**PSYC 415 (DL1) | Psychological Factors in Aging** – 3 credit hours

**SPRING 2021** January 25 – May 10

**Instructor:** Candice Stanfield-Wiswell, M.A. **Office:** Virtual (available via Zoom)

**E-mail**: [cstanfie@gmu.edu](mailto:cstanfie@gmu.edu) **Office Hours:** By appointment

**Class Week:** Monday-Sunday (Online) **Class Location:** Online (Blackboard)

**Course Objectives**

The primary goal of this course is for students to understand the psychological factors of aging and the encompassing cognitive, biological, physical, and social changes that occur during the aging process. This course will cover how to follow a healthy lifestyle and how to cope with aging. Material will be drawn primarily from the gerontology field in the form of scientific literature, and supplemental material may be drawn from philosophy.

A secondary goal is for students to gain critical skills in interpreting peer-reviewed research literature, which is why this course will require careful reading and digestion of journal articles instead of a specific textbook. Although this course is fairly self-directed, it is a great intro into how graduate courses are structured, which require a significant amount of self-discipline and patience in learning to read scientific literature. My hope is that you gain a respect for reading scholarly material and a greater level of comfort in being able to understand scientific literature.

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. Understand the psychological factors of aging and the encompassing cognitive, biological, physical, and social changes that occur during the aging process.
2. Critically evaluate how to protect against degenerative aging, how to follow a lifestyle towards healthy aging, and how to cope with aging along the way.
3. Identify areas with strong support, those that require more investigation, and those that currently lack the support of the scientific community.
4. Gain critical skills in interpreting peer-reviewed research literature in the gerontology field.
5. Discuss the potential personal, societal, and legal ramifications of the findings.

**Readings *–*** *All readings provided as PDFs on Blackboard*

Our course material will be available via Blackboard. You do not need to purchase any materials.

Since this is a 400-level course, I have chosen to have you read professional journal articles each week, to include the possibility of watching TED Talks and listening to podcasts. This course assumes that you have mastered basic concepts in statistics and research methods from your previous psychology course requirements. I have tried to balance the articles in terms of reports on basic research, reports on applied research, and literature reviews which integrate theory and research.

**Class Format**

This course is a discussion-based online seminar and is reliant on the participation from all students. Given this format, it is imperative that everyone come prepared to participate for each “class” session. Preparation involves completing the readings, video assignments, preparing discussion posts. and replying to and extending upon others’ discussions. Students will be expected to access and use Blackboard each week for discussion and assignments. Important class information, such as the syllabus and weekly readings will be posted here.

**General Policies**

Technology: Students will be expected to be able to access and use Blackboard on a regular basis (<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>) to download course information and view grades. To access Blackboard, students log into My Mason using their George Mason email ID and password. In addition, students should check their GMU email account regularly, as this will be the primary means of communication outside of class. Students are expected to monitor their email inbox quota to make sure there is enough room to receive emails from the instructor.

**Official Communication via GMU Email**: Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

* *Throughout the session, all emails will be answered within 2 business days (i.e., Monday–Friday).*

**Honor Code:** George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. It is every student’s responsibility to familiarize himself or herself with the Honor Code. The Honor Code is available at: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

**Disability Accommodations:**  If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

**Diversity:** George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment that is based on diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community. Diversity is broadly defined to include characteristics such as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, ideals and perspectives. Respect for these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging in our university community.

**Resources for Students:**

Counseling & Psychological Services <http://caps.gmu.edu/>

University Career Services <http://careers.gmu.edu/>

Student Services Center <https://mssc.gmu.edu/>

Student Health Services <http://shs.gmu.edu/>

**Important University Dates:** <https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/spring-2021/>

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| **Spring Semester** | **January 25–May 10** |
| First Day of Classes | January 25, 2021 |
| Last Day to Add | February 1, 2021 |
| Last Day to Drop with No Tuition Liability (100% tuition refund) | February 12, 2021 |
| Last Day to Drop (50% Liability) | February 16, 2021 |
| Unrestricted Withdrawal Period | February 17–March 1, 2021 |
| Selective Withdrawal Period (100% tuition liability) | March 2–April 1, 2020 |
| Last Day of Classes | April 30, 2021 |
| **Final Exam Period** | May 3–10, 2021 |

**Course Requirements and Assignments**

This course is online, which means a great deal of responsibility rests on each student’s efforts. To succeed in this class, you will need to work hard to keep yourself on a timeline that allows you to complete material in a timely fashion. All assignments will be available on day one, and students who want to work ahead can do so.

