

SOCIOLOGY 097 DEATH AND DYING

Prof. John B. Williamson
McGuinn 424
617 552 8530
E-mail: JBW@bc.edu

SPRING 2012: Tues & Thurs
10:30-11:45

Office Hours (JBW)
Monday: 4:30-5:30
Thurs: 1:45-2:45
or by appointment

TA: Alex Hernandez (hermanap@bc.edu)

Office: McGuinn 410A, Office Hours: Tuesdays at 9:20-10:20am & Thursdays at 12:00-1:00pm or by appointment

This course presents an overview of the major issues, themes, and controversies in the death and dying literature. Historical, cultural, ethical, and psychological aspects are considered, but the emphasis is on sociological dimensions and perspectives. As this is a core course, it has been designed to introduce you to sociology by emphasizing the sociological approach to these issues and by contrasting the sociological approach to those reflected in several other approaches, including: the historical approach, the psychological approach, the anthropological approach, and the like. One goal of this course is to introduce you to the history and methodologies of the discipline of sociology. Toward that end, you will be reading and I will give a number of lectures that put these issues in historical context. Where appropriate, we will link discussion of these issues to classical studies in sociology. One example will be our discussion of Durkheim's very important work on suicide. The course will also expose you to a range of different methodological approaches used in sociological research including historical analysis, cross-cultural analysis, qualitative field studies, the analysis of aggregate data, and survey research.

There are a number of other goals we seek to achieve in a core course such as this: One is to integrate material from culturally diverse perspectives. Toward this end, we will be discussing how death related beliefs and practices in the United States differ from those in other countries around the world. We will draw on anthropological resources for similar reasons. Where appropriate, we will highlight gender, race and class differences.

The course will offer an opportunity to formulate, analyze, and deepen your own opinions on a number of issues. This will be particularly true with respect to our discussions of suicide, euthanasia, and medical ethics. The central goal here is to help you work out your own personal philosophy with respect to many death-related practices and ethical issues. My hope is to get you to rethink some of your taken for granted views on such issues. You may end up rethinking some of your views about American funerals when you find out how people in Borneo react when told about American practices. You may end up rethinking your views about how to deal with grief after an analysis of the consequences of some of the alternatives. You will be given the opportunity to work on your personal philosophy with respect to doctor assisted suicide and euthanasia for the terminally ill. You will be asked to work out your personal philosophy with respect to a number of ethical issues we as a society are confronted with, such as whether or not those who have been declared brain dead biologically should be kept alive for the primary purpose of their parts being utilized through transplantation, (i.e. as organ donors) for others, over subsequent days, weeks, months, or years. You will also be asked to evaluate the evidence with respect to near death experiences and assess what impact, if any, this evidence has on your own thinking about afterlife.

In this course we deal with a number of what can be called perennial questions. The topic of death itself is one of these issues. In our analysis of death related issues and ethical questions we will touch on many death related perennial questions, such as: To what extent are our beliefs about death largely *social constructions*, i.e. products of our culture? Is there a best way to die or will what is an "appropriate" way to die vary a great deal from one person to another? To what extent are our lives driven by our need to deny the reality that each of us will one day die? Is it preferable to die at home or in a hospital or in a hospice? How extreme can the reaction to the death of a loved one be and still be considered within the realm of "normal?" How do children form their conceptions of death and how do those conceptions change over time? Is suicide ever justified? Is euthanasia ever justified? Is the death penalty ever justified? Do we survive death?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Mid-Term Exam** (40 points): **Thursday, March 15** – essay & objective exam on Topics 1, 2, & 3
2. **Final Exam** (40 points): **Wednesday, May 9 at 12:30** – essay & objective exam on Topics 4, 5, 6, & 7

3. **In-class essays** (20 points): There will be frequent, generally unannounced, brief essays in class. There will be **13** such essays during the term. Your grade will be based on the best 10 of the essays that you do. Each will be graded 0 or 2 (there will never be partial credit). That means that each person will be able to miss up to three of the essays without any loss of credit. However, it also means that it will be **very difficult** to get permission to make up essays missed beyond the first three. The reason for allowing you to drop three essays is to do away with the need for notes from doctors and the like. If, for example, you miss four essays and you hope to not lose credit for that fourth essay that you missed, you will need notes from doctors, nurses, deans, and coaches, etc. for each of the classes (that involved an essay) that you missed, not just the day of the fourth essay that you missed. Thus to be safe, each time you do miss an in-class essay and you have what you believe I will accept as a justifiable reason for not being in class, keep very thorough documentation (including names and phone numbers for me to call) of the reason you were not in class. Save that documentation; **do not send or bring any of this documentation to me until you need it, that is, until and unless you will need it to make the case to be excused from having missed a fourth essay.** You would then turn all of the documentation in at the end of the semester and at that point I will decide whether the case is strong enough to allow credit for any missed essays above three. If you are at all unclear about this set of rules, please come to see me (or the TA) for clarification. If you end up with full credit (i.e. credit for 10 or more essays) you get 20 points for the in-class essay component of the course. **The maximum credit you can get from the essays is 20 points.** The number of points for this component of the course drops by 2 points for each essay under 10. So if you have credit for 9 essays, you get 18 points; if 8 essays, it will be 16 points, etc. **Everyone gets sick from time to time or has a doctor's appointment or an important job or graduate school interview. So please be very careful not to miss class except when you must do so.**

