



Texas A&M San Antonio

Sociology
4372

The Sociology of Death and Dying



*Digging deeper into how we live by
studying how we die.*

Spring 2026 Syllabus

Instructor: Tracy Schluter, M.A.	Start Date: Jan 20, 2026
Cell: 210-415-1155	End Date: May 12, 2026
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

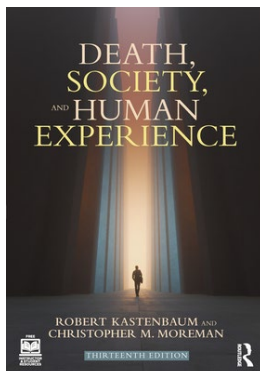
Course Objectives:

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

Kastenbaum, Robert and Christopher M. Moreman



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	30	30%
Three Written Papers	30	30%
Midterm Exam	20	20%
Final Exam	20	20%
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 classmates' 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 As We Think About Death	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: How do Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown differ in their explanations of how religion relates to death and dying? In your response, explain how Malinowski views religion as a way to manage individual fear and anxiety about death, while Radcliffe-Brown emphasizes religion's role in maintaining social order and group stability. Which perspective do you find more convincing, and why? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	1/22 11:59 p.m.
Week 2			
Read: Ch 2 What is Death? What Does Death Mean?	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Paper 1 – Experiences with Death and Dying. Please see Blackboard for full assignment details.	Paper	10	1/30 11:59 p.m.
Week 3			
Read Ch 3 Denial or Adaptation: The Death System	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		

Discussion: Human sacrifice played a significant role in several ancient civilizations. Describe how and why human sacrifice was practiced in at least two ancient societies, explaining the religious beliefs, social structures, and political purposes behind these rituals. What functions did human sacrifice serve for the community, and how did these practices reflect broader ideas about power, the sacred, and the relationship between humans and the divine? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	2/5 11:59 p.m.
Week 4			
Read: Ch 4 Dying: Transition From Life	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Compare the findings of the Last Acts survey (2002) and the NIH report (2005) on care for terminally ill patients. Focus on how each study evaluated pain management, communication with patients and families, end-of-life decision-making, and overall quality of care. What similarities and differences stand out, and what do these reports suggest about ongoing problems or improvements in end-of-life care in the United States? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	2/12 11:59 p.m.
Week 5			
Read: Ch 5 Hospice and Palliative Care	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Based on hospice research, list in order of frequency the five most common responses hospice clients gave when asked how they wanted to spend their last three days of life. Briefly describe what these responses reveal about priorities at the end of life. Then reflect on your own preferences. If you could write the script for your final three days, what would matter most to you and why? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	2/19 11:59 p.m.
Week 6			
Read: Ch 6 End-Of-Life Issues and Decisions	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: Discuss the main findings from the University of Rochester study of college students in history of medicine and sociology courses. Summarize how students viewed illness, death, medical authority, and social responsibility. How did students' academic backgrounds influence their perspectives, and what does this suggest about the role of education in shaping how young adults understand health, medicine, and death? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	2/26 11:59 p.m.

Week 7			
The Midterm Exam will be available for download			2/25 8:00 am
Midterm Exam Due		20	3/2 11:59 pm
Read: Ch 7 Suicide			
Discussion: Compare and contrast the characteristics of youth suicide and elder suicide. Describe key research findings related to each group, including common risk factors, warning signs, methods, and social or psychological circumstances. Then analyze how the situations of younger and older individuals are similar and how they differ, paying particular attention to the roles of mental health, social isolation, physical illness, life transitions, and access to support. What do these comparisons reveal about how age and social context shape suicide risk? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	3/5 11:59 pm
Week 8 – SPRING BREAK			
Week 9			
Read: Ch 8 Violent Death: Murder, Terrorism, Genocide, Disaster, and Accident	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Video		
Discussion: What patterns appear across different cases of family violence involving spouses, parents, and children? Identify common social, psychological, and situational factors such as power, dependency, stress, mental illness, economic strain, caregiving burden, or prior violence. How do these patterns help explain why family relationships can become sites of extreme harm? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	3/19 11:59 pm
Week 10			
Read: Ch 9 Euthanasia, Assisted Death, Abortion, and the Right to Die	Reading		
Watch the video on Blackboard	Watch Video		
Read the article: http://all-that-is-interesting.com/double-euthanasia-nic-trees-elderhorst			
Discussion: Compare the cases of Karen Ann Quinlan and Nancy Cruzan. Describe their medical situations, the legal issues involved, and the role of family and the state in each case. What do these cases show about patient autonomy and decision-making at the end of life? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays		2.5	3/26 11:59 p.m.
Week 11			
Read: Ch 10 Death in the World of Childhood	Reading		

Paper 2 – Children often struggle to understand death due to their developmental stage, emotional vulnerability, and limited experience with loss. Provide five evidence-based guidelines that adults can use to address children’s concerns about death. For each guideline, clearly explain its purpose and importance, drawing on course concepts, research, or readings where appropriate. Then provide a concrete example illustrating how the guideline could be applied in a real-life situation, such as a conversation with a child, a classroom setting, or a family loss. In your essay, consider how factors such as age, culture, family beliefs, and the circumstances of the death shape how children respond and how adults should communicate with them.	Paper	10	4/3 11:59 p.m.
Week 12			
Read: Ch 11 Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning			
Discussion: Using the Hmong example discussed in the text, explain the process of mourning and the cultural meanings attached to death rituals. Describe the key features of traditional Hmong mourning practices and then compare them to how mourning may occur for Hmong families living in the United States. What changes have occurred due to migration, medical systems, and legal or social pressures, and how do these differences illustrate the challenges of maintaining cultural traditions around death in a new social environment? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Discussion	2.5	4/9 11:59 p.m.
Week 13			
Read: Ch 12 The Funeral Process	Reading		
<i>Watch the video on Blackboard</i>	Video		
Paper 3 – Disenfranchised Grief	Paper	10	4/17 11:59 pm
Week 14			
Read: Ch 13 Do We Survive 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: Interview three friends or peers by asking the following question: What are your beliefs about what happens after death? Record and summarize each person’s response, noting key themes, similarities, and differences. Then reflect on your own beliefs about the afterlife or what happens after death. Using concepts from the text, analyze how factors such as religion, culture, family background, socialization, and personal experience with death may shape these beliefs. How do your views compare with those of your friends, and why do you think these beliefs align or differ? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Read	2.5	4/23 11:59 pm

Week 15			
Forum Discussion: Using the text, identify and briefly explain two ways that people can help care for those who are dying. Then choose the one you think most people would find the hardest to do and explain why. Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays		2.5	4/30 11:59 pm
Week 16			
The final Project is available to work on	5/4		
Read: Ch 15 Good Life, Good Death? Trying to Make Sense of it All			
Forum Discussion: Kastenbaum wrote a personal statement describing the idea of moving from a “good life” to a “good death.” Drawing on this perspective, write your own personal statement reflecting on how the way you live your life now shapes the kind of death you would consider a good one. Describe the values, relationships, choices, or priorities that matter most to you, and explain what a “good death” would look like in your own terms. How do your beliefs about meaning, responsibility, and dignity influence both how you live and how you imagine the end of life? Respond to 2 classmates. All responses are due by 11:59 on Sundays	Read	2.5	5/7 11:59 pm
Last Day for all late work to be turned in for a diminished grade (Better than a 0)			5/8 11:59 pm
FINAL PROJECT DUE – Available on May 4th		20	5/11 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!