

SOC256H1S: LIVES AND SOCIETIES

2026 WINTER TERM

Class meets: Thursdays, 1:10 – 3:00 PM

Professor: Bonnie H. Erickson
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Office hours: Students can consult with the instructor and the TA by email at any time, or on Zoom by appointment.

Readings: Available through Quercus

Prerequisite: SOC100H1. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered, without notice.

INTRODUCTION

Much sociological work considers people at one point in their lives: while working, while in school, while parents of young children, and so forth. Life course analysis makes its special contribution by paying attention to biographies and to the ways that (1) human life histories are shaped by a person's place in society and in social history, and (2) how human life decisions cumulate to affect societies.

In this class we will consider the very large scale comparative picture: very different kinds of society (from hunter-gatherer groups to modern industrial societies) and the differences that kind of society makes to: qualitative differences in life course stages, the timing of stages, transitions between stages, the basic facts of birth and death, and the ways people see the life course.

GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this course, students will learn how to:

1. Think critically about how societal structures affect the life course.
2. Explore how life transitions and their timing differ based on social location.
3. Interrogate the role of technology and the environment in driving social change.
4. Develop qualitative methodological skills to conduct semi-structured interviews and critically analyse differences in how life course transitions are experienced and perceived.

ASSIGNMENTS AND TESTS

1. *Research Paper Proposal*: Students will write a brief proposal where they identify the transition rite they have selected to investigate for their final paper and (using a pseudonym) identify who they plan to interview so as to gather the data needed for completing the assignment. The assignment is to compare the same transition rite in two different kinds of society. There are two strategies for this. First, you could interview a person who has participated in the same kind of transition rite in two different societies at about the same time. For example you could interview a person who has been a guest at a Hindu wedding in Mumbai in 2022 and a guest at a Hindu wedding in Toronto in 2021. Since Canada is much more developed than India, this compares societies that are different in Lenski's sense of having different levels of technology. Second, you could interview a person who has experienced the same transition rite at very different times in the same society. For example you could compare an older person's description of a high school graduation in Toronto decades ago to one they attended recently. Since Canada now is much more developed than it was decades ago, this strategy also compares societies that are different in Lenski's sense of having different levels of technology. Your choice of informant and of transition rite must be checked through the proposal process. Do not proceed until we have approved your plans. If you wish to change your transition rite or your informant after having submitted the proposal you must email the instructor for approval. Students should outline any relevant ethical concerns with conducting the interview and identify the methods they will use to attend to them. In addition, the proposal should address why the transition rite they have selected is sociologically significant. A handout will be distributed with more detailed assignment instructions. Proposals are worth 10% of the final grade. Proposals should be two or three double spaced pages of text. They should be uploaded to Quercus by midnight on Sunday February 1.
2. *Final Research Paper*: Transition rites are rituals marking a change from one life stage to another or, marking steps in the life course. Students will write a research paper comparing the same kind of transition rite in two different societies, based on a qualitative interview they conduct with an informant. For more details, see the Essay proposal information above.
Interviews must follow ethical guidelines, which will be discussed in the January 29 class. Interviews should **not** be conducted until you have participated in this tutorial and until you have received feedback on your essay proposal. You should also not do your interview until you have attended the February 5 class on transition rites and its tutorial on how to conduct your interview. Once you have these necessary preparations, do your interview as soon as possible. Most students do their interviews early in Reading Week. Remember that analyzing your data and writing up your essay takes a lot of time, so do not delay. The goal of the paper is to use course materials to explain similarities and differences in the "same" rite in different types of societies. A handout will be distributed with more detailed assignment instructions. Papers are worth 40% of the final grade, should be no more than 15 pages double-spaced and be uploaded to Quercus by midnight on March 22.

3. *In-class Tests*. Students will write 2 in-class tests, worth 25% each, assessing their ability to think critically about the readings and lecture materials. Both tests will be essay tests. A question bank from which test questions will be selected will be given to students about two weeks before each test. Test 1, on February 12, will primarily cover material from the first half of the course (January 8 through February 5). Test 2, on April 2, will primarily cover material from the second half of the course, February 26 through March 26.

