Course Syllabus

Theory and Methods of the Life-Course Approach
For the Master’s Degree Programme 39.04.01. “Comparative Social Research”

Author/Instruction:
Ekaterina Mitrofanova
emitrofanova@hse.ru, B. Trekhsvyatitelsky Lane 3, room 303

Place/Time
Mondays, 15:10-18:00
Myasnitskaya 11, room 432

Approved at the meeting of the __________________________________________ «___»_________ 2017 г
Head __________________________________________

Recommended by __________________________________________ «___»_________ 2017 г
Head __________________________________________

Approved by __________________________________________ «___»_________ 2017 г
Head __________________________________________

Registered by __________________________________________ «___»_________ 2017 г
Academic secretary __________________________________________

Moscow, 2017

This syllabus cannot be used by other university departments and other higher education institutions without the explicit permission of the Department of Sociology
1. Course Description

This course is devoted to the very promising concept of the Life Course, which appeared in psychology in the mid-1920s and since the mid-1970s has been adopted by sociology, demography and other disciplines. The development of the concept started with the theoretical viewpoints (e.g. that the life is not a cycle, but a path or a course) and continued with the creation of very advanced methods. Right now, the Life-Course Approach and its methods play a key role in sociological disciplines.

There are qualitative and quantitative methods of analysing Life-Course events. During the course, we will focus more on the quantitative methodology, because this is the most intensively developing and most promising part of the Life-Course methodology right now. The most important and influential methods today are Event History Analysis (EHA) and Sequence Analysis (SA). They both aim to work with biographies, but they differ otherwise: EHA is based on regressions and works perfectly with event censoring; SA is a more descriptive method which enables the representation of sequences of events for different groups of people.

After this course, students will know the differences between the life span, the life cycle and the life course; they will be able to work with EHA and SA in SPSS and R. They will have the chance to apply the Life-Course Approach and its methods to their own projects, having been trained in some of the most cutting-edge analytical tools used in sociology today.

2. Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- learn about how the Life-Course Approach appeared and was developed by different disciplines;
- learn about qualitative and quantitative methods of analysing Life-Course events;
- learn about the strengths and limitations of methods of the Life-Course Approach;
- explore the data requirements for Life-Course Analysis;
- practice choosing and applying methods of the Life-Course Approach;
- study their own topics and present them during the course.

3. Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- distinguish the life span, the life cycle and the life course;
- account for basic types of data used in Life-Course studies;
- critically evaluate the use of the Life-Course Approach in different studies;
- critically discuss the limitations of the methods of the Life-Course Approach;
- choose the correct method of analysis for their study of Life-Course events;
- work with EHA and SA in SPSS and R;
- correctly interpret the results of Life Tables, Cox regressions, Kaplan-Meier regressions, Sequence Analysis;
- present research on a chosen topic;
- apply the Life-Course Approach and its methods to their own projects.
4. **Competences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>NC/NRU-HSE Code</th>
<th>Descriptors - the learning outcomes (the indicators of achievement)</th>
<th>Teaching methods that contribute to the development of a competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ability to critically analyze the main methods of scientific inquiry and their applications</td>
<td>SK-M1</td>
<td>Students should be able to distinguish the differences between theoretical concepts and methodological approaches</td>
<td>Group discussion, readings, class and home assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to introduce new concepts and methods and apply them in the professional activity</td>
<td>SK-M2</td>
<td>Capable to offer concepts, models, to develop and to use new methods and tools for professional activity</td>
<td>Readings, class and home assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to learn new methods and change the field of professional interests</td>
<td>SK-M3</td>
<td>Students should be able to find papers, books and electronic resources on the topic of interest; should be capable of mastering the new research methods, changing of scientific and production activities profile</td>
<td>Readings, home assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to improve and develop the intellectual and cultural level, to build a trajectory of professional development and career</td>
<td>SK-M4</td>
<td>Students should be able to communicate with each other, to know more about the culture of the country of origin of each other</td>
<td>Group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to analyze, verify and assess the completeness of information, fill the gaps if necessary under the condition of uncertainty</td>
<td>SK-M6</td>
<td>Students should be able to formulate a main research question and possible hypotheses from a theory, independently choose correct procedures for creating new variables under investigation and correct methods of data analysis to correspond to a research question and variables’ level of measurement. Students should be able to independently find published research using different information resources (journal databases) on their own topics.</td>
<td>Group discussion, class and home assignments, readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to organize and manage multilateral (including cross-cultural) communication</td>
<td>SK-M7</td>
<td>Capable of participating and leading of the group discussion</td>
<td>Group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to conduct professional and research activity in the international environment</td>
<td>SK-M8</td>
<td>Students should be able to read literature in English, communicate in English discussing their class assignments, write class and home assignments in English.</td>
<td>Group discussion, readings, class and home assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The graduate should have such general professional competences (PC) as:**

