

Sociology 418/818
Death and Dying
Professor Deborah Carr
Fall 2019
Thursdays 12:30-3:15 p.m., Soc 252

Professor: Deborah Carr
E-mail: carrds@bu.edu
Office: 100 Cummington Mall, Room 260
Office Hours: Thursdays 10 a.m. – noon, and by appointment

Course Overview: Death is universal, but when, where, and of what causes people die, how societies respond to death, and how bereaved persons mourn are powerfully shaped by cultural and structural factors, ranging from religion to the financial and bureaucratic arrangements of health care systems. The sociology of death and dying is the systematic study of the structure of the human response to death, dying, and bereavement in their socio-cultural, interpersonal, and individual contexts. In this course, we begin by examining the social, historic, and demographic patterning of death. We then focus on the ways that people prepare for, pay for, and experience the end of life, as well as the ways that loved ones respond to and memorialize death. We conclude by discussing contemporary policy challenges, focusing on aid-in-dying debates. An overarching theme of the course is that in contemporary society, death is a prolonged process rather than a discrete event, necessitating an understanding the components of a “good death,” and the social factors that shape who has the privilege of “dying well.”

Course Readings:

- Bonanno, George A. 2009. *The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us about Life after Loss*. New York: Basic Books. ISBN: 978-1541699373.
Available online via [BU Libraries](#).
- Doughty, Caitlin. 2018. *From Here to Eternity: Travelling the World to Find the Good Death*. New York: W. W. Norton. ISBN: 978-0393356281.
- Gawande, Atul. 2014. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. Vol. New York: Metropolitan Books. ISBN: 978-1250076229.

The three required books are available for purchase at Barnes & Noble (910 Commonwealth Ave.). Required articles are available online via Blackboard. I will occasionally upload to Blackboard current news articles pertaining to course material, yet these current events readings are supplemental and recommended only. Students are encouraged to share with the class timely articles that are relevant to class content. Please regularly consult our Resources Page created by BU Libraries for helpful resources. <http://library.bu.edu/deathdyingend>.

Overview of Course Requirements and Grading:

The course is organized as a seminar, and will blend lecture and discussion. During the first half of each class, I will provide a lecture clarifying key concepts and an overview of the week’s readings. The remaining time will be dedicated to in-depth discussion of the week’s topic and readings, and occasional videos to spark conversation. On weeks when a brief written assignment is due, the question or activity will be the starting point for class discussion.

Course grades will be based on: (a) five written assignments of 2-3 pages each; (b) mid-term exam; (c) final independent research paper; and (d) class participation.

1. Five brief written assignments (25 percent of grade; 5% each).

Students will write five brief memos/reports over the course of the semester. These assignments will assess both one's comprehension of the weekly readings, and one's creativity and thoughtfulness in assessing the sociological causes and consequences of death and dying. The assignments will require different tasks, including basic analysis of statistical data, op-ed writing, and preparing one's own end-of-life plan. The assignments will be 2-3 pages each (double-spaced), and should be uploaded to Blackboard 24 hours prior to class on the due date. Assignments will be due on: 9/26, 10/10, 10/24, 11/21, 12/5

2. Midterm exam (25 percent of grade).

A timed take-home exam will assess students' comprehension of the readings, and ability to integrate and contrast findings and concepts from across the class readings, lectures, discussions and media. The exam will be closed-book and will comprise both definitions/short answers and a longer multi-part essay question. A study guide will be distributed one week prior to the exam. The exam questions will be distributed via email at the exam's start time on November 14. You may take the exam at any location you like, during the 12:30-3:15 slot. .

3. Participation in class discussion (10 percent of grade).

This grade reflects class attendance and participation in discussion. Students should read carefully so that they come to class with insightful comments and questions. Students who read materials that are not on the syllabus, or who have professional/educational experiences that are germane to the course material should feel free to contribute their expertise to the discussion.

4. Final research paper or proposal (40 percent of class grade).

Each student will write an original research paper or research proposal (15 pages, double spaced). Paper topic and methodology will be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Final class papers are due no later than Monday December 16 at noon. I will not accept papers submitted after that deadline.

