

SYLLABUS: SOCL 4353
The Sociology of Aging, Death and Dying
Spring 2026
Mon/Wed. 11:00-12:20

Professor: Dr. Beverly L. Stiles

OFFICE: O'Donohoe 124

OFFICE HOURS:

Mon. 11:00 to 12:00

Tues. 9:30 to 11:00

Wed. 11:00 to 12:00

Thurs. 9:30 to 11:00

Friday: By appointment

While I hold regular office hours, I am available to you outside of these times. However, it is best if you make an appointment to see me so that I am free when you stop by. If you do not have an appointment and I am free, I am more than willing to make some time to see you. However, if you just stop by, there will be times when I am unavailable or may be with another student. Do not take this personally

PHONE: 397-4019

EMAIL: Beverly.stiles@msutexas.edu

TEXTS (5): Tuesdays With Morrie by Mitch Albom; Stiff by Mary Roach; Being Mortal by Atul Gawande; Chasing Daylight by Eugene O'Kelly; Dying, Death; and Wisdom in an Age of Denial: With the End in Mind by Kathryn Mannix.

There will be other chapters from other books that I'll provide to you.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To provide students with a sociological understanding of the subject matter of death and dying.
- To provide students with awareness of support systems, ways of helping others deal with death, while recognizing how our society often hides death and grief.
- To encourage student awareness and understanding of death, aging, loss, and grief and how it affects families and communities.
- To encourage lifelong learning regarding living, dying, and death.
- Provide students with practical and useful information regarding legal issues, funeral preparation and information, hospital and hospice care, care for aging family members, and care for those with special challenges such as Alzheimer's.

This course is designed to be an in-depth examination of the sociology of aging, death, and dying. We will discuss historical, cultural, social, medical, moral, and legal issues regarding aging and dying and issues surrounding death. Topics include aging and health, the elderly and health care including

nursing homes and assisted living, major causes of death, suicide, Alzheimer's disease, hospice care, the funeral industry, end-of-life issues, the death with dignity movement, children and death, and grief. We will also look at innovative and positive approaches to improving conditions surrounding aging and dying. Please note that I use a significant number of videos and documentaries in this course, about 8 or 9. To me, they are essential to learning in this class. If you do not like a lot of videos, you might reconsider the class.

This is an emotional topic. Sociology takes death out of the closet, and it can be difficult. Please be supportive of others and respect everyone's privacy. The personal things we may discuss may not be discussed outside of class. If you have had recent losses, please think hard about it before taking this course. We will visit Hospice of Wichita Falls and Lunn's Colonial Funeral Home.

READING HINTS:

A good textbook does not ensure learning. Textbooks must be used properly. I have found over the years that many students simply do not know how to use a textbook, so I am providing, as a part of this syllabus, some suggestions for reading your text.

- The first rule is to begin reading immediately, don't postpone.
- Secondly, realize that reading a textbook is different than reading a newspaper, a magazine, a novel, or something on your electronic devices. Much of the latter is written to give you information quickly and at a glance and to entertain. A textbook is designed to instruct, to develop a position, and to support that position. It demands far more from its readers than all of the latter. While newspapers, magazines, novels, and the like are designed to be read only once, the author of a textbook expects that several readings may be required to fully understand the material. So, allow enough time to read the material several times. **One** strategy is to quickly read the material and grasp the general organization and major points, then carefully read a second time, making reading notes, and then reread quickly one more time immediately before an exam. The third time you should be able to quickly read some passages while concentrating on the more difficult ones. This strategy will also give you a good feeling for how the author writes and organizes material.
- Keep reading.....even if you reach a passage or even pages that you find difficult and that you do not understand. At least read the words. You will find that while you may not understand one point, the next point may be considerably easier and you may understand it quite well.
- Make a schedule for reading and don't deviate from it. Set a date to complete your first reading, second, and third. Schedule yourself for only a few pages at any one session.
- Underline and circle words. Mark and write in the margins. The beauty of a loose leaf textbook is that if you can put your text in a notebook, you can three hole punch and add additional pages with your study notes and even notes from class. All in one tidy package!

ATTENDANCE:

You'll find a high correlation between attendance and class grade! Your class grade is comprised of quizzes, papers, trips to funeral home and hospice, speakers and a journal. You will not be passing this class if you miss much class at all.

