

**The Aging Process: Clinical Issues in Social Work Practice with the Aged  
SSW 796  
Spring 2021**

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**Office Hours:** Wed, 7:00pm to 7:30pm (on Zoom)

**Dates:** 02/03/2021 to 05/19/2021  
**Time:** Wed, 6:00pm-7:30 pm  
**Location:** Online

This course fulfills a required research course in the MSW program.

**INTRODUCTION FROM INSTRUCTOR**

Every year I teach a class for older adults, I think about the students who will soon graduate to become social workers in the field. Almost all of my students find employment right away in various agencies; some work in schools, others enter into public service at state offices and federal bureaus, and a select few go on to pursue their doctoral degrees in social work. Roughly 1 in 10, though, graduate to work in settings that serve primarily older adults. If you are taking this class, you are likely the 1 in 10.

There is a dire need for gerontologically-focused social workers, and this is something most of us are aware of in this class. Most of us are also aware that this need will be unmet by the current pipeline of pre-health professionals. Older adults in the U.S. are becoming very different, and unlike the ones who were older when the Older Americans Act was first passed in 1965. In addition to growing numbers (44.7 million Americans who are 65 and older, and 88.5 million by 2050), older adults are becoming more racially diverse, with 41% of comprising of Latino, Asian and African American descent. Furthermore, many of the older adults we will encounter in this and the next decade are “Baby Boomers.” They are socially conscious, active participants in the Civil Rights Movement, experimented with drugs in their teens, chose to remain active in middle and older age, had hands-on experience with cutting edge technology, and aged through an era of non-traditional families. There are ongoing debates on how to best provide for these persons who no longer fit the mold for what we think of as the older populations. This has led to many questions as to what role various disciplines and professions, in particular social work, can play in addressing the needs of older adults and their families.

Over the past two decades, we also began to reshape the way we think and apply models for services for older adult populations. An example of this is the “successful aging” model, which is one of the important frameworks for implementing cutting-edge science, services, and policies in gerontology. However, not all older adults can easily age successfully, when there are structural barriers such as racism, xenophobia and poverty which drive differences in health outcomes over the lifecourse. Even though people are living longer through advancements in medical science, many older adults from health disparities populations are not seeing the benefits of these

innovations. There are critical gaps in access and utilization of services for older adults, and our current pandemic has highlighted these gaps especially among minority older adult populations. Social work and other helping professions can help close these gaps, or in some cases, widen them.

Social work has a critical and central role in finding solutions to these problems, because we are connected to all other helping professions. Unlike doctors and nurses whose domain is in hospitals and clinics, our domain is the community itself. We are in the perfect position to understand and guide how clinical practice can best serve the needs of our growing aging population, through our ecological perspective and focus on relationships. This is more important than ever, as older adults have borne a disproportionate burden of the effects of the pandemic. The goal of this course is for students to build on a social work knowledge base on clinical issues that impact older adults, while developing the methods and skills that are needed to influence the practice and policy community through the dissemination of cutting edge science and grassroots efforts. It is time to reconnect with our historical focus on community activism as social workers, and engage people and communities to effect change.

### **COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS**

**This is a fully online course.** You will spend 1 hour on Zoom each week and there will be assignments on Blackboard.

Please be aware that live captioning will be used for Zoom sessions.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION and OVERVIEW**

The course provides a strong foundation for clinical social work practice with older adults and their families. Primary focus will be on understanding how diversity factors into the physiological, psychological and social aspects of later life. Students will have the opportunity to develop the skills for completing multi-dimensional assessments and the development of effective social work interventions, with and on behalf of older adults. Focus will also be on the older adult not only as an individual but within the family and within other social systems.

