



Texas A&M San Antonio

Sociology
4372

The Sociology of Death and Dying
*Digging deeper into how we live
by studying how we die.*

Fall 2025 Syllabus

Instructor: Tracy Schluter, M.A.	Start Date: Aug 25, 2025
Cell: 210-415-1155	End Date: Dec 12, 2025
E-mail: Tschluter@tamusa.edu	Office hours: Contact me anytime

Course Description:

This course provides a basic background on historical and contemporary perspectives on death and dying. Attention will be given to current American practices regarding death and cross-cultural interpretation.

Prerequisites or Requirements:

SOCI 1301 or ENG 1301

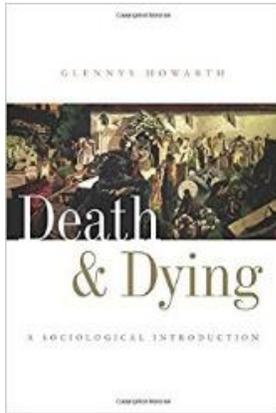
Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of sociology in understanding death and dying
- Be able to examine the core sociological processes associated with dying, death, and bereavement
- Become familiar with the medical, legal, financial, and cross-cultural issues related to death and dying
- Relate the social and cultural context of death and dying to wider social structures
- Develop research and analytical skills in writing academic essays and social analysis

Required Text and Course Materials or Equipment

Howarth, Glennys, *Death and Dying, A Sociological Introduction*



Weekly Procedures

We will be covering approximately 1 chapter in the text per week. Videos also may be included in some weeks to augment the text and Class Notes.

Each week you will participate in one discussion forum. During the 3 weeks that you will have papers due, there will be no forum discussions. Unless otherwise noted, you will be required to also post responses to at least two postings of other students. Your responses should be between 100-200 words.

The last week is designated for your final project.

Technology

Basic Skill Requirements:

To succeed in online courses, you will need basic computer skills that include how to use email, attach a document to an email message, navigate web pages, and download and upload files. You must participate in discussion forums and use the Internet to research information. Additionally, you will need a computer with regular access to a reliable Internet connection, a current web browser (such as Chrome or Firefox), a technology “backup” plan in case your primary computer is unavailable during a test-taking timeframe.

Technical Help:

If you need help logging in to Blackboard, or in finding information, just call the IT Help Desk at (830)784-4357. Office hours are 8-5 M-F. Additionally, you can email them with your questions at helpdesk@tamusa.edu

Netiquette:

Written communication in the online environment is crucial to success. To avoid misunderstandings the following guidelines are provided:

- **Follow the Golden Rule.** Treat others, as you would like to be treated. Be encouraging, helpful, aware, and respectful of others.
- **Avoid using all caps.** Text written in all capital letters is difficult to read and is often interpreted as shouting, which is not appropriate for an academic environment. Additionally, the use of all caps nullifies the use of proper capitalization.
- **Respect copyright.** Ask permission or cite sources for the work of others.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Careful word choice ensures that you have expressed yourself clearly. Review your writing before you post. Using one word over another can dramatically affect the meaning and tone.
- **Use proper grammar and spelling.** Using e-speak as you would in text messaging is not appropriate in an academic environment, such as the discussion forums. Additionally, it can confuse some unfamiliar with the abbreviated spellings.

Student Participation

To be successful in this course you should log in at least five days a week even if you don't post each day.

Instructor Presence and Response Time

The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. The instructor will provide feedback and grades within a week for written assignments and three days after the weekends for the discussion forums.

I often use email to notify you of any changes or notices. Please check your email. Email is also the best way to get a hold of me and I will respond generally within 24 hours. If you're having an emergency, text or call me.

Assessments and Grading

Grading Scale

Late Assignments or Incompletes

Late papers and assignments will be docked one letter grade for each day they are late (with the lowest grade received for late work being a "C") unless we have agreed on prior arrangements. Make-ups of major exams may only be completed when the instructor grants an excuse for a specific absence.

A	94 - 100%
A-	90 - 93%
B+	87 - 89%
B	84 - 86%
B-	80 - 83%
C+	77 - 79%
C	74 - 76%
C-	70 - 73%
D+	67 - 69%
D	64-66%
D-	60-63%
F	59% and lower

Assignments

Assignments	Point Total	% of Grade
Forum Discussions	25	25%
Three Written Papers	30	30%
Midterm Exam	20	20%
Final Exam	25	25%
Total Points Possible	100	100%

Rules for Forum Posting

The forum postings will all be due on Thursday at 11:59 pm of each week unless we have a short week or a holiday. Unless otherwise noted, you will be required to also post responses to at least two postings of other students. Both the original post and responses should be intelligently written using correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Responses must also utilize course material (unless otherwise specified in the question/prompt). These criteria will factor into discussion post grades.

For the responses, please choose 2 of your classmate's postings. Each of your replies should include at least 1 relevant comment and further exploration that supports or refutes your classmate's content. Each reply should be 100-200 words. Your forum post grade will also reflect how thoughtful your responses are.

