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### SW 322.01: Explorations in Gerontology (BSW Level)

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**EXPLORATIONS IN GERONTOLOGY  
SOCIAL WORK 322 (BSW LEVEL)**

**CINDY GARTHWAIT, MSSW, INSTRUCTOR**

**Fall 2002**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

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**PURPOSE**

Is aging an experience to which you look forward, or is aging something you wish to avoid, both as an academic area and as a personal experience? What about the aging process itself contributes to your attitudes toward aging? Is growing old in America a positive or negative experience, and why is it good or bad? What specifics of the societal context, including social systems, social policies, family constellations, health care, financial security, diversity, and assumptions about aging, shape the ways in which we frame and describe aging? What strengths of older adults can be brought to bear on the experience of positive aging, and what concerns and problems are faced by elders in this society?

These questions and others will be explored in Explorations in Gerontology, as students increase their knowledge and understanding of the developmental theories and processes of older adulthood. The course will focus on the physical, cognitive, psychological, social, spiritual, and cultural influences on older persons. An ecological perspective and a critical perspective will be taken, as well as a social systems theoretical orientation to understanding the environment of aging.

Students will be given the opportunity to apply theoretical concepts, professional skills, and social work values in a service learning project. Using service learning as one of the primary pedagogical methods, and in collaboration with two community partners (a skilled care nursing home and an assisted living facility), the instructor and students will participate in a project geared toward the teaching of communication skills with the elderly, including the therapeutic tools of life review and reminiscence.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

Describe and critique the major theories of adult development

Describe and critique the major theories of aging

Demonstrate an initial understanding of the normal and pathological changes in older adulthood

Understand issues related to death, dying and bereavement

Develop an awareness of their own personal attitudes and values related to adulthood (e.g. ageism, sexism, ambivalence, paternalism, new ageism)

Increase their sense of civic responsibility as a result of the service learning component of the course

Integrate academic concepts with community based projects

Reflect upon their service learning activities, thereby developing into "reflective practitioners"

Articulate societal implications of their classroom learning (e.g. organizational analysis, social policy analysis, service delivery)

Examine and clarify their own personal and professional values and ethics regarding the aging process, set within the ethics of the National Association of Social Workers' *Code of Ethics*.

Demonstrate an ability to utilize demographic projections to anticipate and plan for the future of the aging population

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie*. New York, NY: Doubleday

Thorson, J. (2002). *Aging in a changing society*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.

Cohen, J. (2001). *Farewell, my friend: an interfaith conversation on caring at the end of life*. Missoula, MT: Missoula Demonstration Project.

### **TOPICS AND ASSIGNED READINGS**

September 5	Introduction to Aging
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September 10	Theories and Models of Adult Development and Aging Albom, pp. 1-54 Chapter 1 "An Aging Population"
September 12	Positive Aging Saleeby, D. (1992). Introduction:



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- October 15                      Spirituality and Aging  
due                                      Reaction paper on *Tuesdays with Morrie*
- Koenig, H. Meeting psychological and spiritual needs. In *Aging and God: spiritual pathways to mental health in midlife and later years* (297-320). Binghamton, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press.
- 
- October 17                      Elder Abuse  
    Chapter 12 "Abuse and Neglect"
- 
- October 22                      Family and Caregiving Issues  
Disease)                                      Guest Speaker (daughter caring for two parents with Alzheimer's)
- Chapter 3 "Older People and Their Families"
- Paoletti, Isabella. (1999). A half-life: women caregivers of older disabled relatives. *Journal of women and aging*, 11(1), 53-68.
- 
- October 24                      Diversity in Aging  
    Chapter 4 "Minorities / Diversity"
- Fried, S., & Mehrotra, C. (1998). An introduction to aging and diversity. In *Aging and diversity: an active learning experience* (1-19). Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis.
- 
- October 29                      Tour of community facilities  
facility                                      Edgewood Vista, Alzheimer's care
- Grizzly Peak, retirement home
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- October 31                      Housing / Physical Environment
- Silvermaine, S. (1996). *Tales from my friends on the Alzheimer's unit*. Milwaukee, WI: Families International.
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November 5	Death and Dying Chapter 10 "The End of Life" <i>Farewell, my friend.</i>
November 7	Work and Retirement Chapter 11 "Economics, Work, Retirement"
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November 12	VETERANS DAY HOLIDAY
November 14	Examination 2
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November 19	Health Issues of Aging Chapter 7 "Health and Illness in Later Life" Chapter 9 "Older People and the Health Care System:"
November 21	THANKSGIVING VACATION
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November 26	Legal and Ethical Issues Chapter 13 "Older People and the Political World"  National Association of Social Workers (1996). <i>Code of Ethics</i> . Washington DC: Author.
November 28	Services for Older Adults / Planning for the Future Chapter 14 "Programs and Services"  Whiteman, V. (2001). Historical development in social security: what every human services professional should know (1-13). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
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December 3	Service Learning Reports on Building Relationships with Elders through Life Review and Reminiscence
December 5	Examination 3
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**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA**

