

*Bellevue College*  
*SOC: 260 Death & Dying*  
Sara Sutler-Cohen, Ph.D.

Winter Term 1/6 ~ 3/26, 2014  
Fully Online Course  
Office Hours: Fri 9-11,  
Online

[Facebook](#)  
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[Website](#)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course acquaints you with applied sociological concepts and perspectives as you become aware of and explore the realm of death in U.S. society. We will critically engage what it means to engage “Death and the Sociological Imagination” as we explore the socio-historical meaning of death over the past couple of centuries and how Death itself has become a booming industry in the United States. Through lecture, film and other media, as well as assigned readings, this course will take you on an exploration of the many dimensions of the social space of death and dying. We will make broad use of history, social psychology, and cultural studies as they intersect with the field of sociology in order to better understand the many complexities of death and dying in our social landscape today. By the end of this course, I hope to have all of you thinking critically about death and dying, including the way political, social, religious, and cultural history has shaped death. We will also investigate how and why things work the way they do today and who we are in terms of the way we imagine the space of death in our social worlds. You will be asked, over the course of the term, to confront the things you take for granted. Everyday occurrences will be challenged and thought through critically. Imagine yourself as Neo from “The Matrix” when he decides to take the Red Pill or Alice when she decides to explore the rabbit hole. Both must deal with what’s at the end of their adventures. What will *you* find at the end of *this* adventure?



**A NOTE ABOUT COURSE CONTENT:** Since sociologists examine just about every aspect of the social world, we talk about provocative material. When we explore controversial topics, they will always be framed within an academic context. Keep in mind that when we find ourselves in a space outside of our comfort zone, it's an opportunity for learning, and you may be confronted with subject matter that is difficult to watch, see, discuss, or listen to. Please note that you will be responsible for any course material you miss if you choose not to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about content or climate, feel free to speak with me about it right away.

**READING REQUIREMENTS:**

- Course Reader. All readings will be uploaded to our Canvas site
- Any *current* Dictionary of the English Language
- Handouts and articles. All handouts (syllabus included) are available on Canvas. *It is your responsibility to download and print all required material for yourself.*

**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED:**

- Any current Sociology Dictionary
- *A Writer's Reference*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. By Diana Hacker. See the companion website [here](#).

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** If you have medical information to share with me in the event of an emergency, please contact me via email or come to see me during office hours. Emergency preparedness is important! If you need course modifications, adaptations, or accommodations because of a disability, please see me immediately. I can also refer you to our Disability Resource Center (DRC), but you do not need a referral for my class. If you prefer, you may contact them directly by going to B132 or by calling 425.564.2498 or TTY 425.564.4110. Information is also available on their [website](#).

**EXPLORE THE LMC!** The Library Media Center is at your fingertips! I *strongly* encourage you to visit the LMC at least once a week, but you can also access it via the web. Talk to a Reference Librarian at the Library (D-126), by calling (425) 564-6161, or by [email](#).

**LMC Guide**

[Main Library Media Center](#)  
[For the LMC online catalog](#)  
[For article databases](#)

**LEARNING AND COURSE OUTCOMES:** Upon your dedicated participation and completion of this course, you will demonstrate:



- 1) A general understanding of basic concepts most widely used in sociology today, including the recent move toward cultural studies.
- 2) A historically critical idea of death and dying as related to society and community.
- 3) A general knowledge and comprehension of how social, political, and cultural perspectives of death are played out, and how some folks perceive those experiences.
- 4) A general understanding of death and dying representations for various groups in historical and contemporary analyses of culture in the United States. In addition, we will explore the way in which these representations play out in popular culture texts.
- 5) A close inspection of *The Business of Death* in contemporary U.S. culture.

