

**ANTHROPOLOGY 210**  
**THE HUMAN LIFE CYCLE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

ANTH 210: The Human Life Cycle in Different Cultures (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

Childhood, maturity, old age, and gender socialization within the family.

Cross-listed Course: WGST 210

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

The Sphinx' riddle: "What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three in the evening?" Like Oedipus, in this course we will puzzle over the different societal and cultural constructions of gender and age-related identity categories as well as human experiences that span the life cycle—from the dawning of life to the dusk of old age. In other words, this course provides you with an overview of how cultural, psychological and medical anthropologists approach human diversity by attending simultaneously to global socio-cultural patterns [i.e. the search for universals through engaging in cross-cultural comparisons] through detailed ethnographic studies of the particular [i.e. locally specific cultural beliefs and practices].

We will examine, both classic and critical anthropological social scientific approaches as well as entertain interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology and cultural and developmental psychology in addressing how the life cycle is idealized [cultural beliefs and ideologies] as well as how it is actually realized [behavior and social practices]. In addition to learning about some of the major theories of culture in anthropology, some of the questions that this course raises include: How do we become who we are through processes of enculturation and socialization? Specifically, how do we shape and are shaped by forms of social organization, kinds of cultural practices (e.g. quotidian interactions, formal rites of passage, or cultural milestones) and cultural categories (e.g. infant, toddler, child, adolescent, adult, senior citizen)? How does relative age intersect with other ascribed and achieved markers of status [e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, class]? And how are these different "stages" of life actually experienced? The course will primarily draw upon ethnography [books, articles, and film] to illustrate particular case studies that challenge our received knowledge on the limits of human experience.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Upon successful completion of Anthropology 210, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and apply anthropological concepts and methods in the study of human cultural diversity across the life span
2. Debate different perspectives concerning universal and culturally relative criteria pertaining to human diversity across the life cycle

3. Compare and contrast different theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches to childhood and human development across the life cycle
4. Demonstrate an awareness of the social construction of gender and its intersection with other social categories
5. Provide examples of intra-cultural and cross-cultural diversity in life cycle rituals and experiences
6. Demonstrate reflexive reading, writing, and discussion skills;
7. Conduct and write a focused social scientific literature review on a course topic
8. Conduct, transcribe, and analyze a life history interview

### **SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

- 1) Rogoff, Barbara, with Chona Pérez González, Chonita Chavajay Quiacaín, and Josué Chavajay Quiacaín. 2011. *Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Shostack, Marjorie. 1981. *Nisa, The Life & Words of a !Kung Woman*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- 3) Myerhoff, Barbara. 1978. *Number Our Days*. New York: Touchstone.
- 4) Hirsh, Susan F. 2006. *In the Moment of Greatest Calamity: Terrorism, Grief, and a Victim's Quest for Justice*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- 5) Selected articles posted on Blackboard. These are flagged in the schedule below as [BB].

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. **Attendance & Participation:** This course requires that you complete all of the assigned readings and come prepared to discuss them in-class. *Reading assignments should be read for the date that they are listed on the syllabus so that you are prepared to follow the lecture, raise questions that you may have and discuss the ideas presented in class.* Expect to devote two to three hours of work outside of class for every hour of in-class time. Always bring the assigned readings to class with you and **prepare 1-3 discussion questions** that you can share in class. In the weekly schedule this is indicated by the acronym SDQ [Share Discussion Question(s)]. *Those of you who successfully facilitate discussion with one of your questions in class will submit the written version of it to me at the close of lecture & discussion to ensure that due credit is awarded.*
2. **Quizzes:** There are no major exams in this class. However, you will be quizzed over course materials (**a total of 5 quizzes**). The quizzes will require you to recall and apply concepts, compare and contrast theoretical perspectives and cross-cultural case studies, and provide examples of different social and cultural phenomena. A mix of objective and short answer questions will be included on each quiz.
3. **Personal Rite of Passage Essay (pairs):** For this assignment, you must work with a partner. Each of you will individually write personal narrative, 3-5 pages, describing a rite of passage that you underwent. Once both of you have completed this first writing, you must exchange papers and read about each other's experience. Then together you

will craft a reflexive and analytic essay, 3-5 pages, discussing some of the similarities and differences apparent in the two accounts and address what ways these experiences match or diverge from Victor Turner's theoretical writing on rites of passage. A handout provided in class and posted on Blackboard will detail the particular issues that you should take into account when doing an analysis and writing the essay.

