**ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE**

**Social Sciences Division**

**SOC 207 *–* Understanding Death and Dying**

**Course Outline**

**Course Number & Name:**  SOC 207 Understanding Death and Dying

**Credit Hours:**  3.0 **Contact Hours:**  3.0 **Lecture:** 3.0 **Lab:**  N/A **Other:**  N/A

**Prerequisites**:  Grade of “C” or better in SOC 101 or permission from the instructor

**Co-requisites:** None **Concurrent Courses:** None

**Course Outline Revision Date:**  Fall 2010

**Course Description**: This course takes a close look at aspects of the dying process in such situations as murder, suicide, capital punishment, and grief. It examines the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the dying and those affected by death so that the student can gain greater insight into the subtle relationships these factors have with each other and with death. This course is designed for all students seeking better understanding of death and the process of bereavement in contemporary society and other cultures across the world.

**General Education Goals**: SOC 207 is affirmed in the following General Education Foundation Category: **Global and Cultural Awareness of Diversity**. The corresponding General Education Goal is as follows: Students will understand the importance of global perspective and culturally diverse peoples.

**Course Goals:** Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts and sociological theories of society and culture relative to death and dying;
2. explain society and human behavior by applying various sociological concepts;
3. identify and describe historical death rituals and contemporary rituals in cultures across the world;
4. identify and describe health care institutions and various treatments for the terminally ill;
5. discuss the laws, ethical issues and current end-of-life decisions concerning death and dying practices;
6. identify and discuss various models of grief, bereavement, and mourning; and
7. discuss different religions and their views about the afterlife, body disposition, immortality and funerals.

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)**: Upon successful completion of this course, students should specifically be able to do the following:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts and sociological theories of society and culture relative to death and dying:

* 1. *explain the structural functionalist approach;*
  2. *explain the symbolic interactionist approach;* and
  3. *explain the social learning approach*

1. Explain society and human behavior by applying various sociological concepts:
   1. *discuss the influence of family socialization on death attitudes;*
   2. *discuss the influence of social and religious institutions on human behavior*; and
   3. *discuss the influence of cultural beliefs and practices on death views*

3. Identify and describe historical death rituals and contemporary rituals in cultures across the world:

3.1 *explain death rituals of cultures in countries such as Africa, Asia, Egypt, Europe, South America,*

*and the United States;* and

3.2 *examine the similarities and differences of death rituals among the various cultural groups*

4. Identify and describe health care institutions and various treatments for the terminally ill:

4.1 *compare the different functions of hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, and other health care providers in caring for the dying;*

4.2 *explain the various treatment options (e.g., surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, palliative care, and other alternative therapies) for treating the terminally ill*; and

4.3 *discuss the terminally ill patient’s role in coping with illness*

1. Discuss the laws, ethical issues and current end-of-life decisions concerning death and dying practices:

5.1 *explain the legal issues regarding wills, informed consent, advance directives, probate,*

*insurance, etc.;*

5.2 *discuss medical ethics in the United States regarding end-of-life decisions, e.g., suicide,*

*euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, etc.;* and

5.3 *examine the ethical controversies pertaining to end-of-life decisions*

6. Identify and discuss various models of grief, bereavement, and mourning:

6.1 *define grief, bereavement, and mourning*

6.2 *identify and* *explain theoretical models of grief;* and

6.3 *identify and explain theoretical models of bereavement*

7. Discuss different religions and their views about the afterlife, body disposition, immortality and funerals:

7.1 *compare and contrast major religious (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism) views regarding beliefs, the afterlife, body disposition and funeral practices;*

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** (continued):

7.2 *describe funeral practices in the United States and the laws regulating body disposition (ground*

*burial, cremation, etc.);* and

7.3 *compare and contrast contemporary burial customs with ancient burial customs*

**Methods of Instruction**: Instruction consists of lectures, videos/CDs, guest lecturers, class discussions, and oral presentations.

