

SOCI 389

Death and Dying

Course Description:

(From UVIC Catalog): *“Sociological approaches to death and dying, emphasizing cross-cultural differences in the construction of the meaning of death and dying, the rituals accompanying these processes, and their legal, economic and political aspects. The course also focuses on how death is accounted for and processed by state and health agencies.”*

This course will examine the social process(es) of death and dying in contemporary society with specific attention paid to the current social context of the COVID-19 world health crisis. Students will explore the concept of death from a variety of theoretical and philosophical traditions in order to gain a specific understanding of the social weight placed on mortality and, as a result, may hopefully gain valuable insights into life as a social being. We will cover several areas specifically related to how different cultures and spiritual traditions approach the philosophy of death, as well as exploring the idea of death with a sociological lens. This will be a class where one may expect to explore the idea of death in a social way and we may together explore the narratives and ideas surrounding the end of life in our cultural contexts as well as in others.

Ultimately, the end of life is a deeply social component of our existence, where awareness of our own mortality colours our experience of everyday life in ways that are both implicit and explicit. This course will allow students to explore the deeper meanings of death and dying across cultures and within their own social contexts to strive at developing a more complete system of social knowing around death.

Course Evaluation:

Course evaluation will be assessed as follows:

10%	Participation and Discussion
60%	Plague Diaries (5x 12% each)
30%	Final Plague Diary Reflection

Department of Sociology

July-August, Summer, 2021
Mon/Wed: 6:00 –8:20 PM (PST)
Classroom: MacLaurin A144 (In-Person)

Instructor: Tucker Farris
Email: tfarris@uvic.ca
Phone: (250) 853-3774
Office: Cornett A351
Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday/Thursday
3:00-5:00 PM, or Friday by Appointment

Course Materials

All course readings will be provided digitally through Brightspace

Various additional resources may also be provided.

Teaching Assistants (TA):

Dyana Sonik-Henderson
dyanas@uvic.ca

Important Dates:

- Plague Diary 1: July 16th
- Plague Diary 2: July 23rd
- Plague Diary 3: July 30th
- Plague Diary 4: August 6th
- Plague Diary 5: August 13th
- Final Plague Diary Reflection: August 20th

Participation And Discussions:

Attendance in this course is mandatory and each time we meet, attendance will be taken via in-class responses to guiding questions. Participation takes many forms, from engaging in discussion, to asking questions, to silent participation. Whatever mode fits best with your learning style, just ensure you are in class and engaged in some way with the material.

However, since this is a time of unprecedented social reality, and there are far more barriers to coming to class now given the state of the world, students will be allowed one (1) excused absence from class, without question. I would only ask that if you know you will be missing a class, to please send me an email so that I may mark your attendance as excused. If there are extenuating circumstances beyond the excused absence, please reach out to me and we can work something out.

Plague Diaries (60% of Final Grade):

In this class we will be keeping ‘Plague Diaries’ which will have five required entries that will be due every other week this term. These diaries will sometimes have guided requirements (see Course Schedule for specifics) but will mostly be free-form responses to the week’s readings and lectures. Required diary entries will be between 400-600 words (with flexibility for going over the word count within reason) and will be submitted Each Friday, beginning week 2. Diaries will be turned in digitally on Brightspace by 11:59PM.

The purpose and theme of these diaries is mortality within a global pandemic. Students are encouraged to explore the concepts of death and dying with personal respect to their own conceptualization of their own mortality. It is strongly encouraged that students take the time in writing these diaries to closely examine and strive to understand their own thoughts, feelings, and sociological understandings about their own mortality. These plague diaries, in addition to gauging your engagement and understanding of the course readings will be a tool for you to begin to think about your own death, life and lifecourse sociologically. Students are encouraged to mirror the Dafoe reading in style and content, but with specific regard to their own unique social context in a global pandemic. The goal of this is to draw sociological parallels between how humans historically have conceptualized mass-scale global death and threats to mortality, and how our current society is engaging with similar realities.

Students are expected to cite readings and lectures in their diaries and to focus specifically on the personal sociological or philosophical implications and conclusions they draw from the readings. The key goal is to personally connect the sociological study of death to one’s personal experience of grappling with mortality.

It is highly encouraged for students to keep up their diary for EACH concept covered as a way of taking notes and retaining information. While they are free-form, diary entries must observe proper sociological and academic writing etiquette (complete sentences, citations and formal language). Diaries that use quoted or paraphrased material must cite that material in either APA or ASA citation style and include a reference page.

For convenience you will be asked to keep your entire plague diary in one document and upload the entire thing each week so that both you and the instructor can see how your ideas and interpretations are growing over the term. One reference page for the entire diary is acceptable.

