

**SOCIOLOGY OF DEATH AND DYING  
SOCIOLOGY 473:B1**

**Winter 2017  
Tuesday Thursday Jan 10 to April 11  
12:30 – 1:50 PM  
TB-76**

**Instructor: H.C. Northcott, Ph.D.  
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**Office Hours**

**I am always happy to meet with students**

**You are welcome to drop in and visit any time that I am in my office**

**If you wish to make an appointment, please email me at herb.northcott@ualberta.ca**

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**Course Description**

From the U of A calendar: Comparative examination of death and dying in socio-cultural contexts, including theoretical and methodological issues (Prerequisite: Soc 100 or consent of instructor). HN: This course will examine how the intensely personal experiences of dying, death and bereavement are shaped by society and culture.

**Course Objectives**

While this course is offered as a 400-level seminar, for most students it will be a first exposure to the sociology of dying, death and bereavement. Accordingly, the **first objective** of this course is to develop a facility with the conceptual language used to examine the sociology of dying, death and bereavement and to provide an overview of the seminal literature, research, and theory that are foundational to this discipline. This objective will be accomplished through textbook readings, lectures, videos, and three examinations.

The **second objective** of this course is to provide students with opportunities to critically analyze personal experiences with dying, death and bereavement. Personal experience may be described and analyzed as a component of students' term papers.

A **third objective** of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to develop their analytic skills as well as skills in both oral and written presentation. This will be accomplished through a term paper presented orally in class and submitted in writing to the instructor.

## Texts

- Herbert C. Northcott and Donna M. Wilson, Dying and Death in Canada. Third edition. University of Toronto Press, 2017.
- **eBook:** George E. Dickinson and Michael R. Leming, Annual Editions: Dying, Death, and Bereavement 2013-2014. Fourteenth edition. McGraw Hill, 2014. Please purchase this in eBook form using the following instructions.
  - Go on <https://create.mheducation.com/shop/>
  - Change country to Canada
  - Search by professor name (Herb Northcott), or course code (SOC 473)
  - Ensure correct course/instructor, select and enter access code purchased from the bookstore (there is also an option to purchase with credit card)
  - Hit checkout

Email support: [www.mheducation.ca/support](http://www.mheducation.ca/support)

Phone support: [1-800-565-5758](tel:1-800-565-5758)

## Communication

The University advises us to communicate using our ualberta email accounts. Email is the best way for a student to contact me. Please email me at [herb.northcott@ualberta.ca](mailto:herb.northcott@ualberta.ca) from your ualberta.ca account. I will generally answer your email within 24 hours, except on weekends and holidays.

I will communicate with the class using eClass and BearTracks. I will post the course syllabus, announcements, and grades on eClass.

## Class Presentation of Term Paper

You are required to make a 10-minute oral presentation to the class based on a term paper dealing with any topic relevant to dying, death, or bereavement. Your assignment is to explain, illustrate and discuss your chosen topic. You should select a topic that is of interest to you and you may select a topic with which you already have some expertise or personal experience. Your presentation should take the form of a lecture and discussion. Leave approximately half of your allotted time for class discussion. You should research your topic first by referring to the textbooks assigned for this class and then turning to the library and other sources for relevant information.

You can write a conventional term paper based on library research; however, you can also choose a topic with which you have had personal experience. For example, you may focus on a personal experience or conversation you have had in the past, or you may report on an interview conducted with a professional who works with the dying, dead or bereaved, such as

a health care provider, or bereavement counselor, or individual who processes the dead body. Alternatively, you may report on a place or organization where you have had a personal experience relating to dying, death, and/or bereavement. This place or organization could provide care for the dying (e.g., a hospice or palliative care unit or emergency unit in a hospital or intensive care unit or private home), process the deceased (e.g., the medical examiner's office or a funeral home, cemetery and/or crematorium), provide care for the bereaved (e.g., a support group), provide suicide prevention distress services, or provide assistance to persons dying at home and to their lay caregivers (e.g., a palliative home care program). Finally, you may examine aspects of popular culture dealing with dying, death, and/or bereavement.