GRADING SUMMARY

Research Paper Proposal	10 points	February 1
Test 1	25 points	February 12
Final Research Paper	40 points	March 22
Test 2	25 points	April 2
Total	100 points	

Course e-mail policies:

- 1) We will only accept e-mails from your University of Toronto e-mail account. Please put "SOC 256" in your subject line so we know the message is course-related.
- 2) We cannot provide instant response. We will make every effort to reply to e-mails within 48 hours.
- 3) Many important course announcements will be sent to you through the University of Toronto e-mail address recorded for you on Quercus. Be sure to check this e-mail account regularly.
- 4) E-mails asking for information in this course outline (e.g. "How much is the essay worth?") will NOT be answered. Read this outline!

TOPICS AND REQUIRED READINGS

January 8: Introduction: Types of Societies

In this class we review a theory of the evolution of human societies from ones with very simple subsistence technologies to ones with very elaborate subsistence technologies. The theory includes discussions of important differences between societies with different subsistence technologies. We will spend the rest of the course considering the consequences of these societal differences for the lives of people living in these societies.

Required Reading

Chapters 3 and 4 from Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, 2015, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*, Twelfth Edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

January 15: Introducing Hunter-Gatherer Societies

Your reading and the video we will watch in class introduce you to the history and way

of life of two very well studied, and very different, hunting and gathering societies: the Ache and the !Kung. We will use this material as examples of the Nolan and Lenski model of the societal consequences of a foraging subsistence technology, and, as examples of how foraging societies differ from each other in ways that affect life courses.

Required Reading

Pages 41-57 and 65-73 from Kim Hill and A. Magdalena Hurtado, 1996, *Ache Life History: The Ecology and Demography of a Foraging People*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Figure 5.3, page 117, from Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, 2015, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*, Twelfth Edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Special resources: Class will start with the video “A Human Way of Life” (Videocass 001452 from the Audiovisual Library).

January22: The Life Course for Hunters and Gatherers; tutorial on your proposals

Howell, and Hill and Hurtado, describe the life courses of the !Kung and the Ache while they were still living in foraging societies. To give some life to these life course descriptions, please read the selection from Shostak, in which an intelligent and articulate !Kung woman tells us about some of the important events in her own life story.

Required Reading

Chapter 2: Life History Stages, pages 26-57 in Nancy Howell, 2010, *Life Histories of the Dobe !Kung: Food, Fatness, and Well-Being Over the Life Span*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pages 149-166 from Marjorie Shostak, 1981, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. New York: Random House.

Pages 219-237 from Kim Hill and A. Magdalena Hurtado, 1996, *Ache Life History: The Ecology and Demography of a Foraging People*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

NOTE: This class will include a tutorial on how to prepare your essay proposal, due next week. The tutorial will be held in the second hour of our class time (there is no tutorial hour for this class).

Required reading:

Chapter 1(on general principles of inquiry), and Chapter 3 (on ethical issues) from:

Earl Babbie and Lance W. Roberts. 2018. *Fundamentals of Social Research, Fourth Canadian Edition*. Toronto: Nelson Education. ISBN-13: 978-0-17-657011-8.

The file “SOC256_proposal_instructions”

January 29: Life Course Stages in Different Societies: Timing and Types of Stages; tutorial on conducting your interviews in an ethical manner

Here we compare different types of societies in terms of the kinds of life stages they have and how they are timed, with special attention to the role of functional versus chronological age. The readings for the previous week provide rich information for hunting and gathering societies. Gillis discusses the transition from pre-industrial, advanced agrarian society to industrialized society in Europe. Gee provides the changing ages at which people in Canada made key life transitions during industrialization.

We will also have a tutorial on essential ethical considerations in your research and the consent form which you must use. You **MUST NOT** do your interviews until you have done this tutorial.

If there is time we will begin work on how to conduct your interview. For this, read the file “SOC256Transition_Rites_Interviews_Tutorial”

Required Reading

Gee, Ellen M. 1987. “Historical Change in the Family Life Course of Canadian Men and Women.” Pp. 265-287 in *Aging in Canada: Social Perspectives, Second Edition*. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.

Gillis, John R. 2004. “Life Course and Transitions to Adulthood.” Pp. 547-552 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

The files “soc256_essay_ethics” and “soc256_consentform_2024”

February 1: your essay proposals are due by midnight of this day

February 5: Transitions between Stages: Transition Rites

Required Reading

Davis-Floyd, Robbie Elizabeth. 1991. “Ritual in the Hospital: Giving Birth the American Way.” Pp. 275-284 in Philip Whitten and David E. K. Huner (eds.), *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives, 6th Edition*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Pages 151-166 from Marjorie Shostak, 1981, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. New York: Random House. You have read this earlier, but now focus on the material on transitions rites.