Diaries will be assessed based on your use and reflections of the concepts, your applications/interpretations, and finally your own development of your own sociological and philosophical understanding of your own mortality in the context of the current social reality we inhabit. We will discuss this more in the intro class and I will provide you with more feedback on how to construct diaries after the first one has been submitted.

Since meditations on death are *deeply* subjective and there are no *true* correct answers, please use the diaries as an opportunity to explore, create, and investigate your own understanding of death and dying and what these universal social experiences mean for you personally. In the past, students have used these diaries as creative and cathartic spaces to grapple with personal issues sociologically.

You are strongly encouraged to be creative with these, and as a result, the assessment will reflect that creative nature. Diaries will be assessed primarily for adherence to academic formality, and the degree to which students are presenting *original* reflections on the course material. Students will be assessed on their ability to frame both course readings and their own observations on death in a sociological lens. Students should expect ~50% of their journal marks being devoted to how well the student follows instructions/formats and constructs their entry. This is referred to as the ‘professionalism’ aspect of the journal. The remaining 50% will be divided into 25% being reflective of the students’ application of course readings, and 25% being reflective of student’s original meditations on their own mortality, or mortality in general. The final 25% (the originality component) is the most difficult aspect of these assignments and students that earn good marks in this category will present plague diaries that offer carefully constructed insights that present new and *personal* reflections on the social aspects of death and dying.

These diaries, while having the formal requirements outlined above are free-form in construction, however students should attempt to have at least a central thesis statement or theme in each entry that they argue towards/support/explore.

More information on diary writing will be provided in the introductory lecture, as well as throughout the class. A grading rubric will be provided to students to aid in the construction of plague diaries.

Final Plague Diary Reflection (30% of Total Grade):

The final assignment for this course will be an in-depth bookend reflection piece exploring the entirety of the student's plague diary (comprising all 5 entries). The goal of this "final paper" will be to conduct a professional sociological exploration and commentary on the reflections students have composed throughout the course. Think of it as you are writing the first half of a final term paper in constructing the plague diaries, with the second half of the paper being the analytical explorative piece of the final reflection. Much in the way we interpret and ascribe sociological meaning to historical ideas of death in the course, this will be an opportunity for students to do so with their own work.

The final paper will be between 4-6 pages (excluding references), double spaced. You will be required to use at least 5 references from the class materials. All references must be cited in-text and in a references page following either APA or ASA citation styles.

In addition to the 6 required references, students may use references from outside of class if they choose to (or more supplemental sources from class. These external sources can be from a wide-variety of places, but peer-reviewed or otherwise academic sources are preferred. However, creative explorations of death will be considered acceptable for this course.

More information on the final reflection, including a guide to writing it, and a rubric for assessment will be supplied to students later in the course.

Course Experience Survey (CES)

Your feedback on this course is valued. Towards the end of the term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback regarding the course and the instructor's teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey, you will receive an e-mail inviting you to do so. If you do not receive an e-mail invitation, you can go directly to <http://ces.uvic.ca>. You will need to use your UVic Netlink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet or mobile device.

Please be thinking about this important activity, especially the following three questions, during the course.

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?
2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.
3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1 July 5th/7th	Day 1: Course Introduction Course Outline Group Discussion Guideline Construction Thinking Sociologically about death Day 2: What is death?	“The Promise” C. Wright Mills Dafoe “A Journal of the Plague Year” (further abbreviated as “Plague”) pp. 1-10 Pojman, “What is Death? The Crisis of Criteria” McMahan, sections I-III (pg. 91-113) of “The Metaphysics of Brain Death” Feldman, “The Enigma of Death”
Week 2 July 12 th /14 th	Day 1: Socially Surviving Death Diary 1 Due Day 2: Is Death Bad?	Feldman, “Death and the Disintegration of Personality” Foucault, Discipline and Punish Ch. 1 Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” & Nagel, “Death” Silverstein, “The Evil of Death” Agamben, “Homo Sacer” Ch.1 Plague 54-72
Week 3 July 19 th /21 st	Day 1: Social Life After Death Day:2 The Social Implications of Immortality-The Necessity of Death	Pitcher, “The Misfortunes of the Dead” Luper, “Posthumous Harm” Ismael, “The Ethical Importance of Death” Fischer, “Why Immortality is Not so Bad”