### **COURSE COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES**

This advanced practice course will utilize class lecture, discussion, case analysis, media and assessment tools to teach skills which will enable the student to accomplish the following:

1. Demonstrate the ability to complete a basic bio-psycho-social assessment of an older adult. [EP: 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.1.4; 2.1.6; 2.1.7; 2.1.9; 2.1.10; 2.1.10a-d]
2. Demonstrate knowledge of practice concepts and skills regarding the diverse needs and capabilities of older adults and their family systems.[EP: 2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.1.4;2.1.5; 2.1.6; 2.1.8; 2.1.9; 2.1.10a-d]]
3. Demonstrate professional expertise in translating practice concepts and skills into effective individual, family, and group interventions that are appropriate to for meeting the culturally diverse needs and capabilities of older adults and their family systems. [EP: 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.1.4; 2.1.10a-d]
4. Demonstrate the ability to engage, assess, and implement appropriate social work interventions.[EP: 2.1.2; 2.1.6]

5. Demonstrate the ability to respond to the common physical, mental health and social/emotional challenges facing diverse cohort of older adults. [EP: 2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.4; 2.1.5; 2.1.7]
6. Demonstrate the ability to engage and assess intergenerational family systems. [EP: 2.1.2 ; 2.1.3; 2.1.4; 2.1.10a-d]
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the multiple pathways to successful aging. [EP: 2.1.2; 2.1.4; 2.1.6]

## **COURSE CONTENT OBJECTIVES**

### **KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES**

1. To increase the student's knowledge base of theories of behavior related to the older adult.
2. To increase knowledge of special intervention models and techniques that can be effectively used with culturally diverse older adults and their families.
3. To increase awareness of special issues relevant to working with the older adult, including the unique problems related to special populations.
4. To obtain knowledge of the role expectations of the clinical social worker as a team member in various settings serving older adults.
5. To acquire a working knowledge of the bureaucratic systems affecting the aging and their families.

### **ATTITUDE OBJECTIVES**

1. To help the student explore his/her own feelings towards the older adult and the aging process.
2. To sensitize the student to the physically and mentally impaired older adult, as well as to those experiencing sensory loss.
3. To help the student appreciate the complexity of losses that may affect the older adult.
4. To help the student acknowledge the vital role of the family in working with the aging population.
5. To help the student realize the need for the clinical social worker to work as a member of an inter-disciplinary team in order to meet the total needs of the older adult.
6. To help the student understand the ethical and legal issues relevant in working with older persons and their families.

### **SKILL OBJECTIVES**

1. To effectively assess the psychosocial level of functioning of the older adult and their families.
2. To be able to act as an advocate for older adults and their families within various bureaucratic systems.
3. To develop casework and group work skills appropriate for work with older adults and their families including those of various racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
4. To be able to function as an interdisciplinary team member on behalf of the older adult and their families.
5. To be able to act as a care coordinator utilizing available resources.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

McInnis-Dittrich, Kathleen (2009) Social Work with Older Adults. (4th Ed.) Pearson Education.

**Additional readings will be emailed to you through your Hunter email address.**

**An earlier edition of either textbook would be entirely acceptable and less expensive if you wish to shop around for this online. Please ask me if you have questions!**

### **CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Please make every effort to attend our Zoom class sessions because we will be using the time to catch up and exchange information. It would be nice to see you on video at some point this semester so I can connect a face to a name, but this is not required. Each week, I will present a short lecture during class to help guide the learning outcomes for each week. I will also make each week's lecture available on Blackboard.

**You are allowed 3 unexcused absences. If you intend to miss more than 3 sessions, please speak with me about it.** I want to assure you that I will make every effort to be flexible given our current situation with the pandemic.

### **BELOW IS OUR ZOOM CLASSROOM FOR THIS SEMESTER**

Keith Chan (he/him) is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82318162291?pwd=aCtDcmZTZkZrNHVJKzFzSTJXZFZ3Zz09>

Meeting ID: 823 1816 2291

Passcode: 995122

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Dial by your location

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+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 823 1816 2291

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kbXfqkb0c9>

## **GRADING**

The HCSSW grading system is; Credit; No Credit; and Honor for A+ work. All requests for a letter grade should be submitted in writing to the professor via email at the **end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week** of classes. The following represents the Hunter College Grading Schema for Graduate Studies:

A+ 97.5 – 100% 4.0	B- 80.0 – 82.4% 2.7
A 92.5 – 97.4% 4.0	C+ 77.5 – 79.9% 2.3
A- 90.0 – 92.4% 3.7	C 70.0 – 77.4% 2.0
B+ 87.5 – 89.9% 3.3	F 77.0 – 69.9% 0
B 82.5 – 87.4% 3.0	

## **PLAGIARISM**

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY**

*In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 /or TTY (212) 650-3230.*

