PSYC 4260 Psychology of Aging
Fall 2026

Course
Days: T & R | Time: 9:30 - 10:45 AM
Location: TBD

Instructor: Dr. Liao
Hsiao-Wen Liao, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in Psychology
Office hours: Tuesday 11:00 - 11:50 AM or by appointment
Office: JS Coon 123
Email: liao@gatech.edu
Lab website: https://sites.gatech.edu/liaolab/

Teaching Assistant: TBD

Prerequisite: PSYC 1101

Course Description
This course offers an introduction to the processes of aging including changes in physical, cognitive, and socioemotional functioning and psychological impacts and behavioral adaptation associated with age-related changes. Challenges and opportunities that longevity and aging bring will be also discussed. A multi-dimensional approach to learning (e.g., lectures, readings, films & videos) is adopted to convey information. Varied methods are also used to evaluate learning progress and facilitate knowledge acquisition (e.g., individual/group exercises, quizzes, exams, essay assignments). Students' critical thinking will be broadened in three ways. After taking this course, they will be able to (1) evaluate adult development and aging from a life-span developmental perspective, (2) be mindful of stereotypes and myths associated with older people and the process of aging, and (3) apply the learned knowledge to prepare for a fulfilling century-long life.

PSYC 4260/6060 PSYCHOLOGY OF AGING
This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:
- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:
- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:
- Intercultural Competence, Perspective-Taking , and Persuasion

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to

- Use life-span principles to evaluate issues related to adult development and aging
- Acquire a basic understanding of major theories of aging and ways to study aging
- Be aware of individual differences in the process of aging
- Identify factors that may hinder or enhance the chance of successful aging

Required Text and Readings

Cavanaugh J. C. (2024). Adult Development and Aging, (9th ed.). Publisher: Cengage Learning. ISBN-10: 0357796276; ISBN-13: 978-0357796276

or

Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, F. (2019). Adult Development and Aging, (8th ed.). Publisher: Cengage Learning *Georgia Tech Library has a physical copy.

Note that this course is open to graduate (PYSC 6060) and undergraduate students (PSYC 4260). Additional assigned readings that facilitate a more in-depth understanding on aging research will also be posted on Canvas.

Grading Policy

Grade	Points	%
A	450-500	90% and above
B	400-449	80-89%
C	350-399	70-79%
D	300-349	60-69%
F	299 and lower	< 60%

Note. Point values will be used to calculate final grades. If the S/U grading is elected, D is the passing grade for this course.

Final grade is a composite of the following course requirements
(1) Quizzes 60 points (12%)
(2) Exams 210 points (42%)
(3) Exercises 110 points (22%)
(4) Written Assignments 120 points (24%)

Open-book Quizzes. The purpose of these quizzes is to encourage you to study course material before exams. There will be 5 open-book quizzes. You can bring your textbook and lecture notes when taking quizzes during regular class hours. Each quiz is worth 12 points. Each will consist of matching, true/false, multiple-choice, short-answer, and/or open-ended questions. For each quiz, you will have 20 minutes to complete it. **No make-up quizzes will be granted. Should there are personal or family emergencies, contact the instructor ASAP.**

Exams

Exam 1 and Exam 2 will be closed-book exams and administered during regular class hours. Exam 3 will be cumulative and open-book and administered via Canvas. Each exam

consists of multiple-choice, short answer, and open-ended questions. You can expect more open-ended questions in Exam 3.

Each exam is worth 70 points for a total of 210 points. Questions will be drawn from your textbook, lectures, and assigned readings. Make-up exams will only be given in the event of an emergency. It is required that students provide formal documentation for excused absences to arrange a make-up exam in advance. **Exam dates are set and won't change. No make-up exams will be granted, unless such an arrangement is approved in advance. Should there are family or personal emergencies, contact the instructor ASAP.**

Exam Preparation Tips: Should review your textbook and lecture slides. This is an introductory course. Your text covers the basics and offers a nice overview. As such, many contents will come from your text.

For assigned journal articles, key takeaways will be discussed during lectures. You'd make sure you that you can explain age-related patterns in figures from assigned readings *in your own words*.