Your classroom presentation is worth a total of 10% of your final grade. If your presentation has good content (beyond what is contained in the text), critical analysis, and style (that is, you hold the audience's attention and make the audience think), you will earn a good grade. Grades will be assigned as follows:

10%	Very effective, outstanding
9%	Very effective, excellent
8%	Very good, better than average
7%	Very good, average
6%	Room for improvement
5%	Pass
0-4%	Fail

If you fail to attend class on the days when your classmates are making their presentations, up to 10% of your final grade may be deducted.

### **Written Submission of Term Paper**

You will write an 8-page term paper, plus title page and list of references used in the paper, on a topic relevant to dying, death, and/or bereavement (your class presentation discussed above is based on this paper). You should research your topic by referring to the textbooks first and then turning to the library and other sources for relevant information. You should cite 10-15 or more different sources and your two textbooks can be cited and counted as sources (while you may cite one of your textbooks several times in your paper, it would be counted as one source). You may cite academic publications such as journal articles and books, newspaper articles, internet web pages, etc. Do not cite only internet sources (academic articles published in on-line journals are not counted as internet sources). Use a 12-point font such as Times New Roman, double spacing, 1-inch margins, and include page numbers. Your term paper is worth a total of 20% of your final grade. **This paper is due on the last day of classes (April 11).** Papers submitted after this deadline will be penalized 10% per day (that is, 10% of 20%) and no paper will be accepted after April 21. Your graded paper will be available for pick-up by April 21 in the Department of Sociology main office on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Tory Building during the weekday hours of 10-12 AM and 1-4 PM.

## Paper Format

Use American Psychological Association (APA) format.

Within the paper, referencing should be author (date) or author (date, pp. ##) or (author, date, pp. ##). Consider the following example: Kent (2010) criticized the work of Stonehouse (2006, pp. 220-221) by referring to the strangeman thesis (Doonsebury, 1978, p. 5).

The last page of your paper will contain a list of the references you have used. These should be listed in alphabetical order as follows:

Jones, J. L. (2012). Article title. *Journal Title*, volume #, page numbers.

Smith, J. A. (2010). *Book Title*. New York: Publisher.

## Examinations

The examinations will cover both the assigned readings and the classroom material (lectures, DVDs, etc). There will be three examinations:

- The first examination will be held in class on Tuesday, **January 31**
- The second examination will be held in class on Thursday, **March 2**
- The third examination will be held in class on Tuesday, **March 28**

The examinations will contain short answer, multiple-choice, and true-false questions. The exams are not "cumulative." The examinations are worth 20%, 25% and 25% respectively of your total grade. Note that the instructor will retain the examination materials. Your grades will be posted on eclass. Your exams will not be reviewed in class but can be reviewed in the instructor's office.

Each examination must be written. Because each exam tests a separate third of the course, a missing exam grade will not be calculated as the average of the other two exams. Make-up examinations will be scheduled for exams missed because of exceptional circumstances. If you miss an exam, contact your instructor as soon as possible.

## Deferred Final Examination

Please note that students must apply to their home Faculty to write a deferred final exam – instructors cannot grant final exam deferrals. If you miss the final exam and your Faculty grants you a deferred final exam, this exam will be held on Saturday, May 6, 2017 at 9:00am.

Location TBA. A deferred final exam will not be approved if a student (a) has not been in regular attendance where attendance and /or participation are required, and/or, (b) excluding the final exam, has completed less than half of the assigned work.

### **Access to Representative Evaluative Course Material**

Example examination questions follow in this syllabus and are representative of the types of questions that will appear on the three examinations for the course. Previous exams are not available. Examples of short essay questions will be given regularly in class.