100 points	Attendance and Participation
class	Students are expected to attend, and roll will be taken. Students are to participate in discussions, come to having completed assigned readings, and demonstrate the ability to integrate readings into class discussions. Also included in this grading category is classroom participation in reflective activities focused on the service learning project.
100 points	Examination 1
100 points	Reaction paper on <i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>
100 points	Examination 2
300 points	Service Learning Project in nursing home or assisted living facility. This includes four interviews with an elder, reflection paper, three journal entries, and contributions to class discussions.
	Journal entries due October 10, November 4, December 3
	Reflection paper due December 3
100 points	Examination 3

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800 points available

A	720-800 points (90-100%)
B	649-719 points (80-89%)
C	560-639 points (70-79%)
D	480-559 points (60-69%)
F	0-479 points (0-59%)

### DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

*Tuesdays with Morrie* reaction paper

"Everyone knows they're going to die, but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently." (Morrie Schwartz)

"Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live." (Morrie Schwartz)

"Aging is not just decay, you know. It's growth. It's more than the negative that you're going to die, it's also the positive that you understand you're going to die, and that you live a better life because of it." (Morrie Schwartz)

Getting to know the unique and powerful dying man named Morrie Schwartz through the eyes of Mitch Albom, you will no doubt have personal reactions that raise questions about how you are living your own life in preparation for both aging and dying. Write a reaction paper to the book that demonstrates in what ways you have been influenced by this man's life and philosophy, and how you plan to use these ideas in your personal and professional lives. The paper is also to demonstrate your learning about aging, dependency, and dying from Morrie's perspective. Make clear to the instructor how you integrate his ideas with ideas presented in class and textbook concepts.

Possible reflection topics could be the following. You are not limited to these topics

\* What are the most important concepts Morrie has to teach about aging, dependency and dying?

\* How do these ideas fit or not fit with contemporary U.S. beliefs and attitudes about life and death?

\* What are the positive and negative consequences of one's view of aging, dependency, and dying?

\* How do Morrie's ideas fit with human development theories such as Erik Erikson and Robert Peck? With ideas presented in *Aging in a changing society* by James A. Thorson?

\* How will what you learned from reading *Tuesdays with Morrie* assist you in your professional work with older adults and families?

\* How do Morrie's ideas fit with theories/models of aging presented in class?

\* In what ways did Morrie's ideas influence your personal thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about your own aging and views of death?

**SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT -- THERAPEUTIC USE OF LIFE REVIEW AND REMINISCENCE**



Many students report that service learning projects provide them with real life, exciting, scary, challenging, and rewarding learning opportunities that go beyond academic concepts to the application of these concepts, the examination of underlying ethics, the analysis of social policy related to aging, the developing of helping skills and therapeutic techniques, and the chance to weave together and integrate theory and practice.

You will be given this opportunity and a gift this semester by being matched with an elder residing in either a local nursing home or an assisted living facility. You will be trained in class in the use of life review and reminiscence, and you will meet with your elder four times in their living situation. You are to use life review and reminiscence to develop a relationship with your elder and to help them tie together the threads of their personal history through a guided conversation with you.

