**Characteristics of Early Adolescence**  
EPSY 446 (CRN 23982) and PSCH 423 (CRN 23980)  
Spring, 2021, Blended Delivery Online

**Instructor:** Dr. Theresa (Terri) Thorkildsen with LaMarr Magnus (TA)  
**Office:** ETMSW 3549  
**Hours:** Wednesdays 9:00-10:00 or by appointment on Zoom  
**Phone:** (312) 996-8138  
**E-mail:** thork@uic.edu or hmagnu2@uic.edu  
**Web:** http://thork.people.uic.edu/fair/

**Purpose**  
This course focuses on common dilemmas faced by young people who are making the transition from childhood into adolescence. To highlight this period in human development, we will draw age-related comparisons between children and adolescents and theorize about how to construct stimulating environments that account for this developmental transition. Representations of adolescence in the media and in research will be compared, calling attention to common stereotypes that limit or support development. Research findings will also be compared with the details of lives in progress to explore individual differences in adolescents' social and intellectual functioning. Ideally, students who finish the course will have a greater understanding of the common stress and strain as well as the thrill and excitement associated with the transition into adolescence.

This course is designed to allow students to fulfill one of the requirements for the [Illinois State Board of Education](https://www.illinois.gov) and addresses a complex array of learning outcomes. It includes studies from educational and developmental psychology that highlight common characteristics of adolescents who are progressing through early stages of puberty; how physical and cultural environments align with such developmental milestones; and how educators might detect and refer students needing additional support for a variety of life challenges to necessary health and social services. The course offers a strong foundation of key developmental issues that occur in early adolescence, addressing the interests of a wide range of professional schools and learners from all program levels (undergraduates, masters, and doctoral). [Click here to see how the specific learning outcomes are aligned with assessments.](#)

**Readings**  
The readings will come primarily from journals. Students may also enjoy seeing how such information can be applied by reading the following book.


Our reading selections are included in folders found on Blackboard, but students are also encouraged to explore the library’s databases and add their discoveries to this list. Taking advantage of online journal services and mastering the technology needed to find new knowledge from primary sources is essential for maintaining qualifications in a wide variety of professional schools.

**Format**  
This course is designed to be taught asynchronously, although we have added a weekly discussion section to ensure that the content and applications of this challenging reading list are explored in depth. We have confirmed the reasonableness of this load, but it is important to remember that procrastination remains the quickest route to failure.
Students are expected to read and critique at least one journal article each week and share that information with small group members by the end of the day each Thursday. By the following Tuesday, each student is expected to respond to the summaries and critiques of all members of their pre-assigned small group.

The professor will post 1-hour lectures each week that convey why particular readings were selected. On Wednesday mornings from 8:30-10:30 am, an optional discussion session with the professor will be available on Zoom for anyone who would like to participate. Discussions will be spent clarifying misunderstandings and/or controversies associated with the material and drawing connections between theory, evidence, and practical uses for such information. We will regularly ask ourselves, “What can we DO with this information?”

**General Assessment Plan**
The pandemic has forced us to expand technology goals, but a strong assessment plan also requires individuals to read, write, speak, and listen. Five assessments will meet this demand and be weighted equally when calculating final grades. These include: (a) weekly reading summaries and written reflections, (b) weekly evidence of contributions to small-group discussions, (c) a midterm exam, (d) a group-planned presentation that includes information from interviews with at least one middle school student, recorded and shared online, (e) a final survey of how to work with youth in early adolescence. Grades will reflect how well students have demonstrated intellectual growth over time and how well information from research, media sources, and lives in progress is coordinated in each product. Obviously, required knowledge cannot be generated if students are unprepared or fail to study topically relevant readings.

These assessments will require the use of a variety of platforms and meet **technology goals** for different programs. The syllabus is posted on Blackboard as well as on the professor’s website, and students are required to track the changes that will occur across the course. A collection of documentaries about this age group will also be made available for viewing using Box.com. Online discovery activities will encourage everyone to critically evaluate targeted resources. A listserv called social@uic.edu will allow for the efficient sharing of resources with anyone interested in working with learners. Use of Zoom or other recording devices will allow everyone to practice working with current technology while mastering information about adolescent development.