4. There will also be an **optional term paper**. See page 5 for the details. If you plan to write a term paper, the deadline for coming in to see the TA in order to get your topic approved is **March 29**. You are strongly urged to get this approval much sooner, preferable in February. If you write a term paper you may get extra points added to your final point score for the course: For an A you will get 6 points added (very rare); for an A- you will get 5 points; for a B+ you will get 4 points; for a B you will get 2 points; and for any passing grade below B you will get 1 point.
5. There will be an opportunity for some extra credit in connection with the class on May 1. Details to follow.

COURSE GRADING:

To compute the final grade for the course, I first compute the total score for the mid-term, the final, the in-class essays, and the optional term paper. Then a course grade is assigned as follows: 95 and over (A), 90-94 (A-), 85-89 (B+), 80-84 (B), 75-79 (B-), etc. Each grade step for A- and below is 5 points wide.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE NOT PRESENT FOR AN EXAM? If you remember there is an exam while the exam is still in progress, come directly to class and speak to me or the TA. Under most circumstances it will be possible to work something out with no loss of time to take the exam or loss of credit. If you are unable to do that, **as soon as you are aware that you have missed the exam** (or know that you are going to miss an exam), **immediately** contact me or the TA. There will generally be a penalty for missing an exam with the size of the penalty a function of the reason for missing the exam unless you are in the hospital, on an athletic team playing out of town, etc. **I do not give permission to take an exam early or to take it late even when you have several exams on the same day or have purchased a non-refundable air ticket, etc.** If the reason you miss the class is a medical emergency, bring a note from the appropriate medical person with a name and a phone number for me to call. If the reason is a funeral, please provide an explanation of the relationship (e.g., my grandmother), the name and phone number of one of your parents, and a copy of the obituary. Exceptions will be made for athletes who must be away for games so long as they have letters from their coaches, have come to see me in advance, and we have agreed to a time and date for the make-up before the exam day.

REQUIRED TEXTS: (All three books will be in BC bookstore)

1. *Death & Dying SC 097* (THE COURSE BOOK OF READINGS FOR SC097) by John Williamson
2. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (Bantam Books edition 1981) by Leo Tolstoy
3. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Doubleday, 1997) by Mitch Albom

In addition to the readings listed below it is likely that a few additional full-length articles and a few short articles will be distributed by e-mail during the semester or put on reserve at O'Neill Library.

TOPIC 1: FINISH THESE READINGS BY January 31
INTRODUCTION: ATTITUDES ABOUT DEATH
HISTORICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
AIDS AND PLAGUES

- *1. "Facing Life with a Lethal Gene" (Ch. 51)
by Amy Harmon
- *2. "The Pornography of Death"(Ch. 3)
by Geoffrey Gorer
- *3. "Death in Popular Culture" (Ch. 4)
by Michael C. Kearl
- *4. "The Terror of Death" (Ch. 5)
by Ernest Becker
- **5. "Vigor Quest"
by Tom Dunkel
- **6. "The Good Short Life"
by Dudley Clendinen
- **7. "Death and Budgets"
by David Brooks
- *8. "Preventing the Global Spread of AIDS" (Ch. 54)
by Gregory E. Pence

TOPIC 2: FINISH THESE READINGS BY February 16
THE TERMINAL PHASE OF LIFE
DYING IN VARIOUS SETTINGS

- **9. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (read the entire book)
by Mitch Albom
- **10. "Learning to Fall"
by Philip Simmons
- **11. *On Death and Dying*, Chapter 3
by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
- **12. "Dying in a Total Institution: The Case of Death in Prison"
by Francis D. Glamser and Donald A. Cabana
- *13. "Death, Uses of a Corpse, and Social Worth" (Ch. 14)
by David Sudnow
- **14. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (entire story, skip the introduction by Blythe)
by Leo Tolstoy
- *15. "The Social Construction of the 'Dying Role' and the Hospice Drama" (Ch. 55)
by Debra Parker-Oliver