You will thus be providing a service, but will be served as well. Perhaps you may even be matched with someone like Morrie.

It is the hope of the instructor that you and your assigned elder will touch each others' lives in a significant way that leaves you both changed.

The purpose of writing about your visits with your elder is to provide a tool for reflecting on and integrating classroom information and discussions, assigned readings, and nursing home visits. Entries can focus on the following issues and topics"

- Concepts learned / read discussed regarding aging
- Reactions to conversations with your elder
- Questions you have as a result of meeting them
- Observations you have about the elder
- Observations you have about the nursing home or assisted living facility
- New insights into aging or into yourself
- New ideas you have generated
- Emotional reactions you have had
- Personal growth you have experienced
- Ideas for integrating this experience into your professional work

Examples of entries:

"I wonder why nursing homes have to be so institutional.

Isn't there some other way they can be designed so people can thrive instead of just survive?"

"My assigned elder reminds me of my grandmother, so it's hard for me to be objective about her."

"I'm worried about my ability to relate to an older person, and I'm not sure I can interview them adequately."

"Being in the nursing home makes me feel sad. Will that affect my work?"

"Why does society not value older people? How can that be

changed?"

"I wish I had met Morrie, but I know every older person faces death. I hope my resident will talk freely so I can learn from him/her also."

"My elder tells me so many things that I cannot imagine. I find I'm learning much more from him/her than I might be contributing."

"My elder seems to have dealt with issues of dependency and dying very well. I'm going to find out what factors have contributed to that."

"My elder seems anxious and fearful. Hopefully my relationship with him/her and the life review we do together will help him/her move toward acceptance."

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Angel, R.J. & Angel, J.L. (1997). *Who will care for us? aging and long-term care in multicultural America*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Baures, M. (1994). *Undaunted spirits: portraits of recovery from trauma*. Philadelphia, PA: The Charles Press.
- Butler, R., Lewis, M. & Sunderland, T. (1998). *Aging and mental health: positive psychosocial and biomedical approaches*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Dychtwald, K. (1999). *Healthy aging: challenges and solutions*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publications.
- Fried, S. & Mehrotra, C. (1998). *Aging and diversity: an active learning experience*. Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis.
- Gubrium, J. (1997). *Living and dying at Murray Manor*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Koenig, H. (1994). *Aging and God: spiritual pathways to mental health in midlife and later years*. New York, NY: The Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Lustbader, W. (1991). *Counting on kindness: the dilemmas of dependency*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- McDonald, P. & Haney, M. *Counseling the older adult: a training manual in clinical gerontology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- McInnis-Dittrich, K. (2002). *Social work with elders: a biopsychosocial approach to assessment and intervention*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Smith, D. (1997). *Caregiving: hospice-proven techniques for healing body and soul*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Smith, S. (1993). *Making peace with your adult children: a guide to family healing*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Sheikh, J. (1996). *Treating the elderly*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### **SUGGESTED ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

[www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org) (Source for Five Wishes advance directives)

[www.asaging.org](http://www.asaging.org) (American Society on Aging)

[www.geron.org](http://www.geron.org) (Gerontological Society of America)

[www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org) (National Alliance for Caregiving)

[www.nasa.org](http://www.nasa.org) (National Association of Social Workers)

[www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org) (National Council on Aging)

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

[www.meps.ahrq.gov](http://www.meps.ahrq.gov) (Medical Expenditure Panel Survey of the Agency for Health Research and Quality)

[www.MedicareEd.org](http://www.MedicareEd.org) (Center for Medicare Education)

[www.health.gov/healthypeople/](http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/) (Healthy People 2010)

[www.americangeriatrics.org](http://www.americangeriatrics.org) (American Geriatrics Society)

[www.nicoa.org](http://www.nicoa.org) (National Indian Council on Aging)

[www.dphhs.state.mt.us/hpsd/pubheal/healplan/](http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/hpsd/pubheal/healplan/) (Montana Health Agenda 2000)

[www.dphhs.state.mt.us/sltc](http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/sltc) (The State of Aging in Montana)