**Make-up Policy:** Make-up assignments will only be administered in special circumstances. Prior approval should be obtained if circumstances allow, prior to assignment deadline. Please let me know as soon as possible if you are unable to complete an assignment at the scheduled time.

Participation: The class participation for this course is designed within the framework of online classes and is intended to support the learning process. Being active and involved in the discussion board is considered your “participation” in this course, and students are expected to participate fully in all course activities. To complete this course successfully you do NOT have to be online at a particular day or time. However, the course follows a weekly schedule. Students are expected to complete all the work assigned for a particular week and to observe all deadlines throughout the semester. In case of illness, emergency, religious holidays, or participation in official college functions, students remain responsible for completing the requirements of the course.

**Locating Course Material on Blackboard**: Reading materials and links to videos can be found under the Course Modules page on Blackboard in the appropriate folder for that week (e.g., Blackboard course homepage > Course Modules tab > Module #). Each week’s discussion board can be found on the Discussion Board tab. The Research Design Essay assignment information and submission link will be located on the Assignments page.

**NOTE:** A “course week” is considered to begin on Monday and end that following Sunday.

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| Assignments | Maximum Points |
| Syllabus Quiz | 40 |
| Introduction Post | 15 |
| Research Design Idea | 10 |
| Mid-term Project | 100 |
| Research Design Essay | 125 |
| Weekly Discussion Posts | 210 |
| Total Points Possible | 500 points |

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| Grading Scale |  |  |
| A+ 97-100% | A 93-96% | A- 90-92% |
| B+ 87-89% | B 83-86% | B- 80-82% |
| C+ 77-79% | C 73-76% | C- 70-72% |
| D 60-69% | F below 60% |  |
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*\*\* All assignments are due by 11:59 pm (EST) on their scheduled due date. \*\**

***Assignment Descriptions…***

**Syllabus Quiz (40 points):**  Your first assignment in the course will be to answer a series of questions about the syllabus and logistics of the course, this is to ensure that all students have fully read over the material necessary to proceed in the course. You are allowed to use your course materials during this quiz. The purpose is not to test your memorization of the information but to ensure that you have read everything required for success in the course. You have only ONE CHANCE to take this quiz, so check your answers before submitting.

**Introduction Post (15 points):** By the end of the second week of class on Sunday, your Introduction Post is due on the Blackboard Discussion Board. I would like to hear why you are taking this course. Please provide the following information and answer the following questions (do not be afraid to be brutally honest!):

1. Year in school
2. Degree program – major, minors, etc.
3. Two fun facts about yourself
4. What made you interested in this course?
5. What do you hope to learn generally? What burning question do you have about aging?
6. What is your comfort level with reading scientific journal articles?
7. What in terms of aging are you most excited?
8. What scares you about growing older?
9. What’s one thing you would like to change about yourself or your style of living to promote healthier aging? (This question may not be easy to answer right now, but I hope you keep it in mind as we progress through the course!)

**Research Design Idea (10 points):**  On Day 1, start brainstorming how you will design your own [pretend] quality of life for aging study. This assignment is short and only requires you to share with your instructor what topic you plan to cover for the Final Project/Research Design Essay (Quality of Life for Older Adults) that you will submit at the end of the semester. Please include a brief summary of the topic and how you think it will benefit the quality of life for older adults. You will use professional journal articles of your choice (that are not assigned readings) around topics covered in class to determine which topic you would like to explore for your research design paper.

**Mid-Term Project (100 points):** You will complete a biographical study of an older person. You will be writing a biography that reconstructs the past and integrates it with the present relating to concepts we have covered (or will cover) in this course. For this course we are using guided biography as a way of learning from an older person about the psychology of adult development and aging. Information about this project is detailed below and will be posted on Blackboard. This assignment should be considered a learning process. You will do well if you show appropriate interest and incorporate relevant research reviewed in class.