Students should select the paper format that best meets their own educational and professional goals, although I offer the following broad suggestions:

Undergraduate student papers should identify a research question or puzzle, review relevant prior studies, and draw conclusions about the persuasiveness of the literature – especially when scholars hold two or more competing perspectives on the topic. The paper conclusions should discuss the implications of the research for policy, practice, or theory.

Graduate student papers should define a research question, review relevant prior studies, and either: (1) analyze suitable data, and present the findings and their implications (research paper) or (2) propose a detailed strategy and justification for conducting an original research project (research proposal). Students are encouraged to use this class project to develop a master's thesis, honors project, conference paper, dissertation prospectus, or journal article.

For students planning to conduct secondary data analyses, many data sets with rich measures on mortality, cause of death, caregiving, dementia, end-of-life care, end-of-life medical

expenditures, and bereavement are available through University of Michigan’s Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>). Among these data sets are the Changing Lives of Older Couples (CLOC), Dartmouth Atlas Project data, Health and Retirement Survey (HRS), National Health and Aging Trends Survey (NHATS), National Mortality Followback Survey, Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS), and many others. IPUMS Health Surveys is another large depository of health data that is easily accessed and analyzed (<https://ihis.ipums.org/ihis/>). The Gateway to Global Aging Data (<https://g2aging.org/>) houses harmonized data from more than a dozen different countries. Information on accessing data sets will be made available during the early weeks of the seminar.

Each student will submit to Blackboard a brief (2-3 page) proposal by the start of class on October 31. This brief proposal should describe your research question, the data or method to be used, and the analyses to be undertaken. Please also provide 2-3 references that form the basis of your work. I will provide feedback to help you target relevant readings and refine the scope of your work. You are encouraged to meet with me early in the semester to discuss your research ideas. Extended office hours will be held on October 24, to facilitate one-on-one consultations.

Summary of Grading, Due Dates, and Course Grade Guidelines

Five brief written assignments	Due <u>9/26, 10/10, 10/24, 11/21, 12/5</u>	25% (5% each)
Mid-term exam	11/14	25%
Research paper or proposal	Proposal due 10/31, paper due 12/16	40%
Class participation		10%

Final Course Grade	Final Average
A	94-100
A-	90-93.99
B+	87-89.99
B	84-86.99
B-	80-83.99
C+	77-79.99
C	74-76.99
C-	70-73.99
D+	67-69.99
D	64-66.99
D-	60-63.99
F	Below 60

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

Academic misconduct: Boston University policies state that academic misconduct may involve: cheating; fabrication; facilitating academic dishonesty; plagiarism; denying others access to information or material. Any instances of academic misconduct will be reported to your dean. Plagiarism is using someone else's words without giving the author proper attribution. Undergraduates taking this course are subject to the BU University Academic Conduct Code (<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>), while graduate students must abide by the GRS Conduct Code and Academic Discipline Procedures (<http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academicdiscipline-procedures/>).

Class conduct: The BU Sociology Department encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe and productive classroom environment. Students and faculty must act with mutual respect and courtesy. Behaviors that distract students and faculty are not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, discourteous remarks, and other behaviors specified by the instructor. Courteous expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted.

Schedule and Disabilities Accommodations:

Students are expected to attend class. Student athletes must provide the professor a game schedule for the semester, signed by the coach, to be eligible for an excused absence. If there is a religious holiday that requires your absence, please notify me within the first two weeks of class so that we can make arrangements for your absence. Unexcused absences are reflected your participation grade. In the event of an absence, please notify me in advance and seek notes from one of your classmates. I will not provide class notes to absent students.

Students with temporary or permanent disabilities seeking accommodation should contact BU's Disability Services office at 125 Buick Street Suite 300, Boston, MA 02215 (telephone 617-353-3658 Voice/TTY; email: access@bu.edu). Students requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://www.bu.edu/disability/>. If you require such accommodations, please notify me within the first two weeks of class.

Diversity Statement: The BU Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue.

Trigger Warnings: Any course in death, dying, and bereavement covers topics that some may consider painful, personal, and jarring. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Confronting the realities of death and loss is a necessary component of this course.

