

Bellevue College

SOC: 260 Death & Dying

Sara Sutler-Cohen, Ph.D.

Spring Term April 1st - June 18th

Daily 10:30 - 11:20 L-124

Office Hours Daily 12:30 - 1:30

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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?



Check out BC Sociology’s MySpace page and add us as a Friend!

<http://www.myspace.com/bccsoc>

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:

- Laderman, Gary. *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death 1799 - 1883*. Yale University Press, 1999.
- Roach, Mary. *STIFF: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2004.
- Any *current* Dictionary of the English Language
- Handouts and articles. All handouts (syllabus included) are available on MyBCC. *It is your responsibility to download and print all required material for yourself.*

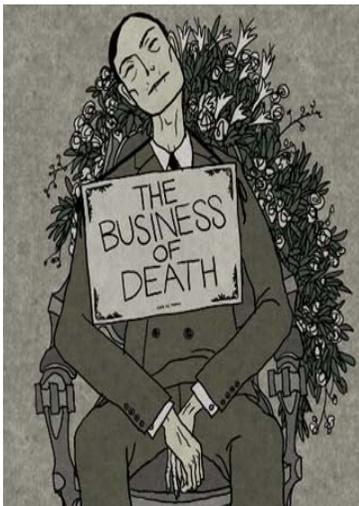
**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED:**

- Any current Sociology Dictionary
- *A Writer's Reference, 6th Ed.* By Diana Hacker. See the companion website here: <http://www.dianahacker.com/>

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, I can refer you to our Disability Resource Center (DRC). 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 at <http://bellevuecollege.edu/drc/>

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 bccref@bcc.ctc.edu.

- Main Library Media Center: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/>
- For the LMC online catalog: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/catalogs.html>
- For article databases: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/periodicals.html>



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) An 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:

- Come to class every day and *on time* (yes – I do keep track!).
- Coming to class five minutes late or more, three times, equals one absence.
- Complete readings and homework assignments *on time*.
- Emailed assignments *are not accepted* without prior arrangement.
- Late homework assignments *are accepted*, but make-up quizzes and make-up in-class assignments *are not*
 - Late homework is docked 10% for every day the work is late, including Saturdays and Sundays.
- I expect that your behavior in our classroom be respectful. Continued disrespectful behavior in my class may result in your being asked to leave and will result in your grade lowering. **Electronic devices are *not allowed* without permission.**
- There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

Remember: Falling behind can be hazardous to your health!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and Participation:	150 points
Response Handouts (3):	300 points
Final Project (1):	250 points
“Field Trip” Assignments (3):	150 points
Course Quizzes, Overall:	150 points
TOTAL:	1000 points

The Fine Print (or, what I really mean by that table above):

Attendance & Participation: Be here, provoke energetic and polite discussion, listen actively, work respectfully with your colleagues in class, take loads of notes in class and from your readings, look up words you don’t understand, ask questions, etc. Think critically about the world around you.

Quizzes: Your quizzes will cover everything up through the week they’re given, and may include multiple choice and/or short-answer questions (either or both). Your responses should be clear and concise. Your short-answer responses will range from no less than **one full paragraph**, to three **full paragraphs**. Study guides will not be available to you, as the expectation is that you’re up on the reading, attending class, and taking copious notes.

Response Handouts: You will be writing about your ideas based on class discussion and readings. These handouts are a series of questions based on the reading, lecture, handouts, and in-class discussion. These will be available on MyBCC. It is your responsibility to download them.

“Field Trip” Assignments: Because this class only meets for 50 minute periods, we cannot go on field trips as a class. However, you will be required to go to three on your own time. Where you go is determined by class discussion, but you should plan on going to a cemetery for one of these assignments. You will then write a response paper based on your experiences on these Trips. You are encouraged to go in groups. Details to follow.

Final Project: This is a free-flowing and creative project for which you come up with the idea(s) on your own. You may work on this independently or pairs. You must choose a topic that is related to death and dying. You will spend some time researching your topic and then choose whether you want to generate a creative way of presenting your research or produce an exploratory research paper. For the creative project, you must do original art work, but you *do not* have to be an “artist!” Students have done paintings, skits, or documentary films in the past. I will bring examples of past student work into the classroom. What the project ends up looking like is also up to you (I will help you stay on track to make certain it remains sociologically relevant). Really, there is no limit to applying your sociological imagination to a project and getting something educational out of it! We’ll talk about this over the first couple of weeks of class. All creative projects have a final writing component. If you want to do a research *paper*, that’s fine, too. Guidelines for both types of research projects are posted online. Choose one and stick with it.