Papers

There are 3 papers this semester. The paper topics and due dates can be found on the syllabus and Blackboard. The papers should be between 2-5 pages in length. Please use ASA style. You can refer to the ASA Style guide or the link above.

Sociology 4372 Syllabus

Title of Assessment/Instructions	Category Name	Point Value	Assessment Due Date/Time
Week 1			
Read: Ch 1 Death, Denial and Diversity	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Take one minute to jot down all the words you associate with <i>death</i> . Label each with a + (positive), – (negative), or / (neutral) connotation. Share your list and reflect on whether your associations lean more positive, negative, or neutral—and what that might say about your view of death. Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	8/28 11:59 p.m.
Week 2			
Read: Ch 2 When and How People Die	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Paper 1 – Experiences with Death and Dying. Please see Blackboard for full assignment details.	Paper	10	9/5 11:59 p.m.
Week 3			
Read Ch 3 Life and Death in “Risk Society”	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Do governments have an obligation to reduce the risk of death? As social systems become increasingly adept at eliminating premature death, death becomes more predictable. How does this benefit society? Would you encourage our government to continue to allocate funds for programs meant to reduce death risk, such as warning of cigarette smoking, and warning of drinking and driving? What about working to reduce asthma among inner-city youth? Are there other risks that you believe should be addressed at a societal level? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	9/11 11:59 p.m.
Week 4			

Read: Ch 4 Death, Religion and Spirituality	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Would life have the same meaning if people no longer had to die? Some argue that death gives life urgency and purpose, while others see the end of death as a way to relieve suffering. Making immortality a cultural goal raises tough questions about overpopulation, inequality, and whether people would lose their drive or appreciation for life. It challenges us to consider whether death is essential to human meaning or a barrier humanity should try to overcome. Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	9/18 11:59 p.m.
Week 5			
Read: Ch 5 <i>Death and the Media</i>	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Watch an episode of any television show you're interested in or are already watching. I'd like for you to use content analysis and record the number of times death is mentioned, alluded to, or happens in the show. Is it necessary to the plot line? Is it gratuitous? How is it handled? What kind of emotions did it elicit? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	9/25 11:59 p.m.
Week 6			
Read: Ch 6 Dying: <i>Institutionalization and Medicalization</i>	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: In recent years, more people have chosen to spend their final days at home rather than in hospitals or hospices. After researching the movement toward dying at home, how do you feel about this shift? Would you want your loved ones—or even yourself—to experience death at home, and what benefits or challenges do you see in this choice? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	10/2 11:59 p.m.
Week 7			
The Midterm Exam will be available for download			10/2 8:00 am

Midterm Exam Due	Exam	20	10/8 11:59 pm
Week 8			
Read: Ch 7 The Good Death	Reading		
Read the article: http://all-that-is-interesting.com/double-euthanasia-nic-trees-elderhorst	Reading		
Discussion: What does a 'good death' mean to you? If you could plan your own, what would it look like, and how much control do you think people really have over how and where they die? After reading the article and watching the video, do they match your vision of a good death? Why or why not? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	10/16 11:59 pm
Week 9			
Read: Ch 8 The Social Organization of Sudden Death	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: How do coping strategies differ between sudden and expected deaths, and what unique challenges might first responders face with sudden loss? Have you personally experienced a sudden death, and how did you cope? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	10/23 11:59 pm
Week 10			
Read: Ch 9 The Dying and the Dead Body	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Watch Video		
Discussion: When you think about your own death, what would you want to happen to your body, and what would your ideal funeral look like? Explore one of the new trends in the funeral industry—such as eco-burials, DIY funerals, or drive-by viewings—and share whether it appeals to you and why (or why not). ²⁵ Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays		2.5	10/30 11:59 p.m.
Week 11			
Read: Ch 10 Grief and Loss	Reading		
<i>Watch the video on Blackboard</i>	Video		

Read: https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/01/10/261391130/why-hospitals-and-families-still-struggle-to-define-death <i>Why Hospitals and Families Still Struggle to Define Death</i>	Reading		
Paper 2 – Discuss the ways in which grieving processes differ depending on the nature of a death and the societal expectations attached to it. Are there certain types of deaths—such as those of children, elderly individuals, public figures, or individuals with stigmatized lifestyles—that society expects to be met with either more or less grief? Have you ever observed someone whose grief fell outside of these societal norms? What made this deviation from expectations uncomfortable for others, and what does that reveal about cultural attitudes toward loss?	Paper	10	11/7 11:59 p.m.
Week 12			
Read: Ch 11 Relationships Between the Living and the Dead			
Watch the video on Blackboard			
Discussion: Ask three friends the following question and write down their answers: •What are your after-death beliefs? In other words, what do you believe happens to people after they die? Include your thoughts as well. How do your beliefs compare to those of your friends? Why do you think they are similar or why do you think they are different? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	11/13 11:59 p.m.
Week 13			
Read: Ch 12 Mortuary Rituals	Reading		
<i>Watch the video on Blackboard</i>	Video		
Paper 3 – Mortuary Science. See Blackboard for full details	Paper	10	11/21 11:59 pm
Week 14 Thanksgiving			
Week 15			
Read: Conclusion: Resurrecting Death			
Watch the video on Blackboard	Reading		
Read: https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5637687 Origins of Exhibited Cadavers Questioned	Video		