***For students who would want to take exams at the testing center**, contact the testing center at least a week in advance. Be sure to make a request for Exam 1 and Exam 2, respectively. Visit the Office of Disability Services, https://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/testing-center/scheduling. You can also take Exam 3 at the testing center but note that it is open-booked and online test and you can take it from anywhere.

Exercises

For in-class group exercises, you will submit worksheets before leaving the classroom. If you miss an **in-class group exercise**, you can submit the work individually but 2 points will be off for such a submission. There are also exercises that you will submit to Canvas. Specific instructions will be posted on Canvas. Submit by **11:59 PM** on the set date.

Late submission: **2 points off per day late for any Canvas submission**. If you miss an **in-class group exercise**, you can submit the work but 2 points will be off for such a submission, and if your individual submission is late, late paneities will also be applied.

Documentation or proof of illness, such as doctor's notes, letters (with specific date and descriptions of the conditions), is required to avoid penalties. Contact the instructor if there is an emergency. If you experience life challenges that affect your academic success, consider filing formal assistance, https://studentlife.gatech.edu/request-assistance .

Written Assignments

There are two written assignments. Each is worth 60 points for a total of 120 points. Instructions for each and grading rubrics will be posted on Canvas.

- WA 1: You will be asked to watch a documentary film and use the lifespan developmental principles to analyze factors that shape the development of two main characters chosen from the film.

- WA 2: You will be instructed to interview someone who is 50 or older (e.g., your friends, parents, grandparents, neighbors) and summarize what you learn.

Always submit the work on Canvas before midnight **11:59 PM** on the set date.

Late submission: **2 points off per day late**. It takes time to review your work. Formal documentation or proof of illness (with specific date and descriptions of the conditions) is required to avoid late penalties. Contact the instructor if there is an emergency.

Extra credit (undergraduate students only)
Research participation is encouraged but not required. You can earn extra 3 points for participating in SONA studies that result in 3 credits earned in total (or more) for this particular class. Please login to the SONA system to sign up for studies, gatech-psych.sona-systems.com. Read *Participant Instructions SONA 2020* in the Files folder to learn how to register and sign up for an account. No need to send proof as the instructor will be able to see the SONA report. If you are under 18, you need to enroll in experiments/studies that allow for under-age participants or contact the instructor for an alternative assignment.

SONA tips: If you miss TWO or more experiments/studies, you will not be able to participate in additional SONA experiments/studies. Your SONA ID should be the prefix to your @gatech.edu account. SONA adds @gatech.edu to your username as your email address. This is the most common problem for why students do not receive SONA messages. The instructor will be able to see your completion of research participation on her end when the semester ends. No need to email her proof unless you are contacted.

Attendance Policy
Attendance is expected. The instructor reserves the right to add pop exercises/activities for students who attend classes to earn extra points throughout the semester. If you miss a predetermined in-class exercise due to unexcused absence, you should accept the consequence and utilize other opportunities to makeup the points missed (e.g., SONA research participation). Please see https://registrar.gatech.edu/info/institute-approved-absence-form-for-students for more information about approved absences.

Any letter for Institute approved absences (e.g., conference presentations, athletic events or competitions, religious absences, and/or health emergencies) should be given to the instructor as soon as possible. If you are requesting an absence due to religious observations, those could be made informally with the instructor or via the request form submitted to the registrar. These religious absences should be requested within the first two weeks of the semester.

Academic Integrity
Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, which manages the due process, including collecting

relevant information from all parties, and if responsibility for a violation is found, identifying the appropriate penalty. All students are assumed to have read the GT Academic Honor Code and the student Code of Conduct and have consented to be bound by it.

- https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-life/academic-honor-code
- https://www.policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-life/student-conduct

For this class, specific examples of academic misconduct and dishonesty include:

- Plagiarism: the unattributed use of words and/or ideas of another person or generative AI. Examples include, but are not limited to: words written by another person (including yourself for a previous class) or generative AI or lifted from the internet with and without proper citation; ideas taken from another person without proper citation.
- To avoid plagiarism, a simple solution is to always describe answers in your own words when writing essay assignments and responding to open-ended questions
- Unauthorized collaboration: working with someone else on graded work (e.g., assignments, exams, or presentations) without explicit permission from the instructor
- Submission of an engagement assignment by a student not in the class session.

Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at 404.894.2563 or their website (https://disabilityservices.gatech.edu), as soon as possible, to discuss your needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Also, please contact the instructor as soon as possible should you want to discuss your learning needs.

- If you are planning to take Exam 1 and Exam 2 at the testing center, book your slots for both and book it at least two weeks in advance.
- The instructor is more than happy to meet and discuss individual plans to help you pass this course especially when there are life circumstances that prevent you from class participation and completion of assignments.
- Private one-on-one meetings (online or in person) can always be scheduled.

Communication Tips:

- Please contact the instructor if you experience life circumstances that prevent you from class participation and completion of assignments. Don't wait until the last minute!
- I'd truly appreciate that you indicate **4260** & **keywords** in your Subject Line.
- Please allow 24 hours for the instructor and/or TA to get back to you.
- Please review available resources first before you send us an email.

Contact TA or the instructor for questions about grading

- When a grade is released, it will be announced on Canvas and during class. Students will have a window of one week to ***initiate*** a discussion. After the period of time, any disputes won't be discussed. Act promptly! But again, if you experience life circumstances that prevent you from class participation and completion of assignments, contact the instructor.

Student-Faculty Expectations
At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See the Student-Faculty Expectations (http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/) for an articulation of some basic expectation that you can have of me and that I have of you. In addition, we strive to remove barriers to access and success, and to build an inclusive community where people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn and contribute to our mission. As outlined in our strategic plan (https://strategicplan.gatech.edu/values), we want to create an environment of holistic learning where all individuals can grow and learn to lead healthy, purposeful, impactful lives. Therefore, everyone is encouraged to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial and professional interactions that assume best intentions of each other will help build a learning community and environment in which we handle the stressors of a semester with tolerance, compassion, and mutual respect.

Recordings of class sessions and required permissions
Classes may not be recorded by students without the express consent of the instructor unless it is pursuant to an accommodation granted by the Office of Disability services. Class recordings, lectures, presentations, and other materials posted on Canvas are for the purpose of education and for serving students who are currently enrolled in this course.

Student resources
GT resources such as promoting mental health and wellbeing and managing coursework and assignments are at your fingertips. For more information, visit Canvas under GT Student Resources.

Syllabus Change
Some elements of course content, the day-to-day schedule, and readings are subject to change from what is shown here in the syllabus to best meet the needs of the class. Changes will always be conducted to fairly and equitably benefit all students (e.g., giving extra time to complete an assignment, moving deadlines to a later date).
Note that Exam dates will not change.

Course structure
Course material/schedule is organized into eight modules

- Module 1: Theoretical & Methodological Approaches to Successful Aging
- Module 2: Physical & Biological Aging
- Module 3: Cognitive Aging
- Module 4: Socioemotional Aging
- Module 5: Social Cognition and Aging
- Module 6: Mental Health and Illness
- Module 7: End-of-life Issues
- Module 8: Lifestyles and Aging Well
- Module 9: Aging Topics

Course schedule *Graduate student presentation schedules will be updated once enrollment is finalized					
Module	**Date**	**Day**	**Topic**	**Readings**	**Due**
1	8/25	T	Introduction to the course; life expectancy & demographic trends	**Ch1.1, Ch 1.2, Ch4.1, Ch14.1**	
1	8/27	R	Theoretical & Methodological Approaches to Successful Aging	**Ch 1.2** Rowe, J. W., & Kahn, R. L. (1997). Successful aging. *The Gerontologist*, *37*(4), 433–440. Fries, J. F. (2003). Measuring and monitoring success in compressing morbidity. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 139*, 455-459 Baltes, P. B., & Smith, J. (2003). New frontiers in the future of aging: From successful aging of the young old to the dilemmas of the fourth age. *Gerontology*, *49*(2), 123–135.	
	9/1	T	Theoretical & Methodological Approaches to Successful Aging	**Ch1.1, Ch1.2** Baltes, P. B. (1987). Theoretical propositions of lifespan developmental psychology: On the dynamics between growth and decline. *Developmental Psychology, 23*, 611-626 Lachman, M. E., Teshale, S., & Agrigoroaei, S. (2015). Midlife as a pivotal period in the life course: Balancing growth and decline at the crossroads of youth and old age. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *39*(1), 20–31	Exercise 1: How long will you live? (in class)
1	9/3	T	Theoretical & Methodological Approaches to Successful Aging	**Ch1.3** Sutin et al. (2013). The effect of birth cohort on well-being: The legacy of economic hard times. *Psychological Science*, *24*(3), 379–385.	Exercise 2: Cohort effects (in-class)
1	9/8		Theoretical & Methodological Approaches to Successful Aging	**Ch1.3** Cavanaugh, J. C., & Whitbourne, S. K. (2002). Research methods in adult development. In J. Demick & C.	In-class Quiz 1: Module 1