**Research Design Essay (125 points):** At the end of the course, you will be responsible for completing a 4-5 page essay (following [7th edition APA formatting guidelines](https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition)) on methods in aging research, in which you will design your own [pretend] quality of life for aging study. Details of the essay will be outlined in the Assignments section of Blackboard during the first week of class (this includes a grading rubric). This essay will be more involved than your typical weekly discussion post assignments, so it will account for 25% of your final grade on its own. THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL NOT BE DROPPED; it is mandatory for all students. Any essay turned in after the deadline (or not at all) will be given a grade of zero.

**Weekly Discussion Posts (210 points total):** Each week you will be responsible for posting one original comment to the Blackboard Discussion Board, based on an important issue from each set of weekly reading materials. Material(s) for that week will be labeled “Module 1, 2, etc.” on Blackboard. This will make it easier to track discussions. Each week will begin on Monday and **close by 11:59 pm (EST) Sunday** (Sunday going into Monday). The discussion board is set up to be a “reflection loop.” In other words, ideally, you will need to post an original response by Monday through Thursday of each week; this posting is worth a maximum of 10 points. You will then need to respond to at least two of your classmates’ posts between Thursday and Sunday (or sooner), with each reply post worth a maximum of 2.5 points (5 points total). Thus, you could earn a maximum of 15 points per week by participating on the discussion board. Maximum points possible for the discussion board are 210. *There will be a total of 14 weekly discussions throughout the semester.* Early posts create more discussion, so I do encourage posting early in the week. Below is the grading rubric for the discussion board. Your responses should be in paragraph format and although the conferences are somewhat informal, spelling and grammar are still important. “I agree” will not count as a post. \*\*PLEASE TRY NOT TO WAIT UNTIL SUNDAY TO POST YOUR INITIAL DISCUSSION. THIS DOES NOT ALLOW FOR GENUINE EXCHANGE AMONGST THE CLASS.

* **Original posts (worth 10 points):** Suggested completion is between Monday–Thursday. Original posts will be graded based on amount of thought demonstrated and relevance to the subject matter. Original posts that are both **thoughtful** and **relevant** to the article/topic for that week will receive full credit; whereas, original posts that are lacking one of these will have points deducted, and original posts lacking both of these may be scored a zero. Furthermore, please DO NOT summarize the readings; you will lose significant points. Most original posts will be between 500-700 characters. These posts will build on material presented in the article, and might, for example, describe your reaction to the journal article, connect the findings to real-world experiences, supply thought-provoking questions that the material raised for you, challenge the authors’ conclusions, or potentially (and respectfully) raise a controversial opinion or counter-opinion to the article’s main idea. Posts may include reference to the videos or additional readings for a given week, but *they must also* include reference to at least one of the scientific articles assigned for that week’s topic.
* **Two replies to others (worth 2.5 points each; 5 points total):** Suggested completion is between Thursday–Sunday. Replies to other posts must extend the thoughts expressed in the original post – they **cannot** be simple restatements or statements of agreement or disagreement (such replies will result in zero points for that post). At the same time, there is no need to be overly lengthy. Most original posts and replies will be between 200 and 500 characters.

*\*\*The amount of characters for each discussion post are not requirements, just guidelines – some perfectly acceptable posts may be longer or shorter\*\**

**NOTE:** You will only be able to post for the current week. If you forget to post the previous week, then you lose your opportunity to earn any points for that week. (You can post as many times as you like each week. The more you post, the more you participate, and the higher your grade will be). Reminder: **The discussion board will close each week by Sunday at 11:59 pm (EST) (Sunday going into Monday).**

*Netiquette:* You will be communicating with one another via the discussion board. It is likely that you will not always agree with the opinions of your fellow classmates. Disagreement is fine, but you will need to respect others’ views. Thus, personal attacks and derogatory comments will not be tolerated. If, however, you do disagree with someone, then I expect you to state your position in an articulate fashion on the discussion board.

**Disclaimer:** Due dates and assignment details are subject to change by the lecturer. The only way to stay current with respect to these aspects of the class is to ensure that you attend class (e.g., logging into Blackboard, checking email daily). Failure to do so may result in missed announcements with respect to the details of class assignments and/or assignment due dates.