Stearns, Deborah C. 2004. “Rites of Passage.” Pp. 241-242 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

Stearns, Deborah C. 2004. “Grief, Death, Funerals.” Pp. 401-404 in Paula S. Frass (ed.),

Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

NOTE: This class will include the second tutorial on collecting your data: how to conduct your interview. This tutorial will be in the second hour of our class time.

See the file "SOC256Transition_Rites_Interviews_Tutorial"

Required reading: Chapter 11 (Qualitative Interviewing) from:

Earl Babbie and Lance W. Roberts. 2018. *Fundamentals of Social Research, Fourth Canadian Edition*. Toronto: Nelson Education. ISBN-13: 978-0-17-657011-8.

February 12: In-class mid-term test

February 19: Reading week, no class

February 26: Childhood in Different Societies

Required Reading

Bradbury, Bettina. 1993. "Conclusions." Pp. 214-186 in Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

"Comparative History of Childhood." 2004. Pp. 226-231 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

Gleason, Mona. 2004. "Canada." Pp. 129-131 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

Lassonde, Stephen. 2004. "Age and Development." Pp. 38-45 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

"Native American Children." 2004. Pp. 617-621 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

NOTE: this lecture will include a tutorial on: analysing your data and writing it up.

MARCH 5: Old Age in Different Societies

Required Reading

Keith, Jennie. 1985. "Age in Anthropological Research." Pp. 231-240 in Robert H. Binstock and

Ethel Shanas (eds.), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

March 12: Societies and Mortality – How and When do People Die?

Required Reading

Pages 174, 210 from Kim Hill and A. Magdalena Hurtado, 1996, *Ache Life History: The Ecology and Demography of a Foraging People*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

McCracken, Kevin and David R. Phillips. 2005. "International Demographic Transitions." Pp. 36-60 in Gavin J. Andrews and David R. Phillips (eds.), *Ageing and Place: Perspectives, Policy, Practice*. London: Routledge. For this week, focus on the material on mortality.

Meckel, Richard. 2004. "Infant Mortality." Pp. 474-478 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

Pages 248-250, 309, 316-17 from Marjorie Shostak, 1981, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. New York: Random House.

March 19: Societies and Fertility; Social Implications of Mortality and Fertility

Required Reading

Pages 262, 267, 467-9 from Kim Hill and A. Magdalena Hurtado, 1996, *Ache Life History: The Ecology and Demography of a Foraging People*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

"Fertility Rates." 2004. Pp. 359-362 in Paula S. Frass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

McCracken, Kevin and David R. Phillips. 2005. "International Demographic Transitions." Pp. 36-60 in Gavin J. Andrews and David R. Phillips (eds.), *Ageing and Place: Perspectives, Policy, Practice*. London: Routledge. Read parts on fertility.

Optional Reading on changes in mortality and fertility as a society changes:

Howell, Nancy. 2000. "Return to Dobe." Pp. 362-382 in Nancy Howell, *Demography of the Dobe !Kung, Second Edition*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Sunday March 22: Essays due today!

March 26: How People in Different Societies *See* the Life Course

Required Reading

Collings, Peter. 2000. "Aging and Life Course Development in an Inuit Community." *Arctic Anthropology* 37: 111-125.

Klassen, Sherri. 2001. "The Life Cycle." Pp. 193-203 in Peter N. Stearns (ed), *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350-2000*. New York: Scribner.

Optional Reading

Ikels, Charlotte, et al. 1992. "Perceptions of the Adult Life Course: A Cross-cultural Analysis." *Ageing and Society* 12: 49-84.

April 2: In-class final test

PROCEDURES FOR PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Students will be required to submit their essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool, Turnitin, for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

For your essays, we will be using the software Turnitin. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. Turnitin is integrated into Quercus. The software will review your paper when you upload it to Quercus. To learn more about Turnitin's privacy policy please review its [Privacy Policy](#).

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Turnitin will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. Students wishing to use this option should notify the instructor before the third week of class and undertake to provide an agreed set of secondary materials.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. That is, do not copy words from someone else's writings and present them as your own. If you include someone else's words, use quotation marks and give proper references. It is NOT enough to just include your source in your list of references. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense with very heavy penalties (see the Academic Handbook). Your essay proposal and essay will be compared to texts from many sources, including any essays ever submitted to Turnitin and almost everything on the internet. Your answers to the tests will be compared to such possible sources, and to the answers of other students in our course.