TOPIC 3: FINISH THESE READINGS BY February 28
FUNERAL PRACTICES AND MORTUARY RITUALS

- *16. "The American Way of Death" (Ch. 17)
by Jessica Mitford
- *17. "Death Be Not Strange" (Ch. 10)
by Peter Metcalf
- **18. "How Different Religions Pay Their Final Respects"
by William J. Whalen

*Readings marked with one asterisk can be found in the *Death & Dying SC 097* (THE COURSE BOOK OF READINGS FOR SC097) by John Williamson

**These items are on reserve through O'Neill Library. In most cases if it is an article, it can be downloaded. If it is not listed for downloading, check with the reserve desk at O'Neill about how to access it.

TOPIC 4: FINISH THESE READINGS BY March 20**GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT****CHILDREN AND DEATH**

- *19. “The Five Stages of Grief” (Ch. 57)
by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler”
- *20. “Disenfranchised Grief” (Ch. 22)
by Kenneth J. Doka
- *21. “The Death of a Child” (Ch. 26)
by Beverly Raphael
- *22. “Worlds of Dying Children and Their Well Siblings” (Ch. 24)
by Myra Bluebond-Langner
- **23. “The Aquarium”
by Aleksandar Hemon

TOPIC 5: FINISH THESE READINGS BY April 17**MEDICAL ETHICS, EUTHANASIA, and SUICIDE**

- *24. “The Terri Schiavo Case” (Ch. 60)
by Gregory E. Pence
- *25. “Harvesting the Dead” (Ch. 30)
by Willard Gaylin
- **26. “The Abortion Issue in the United States”
by Michael C. Kearl
- **27. “Hard Choice for a Comfortable Death: Sedation”
by Amemona Hartocollis
- *28. “The Nazi 'Euthanasia' Program” (Ch. 29)
by Robert Jay Lifton
- **29. “The First Official Human Bomb”
by Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase
- **30. “The Truth about Jonestown”
by Keith Harrary

TOPIC 6: FINISH THESE READINGS BY April 26**VIOLENT DEATH**

- **31. “On the Role and Meaning of Death in Terrorism”
by Lee Garth Vigilant and John B. Williamson
- **32. “Rwanda—The Legacy of Inequality”
by Neil Kressel
- **33. “Capital Punishment in the United States”
by Stephanie Picolo Manzi

TOPIC 7: FINISH THESE READINGS BY May 3**BEYOND DEATH and NEW STUDENT TOPIC(S)**

- *34. “Near-Death Experiences: New Evidence for Survival?” (Ch. 41)
by Robert Kastenbaum
- *35. “The Postself” (Ch. 43)
by Edwin S. Shneidman

*Readings marked with one asterisk can be found in the *Death & Dying SC 097* (THE COURSE BOOK OF READINGS FOR SC097) by John Williamson

**These items are on reserve through O’Neill Library. In most cases if it is an article, it can be downloaded. If it is not listed for downloading, check with the reserve desk at O’Neill about how to access it.

OPTIONAL TERM PAPER GUIDELINES

The following are the requirements for those who elect to do the optional term paper.

Length: 4,000 to 5,000 words. Use the word count facility in your word processing program to do the counting and count the references as well as the words in the body of the paper.