TENTATIVE TOPICS & READING SCHEDULE

September 5. Introduction and Course Overview

This chapter provides a brief overview of the main topics to be discussed this semester:

Carr, Deborah. 2019. "Is Death the Great Equalizer? Disparities in Death and Dying." Pp. 179-209 in *Golden Years? Social Inequality in Later Life*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

September 12. How Do We Think About and Study Death and Dying? Methodological and Conceptual Overview

Carr, Deborah and Elizabeth Luth. 2019. "Well-Being at the End of Life." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: Pp. 515-519 only.

Copp, Gina. 1998. "A Review of Current Theories of Death and Dying." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 28: 382-390.

George, Linda K. 2002. "Research Design in End-of-Life Research: State of Science." *The Gerontologist* 42 (Suppl.): 86-98.

Riley Jr., John W. 1983. "Dying and the Meanings of Death: Sociological Inquiries." *Annual Review of Sociology* 9: 191-216.

Guest mini-presentation by Chris Smith, Sociology & Anthropology Librarian, BU Libraries

September 19. Demography of Death: Guest Lecture, Sara Moorman, Boston College

Avendano, Mauricio and Ichiro Kawachi, I. 2014. "Why Do Americans Have Shorter Life Expectancy and Worse Health than Do People in Other High-Income Countries?" *Annual Review of Public Health*, 35(1), 307–325.

Egen, Oliva, Kate Beatty, David J. Blackley, Katie Brown and Randy Wykoff. 2016. "Health and Social Conditions of the Poorest Versus Wealthiest Counties in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(1), 130–135.

Omran. Abdel 107. "The Epidemiologic Transition: A Theory of the Epidemiology of Population Change." *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 49: 509-538.

Umberson, Debra, Julie Skalamera Olson, Robert Crosnoe, Hui Liu, Tetyana Pudrovska, and Rachel Donnelly. 2017. "Death of Family Members as an Overlooked Source of Racial Disadvantage in the United States." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(5): 915-920.

Recommended (not required): Moorman, Sara. Forthcoming. "Chapter 1: The Demography of Death," in *Predictable Death in Public Policy and Personal Life* by Sara M. Moorman. Under contract, New York: Routledge.

September 26. Deaths of Despair and Violence: Suicide, Murder, and Overdose (Written assignment #1 due)

Scan only: Radley, David C., Sara R. Collins, Susan L. Hayes. 2019. *2019 Scorecard on State Health System Performance*. New York. Commonwealth Fund.

Scan only: Cooper, Alexia and Erica L. Smith. 2011. *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008 Annual Rates for 2009 and 2010*. Washington, DC: Department of Justice

Case, Anne, and Angus Deaton. 2015. "Rising Morbidity and Mortality in Midlife among White Non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) 112: 15078-15083.

- Edwards, Frank, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito. 2019. "Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) 116: 16793-16798.
- Hamermesh, Daniel S., and Neal M. Soss. 1974. "An Economic Theory of Suicide." *Journal of Political Economy* 82: 83-98.
- Pitman, Alexandra L., Fiona Stevenson, David PJ Osborn, and Michael B. King. 2018. "The Stigma Associated with Bereavement by Suicide and Other Sudden Deaths: A Qualitative Interview Study." *Social Science & Medicine* 198: 121-129.
- Phillips, Julie A. 2002. "White, Black, and Latino Homicide Rates: Why the Difference?" *Social Problems* 49: 349-373.
- Sontag, Deborah. 2014. "Heroin's Small-Town Toll, and a Mother's Grief." *The New York Times* (February 10, 2014).
- Van Orden, Kimberly A., Tracy K. Witte, Kelly C. Cukrowicz, Scott R. Braithwaite, Edward A. Selby, and Thomas E. Joiner Jr. 2010. "The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide." *Psychological Review* 1172: 575-600.

October 3. Advance Care Planning: Preparing for the End of Life

- Benson William F. and Nancy Aldrich. 2012. *Advance Care Planning: Ensuring Your Wishes Are Known and Honored If You Are Unable to Speak for Yourself*, Critical Issue Brief. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/aging.
- Carr, Deborah. 2012. "'I Don't Want to Die Like That...': The Impact of Significant Others' Death Quality on Advance Care Planning." *The Gerontologist* 52: 770-781.
- Carr, Deborah and Elizabeth Luth. 2017. "Advance Care Planning: Contemporary Issues and Future Directions." *Innovation in Aging* 1: 1-10. doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igx012.
- Thomeer, Mieke Beth, Rachel Donnelly, Corinne Reczek, and Debra Umberson. 2017. "Planning for Future Care and the End of Life: A Qualitative Analysis of Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Couples." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 58(4): 473-487.

