

Biodemography of Aging – GERO/BISC 440

Syllabus - 2020 Spring Semester

1. Basic Information

Course: Biodemography of Aging – GERO/BISC 440
Place and time: GERO 224, Monday 2-4:50pm
Faculty: Dr. Wilber Escorcia, PhD
Instructional Assistant Professor, Gerontology

Office: GER 231H
Telephone: 213-821-4254
Email: escorcia@usc.edu
Office Hours: Monday 12-2 PM
Prerequisites: None
Class web page: <https://blackboard.usc.edu>
Units: 4

Course text: “Biology of Aging” by Rodger B. McDonald

Course coordinator: Dr. Sean P. Curran, PhD
Associate Professor, Gerontology
Associate Professor, Molecular and Computational Biology
scurran@usc.edu

2. Classroom policy

This course will discuss current research in the field of healthy aging, the biology of age-related disease and longevity. The material will be discussed in both lecture and student presentations. As such attendance is mandatory. All electronic communication devices (phones, blackberries, and similar) must be turned off, and no instant messenger/chat type programs are allowed in class.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

3. Course goals and learning objectives

The main goal of this course is to introduce students to the concepts of molecular and genetic regulation of healthy aging, lifespan, and age-related diseases.

The only pre-requisite for this course is scientific curiosity. Students are not expected to know anything specific about molecular biology or genetics. This class is not meant to teach advanced molecular biology or genetics (such classes are already in existence). The emphasis in this course is on practical implementation of scientific concepts.

Specifically, we will learn:

- Why the study of lifespan is important and societal views on the biology of aging and age-related diseases
- How genes that modulate lifespan have been identified using model systems.
- Which biological pathways most potently influence lifespan and discuss the molecular mechanisms underlying this regulation.
- Implications of current research on future studies of human lifespan and age-related diseases.
- Most importantly, this class will provide students the means to break down a scientific hypothesis into its fundamental elements and critically analyze the validity of current theories and dogmas in the field.

4. Course plan

Suggested readings listed are from “Biology of Aging” course textbook and should be done before the lecture as background material.

Week of January 13th

Introduction to the study of Gerontology, syllabus, grading policy, overview of scientific writing expectations for class. Strategies and rubrics for writing powerful and accessible Op-Ed pieces.

Week of January 20th

MLK Day –NO CLASS

Week of January 27th

READING: Preface, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Pgs. 331-338

Why the study of aging is important to your future

Introduction to the study of aging and age-related disease

- Human life expectancy
- Demography of aging

Week of February 3rd

READING: Chapter 5

Review of Basic Molecular Biology, Genetic, and Physiology concepts

Hierarchy of the body

Multimedia presentation - Movie #1

Week of February 10th

READING: Chapter 4 (Pgs. 81-94 and 110-116)

Op-Ed Paper #1 (on Movie #1) Due

Telomeres, DNA Damage, Hayflick limit, cancer

Week of February 17th

Presidents’ Day – NO CLASS

Week of February 24th

Cellular Rejuvenation: Stem cells, protein turnover, the proteasome, immune system

Multimedia presentation - Movie #2

Week of March 2nd

READING: Chapter 8 (Pgs. 208-215), Chapter 9 (283-291) Chapter 10 (pgs. 305-321)

Op-Ed Paper #2 (on Movie #2) Due

Dietary Restriction, Fasting, and nutrient signaling pathways

Week of March 9th

Midterm Exam – In class (2-4pm, no exceptions)

Week of March 16th

Sign up for group presentations

Spring Recess – NO CLASS

Week of March 23rd

READING: Chapter 4 (Pgs. 95-110)

Mitochondria and ROS

Week of March 30th

READING: Chapter 9 (Pgs. 261-271)

Alzheimer's Disease

Multimedia presentation - Movie #3

Week of April 6th

READING: Chapter 4 (Pgs. 89-95, 110-114)

