Syllabus
twentysomething
CAMS-UA.0146

Instructors:
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Course Prerequisites: None.

Course Description:
Are 20-somethings really overeducated, afraid of commitment, self-centered, and spendthrift? It is a fact that people in most countries are marrying, having children, and becoming financially independent at a later age than in any previous generation. In the last 10 years a critical new developmental period between adolescence and adulthood has started to gain recognition. “Emerging Adulthood” has been characterized as the age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling “in-between,” and infinite possibilities. This course will analyze whether this theory has validity, explore the factors that contribute to diverging developmental pathways, review the typical life of the American 20-something, and uncover the truth behind the stereotypes.

Course Goals:

a. Knowledge - Students will learn key aspects of:
   i. “Emerging Adult” development theory and lifespan theory;
   ii. The diverging trajectories, emerging during the late teens and early 20s, that tend to have lasting consequences in adult life, and the cultural, familial, and individual factors that contribute to these trajectories;
   iii. The relationship between the increasing popularity of secondary education, the changing job market, and the ability to achieve financial independence;
   iv. The changing relationships and living conditions that young adults experience with their parents, peers, and romantic partners;
   v. The decline of religiosity and civic duty, and the emergence of grass roots activism to further causes about which young adults are passionate; and
   vi. The paradox of how young adults enjoy robust physical health and record levels of optimism and yet also run a high risk of serious mental disorder, as well as the problems associated with limited health insurance and navigating the complicated systems of healthcare; and
   vii. The ways in which young adults are changing the dynamics of consumerism and media entertainment.

b. Skills - Students will be able to:
i. Use critical thinking to apply the concepts and theories learned in the classroom to their personal experience of modern culture, the media, and their own lives;

ii. Analyze the theories and materials presented to them to determine the degree to which the development theory of “emerging adulthood” has value and validity;

iii. Assess whether today’s college education meets students and parents’ expectations and analyze the benefits and costs of post-secondary education in today’s job market; and

iv. Research and propose a practical policy change that will benefit young adults in their home state.

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Course Syllabus:

There is one book to purchase for this course:


All other articles and book chapters listed below are available on NYU Classes.

**Unit 1: The Paradigm Shift of Emerging Adulthood**

Adulthood has traditionally been marked by transitional events such as leaving home, finishing school, finding full-time work, getting married, and having children. Youth today use a much more individualistic set of criteria, often setting them at odds with earlier generations and mainstream media. This first unit will explore a number of negative stereotypes related to individuals in their twenties, including themes of over-education, lack of work ethic, narcissism, fear of commitment, disconnection from society, and spendthrift consumerism. It will also explore the currently accepted meanings of the terms “adulthood” and “emerging adulthood” and the extent to which the social and cultural environment influences the accepted developmental markers of becoming an adult. The key concepts of emerging adulthood (that is, identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling “in-between,” and infinite possibilities) will be explored in detail, together with arguments that both support and refute elements of the “Emerging Adulthood” developmental theory.

**Required Readings:**


**Required Readings for Feb 13th:**

**Unit 2: Diverging Pathways**
Some researchers reject the concept of separate developmental stages. They prefer to adopt the perspective of a constantly flowing life-course through which individuals advance, regress, and follow individualized pathways towards adult responsibilities. This unit will examine this theory and present the hypothesis that trajectories that are created during this critical period have momentum and a lasting effect that significantly influence adult experiences of relationships, career, living circumstances, and more. Students will explore in detail the multiple factors that influence the diverging pathways that occur in late teens and early twenties, including social/cultural structure, demographics, family and community context, and individual factors and choices.

**Required Readings:**

**PAPER I IS DUE IN CLASS**

**Unit 3: What is the Real Value of Higher Education?**
College has long been regarded as a mechanism for ego, identity, moral and cognitive development. Today’s students are using post-secondary education as a means to explore their identity and achieve greater financial independence following graduation. The “college-for-all” norm fits perfectly with young adults’ optimism and belief in infinite possibilities. The high dropout rates, record-high levels of college debt, and challenging job market, however, are contributing to a sense of instability at this age and often delay young adults from reaching their goal of financial independence. High school graduates (“the forgotten half”) have even worse prospects in this economy as they deal with protracted financial instability and minimal support in finding well-paid employment opportunities. This unit will be used to explore these issues and assess the benefits and costs of a post-secondary education in America today.

**Required Reading:**

Unit 4: Changing Relationships in the Emerging Adult World
The late teens/early twenties is a period of immense change in relationships: young adults have to re-align and re-negotiate an adult role with their parents, a process which is influenced by a number of factors including the nature of the parent-child adolescent relationship, parental style, financial circumstances, and proximity; at the same time, young adults are learning how to navigate the unwritten rules of “hooking up,” dating, and sex. Young women are particularly at risk of experiencing unhealthy outcomes, including depression, guilt, shame, and negative labeling by their peer group. Students will explore these issues, as well as the implications and consequences of returning to the family home after graduation, cohabitation with romantic partners, and the “optimistic bias” of marriage.