Please also review the following advance care planning documents. These documents are for Massachusetts, although you are encouraged to review documents for your home state.

- "Five Wishes"
- MOLST (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatments)
- Do Not Resuscitate Orders (DNR)
- Health Care Proxy Appointment
- Durable Power of Attorney
- Personal Directive

October 10. The Finances of Death and Dying (Written assignment #2 due)

- Scan only:* Kaiser Family Foundation. 2016. 10 FAQs: Medicare's Role in End-of-Life Care. <http://files.kff.org/attachment/10-FAQs-Medicares-Role-in-End-of-Life-Care>.
- Associated Press. 2019. "Paying for Funerals Impossible for Many Poor Families." *NBC News* (January 20, 2019).
- Betancourt, Mark. 2016. "The Devastating Process of Dying in America without Insurance." *The Nation* (June 20, 2016).
- French, Eric B., Jeremy McCauley, Maria Aragon, Pieter Bakx, Martin Chalkley, Stacey H. Chen, Bent J. Christensen et al. 2017. "End-of-Life Medical Spending in Last Twelve Months of Life is Lower than Previously Reported." *Health Affairs* 36: 1211-1217.

Gill, Richard T. 1996. "Whatever Happened to the American Way of Death?." *Public Interest* 123: 105-117.
Mitford, Jessica. 1963. *The American Way of Death*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Chapters 1 and 2 (Pp. 15-55).

October 17. Is A "Good Death" Possible?: End of Life Care

Carr, Deborah and Elizabeth Luth. 2019. "Well-Being at the End of Life." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: Pp. 519-528 only.
Gawande (2014). Chapters 1 through 6 (Pp. 1-190).

October 24. Hospice and Palliative Care (Written assignment #3 due)

Gawande (2014). Chapters 7 through Epilogue (Pp. 191-263).
Littrivis, Evgenia and Cardinale B. Smith. 2011. "Palliative Care: A Primer." *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine: A Journal of Translational and Personalized Medicine* 78(4): 627-631.
Span, Paula. 2014. "Differences in Care at For-Profit Hospices." *The New York Times* (March 3, 2014).

October 31. Grief & Bereavement I (Brief proposal due)

Bonanno (2009). Chapters 1 through 6 (Pp. 1-94).

November 7. Grief and Bereavement II

Bonanno (2009). Chapters 7 through 10 (Pp. 95-144), Chapter 12 (Pp. 195-204).

November 14: Timed take-home midterm exam. (Study guide posted on 11/7).

November 21. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Death and Dying (Written assignment #4 due)

Bonanno (2009). Chapter 11 "Chinese Bereavement Ritual" (Pp. 169-194).
Doughty (2018). *From Here to Eternity: Travelling the World to Find the Good Death*.
Note: This book is a very 'quick read.' Please make every effort to read the entire book.
If pressed for time, you could skip "North Carolina" (pp. 105-136).

November 28. Happy Thanksgiving!

December 5. Ethical and Policy Challenges: Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia (Written assignment #5 due)

Brenan, Megan. 2018. "Americans' Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists." *Gallup* (May 31, 2018).

Death with Dignity. 2019. *How Death With Dignity Laws Work*.

Ganzini, Linda, Elizabeth R. Goy, Steven K. Dobscha, and Holly Prigerson. 2009. "Mental Health Outcomes of Family Members of Oregonians Who Request Physician Aid in Dying." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 38: 807-815.

Hedberg, Katrina, and Craig New. 2017. "Oregon's Death With Dignity Act: 20 Years of Experience to Inform the Debate." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 167: 579-583.

Peralta, Eyder. 2014. "As Planned, Right-to-Die Advocate Brittany Maynard Ends Her Life." *NPR* (November 3, 2014).

Sulmasy, Lois Snyder, and Paul S. Mueller. 2017. "Ethics and the Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide: an American College of Physicians Position Paper." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 167: 576-578.

GOOD LUCK WITH FINALS AND HAVE A WONDERFUL WINTER BREAK!