Forum Discussion: Currently, there are Body World exhibitions all over. Is this substantially different than what was done to Julia Pastrana? What about other deceased people are on display around the world? What is the significance of keeping a body on display? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Read	2.5	12/4 11:59 pm
The final Project is available to work on			12/4
Last Day for all late work to be turned in for a diminished grade (Better than a 0)			12/5 11:59 pm
Week 16			
Final Project due 12/10 by 11:59 pm		25	12/10 11:59 pm
		100	

Discomfort Statement

As a professor, it is my job to challenge you to think critically about your assumptions regarding yourself and others, as well as to learn and analyze many materials we will come across. Sometimes the materials and the discussions will make you uncomfortable, and that's okay. When you feel uncomfortable, you are developing critical thinking skills because you're looking at things in a way you might never have before. This is a great opportunity to contact me and have a deeper conversation if needed. We will discuss some of the negative sides of life in this class, which means you will have to sit with ideas such as inequality, mortality, illness, and access to power. Understanding that there may not be one right answer for everyone and being able to problem solve for groups of people is a valuable skill in all walks of life. I'm asking you to get comfortable being uncomfortable. (Many thanks to Dr. Theresa MacPhail)

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are federal anti-discrimination statutes that provide comprehensive civil rights protection for individuals with disabilities. Title II of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require that students with disabilities be guaranteed equal access to the learning environment through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodations of their disability. If you have a disability that may require an accommodation, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the coordination of services. The phone number for DSS is (210) 784-1335 and email is dss@tamusa.edu.

Academic Learning Center: All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. The Academic Learning Center is an appointment based center where appointments are made through the Navigate platform. Students access Navigate through Jagwire in the Student Services tab. The

Center is active on campus outreaching to students to highlight services offered. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu or calling (210)-784-1332. Appointments can also be made through JagWire under the services tab.

Counseling Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you or someone you know is experiencing life stressors, emotional difficulties, or mental health concerns at Texas A&M University – San Antonio, please contact the Student Counseling Center (SCC) located in Modular C, Room 166 (Rear entrance) or call 210-784-1331 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday – Friday. After-hours crisis support is available by calling 210-784-1331. Please contact UPD at 911 if harm to self or harm to others is imminent. All mental health services provided by the SCC are free, confidential (to the extent permitted by law), and are not part of a student’s academic or university record. SCC provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information, please visit www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio’s mass notification system. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff, and faculty who are registered in JagE Alert, will have the option to receive a text message, email, and/or phone call with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Preparedness and the Emergency Response Guide can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/upd/index.html>.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Jaguar Writing Center: The Jaguar Writing Center provides writing support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges. Writing tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Students can schedule appointments with the Writing Center in JagWire under the student services tab. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at www.tamusa.edu/Writing-Center. The Writing Center can also be reached by emailing writingcenter@tamusa.edu.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. In addition, you may notify the instructor if you are comfortable doing so.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, about special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment,

drill requirements, disability accommodations). You are also encouraged to visit the Patriots' Casa in-person, Room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under A&M System policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

Respect for Diversity: We understand that our students represent diverse backgrounds and perspectives. When we are equity-minded, we are aware of differences and inequalities and are willing to discuss them so we can act to resolve them. The University is committed to building cultural competencies, or the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that enable individuals and organizations to acknowledge cultural differences and incorporate these differences in working with people from diverse cultures. Respecting and accepting people different than you is vital to your success in the classroom, on campus, and as a future professional in the global community. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- Share their unique experiences, values, and beliefs.
- Be open to the views of others.
- Honor the uniqueness of their colleagues.
- Value each other's opinions and communicate respectfully.
- Use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in this course and across the A&M-San Antonio community.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality, diversity, pluralism, and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating

campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the university. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and other healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about an incident of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331, Modular C.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The purpose of the following statement is to enumerate the essential provisions of students' freedoms and responsibilities to learn at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. All students are required to follow all policies and regulations as set forth by The Texas A&M University System, including the A&M-San Antonio Student Code of Conduct.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no university rule or procedure that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition, and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the university, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty and staff, and the administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted and compliant with the University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, and in the University Catalog.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their University email for any updates or official University notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

What about AI

In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original. Using an AI-content generator (such as ChatGPT) to complete coursework without proper attribution or authorization is a form of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure about whether something may be plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please contact your instructor to discuss the issue. Faculty, students, and administrative staff all share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment.

Smart is something you learn.

not something you are!