**GENERAL RULES & EXPECTATIONS:**

- Check in to our online classroom no less than *four times per week* (yes – I do keep track!). This means you log on and surf around the site. No need to check in with me. Make this work for you on your own time.
- Complete readings and homework assignments *on time*. I do not check whether you complete your readings; this is on the honor system! You do need to read your required material in order to complete homework assignments.
- Late homework assignments *are accepted*, but *late exams are not*.
  - Late homework is docked 10% for every day the work is late, including Saturdays and Sundays.
  - Late Discussion Boards that go beyond the date for responses can only be made up for half credit. Responses are due three days after the Initial Posts are due (see schedule for details). A big part of these assignments is your communication with other students. If you make up an initial post past the deadline for responses, you'll get credit for that post, with late points assessed, but the base grade will be half of its original worth, regardless of the days you're late. Otherwise, your post will be assessed late points within the first three days and your response will be accepted.
- I expect that your behavior in our virtual classroom be respectful. Continued disrespectful behavior in my class will result in your grade lowering. Please keep your postings to discussion boards (DBs) thoughtful and polite. One-on-one conversations should be taken off-board and onto email so our DBs don't get clogged. If you find at any point that you are uncomfortable with anything posted to a DB, please email me right away. Be wary of soap boxing in this class; you may be tempted to present your opinion and editorialize, but refrain from doing this.

**Remember: Falling behind can be hazardous to your health!**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** In this course you will be completing assigned readings, participating in discussion board assignments, and completing short homework assignments. The work you do for this class will keep you critically engaged with the world around you from a sociological perspective. There is a Final Exam and a Midterm Exam. Expect to be writing every week. The key to this course is your thoughtful reflection on course material.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

<b>Attendance and Participation*:</b>	150 points
<b>Reading "Cards" (10):</b>	100 points
<b>Key Terms Assignments (5):</b>	100 points
<b>"Your Turn" Assignments (5):</b>	200 points
<b>Main Discussion Boards (3):</b>	300 points
<b>Course Exams, Overall:</b>	200 points
<b>TOTAL:</b>	1000 points



*The Fine Print:*

\*Participation points accrue with various short assignments in the Discussion Area, such as your Introductory DB. These are labeled **PARTICIPATION DBs**. The Main DB assignments are labeled **MAIN DBs**.\*

**Attendance & Participation:** Check in no less than four times per week, be engaged with all of your discussion board assignments, provoke energetic and polite discussion, listen/read/comprehend actively, work respectfully with your colleagues in class, take loads of notes from your readings, look up words you don't understand, ask questions, think critically about the world around you, etc. Make use of the Q&A Board as well. This is not scored, but even if you don't have questions, you might be able to answer somebody's query – so have some presence there.

**Reading “Cards”:** Reading Cards demonstrate to me that you've done the reading. You will turn in one paragraph submissions highlighting key points for each reading assignment. A bullet-pointed list is fine, but submissions must be in complete sentences.

**Key Terms Assignments:** You are expected to understand certain terms used in the field of Social Psychology. For these assignments, you will demonstrate your understanding by following exercises laid out for you in the Key Terms accompanying Prezi presentations. Remember this important note about your KT assignments: you *must do the reading*. There are several Terms in these assignments you will not find in the index of the book, as they are incorporated into the articles. In order to do well on these assignments, reading the articles all the way through is vital to your success. Be aware that some of these require a few days, or even a week, of preparatory work. Make sure you look ahead at your homework!

**Your Turn Assignments:** These short assignments are an opportunity to put your learning to use as you explore the world around you using the themes and theories we examine in this course. Be aware that some of these require a few days, or even a week, of preparatory work. Make sure you look ahead at your homework!

**Main Discussion Board Assignments:** The work done in the Discussion Board area will have you engage course material and work closely together. You are expected to participate in these assignments in order to generate critical discussion amongst one another. Be aware that some of these require a few days, or even a week, of preparatory work. Make sure you look ahead at your homework! This method of learning gets you going socially! These assignments are always due on Wednesdays and Saturdays (your initial post goes up



Wednesday and your responses to one another are due Saturdays). Your DBs are graded on two things: your original post and your responses (usually two of them) to colleagues of yours in the class. You must do both to earn full credit. A submission with no responses posted earns ½ credit at most, and responses without an original submission receive zero credit.