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

Participation	10%
Assignment 1 – Due 02-10-2021	10%
Assignment 2 – Due 03-10-2021	10%
Assignment 3 – Due 04-21-2021	10%
Midterm Paper, Part 1 Due <b><u>03-31-2021</u></b>	25%
Final Practice Brief, Due <b><u>Last Day 05-19-2021</u></b>	25%
Final Video Due <b><u>Last Day 05-19-2021</u></b>	10%
	100%

Credit for the course will be based on the successful completion of written assignment. My goal is to support you this semester while delivering the content for the course. Given current challenges with the pandemic, I will offer as much flexibility as I can to help shepherd you along this semester.

## **VIDEO PRESENTATION**

A video presentation will submitted at the end of the semester to the class from any of the popular mediums (i.e. poetry, literature, art, music, theater, etc.). The presentation should summarize how the media being represented illustrates one or more theories of aging (i.e.,

activity, disengagement, continuity, life course, etc.) and how the selected media presentation validates or dispels at least one myth or stereotype about aging.

**10% of Total Grade**

### **MID-TERM PAPER**

Students are required to view and critique ONE MOVIE (a list of suggested movies is provided) that has Aging or Intergenerational Family Systems as a key component of the movie. The family **must** have at least one family member who is an ‘older adult’ as either the primary focus or an important character in the overall theme of the movie. **For this assignment you will prepare a Bio-Psychosocial Assessment of the older adult that includes relevant information outlining the Medical, Physical, Psychological, Social, Spiritual, Financial, Environmental, and Legal components as they relate to the older adult.**

The findings of your assessment must be presented in a clearly written professional style. In addition to the assessment your paper must also include the following:

1. A genogram that spans at least three generations of the older adult in the movie;
2. An eco-map reflecting the formal & informal systems involved with the older adult;
3. A brief statement about which of the aging theories best explains the older adult or situation portrayed in the movie; including the biological theories of aging
4. A brief description of the theoretical orientation that you might use if you were to engage the older adult/family system in treatment. (Strengths, Membership, Life Review)

**Assignment is due 03/31/2021**

**25% of Total Grade**

### **FINAL PRACTICE BRIEF**

Each student will produce a practice brief (2-3 pages) that focuses on a specific sub-group of older adults (i.e., men, women, African American, Latino, etc.), a substantive area (i.e. caregiving, physical or mental illness, substance abuse, etc.), and an appropriate intervention strategy (i.e., case management, cognitive, narrative, behavioral, etc.). The brief must demonstrate an understanding of the impact of unique risk and protective factors of the sub-group and how those factors impact engagement and treatment of the substantive area.

**Final Paper Due: 05/19/2021**

**25% of Total Grade**

## **CLASS CALENDAR**

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

#### **UNIT 1: AGING FRAMEWORKS**

##### **SESSION 1: AGING IN THE US**

**(02-03-2021)**

Overview of Class

Demographic Revolution of Aging

Role of Social Workers in Policy, Programs and Services: Where do Social Workers fit in?

**Readings: None**

**Assignments Due: None**

##### **SESSION 2: SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY AS POLICY AND PRACTICE**

**(02-10-2021)**

How do social workers fit into aging services?

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich. Chapter 1. The Context of Social Work Practice with Elders

Martinson, M. & Berridge, C. (2015). Successful aging and its discontents: A systematic review of the social gerontology literature. *Gerontologist, 55*(1), 58-69.

doi:10.1093/geront/gnu037

**Assignment 1 – Short Paper**

How can social work practice address the needs of older adults?

##### **SESSION 3: HISTORY AND BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL THEORIES OF AGING**

**(02-17-2021)**

How did our theories evolve about aging?

What is the life course perspective?

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich, Chapter 2

Agronin, M. E. (2013) From Cicero to Cohen: Developmental theories of aging, from antiquity to the present. *The Gerontologist, 54*(1), 30-39

Antonucci, T. C., Ajrouch, K., Birditt, K. S. (2013) The convoy model: Explaining social relations from a multidisciplinary perspective. *The Gerontologist, 54*(1), 82-92

#### **UNIT 2: ASSESSMENT & DIVERSITY**

##### **SESSION 4: GERIATRIC ASSESSMENT PART I**

**(02-24-2021)**

This session will focus on how culture and socioeconomic status impact the aging process and ultimately the geriatric assessment. A strengths-based approach to assessing the cognitive, emotional, social, financial, spiritual, and ecological factors, as well as risk and protective factors with diverse populations will be discussed.