### **Withdrawal versus Failing to Complete**

Note that there is a difference between formally withdrawing from the course and failing to complete the course. If you fail to complete a course component, you will receive a zero for that component, unless you have formally withdrawn from the course. Having an “F” on your transcript is more serious than a “W”, so be sure to formally withdraw if you decide not to complete the course. The Winter 2017 term deadline for withdrawal is April 5, 2017.

### **Additional Notes**

The University of Alberta requires the following notes in each syllabus.

#### **Policy about course outlines**

Policy about course outlines can be found in *Course Requirements, Evaluation Procedures and Grading* of the University Calendar.

#### **Academic Integrity**

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at <http://www.governance.ualberta.ca>) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

#### **Recording of Lectures:**

Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

## Grading Overview

First Examination January 31	20%
Second Examination March 2	25%
Third Examination March 28	25%
In-class Presentation of Term Paper (to be scheduled on either March 30, April 4, 6, or 11)	10%
Term Paper, due April 11	<u>20%</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Your grades will be added together and calculated as a percentage. Your percentage grade will then be converted to the four-point scale as shown below. You can expect that the average grade for the class will be a B+.

Description	Percentage	Grade	Value
Excellent	95-100	A+	4.0
	90-94	A	4.0
	86-89	A-	3.7
Good	82-85	B+	3.3
	77-81	B	3.0
	73-76	B-	2.7
Satisfactory	69-72	C+	2.3
	64-68	C	2.0
	60-63	C-	1.7
Poor	55-59	D+	1.3
Minimal Pass	50-54	D	1.0
Fail	0-49	F	0.0

## Sample Exam Questions

Your exam is divided into sections labeled as follows:

- According to the Dickinson & Leming Textbook
- According to the Northcott & Wilson Textbook
- According to your Lecturer (this section includes lecture material and videos shown and discussed in class)

### 1. Exam questions will test your knowledge of trends. For example:

Which one of the following statements is true?

- A. Life expectancy increased in the twentieth century
- B. Life expectancy decreased in the twentieth century
- C. Life expectancy did not change in the twentieth century
- D. Life expectancy rose and then fell in the twentieth century
- E. Life expectancy fell and then rose in the twentieth century

There is evidence that the increasing trend in the twentieth century towards dying in the hospital is continuing in Canada in the twenty-first century, that is people are increasingly likely to die in the hospital.

- A. True
- B. False

### 2. Exam questions will test your knowledge of seminal dates, persons, and events. For example:

In which year was the Alberta Personal Directives Act passed?

- A. 1957
- B. 1967
- C. 1977
- D. 1987
- E. 1997

Published in 1963, this book was most critical of the funeral industry?

- A. Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death*
- B. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying*

- C. Herman Feifel's *The Meaning of Death*
- D. Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*

The "suicide physician" in Michigan who assisted with individual suicide deaths in the 1990s was:

- A. Michael DeBakey
- B. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
- C. Earl Grollman
- D. Jack Kevorkian

**3. Exam questions will test your knowledge of the language of the sociology of dying and death. For example:**

Which term refers to the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful or less offensive than another word or phrase?

- A. euphemism
- B. etiology
- C. cyronics
- D. humanism
- E. behaviorism

Erik Erikson's last stage of the life cycle is called:

- A. senescence
- B. adulthood
- C. play age
- D. adolescence
- E. none of the above

*Karma* refers to religious duties, requirements, and/or religious prescriptions for Hindus:

- A. True
- B. False

The levirate marriage is one method for providing symbolic immortality for one's kinsmen:

- A. True
- B. False

**4. Exam questions will test your knowledge of selected theories and theorists. For example:**

Which one of the following sociological theories best explains the importance of having a will?

- A. structural functionalism
- B. conflict theory
- C. feminist theory
- D. symbolic interactionism
- E. exchange theory

Which social theorist developed the concept of anomie?