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| **Course Week** | **Topic** | **Assignment Readings** |
| **Week 1:** 1/25-1/31  **Week 2:** 2/1-2/7 | **Module 1: Foundations in Aging**   * Intro, Themes, & Issues in Aging * Contemporary Theories of Adult & Late Life Development | Discussion Board  \*Articles on Blackboard |
| **Week 1:** *Assignments due**1/31 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Syllabus Quiz: (40 points) * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 2:** *Assignments due**2/7 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Introduction Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) | |
| **Week 3:** 2/8-2/14  **Week 4:** 2/15-2/21  **Week 5:** 2/22-2/28 | **Module 2: Health & Aging**   * Sociocultural Perspectives * Successful Aging * Intersection of Physical and Mental Health, & Mental Health Treatment | Discussion Board  \*Articles on Blackboard |
| **Week 3:** *Assignments due**2/14 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 4:** *Assignments due**2/21 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 5:** *Assignments due**2/28 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Research Design Idea: (10 points) * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) | |
| **Week 6:** 3/1-3/7  **Week 7:** 3/8-3/14  **Week 8:** 3/15-3/21 | **Module 3: Brain & Behavior in Aging**   * Changes in the Brain/Cognitive changes * Dementia & Alzheimer’s Disease * Elder Abuse & Medicare | Discussion Board  \*Articles on Blackboard |
| **Week 6:** *Assignments due**3/7 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 7:** *Assignments due**3/14 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 8:** *Assignments due**3/21 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Mid-term Project: (100 points) * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) | |
| **Week 9:** 3/22-3/28  **Week 10:** 3/29-4/4  **Week 11:** 4/5-4/11 | **Module 4: Individual Factors in Aging**   * Personality * Personal Control & Coping * Social and Emotional Processes | Discussion Board  \*Articles on Blackboard |
| **Week 9:** *Assignments due**3/28 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 10:** *Assignments due**4/4 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 11:** *Assignments due**4/11 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) | |
| **Week 12:** 4/12-4/18  **Week 13:** 4/19-4/25  **Week 14:** 4/26-5/2 | **Module 5: Relationships & Transitions in Aging**   * Social Relationships, Family Relationships, Extended Social Relationships * Late Life Transitions: Work and Retirement * Death, Dying, & Bereavement | Discussion Board  \*Articles on Blackboard |
| **Week 12:** *Assignments due**4/18 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 13:** *Assignments due**4/25 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points)   **Week 14:** *Assignments due**5/2 by 11:59 pm EST*   * Research Design Essay: (125 points) * Discussion Post: Post Article Review (10 points); Respond to Others (5 points) | |
| **FINAL: 5/2**  **11:59 pm EST** | **FINAL:** RESEARCH DESIGN ESSAY (see points information above)  **\*Please note that this posting is in Lieu of a Final Exam, and there are no extensions past 11:59 pm EST on Sunday, May 2**  *(Instructor will need approximately 1-week to grade all essays)* | |

**NOTE:** Check-boxes have been added next to graded assignments for your convenience. Please feel free to print the syllabus and check off graded assignments as you complete and submit them to Blackboard.

**Guidelines for Projects**

Term projects must include a component that addresses the academic perspective of the psychology of aging. Term projects **must** be typed double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12-point font.

1. **MID-TERM PROJECT: Biographical Study of an Older Person**

A biography is the personal history of an individual life written by another person. This biography will be one that reconstructs the past and integrates it with the present using thematic outlines or topics. Several major themes have been identified as significant in the fabric of developing and maturing lives: family, career, health, sex role development, experiences with death, and social relationships. For this course, you will be writing a biography as a way of learning from an older person about the psychology of adult development and aging. Students will not simply report the facts from their interviews but will try to identify themes in the life of their interviewee. We are not, however, using guided biography as a research technique or as a clinical intervention.

Below are a number of suggested topics or themes that you may want to touch on in conduct­ing your guided biography of some person 55 years or older.Please do not limit yourself to the questions listed, try to come up with additional questions that may be relevant to them, and most important, let the conversation flow where it may:

* What is your family history?
* How has family influenced your life?
* Describe the history of your principal career (work or homemaker).
  + Successes
  + Failures
  + Trials and difficult situations from which you learned
* What roles have finances played in your life?
* How has education impacted your life?
* Describe your 3 most influential relationships throughout life.
* What is your health history?
* How would you describe the history of your self-development?
* What experiences have you had with death, and how have they affected how you live your life?
* What is the history of your loves and hates?
* Describe the development of your life in terms of meanings, values, ethics and goals.
* What regrets do you have, if any, about how you have led your life?
* Have you developed a philosophy of aging and/or of life that you feel helps you when times get difficult for you?
* What advice would you give to future generations of people to help them age “success­fully?”
* Would you like to make any final comments about how your life has unfolded or about your participation in this guided biographical course exercise?