4. **Monograph Paper (individual):** You will be asked to write a short analytic paper over *one* of the required ethnographies. During the first week of class you will be able to sign up for the book of your choice, but spaces are limited. Essay prompts for each text will be distributed in class the day we begin discussing the text. It will raise a particular issue and question that forces you to critically and constructively examine the ethnography using course concepts and frameworks. The paper should be no more than five-page paper, double-spaced. The paper will be due one week from the date when we finish reading the text in class.
5. **Life Span Oral History Project (individual):** You will conduct and analyze at least one oral history interview about a topic of your choice, provided that it relates to course topics and materials and attends to both universal and culturally relative perspectives. A detailed handout will be distributed in class. This project can be structured in various ways depending on the topic you choose, but it requires two types of engagement:
  - A. **Conduct a brief literature review** within which you will base your analysis of life span experience(s) as narrated to you in interview(s) that you conduct.
  - B. **Brief oral presentations** of final projects will take place during the last week(s) of class. Final papers will be due on the last day of class. You must seek my approval of your topic before beginning this project.

## **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

### **Week 1:**

1. Introductions: Meet, Greet & Discuss Course Requirements, Sign-up for ethnography.

### **Week 2:**

1. Boas' Concept of "Culture" and his Approach to the Social Scientific Study of Humankind  
[Concepts: "kultur," culture, four field anthropology, ethnocentrism, universalism & cultural relativism]
2. Universal Life Event: Birth  
Video: First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby  
Required Reading: Davis-Floyd [BB]  
Share Discussion Questions [**Henceforth, SDQ**]  
[Concepts: field work, ethnology, cross-cultural comparison, ethnography, emic & etic]
3. The Legacy of Margaret Mead  
Video: Karba's First Years: A study of Balinese childhood

Required Reading: Excerpts from Mead's Coming of Age in Samoa, Forward, Preface & Chapters 2-3 [BB]  
SDQ  
[Concepts: cultural relativism revisited, enculturation & socialization; Theory: School of Culture & Personality]

**Week 3:**

1. Ritualized Milestones in Early Infancy  
Video: Kawitan: Creating Childhood in Bali
2. A Vygotskian Cultural-Historical Theory of Human Development & Socialization Across Generations  
Required Reading: Rogoff Chapters 1-8  
Quiz #1  
SDQ
3. Required Reading: Rogoff Chapters 9-13  
SDQ  
[Concepts: microgenetic & ontogenic development, keen attention & guided participation & zone of proximal development]

**Week 4:**

1. Gender, Development & Socialization  
[Concepts: gender, attachment, Erikson's life stage transitions & identity crises; Methods: Participant Observation & Fieldnotes]
2. [Concepts: self and other, cultural models of personhood]  
Required Reading: Lebra [BB]  
Rogoff Paper Due  
SDQ

**Week 5:**

1. Childhood I  
Required Reading: Dell Clark [BB]  
SDQ  
[Concepts: enculturation & socialization revisited]
2. Childhood II  
Required Reading: Bock [BB]  
SDQ  
[Theory: ecological & evolutionary perspectives]
3. Childhood III  
Required Reading: Bird-David [BB]  
SDQ  
[Theory: social constructivism]

**Week 6:**

1. Childhood IV

Required Readings:

- The Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) [BB]
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) [BB]
- Stephen [BB]

Quiz #2

SDQ

[Concepts: political economy, relativism & universalism revisited]

2. Rites of Passage & Ritual – Classical Approaches

Required Reading: Turner [BB]

Handout: Rite of Passage Assignment

SDQ

Video: A Rite of Passage

[Concepts: rite of passage, ordeal, liminality, komunitas, ritual]