				Andreoletti (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult Development* (pp. 85–100) Key topics: reliability and validity; cross-sectional & longitudinal research; attrition and survivorship bias; age/cohort/time of measurement effects	
2	9/10		Physical and biological aging: changes and related impacts	**Ch3 & Ch4** Tay et al. (2006). Sensory and cognitive association in older persons: findings from an older Australian population. Gerontology, 52(6), 386–394. Infurna et al. (2021). Historical change in midlife health, well-being, and despair: Cross-cultural and socioeconomic comparisons. American Psychologist, 76(6):870-887.	
2	9/15		Physical and biological aging: changes and related impacts	Hughes, V. (2013). The big fat truth. *Nature*, *497*(7450), 428–430. Miner, B. & Kryger, M. H/ (2018). Sleep in the Aging Population. *Sleep Medicine Clinics*. *12(1)*, 31-38. McCrae et al. (2005). Sleep complaints, subjective and objective sleep patterns, health, psychological adjustment, and daytime functioning in community-dwelling older adults. The Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 60(4),* 182-189.	Exercise 3: Obesity paradox (in class)
2	9/17		Physical and biological aging: special topics	No class meetup: Harvard Medical School online seminar, submit Exercise 4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPXgNCefknI&t=728s	Exercise 4: advances in biological aging (Canvas)
3	9/22		Cognitive aging: cognitive neuroscience	**Ch2** Grady, C. (2012). The cognitive neuroscience of ageing. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *13*(7), 491–505.	In-class Quiz 2: Module 2
3	9/24		Cognitive aging: attention and memory	**Ch6**	

3	9/29		Cognitive aging: intelligence	**Ch7** Gerstorf et al. (2022). Today's older adults are cognitively fitter than older adults were 20 years ago, but when and how they decline is no different than in the past. *Psychological Science*.	
3	10/1	R	Cognitive aging: everyday cognition	**Ch7** Staudinger, U. M., Smith, J., & Baltes, P. B. (1992). Wisdom-related knowledge in a life review task: Age differences and the role of professional specialization. *Psychology and Aging, 7(2)*, 271–281. Thomas, S., & Kunzmann, U. (2014). Age differences in wisdom-related knowledge: Does the age relevance of the task matter? *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 69(6)*, 897–905.	In-class Quiz 3: Module 3
	10/6	T	Fall break		
	10/8		**In-class Exam 1: Module 1-3** (regular class hours)		
4	10/13		Socioemotional aging: general trends	Riediger et al. (2009). Seeking pleasure and seeking pain: Differences in prohedonic and contra-hedonic motivation from adolescence to old age. *Psychological Science*, *20*(12), 1529–1535. Carstensen et al. (2011). Emotional experience improves with age: Evidence based on over 10 years of experience sampling. *Psychology and Aging*, *26*(1), 21–33 Charles, S. T., & Luong, G. (2013). Emotional experience across adulthood: The theoretical model of strength and vulnerability integration. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(6), 443–448	

