

MA in Social Sciences (IC3JM)
Social Stratification II
(358-17101)

Winter Term, 2022–2023
Thursday, 15:00–18:00, Room 18.1.A01

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Overview

The influential life course perspective implies a dynamic view on population processes and socio-economic outcomes, emphasizing the changing roles of historical context and within-family interdependencies. In modern societies, each life stage from childhood over adolescence to adulthood and retirement is subject to specific timing and sequencing effects, including important patterns of heterogeneity. Understanding the mechanisms through which social inequality is shaped through major biographical transitions remains one of the key challenges for social science research. This seminar offers an advanced approach to current debates in the life course literature, with a focus on recent insights from cross-country comparative studies.

Course Requirements

Class participation:

This is a graduate-level course following a seminar format (not a lecture, although there will also be short presentations by the instructor). Thus, active participation is an essential requirement. All readings in the syllabus are mandatory, and students should be prepared to raise questions and/or make reflected comments on the weekly reading assignments. Students' active participation in the critical discussion of the course material is crucial.

Stinchcombe Test:

The eminent US sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe is cited with the statement that a good sociologist should be able to stipulate various competing explanations for a relevant social phenomenon. This exercise consists in preparing and delivering a 15-minute presentation about three alternative hypotheses that might explain a stylized social fact (which can either be self-selected or picked from a set offered by the instructor).

Writing Clinic:

Students have to hand in a written seminar paper at the end of the semester. To facilitate this task and help develop academic writing skills, the course also includes a writing clinic. For this interactive activity, brief early drafts of different pieces of (what will become) the seminar paper are circulated and discussed in class. For every Thursday session of the writing clinic, each student has to share the respective draft document with the group by Tuesday night (via Aula Global) to allow enough time for reading. The writing clinic is based on reciprocity and lives from students providing constructive feedback to each other. It culminates in a mini conference that takes place in the last session of the course, where all students present their seminar paper projects, to be discussed in class.

Final seminar paper:

The final seminar paper can either follow a short or full format. A short paper resembles the front-end of an empirical research article: it raises a research question that fills a gap in the existing knowledge, justifies its relevance and discusses the previous literature on the topic. Moreover, it briefly outlines a theoretical framework, spells out one or several hypotheses before describing a research design that could be used to test expectations against available data. Such short papers should have an extension between 3,000 and 5,000 words; alternatively, full papers that also include empirical evidence can be between 6,000 and 10,000 words long. The seminar paper should be seen as an opportunity to move own project ideas forward and, possibly, begin a paper that can become a Master's Thesis.

Grading:

Class participation: 25%; Stinchcombe test: 15% writing clinic: 25%; seminar paper: 35%.

Syllabus

PART I: THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

Session 1: The life course approach

Introduction to the course

Kohli, M. (2007). "The institutionalization of the life course: Looking back to look ahead." *Research in Human Development*, 4(3-4), 253-271.

Brückner, H., & Mayer, K. U. (2005). "De-standardization of the life course: What it might mean? And if it means anything, whether it actually took place?" *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, 27-53.

Session 2: Current life course research

Bernardi, L., Huinink, J., & Settersten Jr, R. A. (2019). "The life course cube: A tool for studying lives." *Advances in Life Course Research*, 41, 100258

Settersten Jr, R. A., Bernardi, L., Härkönen, J., Antonucci, T. C., Dykstra, P. A., Heckhausen, J., ... & Thomson, E. (2020). "Understanding the effects of Covid-19 through a life course lens." *Advances in Life Course Research*, 45, 100360.

Session 3: Life course regimes

DiPrete, T. A. (2002). "Life course risks, mobility regimes, and mobility consequences: A comparison of Sweden, Germany, and the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(2), 267-309.

Vandecasteele, L. (2011). "Life course risks or cumulative disadvantage? The structuring effect of social stratification determinants and life course events on poverty transitions in Europe." *European Sociological Review*, 27(2), 246-263.

PART II: EARLY LIFE COURSE AND TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Session 4: Inequality from birth

Bernardi, F. (2014). "Compensatory advantage as a mechanism of educational inequality: A regression discontinuity based on month of birth." *Sociology of Education*, 87: 74–88.

Writing Clinic I: Research Ideas

Session 5: Education and skills formation

Hsin, A., & Xie, Y. (2017). "Life-course changes in the mediation of cognitive and non-cognitive skills for parental effects on children's academic achievement." *Social Science Research*, 63, 150–165.

Passaretta, G., & Skopek, J. (2021). "Does schooling decrease socioeconomic inequality in early achievement? A differential exposure approach". *American Sociological Review*, 86(6), 1017-1042.

Session 6: Transition to adulthood

Billari, F. C., Hiekel, N. & Liefbroer, A. C. (2019). "The Social Stratification of Choice in the Transition to Adulthood". *European Sociological Review*, 35(5), 599–615.

Writing Clinic II: Literature Reviews

PART III: WORK TRANSITIONS

Session 7: School-to-work transitions

Brzinsky-Fay, C., & Solga, H. (2016). "Compressed, postponed, or disadvantaged? School-to-work-transition patterns and early occupational attainment in West Germany." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 46, 21-36.

Vancea, M., & Utzet, M. (2018). "School-to-work transition: The case of Spanish NEETs." *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(7), 869-887.

Session 8: Labor market transitions

Weisshaar, K. (2018). "From opt out to blocked out: The challenges for labor market re-entry after family-related employment lapses." *American Sociological Review*, 83(1), 34-60.

Writing Clinic III: Hypotheses and Research Design

Session 9: Retirement

Barban, N., De Luna, X., Lundholm, E., Svensson, I., & Billari, F. C. (2020). "Causal effects of the timing of life-course events: age at retirement and subsequent health." *Sociological Methods & Research*, 49(1), 216-249.

Grünwald, O., Damman, M., & Henkens, K. (2021). "The differential impact of retirement on informal caregiving, volunteering, and grandparenting: results of a 3-year panel study." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 76(3), 607-619.

PART IV: FAMILY TRANSITIONS

Session 10: Gender and the life course

Gonalons-Pons, P., & Gangl, M. (2021). "Marriage and masculinity: Male-breadwinner culture, unemployment, and separation risk in 29 countries." *American Sociological Review*, 86(3), 465-502.

Writing Clinic IV: First Results

Session 11: Family life courses

Aisenbrey, S., & Fasang, A. (2017). "The interplay of work and family trajectories over the life course: Germany and the United States in comparison." *American Journal of Sociology*, 122(5), 1448-1484.

Van Winkle, Z. (2020). "Family policies and family life course complexity across 20th-century Europe." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 30(3), 320-338.

Session 12: Mini-conference

Writing Clinic V: Paper Presentations and Discussion