

# **Institute in Educational Gerontology: Aging and Life Review (HRD 558)**

June 26 – 29, 2006

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## **Course Description**

This course examines the process of life review and its role in human aging. The phenomena of memory, imagination, and identity in later age will be examined. Implications of Kierkegaard's statement, "We live life forward but understand it backward," will be explored. Participants will develop practical methods of facilitating life review for themselves and older students/clients.

## **Goals of the Course**

By the end of this summer institute participants will . . .

1. . . . become familiar with the emerging literature on aging and life review as it is being reported in educational, social, and humanistic gerontology.
2. . . . consider nuances between the commonly "collapsed" categories of reminiscence, life review, life history, and oral history. They will also consider the distinction between memoir and autobiography.
3. . . . learn some of the basic components of human memory and understand normal changes in memory associated with aging.
4. . . . explore metaphors of the human life course and will seek applications of these metaphors to older students/clients as well as to their own lives.
5. . . . examine the relationship between developmental psychology and life review.
6. . . . become familiar with current research findings in this sub-specialty of gerontology
7. . . . experience a variety of artistic expressions of aging and life review including film, poetry, and music.
8. . . . will have the experience of writing and reflecting on their own memoirs

9. . . . share vignettes of their own life histories with each other.
10. . . . develop a personal theory of aging and life review and will also be encouraged to apply this theory to one's own professional practice.

## Major Questions Driving the Institute

1. What is life review? What role does it have in the aging process?
2. Who are the major contributors to the theories of life review? What are their contributions?
3. Why bother? What is the value of life review for my older clients, family members, or friends? For myself?
4. What role might life review have in my professional practice - be it adult education, nursing, social work, counseling, religious ministry, . . . ?
5. What is the relationship between life review and death?
6. How might I facilitate my own or others' life reviews?
7. What is it like to write a memoir? What value does this act have sui generic? What value is there in communicating one's memoir with other people?
8. What role does life review have in helping us to confront some of the age-old questions of the human condition, i.e., What is life's meaning and purpose? Why was I born? Why must I die? Is there value in human suffering? If so, what is it? Why do we grow old? How might we do so with "glad grace?" Is our personal destiny as human beings finite or infinite; mortal or immortal?

## Required Reading

Scott-Maxwell, Florida (1968). *The Measure of My Days*. New York: Penguin Books.

Hull, Jonathan (2000). *Losing Julia*. New York: Bantam/Dell

*Generations: Listening to Older People's Stories*. San Francisco: American Society on Aging, Vol. 23, Number 3, Fall 2003.

## Recommended Reading

Atkinson, R. (1998). *The Life Story Interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Pubs.

Atkinson, R. (1995). *The Gift of Stories*. Westport, CT.: Bergin and Garvey

Bernat, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, Evaluations, Achievements*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

- Birren, J., Kenyon, G., Ruth, J., Schroots, J. and Sevnsen, T. (Eds.). (1996). *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development*. New York: Springer
- Birren, J. and Deutchman, D. (1991). *Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Blythe, R. (1979). *The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age*. New York: Penguin.
- Breyspraak, Linda (1984). *The Development of Self in Later Life*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Butler, R. and Lewis, M. (1982). *Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial Approaches*. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby.
- Casey, Edward (1987). *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cowley, Malcolm (1980). *The View From Eighty*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Erikson, E., Erikson, J. and Kivnick, H. (1989). *Vital Involvement in Old Age*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Hendricks, J (Ed.). (1995). *The Meaning of Reminiscence and Life Review*. Baywood.
- Kaminsky, M. (Ed.). (1984). *The Uses of Reminiscence: New Ways of Working with Older Adults*. New York: Haworth.
- Kenyon, G. and Randall, W. (1997). *Restorying Our Lives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Metzger, D. (1992). *Writing For Your Life*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Myerhoff, B. (1978). *Number Our Days*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Myerhoff, B. (Ed.). (1992). *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan
- Neisser, U. (Ed.). (1982). *Memory Observed*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Co.
- Rainer, T. (1997). *Your Life As Story*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Randall, W. (1995). *The Stories We Are: An Essay in Self-Creation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sarton, M. (1984). *At Seventy: A Journal*. New York: Norton.
- Sarton, M. (1996). *At Eighty-Two*. New York: Norton.
- Sherman, E. (1991). *Reminiscence and the Self in Old Age*. New York: Springer.

Thomas, F. (1984). *How to Write the Story of Your Life*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest.