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: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/academicsuccess/>
- Academic Tutoring Center: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/tutoring/>
- TRiO Student Support Services: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/TRiO/>
- Writing Lab @ BCC: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/writinglab/>

Below is a checklist for you to go over before you hand in each written assignment. Points are deducted when these are not followed.

- Twelve-point sized Times font, double-spaced.
- 1” margins all around.
- PAPERS ARE STAPLED.
- MLA Citations where appropriate - credit is given even where any *ideas* presented in the paper are not your own.
- Title pages and bibliographies are not counted in final page count.
- 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.’

Your written work is evaluated on:

- 1) Content
 - a. Fulfilling the assignment.
 - b. Developing your argument and making use of examples and evidence to support your argument.
 - 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.
 - g. Dude, like totally don't write **colloquially**. A conversation is a conversation. A paper is an entirely different set of discussions. ☺

Grading: Please use the following rubric to help explain the grade you're given for a given assignment. You will receive a Numerical Grade from me, with little-to-no commentary. This is only because I've found that most students do not read written comments from their professors. Please 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 and I'm always happy to go over grades with you.



90-100 = A. The A paper shows me you're engaged with the readings, the media, and the lectures in class by utilizing quotes and ideas. It's a paper *completely free* from grammar and spelling errors, and demonstrates 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 paper 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. The C paper 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. 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." A D paper 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 no integration of material and you're not responding to the questions raised in class. 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 (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

READINGS DUE MONDAYS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES VARY; PLEASE SEE SCHEDULE BELOW

Week One: April 1st - 3rd

Thematic Overview:

- Introduction to this course
- Death & The Sociological Imagination

Readings (please complete this reading by Friday):

- *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799 - 1883*
 - Introduction to the text, pg. 1.
 - Living with the Dead in the Antebellum North: George Washington's Invisible Corpse and the Beaver Hat, pg. 15

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: April 6th - 10th

Thematic Overview:

- Death and Movement
- Death and Industry
- Escapism and Mortality

Readings:

- *The Sacred Remains:*
 - Signs of Death, pg. 22.
 - From the Place of Death to the Space of Burial, pg. 27
 - Simplicity Lost: The Urban Model of Death, pg. 39
 - The Great Escape, pg. 51

Assignments:

- Response Handout 1 Due Friday, April 10th

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

Week Three: April 13th - 17th

Thematic Overview:

- Death and Nature

- The Culture of Disgust
- Antebellum Death & Blood on the Soil
- Death and Closure

Readings:

- *The Sacred Remains:*
 - “The Law of Nature”: Revisioning Mortality and the Natural Order, pg. 63.
 - Morbid Obsessions, pg. 73
 - John Brown’s Body and a Soldier’s Experiences of Death on the Battlefield, pg. 89
 - Death During Wartime, pg. 96

Assignments:

- Final Project Topic Idea Due Friday, April 17th

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: April 20th - 24th

CAMPUS CLOSED APRIL 23RD FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY.

Thematic Overview:

- The Politics of Death
- A Cultural Shift of Expiration
- What War Did for the Dead
- Disenchantment With Dead Bodies

Readings:

- *The Sacred Remains:*
 - “Let the Dead Bury the Dead”: The Search for Closure, pg. 103
 - National Interests, pg. 117
 - “Resurrection Days” and Redemptive Blood, pg. 123
 - Disenchantment with the Mortal Remains, pg. 136

Assignments:

- Field Trip Response Paper 1 Due Friday, April 24th
- Outline due for Research Projects (use directions for either Creative Research or Research Paper Projects) Due Friday, April 24th

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: April 27th - May 1st

Thematic Overview:

- The Future of American Deathways
- What to do with the Cultural of Preservation
- Death Becomes Big Business
- Death and Postbellum Public Health

Readings:

- *The Sacred Remains:*
 - Looking Death in the Face, pg. 144
 - Epilogue: The Birth of the Death Industry: Abraham Lincoln’s Hallowed and Hollowed Body, pg. 157
 - The Business of Death in the Late Nineteenth Century, pg. 164