**Selection of Person:** You may choose to do this exercise with any person of your choice (age 55+). Be sure that you inform him/her of the circumstances under which you are conducting the guided biography. Try to pick a person who you think will help you to learn a lot about the psychology of adult development and aging.

**Gathering Data for the Guided Biography:** Data should be collected using a set of probes. Do not try to collect all of the data in one inter­view. *Explain at the beginning that several interviews will take place*. Let the person do most of the talking. Be alert to spontaneous opportunities to alter your preestablished set of probes. Ask the person if he/she would mind if you taped the conversation. If no, use only a pad to take notes; if yes, tape the conversations and use a pad to make supplemental notes to yourself.

If you sense that the person is getting uncomfortable with the interview, ask him/her if he/she wants to stop. If his/her uneasiness continues, then stop. If the person tries to engage you in a quasi-therapeutic dialogue, remind him/her that the purpose of the exercise is education and that you are not trained as a clinical psychologist.

**Write-Up**

Present your write-up in the following format: 12-point, Times New Roman font; double-spaced; 5-10 pages; APA formatted: <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html>

A. The circumstances under which you know this person and why you chose him or her;

B. Overview of the person’s current life situation;

C. Biographical sketch of the individual’s history from childhood to the present;

D. Themes, values, and special topics;

E. Interweaving of course material with their life: exploration of one or more aspects of this person’s life form the academic framework of the psychology of aging (**NOTE: this section is most important)**; you should try to relate the themes of the interview and major findings to topics covered in class (you may need to take a cursory look at topic to be covered)

F. What you learned from this exercise that you intend to think about in terms of your own developing and aging.

\*\*Guided biographies are graded based on *inter-weavings*, which involve discussing how the themes, values, and special topics pertaining to the person interviewed intersect with the academic treatment of the psychology of aging.

1. **FINAL PROJECT: Research Design Essay – Quality of Life (QoL) for Older Adults**

For this assignment, you are to design a program for improving quality of life in older adults, and a plan to evaluate its success. Your paper should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, and in 12-point, Times New Roman font with normal one-inch margins, written in APA (7th ed.) style, and free of typographical and grammatical errors.  In addition to the required content listed below (body of paper), your paper should include a title page with a running head and a reference page. The body of the paper should be organized into the following three sections:

**1. Introduction and Background: Discuss the following…**

•      The trajectory of development past adulthood.

•      The difference between memory loss that is normally associated with aging, and dementia.

•      The role or impact that depression may play in memory changes during late adulthood.

•      Any differences you would expect to see based on individual differences such as sex, socio-economic status, educational attainment, ethnicity, race etc.

•      Research supporting implementing quality of life programs such as the one you are proposing (provide information from at least three academic sources).

**2. QoL Program: Describe in detail…**

•      Type(s)of training/program you would implement.

•      The aspects of development (cognition/physical/emotional/spiritual) your training would seek to address.

•      The types of activities/exercises would you include. Provide examples. These can be based on current standardized tests/exercises.

•      How long the participant would have to engage in the activities, program, or exercises to see results.

•      What precautions and safeguards you would recommend.

•      The current research and theories that support the program (and types of exercises) you are proposing.

**3. Research Design: Describe in detail…**

•      The specific research method that would be suited to test for the efficacy of your program, and the ethical considerations you would have to be mindful of given this population.

•      The target population and the sample size you would anticipate recruiting.

•      Where you would want to recruit for your participants, and how you would screen for participants.

•      How frequently, and for how long you would ask the participants to run themselves through the activities or exercises.

•      How you would test for progress, what measurements would you obtain (whether they would be self-report or objective measures, etc.).

•      How you would know whether your training resulted in significant (practical and statistical) improvements in quality of life.

* A complete online guide for how to conduct APA style formatting can be found here:  <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html>
* To view a sample paper of how APA formatting should look for this essay assignment, please see the **APA 7 Student Paper** example here: <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_sample_paper.html>