Wakefield, D. (1990). *The Story of Your Life: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Webster, J.D. and Haight, B. (Eds.) (2002). *Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work: From Theory to Application*. New York: Springer Publishing Co.

Witherell, C. and Noddings, N. (Eds.) (1991). *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Zinsser, W. (Ed.) (1982). *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

## **Course Requirements**

There are three layers of requirements for this course. They consist of pre-institute assignments, within-institute activities, and post-institute work.

### Pre-Institute Assignments

All participants in this course are expected to have completed the reading, life review interviews, and memoir vignettes as described in the instructor's memorandum of May, 2006. This applies to students who are taking the course for graduate credit, for continuing education units, or as an audit. This reading, interviewing, and writing needs to be completed by the start of the institute.

### Within-Institute Activities

Participants are expected to attend all institute activities, including lectures, small and large group discussions, films, and other engagements. Since (like all other educational enterprises) the outcomes of this experience will be determined by the quality of the student's inputs, active attention, contribution, and general engagement in the discourse of the week is expected.

### Post-Institute Work

The 2006 version is different from earlier iterations of HRD 558 in that "seat time" only comprises four days and there is the expectation that post-institute work be shared with other members of the course via "Blackboard," an electronic forum. However, the nature of the post-institute work and choices involved are essentially the same as they

have been with the five-day on campus course. Blackboard postings are due **Monday, August 21, 2006** and there will be a two-week response period before the course Blackboard site closes.

A. All students will write a brief but thoughtful letter to the older person they interviewed prior to the start of HRD 558. In this letter please thank the person for sharing her/his life history with you and reflect upon what that experience has meant to you, the interviewer. Emphasis should be placed not on length or “how many ideas I can get into two pages.” It should be on quality of thinking and clarity of expression. Remember the epigram: “Long thoughts in a short space.” Please send this letter to the person to whom it is written. On Blackboard, please either post the entire letter or, if there are parts of the letter that are too personal and confidential to share, select appropriate paragraphs to communicate with classmates.

B. There will be one forum created in Blackboard onto which each member of the course will write a response to the novel, *Losing Julia*.

C. Each learner will choose two of the following five options.

1. Design one life review activity for a client group of your choice. This is an opportunity to focus attention on clients with whom you might ordinarily interact in your everyday work (e.g., adult educators with students or colleagues, long term care nurses with their patients and families, counselors with a group of clients, etc.). The written activity design need not be long – 250 to 350 words will suffice – but should include such variables as target audience, goals, methods that will be engaged, and resources that will be called upon during this life review activity (e.g., readings, films, specific group discussion questions, etc.). While it is preferred that the audience you select consist of older persons – afterall, this is a gerontology course - this is not a requirement.

This is an opportunity to be practical with the content of the institute. Since HRD 558 is not a program development or curriculum design course, the nuances of design will not be taken into account in the evaluation of this product. Ideas, creativity, and the ability to apply the concepts treated in the course in a concrete professional situation will.

2. Write a brief essay addressing Soren Kierkegaard’s idea, “We live life forward but understand it backward” (an alternative translation from the Danish is: “Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward”). Like most essays in the social sciences, you may wish to reference books and articles that have influenced your thinking. Or, you may choose to use the genres of personal essay or journal writing where references to other literature are less direct. While, like with the letter assignment, I am interested in the quality of your thinking and the clarity of your expression, the way in which you choose to organize your ideas and the essay’s length is up to you. Mail the entire essay to Mike and post a 150-word abstract of the essay on Blackboard.

3. Read an autobiography or memoir of your choice (outside the required texts) and write a 3 – 5 page book review with a special focus on addressing ideas or themes that have been raised in this institute. Send the complete review to Mike and post (on Blackboard) a 150 word abstract of your review.

4. Write three memoir vignettes reflecting experiences in your own life. These may be re-writes of those you prepared in advance of the institute or they may be new. Then compose brief reflection (3 – 5 pages) in which you consider the meaning of these vignettes in light of the themes treated in the institute. For example, why did you choose to remember the specific events that you did? How did it feel to write about them? What, if any, integrating role did this reminiscing have? You do not have to ask these specific questions - other queries may be more appropriate and meaningful for your reflection. Please write only one reflection paper on the three memoir vignettes. Mail three memoir vignettes and reflection essay to Mike. With regard to the Blackboard posting for option #4, only post a 150 word abstract of your reflection essay.