**Participation Discussion Board Assignments:** These are meant to support you throughout the course. They are required and the grades get folded into your overall Participation Grade.

**Midterm and Final:** Your Exams cover everything up through the week they're scheduled; the midterm is made up of short-answer questions that engage a documentary film. The Final Exam is a series of short answer questions. Your responses should be clear and concise. You will never be asked a question out of "left field". Questions are based on readings, Main discussion boards, Prezi, and Power Point material. Point distribution info will be on the exams.

**For all of your written work:** Submit proofread work **only**. Work not proofread will be returned *once* for a rewrite, expected to be handed in within 48 hours. If you need help with your writing, please make use of the following student support services:

- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [Academic Tutoring Center](#)
- [TRiO Student Support Services](#)
- [Writing Lab @ BC](#)

**Below is a checklist for you to go over before you hand in each written assignment.**

- Twelve-point sized Times font, double-spaced
- 1" margins all around
- APA Citations where appropriate – credit must be given even where any *ideas* presented in the paper are not your own (see notes below about avoiding plagiarism)
- Title pages and bibliographies are not counted as pages due
- Student information is at the top left of the page, single spaced
- There are no extra spaces between paragraphs.
- Paragraphs contain no less than four sentences.
- Magazines, newspapers, journals, and books are *italicized*. Movie titles, article titles, song titles, etc. are "in quotation marks." Quotes inside of a quotation use 'single quotation marks.'
- Avoid the universal "we", "our", "us" – ask yourself: Can I speak for everyone? If you cannot, do not write it. Also avoid phrasing such as "nowadays..." and "since the beginning of time." Be accurate. Know what you're writing and why.
- Do not ever use Wikipedia, CliffNotes, or other such encyclopedic references. Wikipedia is not peer-reviewed and therefore unreliable. Do your own research.

If you're going to research online (which is absolutely encouraged and totally legit), make sure you understand what you're looking for. Do a deep dive into the internet to find your stuff.

- Be sure that no more than 20% of your papers are outside sources. You must be providing your own analysis while you draw from material presented to you in class.

### Your written work is evaluated on:

#### 1) Content

- a. Fulfilling the entire assignment. Doing the minimum amount of work expected will likely get you a passing grade, but not an outstanding one. You're expected to go the extra mile.
- b. Fully developing your argument(s) and making use of examples and evidence to support your argument(s).
- c. Flow of thought throughout the paper, with strong analyses and conclusions.

#### 2) Writing Style

- a. Excellent command of the written English language. In other words, most excellent grammar. **NOTE: If you struggle with grammar and spelling or are an ESL student, please let me know! I'm happy to work with you and point you in the right direction.**
- b. Clarity of thought.
- c. Good organization and attention to detail.
- d. Persuasiveness of your argument/s.
- e. Creativity. Make it an interesting read!
- f. PROOFREAD your work. Please do a spell/grammar check before you hand it in. Read it out loud to yourself, too! It really helps.
- g. Dude, like totally don't write **colloquially**. A conversation is a conversation. A paper is an entirely different way of presenting your research and ideas. ☺

**Preventing Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty occurring when students use information or material from outside sources and do not properly cite those sources. This is grounds for disciplinary action. It is your responsibility to understand plagiarism and its consequences. Plagiarism occurs if:

- a. You do not cite quotations and/or attribute borrowed ideas.
- b. You fail to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks.
- c. You do not write summaries and paraphrases in his/her own words and/or doesn't document his/her source.
- d. You turn in work created by another person.
- e. You submit or use your own prior work for a current or past course, or work from one current course in another course *without express permission* from your professors. This may also be considered academic dishonesty.

- f. Consequences: If it is determined that you have plagiarized or engaged in other forms of academic dishonesty, you will likely fail the assignment and possibly the course, despite points earned through other work. Acts of academic dishonesty are reviewed for disciplinary action.

### Grading:

Please use the following rubric to help explain the grade you're given for a given assignment. I offer comments on all of your written work and general comments on the Discussion Boards – sometimes more, sometimes less. Please read my comments and do not hesitate to come to me with any questions you ever have on a grade you receive. There is no limit to how many times you email me! My email door is *always* open.