- A. Marx
- B. Freud
- C. Becker
- D. Durkheim
- E. Berger

Day/Date	Topic	Chapters: Dickinson	Chapters: Northcott	Videos/DVDs	Supplementary Material	Activities
Jan 10, 12, 17	Introduction to Dying, Death, and Bereavement	1, 7-10, 20		The Bridge (first 20 min) Jan 10  Death: Trip of a Lifetime I. The Chasm (60 min) Jan 12  Chasm = a deep crack, abyss, crevasse, break or gap	Metaphors  Becker: Denial of Death  Pornography of Death	Groups: Make list of things to be done when a parent dies suddenly? Present to Class.  Groups: Does the media sensitize or desensitize people about death? Present to Class.  Individuals: Write your epitaph*. Share with class. Analyze content.
Jan 19, 24	Death: Then & Now	6, 13-15, 26	1 & 2	Death: Trip of a Lifetime II. The Good Death (60 min) Jan 19	Edgework: Tempting Death  Dangerous Lifestyles Dangerous Sports Dangerous Work High Steel Ironworkers	Individuals: Tell about your first experience with death, your age at the time, its effect on you, etc.  Groups: Discuss how new infectious diseases (AIDS, SARS, West Nile, Ebola, Bird Flu, Swine Flu, etc.), natural disasters, mass shootings, war/terrorism affect us today. Present to Class
Jan 26	Cultural Perspectives		4		Cadaver Stories: Mocking Death  Iconic Images of Death	
Tues Jan 31	<b>Exam 1</b>	54 pages	90 pages			

\***Epitaph**: an inscription on a grave in memory of a person buried there; a brief statement commemorating a deceased person. As opposed to **eulogy**: a commendatory formal statement; high praise; or **obituary**: a notice of a person's death usually with a biographical account.

<b>Day/Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Chapters: Dickinson</b>	<b>Chapters: Northcott</b>	<b>Videos/DVDs</b>	<b>Supplementary Material</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Feb 2, 7	Individual Perspectives: The Dying Process and Living with Dying	19	5	My Healing Journey: Seven Years with Cancer (45 min) Feb 2	Frank: At the Will of the Body Antonovsky: Sense of Coherence Pausch: The Last Lecture ( <a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a> ) That's My Time (DVD 2008: 66 min)	
Feb 9, 14	Dying in the Health-Care System; Biomedical Issues and Medical Assistance in Dying	5, 11, 16-18, 21-23	3 & 7	Who Owns My Life? The Sue Rodriguez Story (47 min) Feb 9  Dr. Lowe (YouTube)  How to Die in Oregon (107 min) Feb 14	Albom: Tuesdays with Morrie  Road to Mercy CBC Documentary 2016	Lecture/Class discussion and/or group discussions on Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, and Hastened Death. Debate for and against.
Feb 16, 28	Suicide			Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child (30 min) Feb 16  The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off— Jonny Kennedy (50 min) Feb 28	Personal stories  Kevin Carter and the photo of the vulture and the little girl	

Thurs March 2	<b>Exam 2</b>	31 pages	78 pages			
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<b>Day/Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Chapters: Dickinson</b>	<b>Chapters: Northcott</b>	<b>Videos/DVDs</b>	<b>Supplementary Material</b>	<b>Activities</b>
March 7, 9	Death Rituals; The Death Industry	3, 27-29, 31-33		The Undertaking (50 min) Mar 7	Parallels between birth and death  Green funerals  Von Hagens' <i>Body Worlds</i> exhibit	Individuals: Write your own obituary stating how, when (at what age), and where you died and funeral arrangements. Share with class. Analyze content.
March 14, 16	Bereavement and Grieving	4, 12, 30, 34-41	6	Death: Trip of a Lifetime III. Letting Go (60 min) March 14	Karen Martin's Model of Grieving	
March 21	Caring for the Caregivers		8			Group: Discuss the normalization of PTSD.
March 23	Conclusion			The Bridge (last 74 min) March 23		
Tuesday March 28	<b>Exam 3</b>	41 pages	68 pages			
March 30, April 4, 6, 11	<b>In-class presentations of term paper</b>					<b>In-class presentations of term paper (10 minutes per person)</b>
April 11	<b>Paper Due</b>					

