SOCIOLOGY OF DEATH AND DYING
SOCIOLOGY 473 A1

Fall 2018
Tuesday Thursday Sept 4 to Dec 6
11:00 AM – 12:20 PM
T1-100

Instructor: H.C. Northcott, Ph.D.
Office: 6-25 Tory Building
Phone (office): 780.492.0479
email: herb.northcott@ualberta.ca

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

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, DVDs, 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


  
  - Go on [https://create.mheducation.com/shop/](https://create.mheducation.com/shop/)
  - Change country to Canada
  - Search by professor name (Northcott)
  - Ensure correct course/instructor, add the book to your cart, pay using a credit card
  - Hit checkout

Some printed copies of this text may be available on Amazon.ca. In June 2018, the listed price was C$27.00. Be sure to order the 14th edition (which is far superior to the 15th edition).

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 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 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 (Dec 6). Papers submitted after this deadline will be penalized 2% per day (that is, 2% of your overall grade per day) and no paper will be accepted after Dec 14. Your graded paper will be available for pick-up by Dec 14 in the Department of Sociology.
main office on the 5th 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 (2018) criticized the work of Stonehouse (2012, 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:


**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, **September 25**
- The second examination will be held in class on Thursday, **October 18**
- The third examination will be held in class on Thursday, **November 22**

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.
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 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.

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 September 25 20%

Second Examination October 18 25%

Third Examination November 22 25%

In-class Presentation of Term Paper (to be scheduled on either November 22 or 29, or December 4 or 6) 10%

Term Paper, due December 6 20%

Total 100%

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+.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86-89</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>82-85</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>77-81</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>69-72</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>64-68</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60-63</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimal Pass</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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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 (includes lecture material and DVDs 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings: Dickinson</th>
<th>Readings: Northcott</th>
<th>Videos/DVDs</th>
<th>Supplementary Material</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 4, 6, 11</td>
<td>Introduction to Dying, Death, and Bereavement</td>
<td>Articles 1, 7-10, 20</td>
<td>Pages 139-141 from Chapter 5</td>
<td>The Bridge (first 20 min) Sept 4</td>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td>Groups: Make list of things to be done when a parent dies suddenly? Present to Class.</td>
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<td>Death: Trip of a Lifetime I. The Chasm (60 min) Sept 6</td>
<td>Becker: Denial of Death; Terror Management Theory</td>
<td>Groups: Does the media sensitize or de-sensitize people about death? Present to Class.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Chasm = a deep crack, abyss, crevasse, break or gap</td>
<td>Pornography of Death; Obscenity and Death</td>
<td>Individuals: Write your epitaph*. Share with class. Analyze content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 13, 18</td>
<td>Death: Then &amp; Now</td>
<td>Articles 6, 13-15, 26</td>
<td>Chapters 1 &amp; 2 &amp; pages 144-147 from Chapter 5</td>
<td>Death: Trip of a Lifetime II. The Good Death (60 min) Sept 13</td>
<td>Good Death, Bad Death; Shameful Death Edgework: Tempting Death Dangerous Lifestyles Dangerous Sports Dangerous Work High Steel Ironworkers</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 20</td>
<td>Cultural Perspectives</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cadaver Stories: Mocking Death Iconic Images of Death</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues Sept 25</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>54 pages</td>
<td>96 pages</td>
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*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.
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<th>Supplementary Material</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 27, Oct 2</td>
<td>Individual Perspectives: The Dying Process and Living with Dying</td>
<td>Article 19</td>
<td>Chapter 5 (except pages 139-141 and 144-147)</td>
<td>My Healing Journey: Seven Years with Cancer (45 min) Sept 27</td>
<td>Frank: At the Will of the Body</td>
<td>Lecture/Class discussion and/or group discussions on Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, and Hastened Death. Debate for and against.</td>
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<td>Oct 4, 9</td>
<td>Dying in the Health-Care System; Biomedical Issues and Medical Assistance in Dying</td>
<td>Articles 5, 11, 16-18, 21-23</td>
<td>Chapters 3 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Who Owns My Life? The Sue Rodriguez Story (47 min) Oct 4</td>
<td>Dr. Lowe (YouTube) How to Die in Oregon (107 min) Oct 9</td>
<td>Albom: Tuesdays with Morrie Road to Mercy CBC Documentary 2016</td>
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<td>Oct 11, 16</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
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<td>Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child (30 min) Oct 11</td>
<td>The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off—Jonny Kennedy (50 min) Oct 16</td>
<td>Personal stories Kevin Carter and the photo of the vulture and the little girl</td>
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<td>Thurs Oct 18</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>31 pages</td>
<td>72 pages</td>
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<td>Day/Date</td>
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<td>Readings: Dickinson</td>
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<td>Oct 23, 25</td>
<td>Death Rituals; The Death Industry</td>
<td>Articles 3, 27-29, 31-33</td>
<td>The Undertaking (50 min) Oct 23</td>
<td>Parallels between birth and death Green funerals Von Hagens’ <em>Body Worlds</em> exhibit</td>
<td>Individuals: Write your own obituary stating how, when (at what age), and where you died and funeral arrangements. Share with class. Analyze content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 30, Nov 1</td>
<td>Bereavement and Grieving</td>
<td>Articles 4, 12, 30, 34-41</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Death: Trip of a Lifetime III. Letting Go (60 min) Oct 30</td>
<td>Karen Martin’s Model of Grieving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 6</td>
<td>Caring for the Caregivers</td>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Group: Discuss the normalization of PTSD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 8</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
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<td>The Bridge (last 74 min) Nov 8</td>
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<td>Nov 20</td>
<td>Buffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Nov 22</td>
<td><strong>Exam 3</strong></td>
<td>41 pages</td>
<td>68 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 27, 29, Dec 4, 6</td>
<td>In-class presentations of term paper</td>
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<td>In-class presentations of term paper (10 minutes per person)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 6</td>
<td>Paper Due</td>
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Revised August 29, 2018