Soc 8590: Topics in Life Course Sociology

Careers, Gender, and the Life Course

Fall 2003

12:00 – 2:15 Wednesday
Room: 1114 SST

Instructor:
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Office Hours:
1:30 – 2:30 Mondays or by appointment
1123 SST

Course Description and Goals:
This course investigates careers as an important sociological, organizational, psychological, developmental, and cultural concept, one capturing the dynamics of modern adult life in advanced economies, as well as the gendered organization and distribution of paid work. Career metaphors and regimes are deeply embedded in taken-for-granted age and gender expectations and in occupations, but also in the social organization of temporal routines, roles, and reward systems in virtually every sector of society. For most Americans, their occupational career is also an important source of identity, income, status, security, well-being (as well as stress), and engagement. In this class we will investigate the uses and usefulness of the career construct for understanding the ways both scholars and policy makers define issues (such as inequality, attainment, and risk). We will also consider the possibilities for revitalizing career paths and rethinking the policies shaping them.

Class participants will draw on life a course framing of research questions as it articulates with other theoretical approaches to promote understanding of the patterning and cultural meanings of careers. A life course perspective points to the importance of:

- Individual, organizational, and societal orientations, expectations, and regimes;
- Career timing, sequencing, trajectories and transitions;
- Organizational and institutional policy development and change;
- Large scale societal trends shaping career paths and possibilities
- Social (especially gender and age, but also race and ethnic) heterogeneity, inequality, and risk

Course Requirements:
Class participants will read and discuss the required materials in light of the above issues and in conjunction with several key intellectual challenges (discussed below). Participants will actively engage in this spirit of inquiry, including leading the discussion from time to time. Other expectations:

- Write and present a paper addressing one or more of the above issues, providing either a broad overview or investigating a specific substantive topic;
(including the investigation of specific occupational or organizational career paths, stress or other outcomes, inequality, identity);

• Become familiar with life history analysis through hands-on analysis of several life histories from the *Ecology of Careers* Study, as well as learning other methods for studying careers;
• Write a book review, or else review three articles;
• Provide written and oral feedback to at least one other student.

The class will grapple with five intellectual challenges that emerge from a life course framing of careers:

1. The theoretical and methodological implications of selection into certain roles, relationships, career paths and contexts;
2. The need to reframe individualistic models of career decision-making and behavior to include both networks of social relations and time;
3. The complex relationships between choice, socialization, allocation, achievement, success, and well-being;
4. The interplay between taken-for-granted assumptions, metaphors, research, and policy development about career dynamics;
5. The importance and meaning of comparative analysis, that is, of locating careers in the multiple contexts in which they are embedded and which have emerged in response to the primacy of careers as an orienting framework.

**Required Materials:**

Required Readings available for copying or downloading

**Course Plan:**
The class will provide a broad introduction to the career literature, as well as related literatures. It will also involve some “hands on” assessments of individual career paths as well as actively contributing to participants’ developing expertise in some aspect of career-related research.

**September 3rd: Overview of Course and Introduction**
(reading not expected)

September 10th: “Career” as a Concept, Metaphor, and Orienting Framework

- DUE: Title of book/articles you plan to review

September 17th: Capturing Careers: Pragmatic and Methodological Considerations

- Extra: Carlson, Dawn S.; Derr, C. Brooklyn; and Wadsworth, Lori L. 2003. “The Effects of Internal Career Orientation on Multiple Dimensions of Work-

- **DUE:** 1 paragraph description of proposed paper

**September 24th:** Career Embeddedness: Relational and Biographical Pacing


**October 1st:** Career Embeddedness: Organizational Regimes

- **DUE:** List of 6 key references for paper
October 8\textsuperscript{th}: Career Embeddedness: Culture and Policy Regimes and Structural Lag


October 15\textsuperscript{th}: Theories of Careers

- DUE: 5 page (or less) double spaced book/article reviews
October 22\textsuperscript{nd}: Career Projects


October 29\textsuperscript{th}: Career Paths and Passages


- DUE: Annotated paper outline with 10 references

November 5\textsuperscript{th}: Career Contingencies


November 12th: Rethinking Careers, Career Policies, and Career Research  
- **DUE: Draft paper; paper presentations**

November 19th: Theories of Careers Part II  
- **DUE: Paper presentations; turn in final paper**

November 26th: Understanding the Importance of Career Dynamics  

December 1st  
- **Paper due**

December 3rd: Understanding the Importance of Career Dynamics  
- **DUE: Short (15 minute) paper presentations**
December 10th: Career Innovations


Summary of Readings in Alphabetical Order:


