Course Description

This course addresses sociological aspects of thanatology. We will analyze the social meaning of death and its normative treatment in western civilization, with a focus on the contemporary United States.

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

- Describe and discuss specific theoretical perspectives of thanatology.
- Describe and discuss significant social influences in the meaning given death.
- Describe and discuss social influences on the experience of dying and of grieving.
- Apply sociological theory to analyses of contemporary controversial issues such as physician-assisted suicide.

Weekly On-Line Reading and Discussion Post Assignments

All of the reading assignments are available on-line on the D2L Course Page under the Content tab. *It is necessary to keep up with the reading (and discussion post assignments) to succeed in the course.* There is a reading assignment for each week, due by the first day of class for that week. As part of the reading assignments, students are to submit a brief discussion post prior to the first class of the week. A second discussion post is due before the second class of the week. Guidelines for these posts are described below.

The purpose of the post assignments is two-fold: to demonstrate that the reading assignments have been done and to provide a forum for students to apply critical thinking to the topic at hand. The criteria for each of the two weekly posts are different. For the first post students are to select a direct quote—not already posted by another student—from the reading assignment (if there are two or more reading assignments, a direct quote must be included from each), along with student commentary on the quote. This *first post* will ideally be comprised of three to five sentences to include: 1) the quote itself, which may be part of a sentence or a whole sentence, but should be no longer than one sentence, and must include an author and page reference so the reader can easily find the quote; 2) the student’s reaction to the quote, indicating why it was chosen; and 3) student commentary that indicates that the student understands the quote in context, having read the whole article from which the quote was chosen.

The *second post* is due before the start of the second class meeting for the week. This post does not require a direct quote from the readings, but is instead to be a contribution to the ongoing online discussion. This second post needs to reflect the student’s engagement in the online discussion, including critical thinking applied to the discussion thread. The first and second responses must be at least 24 hours apart, allowing time for other students’ observations to be posted in between one’s own submissions. That is to say that the second submission is to take the
discussion that took place between their first and second submissions into account. The second post for the week may include observations, questions, suggestions and/or general feedback—the main criterion is that the post contribute to the ongoing discussion in a meaningful way, reflecting critical thought in response to the topic of the week. As with the first post for the week, the second post should be brief, in consideration to the other students, all of whom are required to read all of the week’s posts. The ideal post will be between two and five sentences long, not to exceed 100 words each. In-depth discussion is encouraged between students, students and the instructor, and in class meetings—the limits placed on the posts is to keep the workload manageable for all students while ensuring everyone has a voice in the on-line discussion. Hopefully, the on-line discussions will be thought-provoking and inspire ongoing conversation between students both in and outside of class.

Grading Criteria for Discussion Posts
The first weekly post will be worth up to 6 points and the second weekly post will be worth up to 4 points. Credit is earned by adhering to the assignment guidelines: using an original quotation in the case of the first weekly post, placing the quote in context sufficient to demonstrate that one has read the whole assignment, relevance of commentary in the case of the second weekly post that indicates that the other posts have been read; and the application of insight/critical thinking in all cases. The occasional misspelling and grammatical error will be overlooked, but points will be deducted if too little attention is given to the quality of one’s post. That is to say, that correct grammar and spelling are social courtesies writers extend to their readers, and reflect a level of self-respect the writer has for their own thinking and writing. Inattention to spelling and grammar (other than the occasional, minor error, of course) demonstrates a careless attitude toward one’s readers, and obvious disregard for or disinterest in the project at hand and those engaged in it. For this reason, significant lapses in attention to the quality of one’s contributions will result in the loss of points.

Late posts will not be accepted, as the timeliness of the online discussion is key. The discussion pages will be open for a limited time, closing at the beginning of each class period. Regular attention to the post assignments will contribute to more productive class meetings as students will come to class prepared to engage in the topic at hand.

