essay. Considering the topics covered in the course, students will define a specific topic to develop critical analyses. The argumentative essay represents an analysis of sociological question of your choice related to one sociological concept or one life course principle covered in the course. The argumentative essay must contain a critical analysis of the concept, or the principle selected.
- Student must inform the instructor by email of their interest in participating in this activity no later than **February 14th by 11:59pm**. Guidelines about this assignment will then be provided. Extra credit paper is due by **March 13th by 11:59pm** on Canvas.

Option 2 – Current Event Analysis: Students will have the opportunity to explore in depth a topic of interest, learn in a group, and practice cooperation, negotiation, and delegation with peers. The topic must be different than the midterm and final projects. Topic ideas may also be provided by the instructor to the students in need of assistance. As part of a team, students will present an analysis of a current event in class. A two-to-three-member team will have 10 minutes to present the current event analysis considering, based on the following format:

- Background/ contextual information
- Fact description, and if possible, the meanings it might have for the actors involved
- Analytical reflections related to the topics discussed in the course
- In conclusion, the team must bring two to three questions to discuss with all the classmates

The team must inform the instructor by email of their interest in participating in this activity no later than **February 21st by 11:59pm**. The presentations will take place in person in class on **March 13th**. The sources of information can be the media, newspapers, and documentary films (not academic articles). Students are encouraged to work together and will receive a group grade for the final product. Current event analysis will be graded based on group participation in preparation and presentation, relevancy of the content, critical thinking, and presentation style. Groups will be supported by the instructor as needed.

Course Assessment:

Grading: Grades are assigned based on the following letter grade and marks criteria (see below). The instructor will take every effort to grade all submitted assignments within ten days of the due date.

Letter Grade and Marks:

A+	96.50 – 100	B+	86.50 – 89.49	C+	76.50 – 79.49	D+	66.50 – 69.49
A	92.50 – 96.49	B	82.50 – 86.49	C	72.50 – 76.49	D	60.00 – 66.49
A-	89.50 – 92.49	B-	79.50 – 82.49	C-	69.50 – 72.49	F	59.00 and below

Key Dates:

ASSIGNMENT	DEADLINE	SUBMISSION TYPE
Reflective Discussion Posts	Every Monday From January 14 th to March 6 th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Midterm Evaluation Survey	From February 4th to February 11th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Midterm Assignment	February 14th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Final Assignment	March 11th	Final Presentations in person in class or on Canvas by 11:59pm (students' choice)
	March 13th By 11:59pm	On Canvas

Extra credit opportunity		
Interest in Participating	February 21 st By 11:59pm	By email to Erik Tan y7tan@ucsd.edu
Option 1 – Extra credit paper	March 13 th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Option 2 – Extra credit group presentation	March 13 th	In person in class

Course policy:

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be assessed a penalty: a half-letter grade if it is one day late, or a full-letter grade for 2-4 days late. Assignments will not be accepted if late by more than four days.

Grades of "Incomplete": The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent semester or the "I" will automatically be recorded as an "F" on your transcript.

Writing Policy: Commentary on written work will be delivered in written format, at the end of the assignment. However, upon request, an alternate delivery method can be used. If desired, instructor comments can be made verbally and delivered to the student as an mp4. This approach yields far fewer written comments, but much more commentary in general is delivered, due to the speed and specificity of speech. Those requesting mp4 feedback must state so when the essay is turned in. All papers should demonstrate mastery of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax expected of college level students. If you need writing assistance, please seek help from the Student Support Services Program in the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS). You can also contact the UCSD Writing Hub (writinghub@ucsd.edu). All papers are to be word-processed, proofread, and solely the work of the author.

Student Expectations:

Statement of University of California's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship: The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship provides in-depth information about the policies and procedures relating to student integrity of scholarship.

According to the policy, "Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in planning and supervising academic work, so that honest effort will be upheld."

More information can be found on the Academic Senate Office website: <https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/appendices/2>.

Statement Related to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you require classroom accommodation because of a disability, you must first contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>) to determine eligibility for modifications, and other adjustments and accommodations due to a disability. You should inform the course instructor as soon as possible regarding eligibility determinations. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to assist students in their coursework.

Counseling and Student Health: Students may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to talk with an instructor or to seek confidential assistance at Student Health Services, 858-534-3300 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), 858-534-3755. Visit their website for more information: <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/Pages/default.aspx>.

Crisis intervention is always available 24/7 from: CAPS, 858-534-3755. **BUT** – Do not wait until you reach a crisis to come in and talk with us. We have helped many students through stressful situations impacting their academic performance. You are not alone so do not be afraid to ask for assistance.

Title IX Statement: The Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) is the Title IX Office for UC San Diego and investigates reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating and domestic violence and stalking. You may file a report online with the UC San Diego Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) at <https://ophd.ucsd.edu/> or you may call OPHD at 858-534-8298.