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich

Chapter 4 Conducting a Biopsychosocial Assessment

**Social determinants of health for older adults**

<http://www.asaging.org/blog/equity-and-social-determinants-health-among-older-adults>

### **SESSION 5: GERIATRIC ASSESSMENT PART II**

**(03-03-2021)**

This is the continuation of previous class with increased focus on strategies for assessing family systems. Students are required to critique assessment instruments being used at place of employment and/or field practicum.

#### **Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich Chapter 5 Differential Assessment and Diagnosis of Cognitive and Emotional Problems in Older Adults

### **SESSION 6: DIVERSITY IN THE AGING EXPERIENCE**

**(03-10-2021)**

Aging intersects with a multiplicity of factors related to health disparities, and disadvantages accumulate over the life course. It is important to also recognize the resilience in different underserved populations across the lifespan.

#### **Readings:**

Dunlop, D. D., Song, J., Manheim, L. M., Daviglus, M. L., & Chang, R. W. (2007).

Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Development of Disability Among Older Adults. *Am J Public Health*, 97(12), 2209-2215. 10.2105/AJPH.2006.106047

U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means. (2021). *Something Must Change: Inequities in U.S. Policy and Society*.

[https://waysandmeans.house.gov/sites/democrats.waysandmeans.house.gov/files/documents/WMD%20Health%20and%20Economic%20Equity%20Vision\\_REPORT.pdf](https://waysandmeans.house.gov/sites/democrats.waysandmeans.house.gov/files/documents/WMD%20Health%20and%20Economic%20Equity%20Vision_REPORT.pdf)

#### **Assignment 2 – Short Paper**

How can social workers make an impact on older adults with different trans-sectional needs?

### **UNIT 3: AGING & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

#### **SESSION 7: AGING, SUBSTANCE USE & MENTAL WELLNESS**

**(03-17-2021)**

Cutting edge research has provided new understandings in how we understand mental wellness, across the lifespan and with aging populations. Evidence indicate that our mental health needs may evolve, because of specific vulnerabilities in the life course.

#### **Readings:**

McInnis Dittrich. Chapter 7 Alternative Interventions in the Socioemotional Problems of Elders Chan, K., Moller, M., Marsack-Topoelewski, C., Winston, P., Jennings, R., & Prifti, A. (2020).

Age differences in non-medical opioid use and psychological distress. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 55 (11), 1808-1806. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2020.1765808>

#### **SESSION 8: DEMENTIA AND FAMILY CAREGIVING**

**(03-24-2021)**

This session will explore the impact of cognitive impairments on individuals and families. Strategies for developing appropriate assessment and interventions for persons diagnosed with memory impairment and their family caregivers will be discussed.

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich, Chapter 6 Social Work Interventions Socioemotional and Cognitive Problems Dementia & Sexuality in Later Life, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/sexuality-later-life>

Joller, P., Gupta, N., Seitz, D., Frank, C., Gibson, M., & Gill, S. S. (2013). Approach to inappropriate sexual behaviour in people with dementia. *Care of Elderly Series: Clinical Review*. (59), 255-260.

**NO CLASS MARCH 31 DUE TO SPRING BREAK, MIDTERM PAPER DUE.**

**UNIT 2: INTERVENTIONS & STRATEGIES & APPROACHES**

**SESSION 9: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES PART I**  
**(04-07-2021)**

This session will explore the question; Case management or care management, is there a difference? Models of community-based case/care management and social work practice in the public sector will be explored.

**Readings:**

Elder Care Workforce Alliance. (2019). *Care Coordination Issue Brief Update*.  
<https://eldercareworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EWA-Care-Coordination-Issue-Brief-Updated-2019-Final-pdf.pdf>

**SESSION 10: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES PART II**  
**(04-14-2021)**

This session continues an exploration of evidence-based intervention strategies that can be used to meet the needs of the diverse aging populations. This session will also focus on the use of culturally appropriate interventions using alternative strategies, with focus on home and community-based supports (HCBS).

