

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

Winter Term, 2020–2021  
Tuesday, 10:30–13:30, 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**

This is a graduate-level course following a seminar format (not a lecture). 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 each weekly reading assignment. Students' active participation in the critical discussion of the course material is crucial.

In addition to the weekly readings, 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 session of the writing clinic, each student has to hand in the respective draft document to the instructor and the rest of the class by Sunday night (via email) to leave enough time for reading. The writing clinic is based on reciprocity and lives from students providing constructive feedback to each other.

The final seminar paper should resemble the front-end of an empirical research article. It should raise a research question that fills a gap in the existing knowledge, justify its relevance and discuss the previous literature on the topic. Moreover, it should briefly outline a theoretical framework, spell out one or several hypotheses as well as describe a research design that could be used to test expectations against available data. The seminar paper should be seen as an opportunity to move own project ideas forward and, ideally, begin a paper that can become a Master's Thesis and/or even eventually be published. Such seminar papers should have an extension between 3,000 and 5,000 words; alternatively, full papers including empirical evidence can be between 6,000 and 10,000 words long.

Grading: class participation: 40%; writing clinic: 20%; seminar paper: 40%.

## Syllabus

### PART I: THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

#### Session 1:

Introduction to the course

Settersten, R. A. & Mayer, K. U. (1997): The Measurement of Age, Age Structuring, and the Life Course, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 233–261.

Macmillan, R. (2005). "The structure of the life course: Classic issues and current controversies." *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, 3-24.

#### Session 2: Life course structure and standardization

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 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 as equalizer

Von Hippel, P. T., Workman, J., & Downey, D. B. (2018). "Inequality in reading and math skills forms mainly before kindergarten: A replication, and partial correction, of 'Are Schools the Great Equalizer?'" *Sociology of Education*, 91(4), 323–357.

Brand, J.E. & Xie, Y. (2010). "Who Benefits Most from College? Evidence for Negative Selection in Heterogeneous Economic Returns to Higher Education." *American Sociological Review* 75(2): 273–302.

#### Session 6: Grades, tests and achievement

Borghans, L., Golsteyn, B. H., Heckman, J. J., & Humphries, J. E. (2016). "What grades and achievement tests measure". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(47), 13354-13359.

Writing Clinic II: Literature Reviews

#### Session 7: Transition to adulthood

Oesterle, S., Johnson, M. K., & Mortimer, J. T. (2004). Volunteerism during the transition to adulthood: A life course perspective. *Social Forces*, 82(3), 1123-1149.

Billari, F. C., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2007). Should I stay or should I go? The impact of age norms on leaving home. *Demography*, 44(1), 181-198.

### PART III: WORK TRANSITIONS

#### Session 8: Unemployment, job loss and scarring

Gangl, M. (2006). "Scar effects of unemployment: An assessment of institutional complementarities." *American Sociological Review*, 71(6), 986-1013.

Writing Clinic III: Hypotheses

#### Session 9: Retirement

Moen, P., Sweet, S., & Swisher, R. (2005). Embedded career clocks: The case of retirement planning. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, 237-265.

Van Solinge, H., & Henkens, K. (2007). „Involuntary retirement: The role of restrictive circumstances, timing, and social embeddedness." *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 62(5), 295-303.

## PART IV: FAMILY TRANSITIONS

### Session 10: Family transitions in comparison

Kalmijn, M. (2007). "Explaining cross-national differences in marriage, cohabitation, and divorce in Europe, 1990–2000." *Population Studies*, 61(3), 243-263.

Writing Clinic IV: Research Design

### Session 11: Family life courses

Albertini, M., Kohli, M., & Vogel, C. (2007). „Intergenerational transfers of time and money in European families: common patterns—different regimes?". *Journal of European Social Policy*, 17(4), 319-334.

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.

### Session 12: Mini-conference

Writing Clinic V: Paper Presentations and Discussion