**90-100 = A.** “A” work shows me you’re engaged with all course material by utilizing quotes and ideas. It is writing *completely free* from grammar and spelling errors, demonstrating your command not only of the English language, but of the form and flow of a solid piece of written work. I also like to see/read/hear your “writing voice.” That is, I want your style to come through! Your arguments should be solid and backed up with intellectual ammunition. You should demonstrate a strong understanding of our readings and the in-class media and how they intersect with one another. Your ideas should be “fleshed out” and not just a series of statements, in other words.



**80-89 = B.** The “B” tells me you’re doing very good work. You may have a couple of grammar issues, but your work is still tidy and the writing is still strong. You have a firm grasp on the themes in the course but you may not be as well-versed in the readings and/or media and/or lecture material as you could be. I should see that you’re being challenged and that you’re struggling with the course issues and themes, and what they represent to you in an interconnected way. Your understandings of some of the course materials are stronger than others.

**70-79 = C.** “C” work means that you’re not as invested in the material as I would like to see. Your writing is relatively weaker than it could be and you’re not thinking as critically as I would like you to. You write the bare minimum of the length requirement. Some of what you point out I may not follow logically, and your use of the course materials may not be as solid as it could be. You omit some of the important points raised in class.

**60-69 = D.** Ah, the “D.” “D” is for “Don’t be Discouraged.” I will work closely with each of you as much as time allows, getting you up to speed in class. Your struggles should not be with writing so much at this point but if they are please see me immediately. “D” work is not proofread, nor does it deal critically with the themes in the course. It responds, perhaps, to one part of one of the readings but there is little-to-

no integration of material and you're not responding to the questions raised in the assignment. Demonstrated understanding of the course materials is not presented clearly, or at all. (NOTE: A "D" and below may be rewritten **once** if you choose to do so. It must be turned in within 72 hours, and I enter the better grade.)

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE:**

**DO NOT WORK AHEAD MORE THAN ONE WEEK**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- Main Discussion Board Initial Posts are due Thursdays and you are required to respond to two people by Sundays.
- Key Terms & Your Turn Assignments are due Sundays, unless otherwise indicated.
- Participation DBs have varying deadlines and do not require discussion responses.
- All assignments are due midnight.
- Readings should always be done by Mondays of their given week to prepare you for the week's work.
- All deadlines are in the course modules and in this syllabus.

### **Week One: January 6**

#### **Readings (please complete this reading by Wednesday):**

- **Power Point Presentation** (located in Modules and embedded in your Assignment for this week)

#### **Assignments:**

- Participation DB 1 – Introductions. Due Sunday, 1/12
- Participation DB 2 – Sociological Imagination & Death. Due Sunday, 1/12
- Reading Card 1. Due Sunday, 1/12

**Quote of the Week:** "Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything; or, as we are told, it is really a change: a migration of the soul from one place to another." – Socrates, Philosopher (469 – 399 BC)

### **Week Two: January 13**

#### **Readings:**

- Parker, B., Schneider, M., & Winter, L. (2007). Imagining the Alternatives to Life Prolonging Treatments: Elders' Beliefs About The Dying Experience. *Death Studies*, 31: 619-631.

#### **Film:**

- ["Facing Death". Frontline.](#) 2010.

#### **Assignments:**

- Key Terms 1 Due Sunday, 1/19
  - The Sociological Imagination & Death
  - Collective Identity
  - Disciplinary Approaches to Death
  - Death Anxiety

- Note for this last Key Term you'll be watching [Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality](#) in full. It is an hour and a half long.
- Reading Card 2 Due Sunday, 1/19

**Quote of the Week:** "Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible." - Frank Zappa, Musician, Writer, Poet (1940 - 1993)

### **Week Three: January 20**

I will be in Seattle this week! I will be on campus most of the day, Thursday 4/18. Look for announcements about "Tea Time" - I'll let you know when I'll be in the cafeteria for about an hour and you can swing by to visit!