**Readings:**

Supporting Older Adults and Caregivers: Integrative Service and Learning (SOCIAL). The Lori's Hands Model: <https://www.lorishands.org/>

**SESSION 11: END OF LIFE CARE, BEREAVEMENT, AND SPIRITUALITY**  
**(04-21-2021)**

This session explores working with chronically and Terminally Ill Aged, Hospice philosophy and settings, and how awareness of personal attitudes and defenses impacts our work with patients and family members. Issues related to acceptance or denial, bereavement counseling and support programs, as well as the role of faith-based organizations and Religion and Spirituality in Aging, especially during end of life care will be discussed. What skills are important for conducting spiritual assessments with culturally diverse older adults? This session will also

explore the role of faith-based organizations in providing services to older adults and their families.

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich, Chapter 10 Spirituality and Social Work with Elders

Kramer, B. & Auer, C. (2005). Challenges to Providing End-of-Life Care to Low-Income Elders With Advanced Chronic Disease: Lessons Learned From a Model Program. *The Gerontologist* 2005 45: 651-660.

**Assignment 3 – Short Paper**

What interventions can social workers provide for older adults?

**UNIT 4: SPECIAL ISSUES FOR OLDER ADULTS**

**SESSION 12: INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY RELATIONS**

**(04-28-2021)**

This session will explore the application of “shared function” theory and specifically on social work practice with spouses, adult children, and other responsible kin. Cultural attitudes regarding filial responsibility and institutional versus community care the impact of roles in aging family will also be discussed. This session will focus on the impact of life experiences of elders from diverse backgrounds on caregiving decisions.

**Readings:**

McInnis-Dittrich, Chapter 12, Working with Elder’s Support Systems: Spouses, Partners, Families, and Caregivers

**SESSION 13: ELDER ABUSE**

**(05-05-2021)**

Addressing elder abuse is one of the stated priorities of the Older Americans Act Reauthorization in 2016, yet protective services for elders lag far behind the infrastructure that is in place for children. What can social workers do to advocate for the rights of vulnerable elders?

**Readings:**

Acierno, R., Hernandez, M. A., Amstadter, A. B., Resnick, H. S., Steve, K., Muzzy, W., & Kilpatrick, D. G. (2010). Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the united states: The national elder mistreatment study. *Am J Public Health, 100*(2), 292-297. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.163089

Burnes, D., Pillemer, K., & Lachs, M. S. (2017). Elder abuse severity: A critical but understudied dimension of victimization for clinicians and researchers. *The Gerontologist, 57*(4), 745-756. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv688>

**SESSION 14: SOCIAL HEALTH FOR ELDERLY**

**(05-12-2021)**

Eradicating social isolation is one of the grand challenges set by the Society for Social Work Research. What implications does this have for policies, programs and services?

**Readings:**

Snedeker, L. (2017). Aging & Isolation — Causes and Impacts. *Social Work Today*, 17(1), 24.

Retrieved from <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/011917p24.shtml>

Valorta, N. K., Collingridge Moore, D., Barron, L., Stow, D., & Hanratty, B. (2018). Older Adults' Social Relationships and Health Care

Utilization: A Systematic Review. *American Journal of Public Health*, (4). e1-e10.

**SESSION 15: TYING IT TOGETHER & FINAL OFFICE HOURS**

**(05-19-2021)**

**Readings:**

TBA

## Midterm Assignment Suggested Movie List

Hope Springs  
The Bucket List  
Something's Gotta Give  
Grey Gardens  
The Notebook  
The Family Stone  
The Judge  
August of Osage County  
This is Where I leave You  
Harold and Maud  
Harry and Tonto  
Gran Torino  
Amour  
Walk the Line  
Robot & Frank  
Wit  
Grumpy Old Men  
Still Mine  
Cocoon  
On Golden Pond  
Driving Miss Daisy  
Alone and Aging: Asian American Living Along in New York City  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8-JSIw\\_-vE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8-JSIw_-vE)  
The Forgotten Ones  
<https://vimeo.com/236334389>  
The Opposite of A Fairy Tale  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiVRcsMpcvE>  
The Cats of Mirikitani  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_7jq4VESy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_7jq4VESy4)