**Outcomes Assessment:** Exam questions are blueprinted to course objectives. Rubrics are used to evaluate the research paper for the presence of course objectives. Data is collected and analyzed to determine the level of student performance on these assessment instruments in regards to meeting course objectives.  The results of this data analysis are used to guide necessary pedagogical and/or curricular revisions.

**Course Requirements:** All students are required to:

1. Read all assigned readings in the textbook.
2. Share relevant experiences with the class by participating in classroom discussions.
3. Complete all assignments on time.
4. Take exams as scheduled and submit all research papers and reports.

**Methods of Evaluation:** Final course grades will be computed as follows:

**% of**

**Grading Components final course grade**

* **Attendance/Class Participation 5%**

Attendance points will be computed based on the ratio of the number of days attending the course during a regular semester (i.e., 28 contact days). A similar procedure will be used to determine participation points.

* **Research Paper 25%**

This research project requires students to use scholarly journals as sources and ASA formatting to present a professional research paper. The papers are evaluated using a rubric for the presence of course objectives.

* **3 or more Exams**   **70%**

The exams will provide evidence of the extent to which students grasp and synthesize the sociological concepts, methods, and theories and have achieved course objectives.

**Academic Integrity:** Dishonesty disrupts the search for truth that is inherent in the learning process and so devalues the purpose and the mission of the College.  Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

* plagiarism – the failure to acknowledge another writer’s words or ideas or to give proper credit to sources of information;
* cheating – knowingly obtaining or giving unauthorized information on any test/exam or any other academic assignment;
* interference – any interruption of the academic process that prevents others from the proper engagement in learning or teaching; and
* fraud – any act or instance of willful deceit or trickery.

Violations of academic integrity will be dealt with by imposing appropriate sanctions.  Sanctions for acts of academic dishonesty could include the resubmission of an assignment, failure of the test/exam, failure in the course, probation, suspension from the College, and even expulsion from the College.

**Student Code of Conduct:** All students are expected to conduct themselves as responsible and considerate adults who respect the rights of others. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. All students are also expected to attend and be on time all class meetings. No cell phones or similar electronic devices are permitted in class. Please refer to the Essex County College student handbook, *Lifeline*, for more specific information about the College’s Code of Conduct and attendance requirements.

**Course Content Outline:** based on the following texts: The Last Dance (Encountering Death and Dying)

8th edition, by Lynn Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland. McGraw Hill, 2009. Note: It is the instructor’s discretion to recommend other references, as appropriate (e.g., student handbooks, textbooks, resources pertaining to the studies in death and dying).

**Units Topics/ Areas**

1 Introduction – Issues of Death and Dying: The study of death or thanatology, history of death studies, and pioneers of death education

2 Sociological Theories Relative to Death and Dying: Structural functionalist approach, symbolic interactionalist approach, and social learning approach

3 Societal Factors that Influence Human Behavior: Family socialization, cultural beliefs/practices, and social and religious affiliations

4 Ancient Historical and Contemporary Death Rituals Across the World: Case studies of death customs across the world, western culture, and traditional culture

5 Health Care System Providers: Institutional care of terminally ill patients in hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice care; and treatment for the terminally ill

6 Ethical Issues of Death and Dying: Principles of medical ethics and patient rights regarding treatment, wills, insurance, probate, and inheritance

7 Religious Beliefs and Practices Influence on: Meaning of life and death, belief in the afterlife, body disposition, and funeral ceremony and burial practices

8 Survivors’ Reaction to Loss: Bereavement, grief, and mourning experienced by survivors of loved ones

9 Funerals and Body Disposition: Last rites, funeral costs, ceremonies, body disposition, and burial; and laws regulating body disposition

**Note**: In SOC 207, the instructor must cover (at a minimum) the 9 units listed above in any reasonable order throughout the duration of the semester/term. Also, the instructor may include additional areas based on his/her expertise and/or interest.