

Introduction to Gerontology, Master's Level, Course Syllabus  
Kathleen M. Bishop, Ph.D.

**Brief overview of the course:**

This course is intended to introduce the student to concepts in Gerontology and to a new way of thinking about aging or older persons. A variety of topics such as myths, biology of aging, gender issues, social roles, cultural expectations and aging, history, environmental issues, aging in diverse populations, and mental health will be introduced. This course is appropriate for students who intend to pursue the field of gerontology or to students in other majors who desire some background in Gerontology.

Grading will be on a point system using the automated electronic grading system. The professor will provide extensive feedback each week to the discussion questions so that students are continually informed of their level of understanding of the material.

Assignments are designed to give the student opportunities to meet older persons and to visit community sites providing services to older persons in their communities as well as to help the Masters students develop a deeper level of comprehension of the issues.

Students in this course will be given a major project in their interest area.

**About the Professor:**

Kathleen M. Bishop, Ph.D., retired from the State of New York in the summer of 2005 as Assistant Director of Staff Development and Training at the Central New York Developmental Disabilities Services Office. Dr. Bishop has a degree in Special Education and a Ph.D. in Aging with disabilities from Syracuse University. She has over 30 years of experience in the disabilities field and 20 years as a Gerontologist. She is currently a consultant on aging issues for the ARC of Oneida/Lewis. In addition to the above position, Dr. Bishop also is the Director of the Training Program on Aging and Developmental Disabilities at the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in Rochester, New York and an Adjunct Faculty Member of the Institute of Gerontology at Utica College of Syracuse University where she is currently teaching on-line Gerontology courses. The Gerontology Society of America recently (2003) honored Dr. Bishop for her outstanding work as an Adjunct Faculty member in Gerontology. Additionally, she serves in a consulting role for AGE, Inc., a not-for-profit organization with a mission to increase knowledge about aging and advocating for quality of health care and life for older persons.

Dr. Bishop has presented regionally, nationally, and internationally. Her particular areas of expertise are environmental design for people who are aging with a developmental disability, women's health, and practical caregiving for persons with Alzheimer's Dementia. In April 1999, Dr. Bishop participated in a World Health Organization (WHO) forum to develop a position paper regarding persons with disabilities and health issues with a focus on women's health. In 2000, she worked with the CDC in San Antonio, Texas to advocate for quality of health care for women with disabilities. Dr. Bishop was honored in March 2003 for her advocacy and presentations on women's issues by being placed on the Seneca Falls Women's Wall of Fame. Her bibliography, listing many of her accomplishments for women, is listed on the Seneca Falls Website and is available at the Seneca Falls Women's Hall of Fame. Also in 2003, Utica College

of Syracuse University honored Dr. Bishop for her achievements in Gerontology as an Adjunct Faculty member. In recognition of her achievements she received this award in 2003 from the Association for Gerontological Educators.

**Textbook:**

Hillier & Barrow (2007). *Aging, The Individual, and Society*. (Order through the bookstore).

The textbook is meant to supplement the lectures and to help you understand aging from a broader perspective. Additional readings from journals that you will select will be assigned throughout the semester to the Masters students. The journals can be obtained at your local library or from the web.

**Course Expectations:**

It is expected that you will complete all of the sessions for the course. You can work at your own pace, though I strongly recommend that you follow the date guidelines for when sessions are due as it becomes too difficult to catch up and still do quality work. I will provide final deadlines for all of your work and will deduct points from your grade if work is turned in after that date. If at any time you are having difficulty completing your work, have an unusual personal situation you would like to discuss such as a computer malfunction or family illness please contact me so that we can discuss alternatives.

You should complete all of your work and all work of others should be appropriately cited. Please see your Student Code of Conduct in the NMSU Student Handbook for specific guidelines on ethical practices. My goal is for you to learn and to use that learning as a lifetime experience that can only be accomplished through your hard work.

Please also follow all NMSU processes for withdrawal from this course. It is helpful if you would notify me of your formal withdrawal, as there may be some delay time before I am notified.