Cellular Senescence

Op-Ed Paper #3 (on Movie #3) Due

Week of April 13th

READING: Chapter 8 and 9

Progeria, Aging and disease

Multimedia presentation - Movie #4

Week of April 20th

READING: Chapter 3

Identifying and challenging Aging Theories

Past, Current and Future Theories

Op-Ed Paper #4 (on Movie #4) Due

Week of April 27th

Presentations on scientific papers
5-Page paper due

Final Exam

Tuesday May 5th - Final Exam will be posted on Blackboard
Take home examination that is due on the scheduled Final Exam Day/Time

Monday May 11th – Final Exam Due at 4pm!!!
Must be uploaded onto Blackboard before 4pm. NO EXCEPTIONS!!!

5. Assessment

Grades are based on five scores: 1) Participation. 2) There will be four multimedia presentations that relate to the scientific material presented. Students will write a one-page Op-Ed relating the course material to the presentation. 3) midterm exam. 4) group presentation consisting of a 15-20-minute talk including slides where the students describe and lead a discussion of a current research paper in the field and provide a written summary of that paper 5) final exam.

Assessment Procedure	Percent
Op-Eds (10 points each, 4 assignments = 40 points total)	10%
Midterm Exam (100 points)	25%
Group Presentation of scientific papers (50 points), 5-page written summary (50 points), = 100 points total	25%
Final Exam (160 points)	40%
Total = 400 points	100%

Extra credit will be made available throughout the semester. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

5.1. Criteria for grading:

1. Participation is assessed by attendance (mandatory) and participation in class discussions.
2. Written summaries are 1-page in length and should discuss your opinion of an issue from the presentation as it relates to the course material. There are no “right” answers but you must support your opinion with at least **two scientific references** (not including lecture material).

To receive full credit you must:

(3 points) Clearly define your opinion, hypothesis, and position. This includes a brief introduction to the topic and statement/support as to why it is important?

(6 points) Clearly provide the evidence to support your opinion and explain HOW this supports your position - Need two from source material [movie, art, lecture, etc.] (2 points total) and two scientific/peer reviewed supporting material (2 x 2 points = 4 points). You **MUST** take a stance on the topic and explain how the evidence provided supports that stance.

(1 points) – Summarize and state the current state of the field and what the future holds or what is needed to advance the topic.

3. The midterm and final will be open book exams with short answer responses.

4. The final presentation will be graded according to clarity of the presentation. The written summary should be organized in a similar manner to the 1-page summaries with regard to content. They should be more heavily referenced and thorough discuss your interpretation of the paper you are presenting.

Students who are not able to meet deadlines due to medical or other emergency must notify the instructor immediately.

5.2. Course grade: Letter grades will follow a standard scale but at the discretion of the instructor, may be weighted based on the average of the course. 90% and above leading to A, 80-90% leading to B, etc. Pluses and minuses are assigned by dividing each range in corresponding halves (A, A-) or thirds (B+, B, B-, C+, ...).

6. Policy against Cheating

We follow a zero tolerance policy: any student engaging in cheating will fail the course and will be reported to the USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. All USC students are responsible for reading and following the Student Conduct Code.

<https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/>

This policy does not apply to discussion or exchange of ideas. On the contrary, such interactions represent an important way to thoroughly understanding complex questions in molecular genetics.

Students must write their own papers. All written assignments will be turned in through blackboard and analyzed for plagiarism.

7. Disability Policy Statement:

Any Student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

8. Resources

8.1. Web page: A class website will be setup on Blackboard containing information about the course: syllabus, laboratory handouts, grades, miscellaneous information about weekly class activities, and an email directory of all people in the class. Use it as much as you find it useful. The web page can be accessed through the main stem <https://Blackboard.usc.edu>.

8.2 Office Hours: Office hours will be held weekly. Time and location for my office hours are at the beginning of the syllabus. I am always available by email to help you as much as you need.