3. Rites of Passage & Ritual – Contemporary Approaches

Video: The Masai Today

[Concepts: colonialism, post-coloniality, “culture contact,” pluralism]

**Week 7:**

1. Required Reading: Bilu [BB]

SDQ

Video: The Masai Today

[Concepts: rethinking the ordeal, “traditional” Vs. “nonliberal”]

2. Marriage, Sexuality, Parenthood & Culture Change

Required Reading: Selby [BB]

Quiz #3

SDQ

[Concepts: arranged & love (companionate) marriages; exchange relations; kinship terminology & residence rules]

3. Genres of Life Span Life Narratives

Required Reading: Shostak’s Nisa – Introduction & Chapters 1-3

Handout: Life Span Oral History Project [**Henceforth, LSOHP**]

Rite of Passage Assignment Due

SDQ

[Concepts: genre, life narrative, subject & subjectivity, autobiography & memoir, realist ethnography]

**Week 8:**

1. Required Reading: Shostak’s Nisa – Chapters 4-7

SDQ

[Methods: oral history interview Vs. ethnographic interview, use of a “key informant”]

2. Required Reading: Shostak’s Nisa – Chapters 8-11

Video: N!ai: The story of a !Kung woman

[Concepts: intra-cultural variation]

3. Required Reading: Shostak’s Nisa – Chapters 12-15 & Epilogue

SDQ

**Week 9:**

1. Rethinking “Life Stage Transitions”  
Required Reading:  
Johnson-Hanks [BB]  
SDQ  
[Concept: vital junctures]
2. Middle Age & Aging  
Required Reading:  
Kagawa-Singer et al. [BB]  
SDQ  
[Methods: cross-sectional study, focus groups]

**Week 10:**

1. Required Reading: Newman [BB]  
Shostak Paper Due  
SDQ  
[Concepts: genealogical, birth cohort, and historical definitions of “generation”]
2. Social Class & Race Across the Life Span  
Video: 49 up  
[Concepts: ascribed vs. achieved status, identification, social class, race]
3. Video: 49 up

**Week 11:**

1. 49 up  
SDQ
2. Required Reading: Cohen [BB]  
Quiz #4  
SDQ  
[Concepts: Age defined as 1) bio-medical condition, 2) embodied experience, 3) discursive regime]
3. Universal Life Event: Death  
Brandes’ “Is there a Mexican View of Death?”  
SDQ  
[Concept: boundary making] Required Reading:

**Week 12:**

1. Death Rituals & Confronting Death  
Required Reading: Glazier  
SDQ  
[Concepts: this and other world orientations]
2. Video: Releasing the Spirits: A village Cremation in Bali  
SDQ

3. Reflexivity & “Native” Anthropology  
Required Reading: Myerhoff – Chapters 1-3  
SDQ  
[Methods: researcher reflexivity, native anthropology; Concept: survivor’s guilt]

**Week 13:**

1. Required Reading: Myheroff – Chapters 4-6  
SDQ  
[Concept: social drama]
2. Video: Number Our Days  
Required Reading: Myheroff – Chapter 7 Epilogue & Afterward  
SDQ
3. Video: In Her Own Time

**Week 14:**

1. Life After Death: A Survivor’s Perspective of Lost Love Ones and Trauma  
Required Reading: Hirsh – Introduction Chapters & 1-2  
SDQ  
Myerhoff Paper Due  
[Concepts: auto-ethnography, widowhood; individual and collective suffering]
2. Required Reading: Hirsh – Chapters 3-5  
SDQ  
[Concept: legal proceedings as ritual memorialization]
3. Required Reading: Hirsh – Chapters 6-8 & Conclusion  
Quiz #5  
SDQ  
Sign-up Oral Presentation Schedule  
[Concepts: truth & reckoning]

**Week 15:**

1. Oral Presentations

**Week 16:**

1. Oral Presentations     Hirsh Paper Due
2. Oral Presentations
3. Oral Presentations     LSOHP Due