

TEACHING GERONTOLOGY

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WHY STUDY GERONTOLOGY?

Do your students ever wonder why they should take your course on aging? Here are some answers:

"No trend in the last 100 years has had greater impact on the nature of social and political life than the dramatic demographic shifts reflected in the following:

-The population of persons aged 65 and over increased from 3 million in 1900 to 33.2 million in 1994. The number will reach 50 million by 2020.

-The average life expectancy increased from 47 in 1900 to 76 in 1995.

-In 1900 fewer than 1 in 10 persons is over 55 years, now 1 in 5 is over 55 years.

-The median age of the U.S. population increased from 18 years in 1900, to 28 years in 1970, to 33 in 1990, and is expected to peak at 43 years in 2040."

(From "Frequently Asked Questions" published by the Center on Aging Studies, University of Missouri-Kansas

City)

The number of jobs in gerontology-related fields will increase by more than 36 percent by 2012, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. A key factor in the expected job growth in the field of aging, besides the obvious demographic bulge, is the shift away from viewing employment solely from the illness, disease and research model. While demand will remain high in these areas a vast opportunity exists for the development and delivery of new products and services to the aging population.

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LIFE EXPECTANCY CALCULATORS

A recent column in the Wall Street Journal called into question the use of online life expectancy calculators. In that column Carl Bialik argued that new medical data can such tools out of date and, further, that we can't easily foresee the interaction of behavior, genetics, medical history and so on. One expert, actuary James C. Brooks, concluded that none of the life expectancy calculators are any good.

In my view, these judgments are unduly harsh. Such negative judgments don't take into account the educational value and impact of using a life expectancy calculator. An actuary may be entirely justified in being skeptical about such calculators.

But actuarial science is not the proper criterion to use here. Nor should we expect such calculators to take account of every detail of each individual's unique medical situation and history. Instead, the value of such a life expectancy calculator is in helping us focus on risks: such as longevity risk ("Wow, I never thought I might live that long") or health risk ("Hey, you mean obesity, or smoking, or whatever, cuts my life expectancy down that much?"). By using a life expectancy calculator to appraise the differential impact of variables, this tool can be a helpful educational instrument, whether for the public at large or for our students in gerontology.

One of the best, and most popular, of these tools is the Life Expectancy Calculator available at Livingto100.com. This instrument, designed by noted longevity expert Tom Perls, has

40 questions about diet, lifestyle, and family history.

For more on this tool, visit:
<http://www.livingto100.com/>

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GERONTOLOGY IN CANADA

For an overview of "Who's Teaching Gerontology and Courses in Aging" at colleges and universities in Canada, visit:
http://www.agingincanada.ca/Whos_teaching_gerontology.htm

For a compendium of "Programs and Courses in Gerontology and Geriatrics" in Canada visit:
http://www.cagacg.ca/education/600_e.php

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LIFE AND WORK OF ERIK ERIKSON

For a video documentary "Erik H. Erikson: A Life's Work" and "Conversations with Joan Erikson at 92" (including a helpful study guide to Erikson's life and work) visit:
<http://www.davidsonfilmsstore.com/Erikson.htm>

For an overview of resources and ideas about Erikson's stages of lifespan development, visit:
<http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/erikson.html>

For tutorials and weblinks about Erikson and his work, see:
http://college.hmco.com/psychology/seifert/lifespan_dev/2e/students/weblinks.html

See also:
<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/erikson.html>

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PUBLIC POLICY NEWSLETTER

The "Public Policy & Aging E-Report" is a no-cost bimonthly email publication from GSA that features important developments in aging policy from a variety of sources,

including publications in the media, academy, think tanks, private sector, government and nonprofit organizations. To see a sample issue or get a subscription, visit:
http://www.agingsociety.org/agingsociety/publications/public_policy/2008newsletter2n1.htm

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BUYING TERM PAPERS

Where can students go to buy a term paper? On the Internet everything is for sale, so look no further than this website:
http://www.essaytown.com/topics/aging_essays_papers.html

For educators in aging the good news is that this website offers only 28 terms papers under the category of "gerontology." But the bad news is that under "retirement," you'll find 242 term papers available; and for "Alzheimer's Disease" a total of 174. The choices go on and the numbers have increased five-fold just in the past three years. Clearly, an enterprising student doesn't have to look far to find a paper for a class in aging.

Is it time for some additional lessons on the ethics of plagiarism? Maybe that's not bad idea. But perhaps a different approach is called for. Professors who actually know their students personally are far less likely to be fooled by purchased term papers in the first place. By all means, let's have more attention to the problem of buying term papers, just as we have attention to the problem of illicit drugs in our society. But let's also have more attention to the conditions that make plagiarism (or drug use) flourish in the first place.

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WEB SITES TO SEE

HEALTH CARE FACTS. Look at "Facts on Health Care Spending and Costs," by Shelly-Ann Sinclair and AARP's Public Policy Institute at:
http://www.aarp.org/research/health/carefinancing/fs144_costs.html

CAREGIVING. For a report on caregiving, including resources