The post assignments require an ongoing, timely, commitment to the class. At the same time, the instructor recognizes that unexpected events come up and there will be times when routines must be flexible. To accommodate for these times, the lowest two post scores will be dropped when points are added up at the end of the semester. There is no need to offer excuses for missed posts, as the unpredictable, uncontrollable events arise in everyone’s lives—the dropping of the two lowest post scores (up to ten points total) is designed to accommodate for these events. The curving of the final letter grades for the semester provides another assurance to students that the challenges of a full workload are equally manageable for all students.

In keeping with the same spirit, the instructor will make every effort to provide timely grading for weekly discussion posts, available to students via the online gradebook.

Exams

There will be two exams over the course of the semester: one midterm and a final exam. See the calendar below for these dates. If you have a conflict with an exam date, you are expected to speak with the instructor within the first six weeks of class. Make-up exams are only available by pre-approval.

Student Engagement in the Class
The “student engagement grade” is based on more than speaking in class. This grade will reflect the attention paid to lecture and class discussion. Surfing the web, checking email, texting, conversing with classmates other than in-class discussion, etc. are considered incompatible with engagement in class (as well as rude behavior), and will effect this grade. Because it is necessary to be present in order to be engaged in the class, attendance will be taken and considered in the “student engagement” grade. Attendance will be documented by “one minute papers” students are to submit at the end of each class. These are to be about a paragraph in length and will be based on a specific question asked at the end of the class each day. As a courtesy, please let the instructor know ahead of time if it is necessary to leave class early. Leaving class early constitutes an absence for the day.

**Communication with the Instructor**

*Students are expected to check both their individual CU email and the Desire2Learn course site a minimum of every two days, Monday through Friday.*

You may contact Dr. Li via email at: liane.gallegos@colorado.edu or by phone at: (303) 818 4839 (phone Dr. Li in case of emergency only please). No text messages please. The best time to reach her is during office hours (Mondays 11:00 - 1:00). She will make every attempt to respond to questions/messages within 48 hours Monday through Thursdays. Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and after 9 PM all other days are “off-line” times for Dr. Li when she will not be available.

**Technical Support Information**

This course includes embedded and streaming audio and video resources. Most modern browsers should be able to display this content. However, in some circumstances you may need to install the Flash or Quicktime media player (for example, there are known compatibility issues with Chrome). Should you have any difficulty accessing any of your course contents please contact the on-campus IT help line at 303-735-HELP (4357).

**Grading Criteria**

Letter grades are assigned only at the end of the semester as final grades for the course. Individual assignments and exams will receive points, as outlined below. The instructor reserves the right to apply a curve to the final grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Posts</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in the Class</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Letter grades will be determined by a curve of total accumulated points at the end of the semester. Individual assignments/exams will not be curved.
Dr. Li reserves the right to adjust the course calendar and will alert students if any changes are made. Reading assignments are due on the first day of the class each week. Beginning with the second week of class, the first discussion post is due by the first class meeting of the week and the second discussion post is due by the second class meeting of the week.

1  Week of January 11  Introduction
   Reading Assignment:
   - Tolstoy, “The Death of Ivan Ilych”

2  Week of January 18  The Changing Meaning of Death
   Reading Assignment:
   - Aries, “Western Attitudes toward Death”
   - Gorer, “The Pornography of Death”
   First post (include two direct quotes) due Jan 20
   Second post due Jan 22

3  Week of January 25  Socialization
   Reading Assignment:
   - Charmaz, “Death Conceptions and Concerns”
   First post due Jan 27
   Second post due Jan 29

4  Week of February 1  Dying in an Institution
   Reading Assignment:
   - Sudnow, “Preparation of the Corpse and Pre-Corpse”
   - Kubler-Ross, “Living Until Death: A Program of Service and Research for the Terminally Ill”
   First post (include 2 direct quotes) due Feb 3
   Second post due Feb 5