Please note that University employees (including faculty and teaching assistants), who are not confidential resources, are designated Responsible Employees. Responsible Employees are required to report any incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment to Michael Diaz OPHD Director / Title IX Officer.

If you are not ready to file a report, but wish to receive confidential support and advocacy, please contact CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center (CARE at SARC). CARE at SARC provides violence prevention education for the entire UCSD campus and offers free

and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. Accessing resources at CARE at SARC will not constitute a report to the University.

Academic Conduct Policy: The success of the Honor Code is made possible only with the acceptance and cooperation of every student. Each student is expected to maintain the principles of the Code. Example of Honor Code violations include:

- Giving or receiving information from another student during an examination;
- Using unauthorized sources for answers during an examination;
- Illegally obtained test questions before the test;
- Any and all forms of plagiarism – submit all or part of someone else’s work or ideas as your own;
- The destruction and/or confiscation of school and/or personal property.

Violations of the Honor Code are serious. They harm other students, your professor, and the integrity of the University. Alleged violations will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs. If found guilty of plagiarism, a student might receive a range of penalties, including failure of an assignment, failure of an assignment, and withholding of the final course grade until a paper is turned in on the topic of plagiarism, failure of the course, or suspension from the University.

Violations of Academic Integrity: Violations of the principle include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating: Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise.
- Fabrication and Falsification: Intentional and unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification is a matter of inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise.
- Multiple Submissions: The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work for credit (including oral reports) more than once without authorization.
- Plagiarism: Intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one’s own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source).
- Abuse of Academic Materials: Intentionally or knowingly destroying, stealing, or making inaccessible library or other academic resource materials.
- Complicity in Academic Dishonesty: Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying or borrowing liberally from someone else’s work without his/her knowledge or permission; or with his/her knowledge or permission and turning it in as your own work.
- Copying of someone else’s exam or paper.
- Allowing someone to turn in your work as his or her own.

- Not providing adequate references for cited work.
- Copying and pasting large quotes or passages without properly citing them.

Instructor Goals:

At a minimum, I hope to pursue the following goals and solicit your open and timely feedback on how well we are meeting these goals:

- Communicate effectively and frequently;
- Be an enthusiastic, active and involved;
- Demonstrate a mastery of the discipline;
- Relate material to current practices;
- Clearly explain complex concepts and ideas;
- Provide a framework for lifelong learning;
- Strive to involve participant in class activities;
- Be available to assist participants in or out of class; and
- Have respect and concern for all participants.

Class Schedule:

Tentative schedule available at the time of syllabus publication. Due to availability of potential guest speakers, course content might need to be modified. The instructor will inform the students of any changes to topic and readings.

See schedule below and on Canvas for the most up to date schedule!

Module 1 – What is the Life Course Theory and Perspective?

Week 1 – Defining and Conceptualizing a Sociology of the Life Course

Tuesday, January 7th (on Campus)

Welcome, Class Overview and Expectations

Thursday, January 9th (on Zoom)

Introduction to the Life Course Perspective

*No assignment or reading are required for the first week.

Module 2 – Life-Span Development: Childhood and Adolescence

Week 2, 3 & 4 – Life Course Construction

Tuesday, January 14th (on Zoom) & Thursday, January 16th (on Campus)
Constructing Childhood

Tuesday, January 21st (on Zoom) & Thursday, January 23rd (on Campus)
How Inequality During Childhood Accumulates into Adulthood?

Tuesday, January 28th (on Zoom) & Thursday, February 6th (on Campus)
Connections Between Childhood and Adulthood

Module 3 – Lives in Historical Time and Place

Week 4 & 5 – The Influence of Historical Context

Tuesday, February 4th (on Zoom) & Thursday, February 13th (on Campus)
Childhood & Adolescence Parental Incarceration

Tuesday, February 18th (on Zoom) & Thursday, February 20th (on Campus)
Adolescents' Lives in Historical Time and Place

Module 4 – Linked Lives

Week 6 & 7 – Normative Structuring of the Life Course

Tuesday, February 25th (on Zoom) & Thursday, February 27th (on Campus)
Drug Use in Young Adulthood

Tuesday, March 4th (on Zoom) & Thursday, March 6th (on Campus)
Intergenerational Relations and Aging

Module 5 – Human Agency, Transitions and Trajectories

Week 8 & 9 – Planful Behavior and Constraints to Human Agency

Tuesday, March 11th (on Campus) & Thursday, March 13th (on Campus)
Health Inequities Over the Life Course

Tuesday, May 28th & Thursday, May 30th
Navigating Transitions to Adulthood and Late Life & Final Project Workshop

Module 6 – The Future of the Life Course

Week 10 – Final Reflections and Course Synthesis

Tuesday, March 11th (on Campus) & Thursday, March 13th (on Campus)
Student Presentations & Wrap-up