<p>Week 4 July 26th/July 28th</p> <p>Diary 3 Due</p>	<p>Day 1: Guest Lecture Topic (TBA)</p> <p>Day 2: What Makes a Death “Tragic” or “Heroic”</p>	<p>(Readings to be TBA after Consultation with TA)</p> <p>Harman, “Lamenting Non-Existence”</p> <p>Wiest, “Casting Cultural Monsters”</p>
<p>Week 5</p> <p>August 2nd/August 4th</p> <p>Diary 4 Due</p>	<p>Day 1: Pandemics and Death</p> <p>Day 2: Film Study Day</p>	<p>Taurek, “Do the Numbers Count?”</p> <p>Schonberg, “Righteous Dopefiend” (Excerpts)</p> <p>We will be watching the film “Lucky” in class-Snacks will (hopefully) be provided.</p>
<p>Week 6 Aug 9th/11th</p> <p>Diary 5 Due</p>	<p>Day 1: Knowing Our Own Mortality</p> <p>Day 2: Attachment, meaning and death</p> <p>Assisted Death and the Legal Aspects of Dying</p>	<p>Kagan, “Living in the Face of Dying”</p> <p>Goffman Chapter, Cox “Handbook of The Sociology of Death and Dying”</p> <p>Zonnebelt-Smeenge, “The Empty Chair”</p> <p>Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”</p> <p>Herchenov, “Misunderstanding the Moral Equivalence of Killing and Letting Die”</p>
<p>Week 6 Aug 16th/18th</p> <p>August 20th</p>	<p>No In-Person Class Required, Time off is for final assignment writing and office hours.</p> <p>Final Paper Due at Midnight</p>	<p>Idk-maybe we’ll do a pizza party this week sometime we shall see.</p>

Official Grading Standards

Undergraduate Records, University of Victoria, 2014

Passing Grade	Grade Point Value	Percentage	Description
A+	9	90 – 100	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
A	8	85 – 89	
A-	7	80 – 84	
B	6	77 – 79	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
+	5	73 – 76	
B	4	70 – 72	
B-			
C	3	65 – 69	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
+	2	60 – 64	
C			
D	1	50 – 59	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
COM	Excluded Grade		Complete (pass). Used only for 0-unit courses and those credit courses designated by the Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings.
Failing Grades	Grade Point Value	Percentage	Description
E	0	0-49	Conditional supplemental. Supplemental examinations are not offered by all departments and the allowable percentage may vary by program (e.g. 35-49). Students will be advised whether supplemental will be offered and if the percentage range varies when assessment techniques are announced at the beginning of the course.
F	0	0-49	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.
N	0	0-49	Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.
N/X	Excluded Grade		Did not complete course requirements by the end of the term; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages.
F/X	Excluded Grade		Unsatisfactory performance. Completed course requirements; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages.

University Course Policies

Examination and Assignment Policy

As per university policy, absence is only permitted in cases of illness, accident, family affliction, or religious obligations. Missing an exam for other reasons will result in an “F.” In cases of justified absences, the student has the right to request a make-up exam. Please note that exams will not be rescheduled to accommodate students’ personal circumstances, including travelling plans. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Grading

In accordance with Senate Regulations, grading on the curve is not permitted. The grades students receive in this course reflect their performance in relation to specified academic expectations. Students should retain a copy of all submitted assignments (in case of loss) and should retain all their marked assignments in case they wish to apply for a Review of Assigned Standings. Students have the right to view their marked examinations with their instructor, providing they apply to do so within a month of receiving their final grades. All exams remain the property of the University of Victoria.

Attendance

Attendance to all live sessions is mandatory. Students who are unavoidably absent because of illness, accident or family affliction should report to the instructor as soon as possible. Absences that cannot be justified in accordance with university policies will be subject to penalty at the discretion of the instructor.

Academic Integrity

The Department of Sociology fully and rigorously enforces the Senate Policy on Academic integrity. It is of utmost importance that students who do their work honestly be protected from those who do not. Because this policy is in place to ensure that students carry out and benefit from the learning activities assigned in each course, it is expected that students will cooperate in its implementation. Students caught cheating in the course will be expelled and reported to the Chair of the Department of Sociology and the Dean of Social Sciences for disciplinary action.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Students must note the statement on “Plagiarism” in the UVic Calendar, and all regulations under the “Policy on Academic Integrity.” Quotes and citations must be used for any material longer than 5 words in succession that is not the student’s original work.

Harassment

The Department of Sociology supports the University’s policies on harassment, and is committed to ensuring that all students, staff, and faculty are able to exercise fully their rights to participate in activities at the University without fear of harassment.

Accommodations

The University of Victoria accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let your instructor know in advance, preferably in the first week of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. As per university policy, students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with the instructor before the drop date.

Commitment to Inclusiveness and Diversity

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. The Department of Sociology is committed to inclusiveness and to a welcoming, friendly learning and working environment. We condemn sexism, ageism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia and inappropriate behaviour toward people with a disability.