YOU WILL BE DROPPED IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN 2 (Two) UNEXCUSED ABSENCES. I may drop a student for excessive excused absences as well, at my discretion. If your combined excused and unexcused absences add up to more than 4 (four) absences, I will deduct 5 points from your final grade for each additional absence.

An absence is considered officially excused ONLY if a student:

- Presents a written excuse from a physician, or MSU infirmary

- Presents written evidence of attending a mandatory university function (band, choir, sports, etc.)
- Presents a written excuse from a physician for a dependent child's illness, or
- Has a death in his/her immediate family (need proof)

GRADING and REQUIREMENTS:

This course is set up differently from any other class I teach, due to the nature of the course. There are no actual exams in this course. This course is comprised of a total of 400 points. Points are earned from quizzes, speakers, videos, funeral home visit (maybe, if permitted later in the semester), hospice visit (maybe if permitted later in the semester), papers (obituary, ethical will) and a journal/notebook. I will have you place everything in your journal for you to keep. Other items such as a "bucket list," an Advanced Directive, etc. will be contained in your journal. Some papers will be comprised of summaries/notes and short presentations over some of the book chapters, as well as reaction papers. Quizzes will come from readings, class notes, speakers, videos, and presentations at Hospice, the crematorium and the Lunn's Funeral Home presentation (maybe if we are approved). Instructions for the journal will be given in a separate handout. You will be required to keep graded papers and other material in this journal for turn-in at the end of the semester.

You must attend class because I will be giving assignments on a week to week basis, since there are no exams and I'm working everything around when speakers can come to class.

Quiz points, will include "some" summaries (and presentations) and some attendance = 320

The following will total 80 points:

5 reaction papers from speakers and in-class videos, (turn in through d2l, but put a copy in your journal as well) 6 points each = 30

Movie paper---I have a handout of the things you will cover = 20

Obituary = 5

Ethical Will = 10

Journal/notebook turn-in at the end of the semester (the last day of classes) = 15

You will include a copy of your ethical will

Your obituary

You will include your thoughtful bucket list

You will include the survey on death

You will include an Advanced Directive (Can Obtain from any hospital)

You will include a copy of each of your Reaction Papers.

You will include handouts given by speakers.

You will include notes from the speakers in your journal as well.

I will deduct points for things not included. In fact, I'll deduct 5 points for each item missing.

There may be other items as well.

Grades will be determined by the following scale:

A = 360-400

B = 320-359

C = 280-319

D = 240-279

F = below 240

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Office of Disability Accommodation. The telephone number is 397-4618.

TOPICS

QUIZ POINTS	Topics
First 100 quiz points accrued by around the end of Feb.	<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i> , Being Mortal (by Atul Gawande), and other readings distributed by instructor. Aging and Dying, The new geriatric Society, problems in caring for the elderly including nursing homes and assisted living. Adult protective services.
Second 100 quiz points by around the end of March.	Stiff by Mary Roach, and the remaining chapters from Being Mortal. Part of Kathryn Mannix's book. Causes of death including cancer, heart disease, etc. Medical establishment treatment of aging and death. Medical accidents. We'll read <i>With the End in Mind</i> throughout the semester, section by section as I am able to fit it in. Lecture over grief
Remaining quiz and other points by end of semester.	<i>Chasing Daylight</i> book and remainder of Kathryn Mannix book (<i>With the End in Mind</i>). There may be a chapter(s) due from other books, but I'll decide that as we get closer to the end of the semester---If so, I'll make that available to you, so you do not have to purchase it. Alzheimer's speakers, funeral home visit, will t cover suicide and Accidents Legal issues and death, preparation for death (maybe Hospice here). The funeral industry. The grieving process. Children and death. The right to die movement. Oregon's (and other states) right to Die law. What the future may hold

Movie Paper is due April 9th before 11:00 am. I don't want anyone staying home to work on this paper, so it's due before class starts.

Notebook is due May 7th in class. This is the last Thursday of classes, but I will not give you a grade for the notebook until you stop by to pick it up (I do not want to keep these journals).

A few additional rules: This classroom is a cell phone free environment. Please turn off your phones and put them away while in class. Come to class on time; it is your job to come to class on time. If you come in after I have checked roll, you will be considered absent. You may be dropped from class if you frequently come in late. Do not chatter with your neighbor during class or during speakers or videos. You may not bring food or drink into class. There will be no phones on your desk, in your lap, and no reaching to check it when speakers are here. Please be respectful.