

Syllabus for **Literature and Aging**—Interdisciplinary 360
Fall 2001
6-9:30 Wednesdays Gerstacker 123
Carol **Donley** and Martin Kohn

Course description:

This course examines the experiences of aging and illness from the perspectives both of the aging persons and of the family and health care professionals who care for them. The readings include plays, short stories, poetry, and biography, all of which help students experience vicariously what it's like to be aging or to be caring for someone who is. In addition to the readings, we will use several videos which will enhance understanding of the issues and concerns of the aging.

Goals and objectives:

One objective is to increase students' sensitivity to and awareness of issues in aging, so that they may get beyond the usual negative labeling of the elderly and can, instead, come to see them as real and worthwhile individuals. Another goal is to help students imagine themselves as elderly, to "try on" different worlds of those who may have lived four or five times as long as the students have. While the course does not focus on ethics, the conflicts in the literature and film about aging necessarily raise ethical issues about how we treat the elderly.

This course satisfies the college team-taught interdisciplinary requirement. It also serves both the biomedical humanities minor and major.

Course expectations:

Grades will be based on participation, including e-mail responses (20%), two hour tests on the reading (10% each), two papers (20% each) and a final exam (20%).

During this course we will e-mail readings questions to you which you should respond to by e-mail the day before the class meets (i.e. send us your responses by Tuesday). We will use some of your responses as guides for class discussions. They will also count as part of your grade for participation in the class. Students will be expected to attend class and participate in discussions. Cutting class is particularly damaging because the class meets only once per week (in other words, missing a class is the equivalent of missing a week of classes in the normal schedule). Students will all participate in the readers theater events of November 14.

Texts:

Literature and Aging, ed Kohn, **Donley**, Wear
Tuesdays with Morrie, Mitch Albom
Wit, Margaret Edson

Schedule

August	Introduction; images of life spans; "Hundred Penny Box"; "If I Were an Old Woman"
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Sept. 5	Death and Dying: Read all of Tuesdays with Morrie for this class. Prepare your top 10 list Of “Morrie-isms” and be able to explain why you chose them.
Sept. 12	Conscious Aging: read from the anthology: “Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” “Conversations with my Father,” “Idiot’s First”
Sept. 19	Wit
Sept. 26	video of Wit (have draft of first paper due on Morrie and Wit for peer editing)
Oct. 3	first paper due on Morrie and Wit. Also read “In Retirement,” “Leaving the Yellow House,” “Mr. Flood’s Party,” “Stroke,” “Dillinger in Hollywood”
Oct. 10	Moody visiting. Video of “Gin Game.”
Oct. 17	Hour test on anthology readings Family and Aging. Read “Appropriate Affect,” “Maggie of the Green Bottles,” “To Hell with Dying,” “Grandmother’s Stroke,” “Grandmother and Grandson”
Oct. 24	no class, but all students should see the video of “Marvin’s Room” sometimes this week and be prepared to discuss it on Oct. 31
Oct. 31	Discussion of “Marvin’s Room.” Aging and Love. Read “Epstein,” “The Linden Tree,” “Nighttime Travellers,” “Now Before the End,” “Pleasures of Old Age”
Nov. 7	second paper due on readings from the anthology (choice of several topics). Encounters with health care professionals. Read “Toenails,” “Monet Refuses the Operation,” “Fallback,” “Old,” “He Makes a House Call,” “Ancient Gentility”
Nov. 14	play productions. Reader’s theater of sections from “Wit,” “The Sandbox,” “Fortitude.” Take home final handed out.
Nov. 20	Final due by noon in Carol Donley ’s Bonney Castle office (end of the hall, second floor)