5. Keep a journal of readings and reflections about reminiscence and life review. This option should be started during the institute week or immediately thereafter. Please date your entries and write at least one or two per week for a total of 8 – 12 entries. The writing should trace your thought processes vis-à-vis the key themes raised in HRD 558 from approximately late June to the middle of August. Then, after looking back over the body of this work, write a summary of “big ideas” that have emerged through your two months of journal writing. Feel free to quote your original entries in this summary reflection. Mail the entire set of journals to Mike and post only your summary journal entry for others to read and respond to on Blackboard.

## **Grading Policy**

Participants’ final grade will be derived from a combination of the following: (1) the quality of one’s contribution to the institute classes (2) the thoughtfulness and general quality of post-institute activities as expressed in the Blackboard postings.

While it is highly recommended that individuals complete the written requirements by the specified deadline, the grade of “Incomplete” will be granted if necessary.

## **Relationship Between HRD 558 and the College of Education and Human Development Curriculum Framework**

*Using Program Content Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions* - Students are introduced to basic concepts and practices of adult education and gerontology.

*Forging Connections and Partnerships* - Institute participants have an opportunity to interact with practicing gerontology and adult education professionals in the community

who come to the course as guest speakers. They may also choose to do a post-institute project in collaboration with a community program or agency.

*Developing Best Professional Practices* - Curriculum design, facilitation, and life story interview practices are both modeled and discussed.

*Validating Practices* - Students demonstrate their achievement through discussion and written course products.

*Modeling Reflection and Critical Inquiry* - All members of the institute engage in critical reflection and discussion throughout the one-week course and thoughtful inquiry is an important criterion of post-institute activities.

## **Accommodations**

If you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact Mike as soon as possible. Also, you may wish to make an appointment with the Office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities. At any point in the course, if you encounter difficulty or feel you could be performing at a higher level, consult with Mike. For problems with writing skills and/or time management, please call the Learning Center (253 Luther Bonney Hall on the Portland Campus; 780-4228). Help is also available through University Counseling Services (105 Payson Smith on the Portland Campus and 110 Upton Hall in Gorham; 780-4050) and the Office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities (242 floor of Luther Bonney Hall; 780-4706).

## **Outline and Schedule of Life Review Institute**

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|------------------|---|
| Monday, June 26  | (AM) Institute members' introductions<br>Review of syllabus<br>Small group activities |
|                  | (PM) Exploring the life review literature<br>Film: "Peege"                            |
| Tuesday, June 27 | (AM) Aging and memory<br>Individual exercises and group discussion                    |
|                  | (PM) Film: "The Trip to Bountiful"<br>Discussion: Metaphor and the human life course  |

Wednesday, June 28 (AM) Note: The morning session will be held in Masterton Hall, Rm. G-38 on the Portland Campus of USM

Review and Focus

Personal Reflections on the Meaning of Life Review

(Guest speaker - Harry Sky)

OLLI Writing Classes and the Role of Memoir

(Guest Speaker - Frances Boothby)

(PM) Film: "Wild Strawberries"

Group discussion

Thursday, June 29 (AM) Research  
Genealogy and Family History (Guest Speaker: Gail Senese)  
Implications of Life Review

(PM) Film: "The Dead"

Celebrating reminiscence and life review (readings by  
members of the institute)

Institute evaluation

In lieu of a fifth day on campus, members of the course will share their work with HRD 558 colleagues by way of an electronic forum. The posting of these end-of-course projects onto Blackboard is due on **Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>**. Each member of the course will have her/his own forum in which to communicate. There is also an expectation that each person will read and respond to others' end-of-course postings.

Addendum to Syllabus  
HRD 558  
June 26 – 29, 2006

#### Post-Institute Work

- C. Each learner will choose two of the following six options.
1. as stated on p. 5 of the syllabus
  2. as stated on p. 5 of the syllabus
  3. as stated on p. 6 of the syllabus
  4. as stated on p. 6 of the syllabus
  5. as stated on p. 6 of the syllabus
  6. Undertake a creative project that involves reminiscence, life review, and/or some other topic related to the central themes(s) of this course. This may involve writing a sequence of poems, making a video, writing a piece of short fiction, creating a slide show or other visual product, composing music, or another creative activity. Send this project to Mike along with the other post-institute materials by August 21, 2006. There is no requirement to post option C-6 on “Blackboard.” However, if you wish to write a short summary of what you did and its meaning to you to share with your classmates, please feel free to do so.