**Reading and writing goals** are met by evaluating how well students construct and write about general conclusions related to early adolescence. Tasks also ask students to distinguish research and practical evidence as they support specific ideas by assessing how well research information about adolescent development is integrated with practical plans for nurturing adolescents’ growth. The article reviews and the midterm will integrate these priorities into a tangible product.

Students are expected to share with one another and with the instructors their understanding of assigned readings and suitable support materials to achieve **speaking and listening goals**. Programmatic needs are met by adopting a predetermined set of topics listed in the tentative schedule. Nevertheless, the ebb and flow of existing knowledge about early adolescence is not limited to a fixed set of readings. Each week students will be expected to read and respond to at least one paper chosen by the professor, but everyone is encouraged to identify other suitable resources for expanding or applying such knowledge. The final exam will serve as a capstone for these goals.

**If someone should miss a week**, he or she is responsible for contributing to the group discussion by adding a response either to the readings or to the discussion that is represented in the notes.
Specific Assignments
Each assignment will involve a set of guidelines that, when followed, foster clear communication. This syllabus offers a brief summary and as we progress through the course, the midterm and final details will be added using a hyperlink and/or included in a separate location on the Blackboard site. Students should watch for any changes in the course syllabus.

Reading summaries and written reflections. To ensure that we cover a wide range of topics during our time together, the course will rely heavily on jigsaw learning. This means that each student in the course must remain responsible for their own learning and for communicating their knowledge with members of their working group and with the instructors. Everyone will be assigned to a small group based on reported interests and reasons for exploring early adolescence. Each week, groups will meet in whatever manner they decide (e.g., recorded Zoom meetings, using Google docs, by tracking the content of GroupMe conversations) to discuss the readings and imagine ways to use the information in practice. Everyone will want access to their own and others’ article summaries and is expected to use that information to construct a strong evidence-based midterm and final. Therefore, groups may use e-mail, Google+, or Box.com to keep track of their work and turn these responses in for evaluation by the instructors. For example, article summaries and reflections could be posted in a Google drive folder shared with all group members and with the instructors, or by using the resources available on Blackboard. When crafting article summaries, try to include at least one extension question in the summary to enhance everyone’s comprehension of the material. For more advice, click here.

Discussion activities. Along with the article summaries and reflections, everyone is expected to construct and contribute to a discussion, organized so that this is tracked like minutes in a business meeting. One difference is that the contributions made by individual members should be tracked. These discussions should ideally connect research information with details of lives in progress and specific youth development activities. Group members may take turns recording minutes of these discussions, or the group may appoint an organizer who tracks all the contributions. For more advice, click here.

In each set of minutes, note-takers should record the gist of what each person says and document who offered each contribution. Some groups may prefer to record the discussion, but an accurate gist is perfectly acceptable. Documenting where each group member has contributed to the discussion ensures fairness in grading. Serving as a note-taker teaches listeners how to fully hear the views of others in a careful manner—essential for trust-building in any conversation. The notes should be typed clearly enough so that group members (and the instructors) can critique the contributions across the semester. Members may edit these notes, add amendments, or delete any material they do not feel is accurate. Like qualitative investigators, it is helpful to regularly evaluate the accuracy of the transcript from the previous week as well as any new conversations. Once notes are approved by the group, the final notes are included in a record that is evaluated at various points in the semester. Labeling participants in each conversation ensures that individual grades are not caused by variation in group dynamics.

During small-group discussions, it will be a good idea to design a new activity or complete an instructor-shared activity that might be used with youth in an educational context. Considering the topics in the timetable when choosing a theme that is helpful for future work, the final exam will require groups to design at least one way to apply information from our course and to discuss that plan with at least one youth in our target age group. Weekly practice will make that final assignment easier to manage.
**Midterm paper.** A short-answer midterm will be distributed two weeks prior to its due date. In this assessment, students will use research findings to imagine the general perspectives of adolescents. The structure of the midterm aligns with the outline of topics in the timetable. Reading summaries, chapters from the recommended book, and/or experience working directly with youth in educational settings will be used to generate a story about working with youth in early adolescence. The short answer format lends itself to the use of bullets and short paragraphs to use a policy report format to convey your ideas, but half the points on this assignment will reflect the **use of research findings to justify all claims** about working with youth in this age group. Midterms will ideally be about 5 pages in length.