1. Pick a topic that will provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate your ability to do sociological analysis. This means using sociological concepts, asking sociological questions, using sociological sources, etc. For those with limited background in sociology, I would urge you to take a look at any basic textbooks in introductory sociology such as: *Sociology* by Calhoun, Light, & Keller (HM 51. C282 1997), *Sociology* by Robertson (HM51.R68 1987) or *Sociology* by Macionis (HM 586.M33 2001). What are you looking for? Answer: sociological concepts, issues, and questions.
2. How do you pick a topic and what do you read and then use as your sources? Go to the O'Neill Library Reserve room and look through the table of contents from either the *Handbook of Death & Dying* (2003) edited by Clifton D. Bryant or the *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience* edited by Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck. You can write your paper on any of the topics listed in either of those sources or a topic that is a subpart of one of those topics. But you will need to first check to make sure you can obtain the required number of sources on that topic. In the paper that you write you will need to read and cite in the body of your paper least 8-10 scholarly sources (e.g. refereed journal articles, chapters in scholarly edited books, scholarly monographs, etc.). You can also include some additional references from other reputable, but not scholarly sources, such as the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, or various undergraduate textbooks, sources that are generally not considered scholarly sources. You will need to select sources that you can get access to here at BC or obtain via the internet. You may try to use interlibrary loan, but if you do so, you must keep in mind that sometimes it takes weeks to get items that way and thus you will need to start your reading very early. This set of rules must be strictly followed if you want your paper to be graded. If you have any doubts about what the rules of the game are with the selection of sources, please check with me or the TA.
3. **START YOUR PAPER EARLY IN THE SEMESTER!** It is going to take considerable time to locate your sources and to do the relevant reading. **It is best to start in February and to finish by early April.**
4. **We will not count or even grade a paper that is turned in without following the rules outlined in point #2 above or without the extensive consultation outlined here. (1) Decide who you are going to consult with, the TA or me, and consult with the same person for both visits. You must come in once to get your proposed topic approved. To this meeting bring a list of at least 8-10 sources that you have tentatively selected (see point # 2 above) to base your paper on. You will be free to make substitutions after we meet so long as the final set of citations meet the specified criteria. (2) You will come in to see your consultant a second time after you have done all your reading. You need to convince us that you have an adequate mastery of the sources that you will be citing in your paper. For this second visit, bring the books, articles, or notes on the reading you have done for the paper. This is just a check to make sure you did do the reading and have an adequate understanding of the central ideas in the sources being cited. We do not expect you to remember all the specific details in all of those readings. (3) Please do not use direct quotes. Paraphrase (or summarize the idea in your own words) and then give a citation that in all cases mentions the actual page in the source used.**
5. Review and use the checklist that I have provided on the next page.
6. There are many ways to write a sociological paper. It is possible to bring sociological concepts, theories, ideas, questions, and issues to the analysis of a set of articles that are not themselves sociological. Talk to the TA or to me about how to do this.
7. Use the official citation style of APA (American Psychological Association). For information on how to use that style see: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> . Part of your grade will be based on your ability to use the APA citation and reference style consistently and accurately. If you prefer you can use ASA citation style, see: <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/research/guides/asa.pdf>
8. The potential credit for the term paper will be as follows: A paper grade of A (a rare grade) will add 6 points of extra credit to your total score for the course, a grade of A- (the grade for a very strong paper) will add 5 points (and move you up one grade level), a B+ will add 4 points, a B will add 2 points, any passing grade below B will add 1 point. This means that if you do a term paper the maximum possible number of points for the course become 106 (not 100).
9. **To be eligible to write the optional term paper for the course, you need to have your topic approved by the TA by March 29.**
10. **The due date for the optional paper is Thursday, May 3.** Submit an electronic copy to both the TA and me. Submit a hard copy on the last day of class to the person you consulted with (unless that person instructs you otherwise). **A late term paper will be reduced one point for each day it is late** (e.g., an A- paper would get you 3 points of extra credit (rather than 5 points) if it is two days late.

CHECKLIST FOR SC097 TERM PAPERS

The following are some of the criteria that we will be using when we evaluate your term papers for SC097. Please ask about any of these criteria that you do not understand. You must familiarize yourself with and abide by the official BC rules with respect to academic integrity. Please spend some time checking out the information at the following website: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity> . Any paper written for this course must be written by you, be original to this course, be done only for this course, and not be a revised version of a paper done for a different course. If we have any concerns regarding your adherence to any of the above criteria, you will be asked to orally defend your paper; that is, you will come and meet with one of us and we will ask you questions about the paper, the reading, and any help you may have received when writing the paper.

1. Is this an interesting paper?
2. Does the author demonstrate an ability to think about this issue sociologically?
3. Does the author demonstrate a capacity for analytical thinking? (Analytic thinking refers to your ability to go beyond mere synthesis of what others have to say on the topic. It refers to the ability to see the major issues, see flaws in an author's reasoning, to combine the ideas and evidence in such a way as to bring new insights.)
4. Is the paper well organized?
5. Does the paper have a strong introduction?
6. Does the paper have a strong conclusion?
7. Does the author correctly cite sources? Are each of the items mentioned in the references at the end of the paper also cited in the body of the paper? Is the standard citation and reference format of APA (American Psychological Association) used consistently and accurately?
8. Does the author tend to use impressive sources? Where academic sources are called for, are strong sources used (e.g. a professional monograph is more impressive than a basic textbook for undergraduates; a journal article is more impressive than a magazine article, etc.)?
9. Does the author make good use of sources? Are the sources used as a source of data or evidence to support arguments?
10. Are there few if any spelling errors in the paper?
11. Are there few if any grammar errors?
12. Is the writing clear?
13. Does the paper flow well? As the reader moves from paragraph to paragraph is there a logical progression?
14. Are paragraphs about one topic or does the author end up discussing several quite different topics in the same paragraph?