Assignments:

- Working Bibliography due for All Research Projects Due Friday, May 1st

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 Six: May 4th - 7th

CAMPUS CLOSED MAY 8TH FOR COLLEGE ISSUES DAY

Thematic Overview:

- Fast Forward One Hundred Years
- Poking Holes, Chopping Limbs, Boring Eyes

Readings:

- *STIFF: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*
 - Introduction, pg. 9
 - A Head is a Terrible Thing to Waste: Practicing surgery on the dead, pg. 19
 - Crimes of Anatomy: Body snatching and other sordid tales from the dawn of human dissection, pg. 37

Assignments:

- Response Handout 2 Due Thursday, May 7th

Quote of the Week: “I'll sleep when I'm dead.” - Warren Zevon, Poet, Activist, Musician (1947 - 2003)

Week Seven: May 11th - 15th

Thematic Overview:

- The Inevitable Rot
- “Impact Tolerance” - is that an oxymoron?

Readings:

- *STIFF:*
 - Life After Death: On human decay and what can be done about it, pg. 61
 - Dead Man Driving: Human crash test dummies and the ghastly, necessary science of impact tolerance, pg. 87

Assignments:

- Creative Research Projects Detailed Plan Due Friday (see handout), May 15th
- Research Paper Projects First Draft Due Friday (see handout), May 15th

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

Week Eight: May 18th - 22nd

Thematic Overview:

- Airborne Death Stories
- Test Bodies and War Wounds

Readings:

- *STIFF:*
 - Beyond the Black Box: When the bodies of the passengers must tell the story of a crash, pg. 113
 - The Cadaver Who Joined the Army: The sticky ethics of bullets and bombs, pg. 131

Assignments:

- Field Trip Response Paper 2 Due Friday, May 22nd

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: May 26th - 29th

CAMPUS CLOSED MAY 25TH FOR MEMORIAL DAY

Thematic Overview:

- On The Cross
- Don't Bury My Uncle Hal Just Yet!
- Soul Searching

Readings:

- *STIFF:*
 - Holy Cadaver: the crucifixion experiments, pg. 157
 - How to Know if You're Dead: Beating-heart cadavers, live burial, and the scientific search for the soul, pg. 167

Assignments:

- Field Trip Response 3 Due Friday, May 29th

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 Ten: June 1st - 5th

Thematic Overview:

- Is the Soul Animated?
- Science Loves The Head
- Snacks and Chew Toys

Readings:

- *STIFF:*
 - Just A Head: Decapitation, reanimation, and the human head transplants, pg. 199
 - Eat Me: Medicinal cannibalism and the case of the human dumplings, pg. 221
- *Kittawat Unarrom: “Body Bakery”*
 - In *Shape and Colour* online:
<http://shapeandcolour.wordpress.com/2008/05/15/kittawat-unarrom-body-bakery/>

Assignments:

- Response Handout 3 Due Friday, June 5th

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)

Week Eleven: June 8th - 12th

Thematic Overview:

- ...and in the end...
- Remains of the Professor: Will she or won't she?
- Remains of the classroom: Will you or won't you?

Readings:

- ***STIFF:***
 - Out of the Fire, Into the Compost Bin: And other new ways to end up, pg. 251
 - Remains of the Author: Will she or won't she?, pg. 281

Assignments:

- Final Presentations and Discussion

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)

Week Twelve: June 15th - 18th

IMPORTANT NOTE: Our last class is Monday, June 15th.

- Final Exams are June 16th - 18th.
- Commencement is June 18th.
- Your last day to come to class is Monday, June 15th. This is a regular, required class period.

EMAILING ME:

When you email me, ALWAYS put in the SUBJECT LINE the following, in this order:
SOC 260 - YOUR NAME - SUBJECT

For example: **SOC 260 - Jane Doe - Question about Quiz Number 4.**

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR:

When I'm not teaching, I'm usually 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, 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 third year as Instructor of Sociology at BCC, and my first year as Chair of the Sociology Department. I am the Programmer for BCC's Annual American Indian Film Festival. I love to write and am currently working on a memoir and a collection of poetry. More at: <http://sara.sutlercohen.com>

Thank you for a wonderful term!