See also the section "More on academic integrity" below.

LATE ESSAY PROPOSALS

Penalty for lateness: 10% of the maximum grade for every day late. For example, if you submit your proposal on February 2 (one day late) and get a grade of 80%, you will lose 10% and get a grade of 70%.

LATE ESSAYS

Penalty for lateness: 10% of the maximum grade for every day late. For example, if you submit your essay on March 23 (one day late) and get a grade of 80%, you will lose 10% and get a grade of 70%.

These are heavy penalties, so – don't be late! The maximum penalty is 100% of your grade, for proposals 10 or more days late.

POLICY FOR MISSED TESTS AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

If you become ill or injured and it affects your ability to do your academic work, notify your instructor right away. Normally, you must provide documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances.

This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN). This can only be used once during the semester. Students can access the absence declaration tool in ACORN, under the Profile and Settings menu. The Absence Declaration Tool helps students create an official record of their absence that can be used to support a request for academic consideration in their courses, without the need to present further documentation. Read more about the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool process [here](#).

The documentation can also be the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <https://registrar.utoronto.ca/policies-andguidelines/verification-of-illness-or-injury/>.

If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Students who miss a test, or who are late in submitting the essay proposal or the essay for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

College registrars are very experienced, very discreet, and there to help you. The registrar will assess your situation and send an email to your instructor with their recommendations. The registrar does not normally tell the instructor what the problem is, since your privacy should be respected. DO NOT approach the instructor, who is not qualified to assess your situation.

DATES FOR MAKE-UP TESTS

Dates will be arranged when we know who is entitled to write a make-up test and when they can do so.

If you have to miss a test, send your instructor an e-mail no later than the day of the test. Include ALL the times you would be able to write the make-up test during the week following the test. Be prepared to provide suitable documentation as described above.

GETTING HELP IN WRITING YOUR ESSAY

Please remember that your college has a writing lab with lots of experience. These labs

are always very popular and very busy, so you need to make appointments well in advance.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS

Students are encouraged to make use of technology, including generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and GitHub Copilot, to contribute to their understanding of course materials. However, students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit. In this course, you may use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT and GitHub Copilot, as learning aids and to contribute to your understanding of course materials. However, any submitted work (term paper, CRPs, in-class activities, online contributions) needs to be your own. Students who choose to use generative artificial intelligence tools as they work through essay proposals, essays, or participation exercises, must document this use in an appendix. The documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work. Any content produced by an artificial intelligence tool must be cited appropriately. Many organizations that publish standard citation formats are now providing information on citing generative AI (e.g., MLA: <https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/>). Failure to disclose the use of generative AI in the submission of course work will be treated as an academic offense. While some generative AI tools are currently available for free in Canada, please be warned that these tools have not been vetted by the University of Toronto and might not meet University guidelines or requirements for privacy, intellectual property, security, accessibility, and records & retention. Generative AI may produce content which is incorrect or misleading, or inconsistent with the expectations of this course. These tools may even provide citations to sources that don't exist—and submitting work with false citations is an academic offense. These tools may be subject to service interruptions, software modifications, and pricing changes during the semester. Generative AI is not required to complete any aspect of this course. We recommend treating generative AI as a supplementary tool only for exploration. Ultimately, you (and not any AI tool) are responsible for your own learning in this course, and for all the work you submit for credit. It is your responsibility to critically evaluate the content generated, and to regularly assess your own learning independent of generative AI tools. Overreliance on generative AI may give you a false sense of how much you have actually learned, which can lead to poor performance on the midterm test or final exam, in later courses, or in future work or studies after graduation.

MORE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your University of Toronto degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment.

- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work).

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
- Looking at someone else's answers.
- Letting someone else look at your answers.
- Misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading.

Misrepresentation:

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the College Writing Centers, the Academic Success Centre, or the U of T Writing Website.

STUDENTS WHO NEED ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach Accessibility Services at (416) 978 8060 or at accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Accommodations include getting a volunteer note-taker and writing tests under special conditions.

Do not approach your professor or TA about accommodations. Accessibility services has the necessary expertise, and they provide full confidentiality, so your privacy is protected.