**Final project.** The final project will consist of a group-generated presentation of ideas generated with the help of at least one person in early adolescence. This presentation and a self-assessment survey will be used to determine if students have coordinated the information on early adolescent development with some practical plans for working with such youth. **Please begin thinking about how to find at least one adolescent in our target age group to interview about how they understand their life experiences.**

**Academic Integrity**
Academic dishonesty, intentional or accidental, seems to be cropping up across classes at UIC. Two issues seem especially important to discuss as part of our course activities: **plagiarism** and **repurposing the same assignment.**

**Avoid plagiarism.** Article summaries should represent the reader’s version of the main information obtained from the readings. It is not a good idea to quote from the articles. Quotes are acceptable IF the place in the article being quoted is accurately cited; including the last name of the authors, the year of the publication, and the page number where the information appears. **It is important to support all ideas with evidence in the midterm and the final, but we focus on the qualities of the data and not who said what.** There is a wide variety of information that would qualify as evidence and a set of formal rules for citing these sources properly. Rules are available in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.* **Failure to cite sources for borrowed ideas is an act of plagiarism.**

**Avoid repurposing the same assignment.** In this course, you are free to use materials from other courses if that information helps you better understand the developmental processes that occur in early adolescence. That sort of sharing is very helpful among professionals. In addition, it will be important for you to use information from the article summaries and discussion group records as well as the grading rubric for your final paper. Grading rubrics offer an outline of how to meet the requirements of the assignments. However, **even when general topics are similar across courses, assignments are crafted to allow you to develop specific skills and a repurposing of the same paper prohibits such learning.**

We will discuss academic dishonesty further as part of the course. More information on UIC’s Disciplinary Policies can be found at: [http://www.uic.edu/depts/dos/conductforstudents.shtml](http://www.uic.edu/depts/dos/conductforstudents.shtml)