5  Week of February 8  Hospice
   Reading Assignment:
   - Kastenbaum, “Hospice and Palliative”
   - Hannon, “A Spreading Appreciation for the Benefits of Hospice Care”
   First post (include 3 direct quotes) due Feb 10
   Second post due Feb 12

6  Week of February 15  Funerals
   Reading Assignment:
   - Whalen, “How Different Religions Pay their Final Respects”
   - Mitford, “Fashions in Funerals”
   - Basler, “Green Graveyards—A Natural Way to Go”
   First post (include 3 direct quotes) due Feb 17
   Second post due Feb 19
7 Week of February 22    Funerals (cont’d) and Grief and Bereavement
Reading Assignment
- Rando, “The Increased Prevalence of Complicated Mourning”
- Charmaz, “The Social Psychology of Grief and Mourning”
First post (include 2 direct quotes) due Feb 24
Second post due Feb 26

8 Week of March 1    Grief and Bereavement (cont’d)
Reading Assignment
- Doka, “Disenfranchised Grief”
- Corr, “Enhancing the Concept of Disenfranchised Grief”
First post (include 2 direct quotes) due March 3
Second post due March 5

9 Week of March 8    Suicide
Reading Assignment
- Kastenbaum, “Suicide”
- Census Data re Suicide Rates by Age in the US
First post (include 3 direct quotes) due March 10
Second post due March 12

Midterm Exam    Thursday, March 12

10 Week of March 15    Suicide Prevention
Reading Assignment
- Murray, “A Search for Death: How the Internet is Used as a Suicide Cookbook”
- Franke, “When Students Kill Themselves, Colleges May Get the Blame”
- CU Suicide Prevention Information
First post (include 3 direct quotes) due March 17
Second post due March 19

Week of March 22    Spring Break    No Assignments

11 Week of March 29    The “Duty to Die” Debate
Reading Assignment
- Childress, “Priorities in the Allocation of Health Care and Health Care Resources”
- Brock, “How Much is More Life Worth?”
- Collection of Lamm articles
First post (include 3 direct quotes, one to encompass the Lamm articles) due March 31
Second post due April 2

12 Week of April 5    Medical Ethics: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide
Reading Assignment
- Shneidman, “Criteria for a Good Death”
- Orr and Meilander, “Ethics and Life’s Ending: An Exchange”
• Annual Report Oregon’s Physician-Assisted Suicide
  First post (include 3 direct quotes) due April 7
  Second post due April 9

13 Week of April 12  Terror Management Theory
  Reading Assignment
  • Becker, “The Terror of Death”
  First post due April 14
  Second post due April 16

14 Week of April 19  Sociological Analyses of Near-Death Experiences
  Reading Assignment
  • Betty, “Are They Hallucinations or Are They Real? The Spirituality of Death-bed and Near-Death Visions”
  • Rinpoche, “The Near-Death Experience: A Staircase to Heaven?”
  • Zaleski, “Evaluating Near-Death Testimony”
  First post (include 3 direct quotes) due April 21
  Second post due April 23

15 Week of April 26  Catch up; Synthesis  No New Reading Assigned

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 6 1:30 – 4:00 PM
Class Policies

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to be actively engaged in class. Students are asked to turn off the ringers on their cell phones prior to the beginning of each class and to refrain from texting and other on-line activities during class. Students do not have permission to record class lectures. Adherence to these policies will affect the class engagement portion of the grade. The “class engagement” grade will also reflect attentiveness in class, which in turn is dependent on attendance. Attendance will be taken daily via a “one minute paper” assigned at the end of each class in which students will be asked to respond to a different question each class period. Leaving class early constitutes an absence for the day.

University Policies

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Medical Conditions: Injuries, Surgeries, and Illnesses guidelines under Quick Links at Disability Services website and discuss your needs with your professor.

Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, {{insert your procedures here}} See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Code of Conduct

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Honor Code

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://honorcode.colorado.edu
Honor Code: “On my honor, as a University of Colorado at Boulder student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this work.”