4	10/15		Socioemotional aging: implications for relationships and everyday memory	English, T., & Carstensen, L. L. (2014). Selective narrowing of social networks across adulthood is associated with improved emotional experience in daily life. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *38*(2), 195–202 Liao, H.-W., & Westerhof, J. G. (2025). Positivity effects in self-defining memories in men and women across adulthood: Differences between self-reported affect and content-coded meaning. *Cognition and Emotion*, 11, 1-16.	
4	10/20		Socioemotional aging: emotion and the aging brain	**Ch2 pp38-42** Mather et al. (2004). Amygdala responses to emotionally valenced stimuli in older and younger adults. *Psychological Science*, *15*(4), 259–263 Winecoff et al. (2011) Cognitive and neural contributors to emotion regulation in aging. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci, 6(2)*,165-76. Mather M. (2012).The emotion paradox in the aging brain. *Ann N Y Acad Sci,* 1251(1):33-49.	In-class Exercise 5: emotion paradox in the aging brain
4	10/22		Social cognition and aging: age stereotypes, aging attitudes	Diehl et al. (2021). Age-related change in self-perceptions of aging: Longitudinal trajectories and predictors of change. *Psychology and Aging, 36*(3), 344-359. Miche et al. (2014). Attitude toward own aging in midlife and early old age over a 12-year period: Examination of measurement equivalence and developmental trajectories. *Psychology and Aging, 29*(3), 588-600 Levy B. (2009). Stereotype embodiment: A psychosocial approach to aging. *Current Direction in Psychological Science, 8(6),* 332-336.	**WA1 due**
5	10/27		Social cognition and aging: SOC, control beliefs, self-regulation in old age	**Ch 8**	

5	10/29		Social cognition and aging: stability and change in personality	**Ch 9** Specht et al. (2011). Stability and change of personality across the life course: The impact of age and major life events on mean-level and rank-order stability of the Big Five. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*(4), 862–882. Orth et al. (2012). Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(6), 1271–1288.	In-class Quiz 4: Modules 4-5
5	11/3		Mental Health Issues: depression & dementia	**Ch10.1** Barnes et al. (2013). Racial differences in depression in the United States: How do subgroup analyses inform a paradox? *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, *48*(12), 1941–1949. Bui et al. (2021). Race and ethnic group disparities in emotional distress among older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Gerontologist*, *61*(2), 262–272.	
6	11/5		Mental Health Issues: depression & dementia	**Ch10.1** Kim, H., Chang, M., Rose, K., & Kim, S. (2012). Predictors of caregiver burden in caregivers of individuals with dementia. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 68(4), 846–855. Roland, K. P., & Chappell, N. L. (2015). Meaningful activity for persons with dementia: Family caregiver perspectives. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementiasr*, *30*(6), 559–568 NIH resources: https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers	Exercise 6: Dementia caregiving (Canvas)
6	11/10		**In-class Exam 2: Module 4-6** (regular class hours)		
7	11/12		End-of-life issues	**Ch13** Fontalis A et al. (2018). Euthanasia and assisted dying: what is the current position and what are the key	Exercise 7: Euthanasia debate (in class)

				arguments informing the debate? J of the Royal Society of Medicine, *111(11),* 407-413. Sarbey, B. (2016). Definitions of death: Brain death and what matters in a person. *Journal of Law and the Biosciences,* 743–752.	
7	11/17		Lifestyle and successful aging: relationships & leisure	**Ch11.3, Ch12.5** Huxhold, O., Fiori, K. L., Webster, N. J., & Antonucci, T. C. (2020). The strength of weaker ties: An underexplored resource for maintaining emotional well-being in later life. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *75*(7), 1433–1442. Silverstein, M., & Parker, M. (2002). Leisure activities and quality of life among the oldest old in Sweden. *Research on Aging, 24,* 528-547. Paggi, M. E., Jopp, D., & Hertzog, C. (2016). The importance of leisure activities in the relations between physical health and wellbeing in a lifespan sample. *Gerontology, 62*, 450-458.	
8	11/19		Lifestyles and successful aging: technology use	**Ch14, pp 410-411** Pew Research Center Reports Kadylak, T., & Cotten, S. R. (2020). United States older adults' willingness to use emerging technologies. *Information, Communication & Society*, *23*(5), 736–750. Tu et al. (2020). Age related differences in the uncanny valley effects. *Gerontology, 66,* 382-392.	In-class Quiz 5: Modules 7-8
8	11/24		No class meetup: Use the time to complete WA2 - instructions will be posted on Canvas		**WA 2 due**
	11/26		No class meetup: Holiday		
8	12/1		Aging topics	Graduate students present research topics	Exercise 8: Presentation feedback (in class)

9	12/3		Aging topics	Graduate students present research topics	Exercise 9: Presentation feedback (in class)
9	12/8		Aging topics	Graduate students present research topics	Exercise 10: Presentation feedback (in class)
			Exam 3: Module 1-8 Cumulative, open-book test via Canvas (online) Date TBD, GT's Final Exam Matrix will be followed		