While on-line courses are designed to be accessible according to ADA standards, please let me know if there are any accommodations that I can help you with to make this a successful learning experience for you. Do not hesitate to contact me to discuss accommodations and alternative assignments should there be barriers to the completion of those assignments such as a site-visit. Below is the NMSU official statement on ADA:

“Students with Disabilities. If you have or believe you have a disability and would benefit from any accommodations, you may wish to self-identify by contacting the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office located at Garcia Annex (phone: 646-6840). If you have already registered, please make sure that your instructor receives a copy of the accommodation memorandum from SSD within the first two weeks of classes. It is your responsibility to inform either your instructor or SSD representative in a timely manner if services/accommodations provided are not meeting your needs.

If you have a condition which may affect your ability to exit safely from the premises in an emergency or which may cause an emergency

during class, you are encouraged to discuss any concerns with the instructor and/or Mr. Michael Armendariz, SSD Coordinator. Feel free to call Ms. Angela Velasco (Interim EEO/ADA and Employee Relations Director) at 646-3333 with any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. All medical information will be treated confidentially.

### **Grading:**

Grades will be on a point system with every assignment, including discussion questions and chat room assignments receiving a specific point value based on the amount of work required and the value of the assignment towards your total learning experience. If you are not pleased with the points you have been given for any assignment and would like to do extra for additional points, please contact me. I will provide feedback for every assignment as timely as possible, so that you will know if you understand the content of the assignment and will know the progress you are making on the course. This is a writing intensive course. All assignments are designed to enhance your learning experience and to reach the objectives of the course. Each session will have objectives clearly written at the onset of the lecture section.

The total number of points for the course is 515. I will use a computerized grading system for the total number of points to equal a specific letter grade, following the University guidelines. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions regarding your grade or how you can improve your grade. I am very fair on grading, as long as you are doing the work.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Participants will be able to discuss aging from a positive perspective with understanding of why many of the myths and stereotypes about aging are inaccurate.
2. Participants will be able to discuss the factors of aging as well as the uniqueness of aging.
3. Participants will be able to discuss the aging network and some of the issues regarding services for older persons in the US.
4. Participants will be able to understand aging from a cultural perspective with a particular understanding of their specific selected culture to study.
5. Participants will be able to discuss environmental implications of aging.
6. Participants will be able to discuss basic needs and issues for older persons in the US.
7. Participants will be able to discuss the implications of Social Security reform and Medicare/Medicaid reform, especially for women and low-income older people.
8. Participants will be able to discuss the various methodologies of gerontological study.
9. Participants will complete a project that will add to their knowledge of aging in their cultural population of interest and will benefit the community.

### **Course Outline:**

**Session 1:** Introduction, Outline of course, course expectations, overview of demographics including diverse cultural and ethnic populations in the United States.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1-Watch 3 hours of television and write a summary of how older persons are presented on television including the ethnic or cultural identity of the characters. (10 points)

2-Find one advertisement (newspaper or magazine) that is directed towards an older population. Comment on how older persons are represented in the advertisement including the ethnic/cultural background. (10 Pts.)

3-Select a specific cultural or ethnic group within the US that you will follow throughout the semester. There will be assignments based on your selection through the semester. Please let me know your selection. (Master's Level only - Your selection of the specific group will also be the topic for your course project/paper. You have the option of selecting a project that you can apply directly to your community or a paper on your selected cultural or ethnic group.

**Reading assignment:** Read Chapter 3 from the Textbook Aging, the Individual, and Society

**Session 2:** Myths and Stereotypes about aging, including culturally influenced myths and stereotypes, and the effect on older persons in America.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. List at least 20 causes for functional or cognitive decline in older persons. Post those causes on the chat page and feel free to add to them as you read other students' lists. (5 points)
2. Briefly discuss (one to two pages) how the people from your chosen culture for this class are affected by myths and stereotypes about older persons in general. (10 points)
3. (Master's Level course only): Develop your project proposal. The proposal should be related to your selected cultural group, help further your understanding of aging in your selected group, and benefit the community. Please forward your proposals to me by next week. This project is worth 100 points towards your final grade and is the most important project for the Masters student.