#### **Readings:**

- Thomson, Graeme. (2008). The Art of Dying. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 55 Issue 12, pB16-B17
- Sutler-Cohen, Sara C. (2011). "Plans are pointless. Staying alive is as good as it gets." *Zombie Sociology and the Politics of Survival. Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*. Moreman, C. and Rushton, C., eds. McFarland & Co.
- Tomer, A. & Wong P. (2011). Beyond Terror and Denial: The Positive Psychology of Death Acceptance. *Death Studies*, 35, 99-106.

#### **Assignments:**

- Key Terms II, due Sunday 1/26
- Your Turn Assignment I, due Sunday 1/26
- Reading Card 3, due Sunday 1/26

**Quote of the Week:** "All human actions have one or more of these seven causes: chance, nature, compulsions, habit, reason, passion, desire." - Aristotle, Philosopher (384 - 322 BC)

### **Week Four: January 27**

*Please note, the next two weeks deal with suicide. The films we're going to watch can be very challenging to watch. If you have any difficulties discussing or studying suicide, please let me know. These are very well done films, they are incredibly thoughtful and quite beautiful.*

#### **Reading:**

- Kitanaka, Junko. (2008). Diagnosing Suicides of Resolve: Psychiatric Practice in Contemporary Japan. *Culture, Medicine, & Psychiatry*, Vol. 32 Issue 2, p152-176.

#### **Film:**

- [Aokigahara: Suicide Forest](#). Vice, 2011.

#### **Assignments:**

- Main Discussion Board I, initial response due Thursday 1/30, Responses by Sunday 2/2
- Your Turn Assignment II, due Sunday 2/2
- Reading Card 4, due Sunday 2/2

**Quote of the Week:** "I leave you my portrait so that you will have my presence all the days and nights that I am away from you." - Frida Kahlo, Activist, Poet, Painter, Sculptor (1907 - 1954)

### **Week Five: February 3**

#### **Assignments:**

- Participation DB 3: Mid-Term Check-In, due Sunday 2/9
- Midterm Examination due Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup>. The Exam will open at 8:00am, PST on Friday, 2/7 and will be open until 11:59, Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>. The Exam should take no more than two hours, but will be open for four to accommodate anyone needing extra time. It

is open book and open note. Use your Reading Cards and Key Terms assignments as your study guides (see what I meant in Week One now? ☺)

### Week Six: February 10

#### Reading:

- [Dr. Karl's Sociology of Death info site: Focus on Suicide](#)
- [Controversy over "The Bridge"](#)

#### Film:

- [The Bridge](#)
  - You will want to take a look at the [film's website](#) prior to watching it in full.

#### Assignments:

- Main Discussion Board II, initial response due Thursday 2/13, Responses by Sunday 2/16
- Your Turn Assignment III, due Sunday 2/16
- Reading Card 5, due Sunday 2/16

**Quote of the Week:** "Of course you don't die. Nobody dies. Death doesn't exist. You only reach a new level of vision, a new realm of consciousness, a new unknown world." - Henry Miller, Novelist (1891 - 1980)

### Week Seven: February 17

#### Readings:

- Lynch, T. (2004). Funerals-R-Us: From Funeral Home to Mega-Industry. *Generations*, 28 (2), 11-14.
- [Infinity Burial Project Blog: The Infinity Mushroom](#)

#### Video Clips:

- [Penn & Teller: Death, Inc.](#)
- [The Undertaking. Frontline.](#)

#### Assignments:

- Key Terms Assignment III, due Sunday 2/23
- Reading Card 6, due Sunday 2/23

**Quote of the week:** "You think you're so clever and classless and free." - John Lennon, Musician, Activist, Poet (1940 - 1980)

### Week Eight: February 24

#### Readings:

- Gibson, M. (2007). Death and mourning in technologically mediated culture. *Health Sociology Review*, 16(5), 415-424.
- Bryant, C. (1999). 'Every Goodbye Ain't Gone': The Semiotics of Death, Mourning, and Closural Practice in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon. *Melus*, 24(3), 97.