**Resources for Students Who Need Extra Help**
UIC offers a wide range of resources for students who need extra help. Students may want to pay special attention to the resources available at the UIC Writing Center. It is essential that students get in the habit of writing at least something as often as possible, preferably every day. More details on support services can be found at: [http://www.uic.edu/academics/student-support](http://www.uic.edu/academics/student-support)
Accessibility
UIC strives to ensure the accessibility of programs, classes, and services to students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations can be arranged for students with various types of disabilities, such as documented learning disabilities, vision or hearing impairments, and emotional or physical disabilities. All students should know that the University of Illinois at Chicago is committed to maintaining a barrier-free environment so that individuals with disabilities can fully access programs, courses, services, and activities at UIC. Students with disabilities who require accommodations for full access and participation in UIC Programs must be registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Please contact DRC at (312) 413-2183 (voice) or (312) 413-0123 (TDD).
### Tentative Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Social Sphere</th>
<th>Common Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Characteristics in context</td>
<td>Development is pan-contextual</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Jan 12th to Jan 14th)</td>
<td><strong>Organizational Survey</strong></td>
<td>Stage-environment fit</td>
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<td><strong>True Colors Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Selves and discourse</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Signature Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discussion Record Due for Review—Thursday (this week only)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Overview Card Sort Activity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Card Sort “Answers”</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td><strong>Selves</strong></td>
<td>Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Jan 19th to Jan 21st)</td>
<td><strong>Inside the Teenage Brain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Brain growth, puberty and body image</strong></td>
<td>Catch up with discussion records this week</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td><strong>Families</strong></td>
<td>Attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Jan 26th to Jan 28th)</td>
<td><strong>Talk Matters Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Middle School Transitions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discussion Record Due for Review—Tuesdays (going forward)</strong></td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Feb 2nd to Feb 4th)</td>
<td><strong>Middle School Confessions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td><strong>Families</strong></td>
<td>Siblings and structure</td>
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<td>(Feb 9th to Feb 11th)</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Feb 16th to Feb 18th)</td>
<td><strong>Middle School Confessions</strong></td>
<td>Intimacy (friendship/romance)</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Midterm Instructions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Exam Template</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Record Due for Review</strong></td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
<td>Exchange (acquaintanceship/aggression)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Feb 23rd to Feb 25th)</td>
<td><strong>Group Progress Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td><strong>Schools &amp; Internships</strong></td>
<td>Motivation and Achievement</td>
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<td>(Mar 2nd to Mar 4th)</td>
<td><strong>Christopher on School</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discussion Record Due for Review</strong></td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td><strong>Community-based Organizations</strong></td>
<td>Character and moral decision-making</td>
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<td>(Mar 9th to Mar 11th)</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Midterm Paper Due</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Instruction video</strong></td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td><strong>Multi-Age Settings</strong></td>
<td>Civic engagement/Free-time activities</td>
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<td>(Mar 16th to Mar 18th)</td>
<td><strong>Kids in Sports</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS</strong></td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td><strong>Local Activities</strong></td>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
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<td>(Mar 30th to Apr 1st)</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding questions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Record Due for Review</strong></td>
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<td>Dates</td>
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<td>Common Issues</td>
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<td>Week 12 (Apr 6th to</td>
<td><strong>National Activities</strong></td>
<td>Media and citizenship</td>
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<td>Apr 8th)</td>
<td><em>Growing up Online</em></td>
<td><em>Guiding questions</em></td>
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<td><strong>Final exam video</strong></td>
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<td><strong>FINAL EXAM OUTLINE</strong></td>
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<td>Week 13 (Apr 13th to</td>
<td><strong>Transnational Activities</strong></td>
<td>Civil engagement/Global awareness</td>
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<td>Apr 15th)</td>
<td><em>Young, Muslim in America</em></td>
<td><em>Guiding questions</em></td>
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<td><em>Youth Summit Guide</em></td>
<td><em>Transnational discourse article</em></td>
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<td><strong>Submit final project plans for review</strong></td>
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<td>Week 14 (Apr 20th to</td>
<td><strong>Discovering Human Rights</strong></td>
<td>Balancing discourse opportunities</td>
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<td>Apr 22nd)</td>
<td><strong>Vocational Virtues</strong> Part 2</td>
<td><em>Guiding questions</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15 (Apr 27th to</td>
<td><strong>Review group projects</strong></td>
<td><strong>Final discussion records (group log) due April 27th</strong></td>
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<td>Apr 29th)</td>
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<td><strong>Group projects due</strong></td>
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<td>Week 16 (May 7th)</td>
<td><strong>Review group projects</strong></td>
<td><strong>Final self-evaluation due</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Final project grading rubric</strong></td>
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**Links to Final Group Presentations**
Readings

Week 1: Characteristics in context

Thorkildsen—Introduction


Week 2: Discourse and the Self system

Thorkildsen—Introduction


**Week 3: Self system: Physical changes**

**Thorkildsen—Chapter 1**


**Week 4: Family system: Attachment**

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 2*


**Week 5: Family system: Siblings and structure**

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 2*


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Week 6: Peer systems: Intimacy (friendship and romance)

**Thorkildsen—Chapter 3**


Week 7: Peer systems: Exchange (acquaintanceship and aggression)

**Thorkildsen—Chapter 3**


Week 8: Schools & Internships: Motivation and achievement

Thorkildsen—Chapter 4


**Week 9: Community-based Organizations: Character and moral decision-making**

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 4*


**Week 10: Multi-Age Settings; Civic engagement/Free-time activities**

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 5*


**Week 11: Local Activities; Civic engagement**

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 6*


Week 12: National Activities; Media and citizenship

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 7*


Week 13: Transnational Activities: Civil engagement/Global awareness

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 8*


Week 14: Discovering Human Rights: Civil engagement/Enacting human rights

*Thorkildsen—Chapter 9*

Sample websites

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_and_political_rights
http://transnationaldiscourse.weebly.com/

*Youth Leadership Summits: Balancing Discourse Communities*

*Thorkildsen--Epilogue*