**Reading assignment:** Read Chapter 2 from the Textbook

**Session 3:** History of Aging and Ageism in the United States

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Write a brief (one to two page) paper on the history of your chosen cultural group. Answer the question how you think that aging may be affected by this history. What prejudices or stereotypes are there historically about this cultural group? How do those affect prejudices about aging? (10 points)
2. On-line class discussion- How would the United States change if the average life expectancy were 100? What infrastructure systems would need to change? Should

- our focus be increased longevity or improvement of quality of life and functioning? (10 Pts.)
3. Interview a person over the age of 65. Write a 5 – 7 page summary of the interviews. Include how your interviewee thinks about aging, how she/he spends time, relationships, quality of life, types of activities, ethnic/cultural background, and stories of their lives. Due by midsemester. (50 Pts.)

**Reading assignment:** Read Chapter 1 from the Textbook.

**Session 4:** Psychology of Aging

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Select a book about aging or written by an older person (such as *Having our Say* by the Delaney Sisters or *Tuesdays with Morrie*). Write a 1 to 2 -page overview of the book including what you learned about aging in the book. (30 Pts.)

**Reading assignment:** Read Chapter 13 from the Textbook

**Session 5:** Mental Health and Older persons.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Chose one mental illness diagnosis and write a 1 to 2page concept paper. Discuss risk factors, cultural and ethnic considerations (especially for your selected cultural group), and demographics for older persons in the US. (20 Pts.)

**Reading assignment:** Read Chapter 11 from the Textbook.

**Session 6:** Cultural and Ethnic Factors in Aging

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. (Master's Level only) Write a 10-15 page paper on the cultural group you have selected. Discuss how this group thinks about aging, cares for their elderly, specific risk factors to that cultural or ethnic group, barriers to health care or services, and mental health issues. Due by the end of the semester. (40 Pts.)

**Reading Assignments:** Read Chapter 14 of the Textbook.

**Session 7:** Gender Issues and Aging, Social Roles and Aging, Overview of Cultural Factors in Aging in the United States

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Find one journal article on gender issues and aging. Write a 1 to 2- page review of the journal article with your reactions to the information provided. (10 pts)

**Session 8:** Midterm (50 Pts.)

**Session 9:** Service Delivery system in the United States for Older persons, Social Security, Medicaid/Medicare, Cultural issues in service delivery, Medicare & drug card systems in the United with implications for older Americans.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Write a one to two page paper on what **cultural competence** means for your selected cultural group. Include what considerations should be made when offering or developing services to older persons within that cultural group. (20 pts)

2. Find the web page for your state's Office for Aging. Write a one to two page summary of what services are available in your state as well as the information available on the website. Post this on our chat page so that the information can be shared amongst the class (An actual visit to an AAA can be substituted for this assignment, if that is possible for you. (10 pts)

**-Reading Assignment:** Read Chapter 17 of the textbook.

**Session 10:** Elder Abuse, Cultural and ethnic implications regarding Elder Abuse.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Find one journal article or newspaper article on Elder Abuse and write a 1-2 page summary of the issues discussed in the article.

**Session 11:** Housing, Living Environments, and programs of support

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. (Master's Level only) Continue working on your cultural paper. Include the various issues we have discussed throughout the semester including housing issues from this session.

2. **Readings:** Read Chapter 10 from the Textbook.

**Session 12:** Dementias and Aging

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Write a one-two page concept paper on the risk factors for dementias in your selected cultural study group. (10 Points)

2. **Readings:** Read Chapter 7 from the textbook.

**Session 13:** Physical environments and aging

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

1. Visit a Social Adult Day Care Program, Senior Center, or Nursing Home. Summarize the barriers and good environmental design features that you observe including any cultural implications that you observe (ethnic background of staff, cultural sensitivity, etc.). (30 Pts.)

**Session 14:** Special populations and issues. Cognitive Ability, learning, and aging.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

**Readings:** Chapters 13 in the textbook.

**Session 15:** Caregiving Issues and aging including cultural implications, Sexuality and aging.

**Assignments:** Discussion Questions (10 Pts.)

**Readings:** Chapters 5, 6, and 16 in the textbook.

The Final Project is due this week!

**Session 16: Final Exam (50 Pts.)**