Required Readings:


**Paper II is due in class**

Unit 5: Slackers or Social Activists?
Young adults increasingly seem disconnected from society, with fewer 20-somethings reading newspapers, attending church, belonging to a religion or a union, voting for elected officials or identifying with a political party, all of which the media often interprets as a lack of social commitment or corporate citizenship. As a result, 20-somethings are often labeled as self-centered, narcissistic, apathetic, or simply “slackers.” This unit will explore the reasons why
young adults are increasingly rejecting organized religion and politics, and increasing activism by embracing social media, “smart mobs,” fan activism, and volunteerism.

Required Readings:


Unit 6: Mental Health in Emerging Adulthood
While the period of adolescence is acknowledged as being paradoxical in terms of physical health and death/injury rates, the period of emerging adulthood offers a different kind of paradox: 20-somethings are experiencing robust physical health, increased well-being, reduced risk-taking, and high levels of optimism for the future; yet 40% of 18 to 29 year old Americans meet criteria for a psychiatric disorder, and 25% meet criteria for major depressive disorder, the highest prevalence of depression of any age group. This unit will explore the different factors at play, including the unexpected pitfalls of greater agency and autonomy, the high prevalence of significant transitions during this period, the ramifications of a lack of institutional and social support, and the barriers to seeking professional help for an age group that loses much of its protective services at age 18. Even given the high risk of these mental health issues and general instability in their lives, young adults appear to be remarkably resilient. This unit will end the course by reviewing the factors that have helped to create such a resilient generation and exploring the “second-chance” opportunities that can help young adults succeed in life.

Required Readings:


**Unit 7: Consumerism and Entertainment of Emerging Adults**

20-somethings are an extremely attractive but challenging consumer target for marketing and branding professionals. 18-29-year-olds are the largest demographic with money to spend, they are trendsetters and early adopters. Marketers are responding by tailoring their products and messages specifically targeted for this demographic. This unit will provide an overview of consumerism and branding for this market segment and explore the ways in which the millennial generation is changing the world of media entertainment.

*Required Readings:*


**Paper III is due in class**
Assignments and Grading:

1. Class participation (15%): Students are expected to attend and participate actively in all class sessions and activities and to demonstrate familiarity with the content of the assigned readings during class discussions.

2. Class journal (25%): Students are expected to complete an electronic journal in which they will be graded on the degree to which they have understood and can apply the material covered in class, as well as the quality of their critical thinking. **Students are expected to complete a minimum of one journal entry per class (i.e., 14 entries) and that weekly journal entries must be completed by the Saturday night following that week's class.** The journal must have RSS capability built in (e.g., blogspot, tumblr, wordpress.) Unfortunately we cannot accept Googledocs or password-protected sites.

3. Paper I (20%): Students will write a 10-12 page, double-spaced critical evaluation of the Emerging Adult theory, in which they will address the following questions: (1) What is the validity and value in identifying emerging adulthood as a developmental stage, separate from adolescence or adulthood? (2) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement by Hendry & Kloep (2007): “[Emerging Adulthood] theory is limited to a certain age cohort in certain societies at a certain historical time with particular socioeconomic conditions.” (3) How does this theory apply to your own personal circumstances? Please provide examples to support your views.

4. Paper II (20%): College students are often told that the college years are the best time in an individual’s life to (a) find yourself, (b) find your lifetime romantic partner, and (c) establish career goals and a plan for achieving them. Students will write a 10-12 page, double-spaced critical evaluation about opportunities and challenges on the modern college campus, in which they will address the following questions: (1) To what extent do you agree with the idea that college is an ideal time to achieve the 3 goals mentioned above and what goals (if any) have you set yourself in each of these 3 aspects? (2) What obstacles or barriers have you experienced or might a typical college student encounter when trying to achieve these goals in the college environment?

5. Paper III (20%): In the scenario where individuality and delayed adulthood continue to become increasingly important for the foreseeable future, it is likely that policy guidelines and laws will start to reflect these developmental changes in the same way that new adolescent laws and policies were introduced in the last century. Students will write an 8-10 page, double-spaced paper on one or more likely policy outcomes. The paper should address the following question: What new policy or law would you want to implement in your home state, region or country in order to help youth transition more easily into adult responsibilities? Please provide a description of the problem/opportunity, your proposal, arguments and statistics in support of your proposal, possible barriers to implementation and how you would overcome them.