| PC1 |
| The ability to formulate aims and purposes of fundamental and practically oriented sociological research and solve them using contemporary research methods (Russian and foreign) and technology. | PC3 | Students should be able to put forward research questions and hypotheses; choose correct methods of data collection and data analysis | Group discussions, readings, class and home assignments |
| The ability to develop ideas and recommendations how to solve social problems, how to coordinate the interests of different social groups and communities | PC5 | Students should be able to offer solutions for different social problems and take into account interests of different social groups | Group discussions, class and home assignments |
| The ability to speak foreign language fluently | PC8 | Students should be able to ask questions, take part in discussions and fulfill home assignments | Group discussions, readings, class and home assignments |
| The ability to present the results of the activity using presentation methods and techniques | PC9 | Students should be able to give a solid presentation of a chosen topic; to do and to properly issue their home assignments | Class and home assignments |
| The ability to collect, analyze and interpret data using contemporary technology and draw conclusions on social, scientific and ethical problems | PC11 | Students should be able to choose the correct method of data analysis, to conduct research and to interpret results | Home assignments |
| The ability to describe problems and situations of professional activity, using language and instruments of philosophy and social sciences for the solution of multidisciplinary problems | PC12 | Students should be able to use a scientific language and concepts when they offer solutions for scientific problems | Group discussion, class and home assignments, readings |
| The ability to use sociological research methods to study important social problems and identify the needs of specific social groups | PC13 | Students should be able to put forward research questions and hypotheses; choose correct methods of data analysis | Group discussion, class and home assignments, readings |
| The ability to use social and multicultural differences for the solution of problems in professional and social activity | PC15 | Students should be able to use the differences between groups of people and cultures to solve problems in their professional area | Group discussion |
| The ability to resolve ideologically, socially and personally significant problems | PC19 | Students should be able to solve the problems, at the heart of which distinctions in belief systems, social or personal background | Group discussion |
| To be able to follow professional ethical standards and principles of social responsibility | PC21 | Students are expected to follow the ethical standards of the profession and to avoid plagiarism and unfair behavior | Group discussion, class and home assignments |
## 5. Course Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lectures (hours)</th>
<th>Seminars (hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30.10.17</td>
<td>Introduction to the Life-Course Concept</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.11.17</td>
<td>The Main Terms of the Life-Course Concept</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.11.17</td>
<td>Methods of the Life-Course Approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27.11.17</td>
<td>Quantitative Methods of the Life-Course Approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>04.12.17</td>
<td>Event History Analysis in SPSS and R</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.12.17</td>
<td>Sequence Analysis in SPSS and R</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.12.17</td>
<td>The presentations of students and conclusion of the course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WEEK ONE, October 30: Introduction to the Life-Course Concept


### WEEK TWO, November 6: The Main Terms of the Life-Course Concept


**WEEK THREE, November 13: Methods of the Life-Course Approach**


**WEEK FOUR, November 20: Quantitative Methods of the Life-Course Approach**


**WEEK FIVE, November 27: Event History Analysis in SPSS and R**


**WEEK SIX, December 4: Sequence Analysis in SPSS and R**


WEEK SEVEN, December 11: The presentations of students and conclusion of the course

6. Grading System
There will be no in-class exam, but there will be two assignments and an evaluation of activity during the class time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course element</th>
<th>% of the final grade maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity during the class time</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A presentation on a topic chosen during the course</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An assignment on Event History Analysis in SPSS and R</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1. Activity during the class
Activity during the class is evaluating by the following rules. The maximum is 4 points. Considering your activity, you can get:

1 point – attendance, but no participation in discussion;
2 points – attendance and low participation in discussion;
3 points – attendance and low participation in discussion, but correct answers OR high participation in discussion, but not always correct answers;
4 points – attendance and high participation in discussion and correct answers.
6.2. Assignments

There are two assignments: an individual presentation on a chosen topic and a home assignment on Event History Analysis in SPSS and R.

6.2.1. An individual presentation

Every student must give a short presentation (up to 10 minutes) on a chosen topic. The first day a student may give a presentation is November 13, the last day is December 18. The presentation should be short (up to 10 minutes) and illustrate the main findings of the student on a chosen topic.

You need to write topic in the google doc.

Students can offer their own topic for presentation or choose one from the list (topics can be changed):

1. Contribution of the Life-Course Approach to different disciplines.
2. Changes in the Life Course of modern people over last 150 years.
3. The changing role of the transition to adulthood in Life-Course formation.
4. Which events mark the transition to adulthood today?
5. The role of ageing in Life-Course formation.
6. What determines the changes in the schedule of life?
7. Different types of clocks (based on the article by M. Mills, “Providing space for time. The impact of temporality on life-course research”).
8. The role of time in the life of a person and society.
9. Big international studies of the Life-Course.
10. The strengths and limitations of the biographical method (or other qualitative methods of the Life-Course Approach).
11. The development of quantitative methods of the Life-Course Approach.
12. An ideal design of a survey for the analysis of Life-Course events.
13. The Life-Course Approach in health studies.
14. The Life-Course Approach in studies on marriage and divorce.
15. Is it the life course or the life cycle of family?
16. The Life-Course Approach in studies on reproduction.
17. The Life-Course Approach in studies on the work career.
18. The Life-Course Approach in studies on the educational career.
19. The Life-Course Approach in studies on the transition to adulthood.
20. The sequence of Life-Course events in modern countries.

6.2.2. Home assignment

The assignment will be given on December 4. There will be almost two weeks to complete it, because December 18 is the final class of the course. The deadline for the assignment is December 15.

7. Software

During the seminars, we will use the programmes SPSS and R. SPSS is available on the HSE laptops. I will also show how Sequence Analysis works in the programme R (package TraMineR). R is available here: http://r-project.org/ and http://rstudio.com/. TraMineR is here: http://traminer.unige.ch/.