#### Review Website:

- [DeadSocial](#)

#### Assignments:

- Your Turn Assignment IV, due Sunday 3/2
- Key Terms Assignment IV, due Sunday 3/2
- Reading Card 7, due Sunday 3/2

**Quote of the Week:** "Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in hospitals dying of nothing." - Redd Foxx, Comedian, Artist, Writer, Actor, Activist (1922 - 1991)

### Week Nine: March 3

#### Readings:

- Ironstone-Catterall, P. (2004). When Isaak Was Gone: An Auto-Ethnographic Meditation on Mourning a Toddler. *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying*, 50(1), 1-21.
- Kaufman, K.R., & Kaufman, N.D. (2005). Childhood Mourning: Prospective Case Analysis of Multiple Losses. *Death Studies*, 29(3), 237-249.

#### Assignments:

- Key Terms Assignment V, due Sunday 3/9
- Your Turn Assignment V, due Sunday 3/9
- Reading Card 8, due Sunday 3/9

Quote of the Week: "I know it is coming, and I do not fear it, because I believe there is nothing on the other side of death to fear. I hope to be spared as much pain as possible on the approach path. I was perfectly content before I was born, and I think of death as the same state. I am grateful for the gifts of intelligence, love, wonder and laughter. You can't say it wasn't interesting. My lifetime's memories are what I have brought home from the trip. I will require them for eternity no more than that little souvenir of the Eiffel Tower I brought home from Paris." - Roger Ebert, *American Journalist, Screenwriter, Film Critic, Television and Radio Personality* (1942 - 2013)

### Week Ten: March 10

- No readings – catch up and study for your final! Please closely review your Reading Cards as well as all homework assignments for your Final Exam.
- Extra Credit Requests taken this week. You must have a grade of C or lower to qualify for an extra credit assignment. **You must email me by Friday, 3/14** and request an Extra Credit assignments. ECs will be different for each student, and are randomly selected. You may earn up to 50 points. **Requests for ECs later than the 14<sup>th</sup> will not be granted.**
- Reading Card 9, due Sunday 3/16

Quote of the Week: "A man who won't die for something is not fit to live." – Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Community Leader, Minister, Activist, Writer, Intellectual, Religious Thinker (1929 - 1968)

### Week Eleven: March 17

#### Film:

- Tim Wilson, [Griefwalker](#). 2008. National Film Board of Canada.

#### Assignments:

- Main Discussion Board III, initial response due Thursday 3/20. No responses due.
- Extra Credit Assignments due Sunday 3/23
- Final Reading Card due Sunday 3/23

Quote of the Week: "Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see." – Helen Keller, Activist, Poet, Writer, Community Leader (1880 - 1968)

### Finals Week: March 24-26

**Final Exam will be open from 8am 3/24 through midnight 3/26**  
**Exam will time out after four hours. Do not start the exam unless you intend to finish it during your chosen time period.**

**Assignments:**

- Participation DB, Quarter Reflection, due Wednesday, 3/26

**Quote of the Week:** "If you're losing your soul and you know it, then you've still got a soul left to lose." - Charles "Hank" Bukowski, Poet, Novelist (1920 - 1994)

**ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR:**

When I'm not teaching, I'm usually skating, whipping up some sort of baked goodness in my kitchen, doing collage art, taking photos of the world around me, hanging out with my kid, watching horror movies, playing roller derby, or going out to listen to live music. Mostly, I go to hear metal, bluegrass, punk, or local hip-hop shows. I received my Ph.D. in Sociology (with an emphasis in American Studies) from UC Santa Cruz. I received my first MA in Sociology from Humboldt State University and my second MA in Sociology from UCSC, my BA in Sociology and Journalism from Mills College, and my AA in English and Creative Writing from Vista Community College. This is my eighth year as Instructor of Sociology at BC. I am currently working on two research projects. One that deals with heavy metal and social class and another that looks at death, dying, and bereavement. I'm also writing a cookbook that should be out in the next few months.

*Let's have a wonderful term!*