



SOCIOLOGY 300:

# THE SOCIOLOGY OF BIRTH AND DEATH



Sample Syllabus Incorporating Dialogue:

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## PURPOSE:

This syllabus serves as an example of how to incorporate dialogue into a course through syllabus design. The dialogue-related pieces are highlighted with a dotted box..

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Teachers can use this syllabus as a guide or resource for their own subjects.

## ADAPTATIONS AND VARIATIONS:

A professor can adapt this syllabus in infinite ways. Feel free to use this as a guide and adapt in whatever way best fits your pedagogical style and classroom.

## NOTE ON RESOURCE:

For the mechanics of how to guide and lead a dialogue or dialogical discussion, see [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#) (link to resource)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

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One of the few common denominators among human beings is that each of us was born into this world and each of us will die. These two constants exist in an otherwise rapidly changing world. Both of these events are defined as "natural" but are conditioned by social and cultural forces. We will attend to these forces and consider the way in which these two events have been transformed by history and technology. This course will place its greatest emphasis on the socialization of nature. We will explore cross-cultural expressions, the changes in medicine, dynamics of class, gender and power; the cultural mores regarding birth and death; and the rituals which surround these fundamental transitions. As we examine each event we will be looking at how society supports, controls, and constrains our arrival into and departure from the social world.

## INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. Harriett E. Hayes

## CLASS TIME & LOCATION:

T & TR - 8:00am-9:15am  
Bowman 301

## OFFICE HOURS:

Monday, Wednesday & Friday 8:00-10:00am  
or by appointment  
Dialogue Hall 212

## PHONE: (O) x 5654

(H) 000-000-0000 Please do not call after 9pm

## EMAIL: ProfEssential@\_\_\_\_.edu

You are always welcome to stop by any time my door is open.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

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- Students will examine the ways in which birth and death have been transformed by history and technology.
- Students will be able to illustrate how the socialization of nature has impacted birth and death.
- Students will be able to demonstrate cross-cultural expressions, the changes in medicine, dynamics of class, gender and power; the cultural mores regarding birth and death; and the rituals which surround the fundamental transitions.
- Students will be able to analyze how society supports, controls, and constrains our arrival into and departure from the social world.





## INTERFAITH STUDIES:

This course is one of a group of courses at \_\_\_\_\_ College that, in addition to their main (or other) focuses, teach students how interfaith cooperation and understanding overlap with their academic and professional goals. You will study, or directly engage in, interactions among people of different faith traditions or non-religious traditions, analyzing causes, processes, and goals of such interactions and focusing on what each person and tradition can contribute to peaceful coexistence. In the end, the goal is to enable you to recognize, appreciate, and communicate with religious, agnostic, and atheistic people. Some of the skills taught in these courses are: interfaith literacy, story-telling/telling your faith story, active listening, perspective-taking, interfaith dialogue, public deliberation, role playing, applied learning, local community interfaith engagement, and activism/advocacy skills. Other courses with strong interfaith components include Introduction to Interfaith Studies, Civil Rights and Liberties, Christian Perspectives on Violence and Peace, Methods of Acting, Acting Styles and Techniques, Neuroethics, Personal and Community Health.

## COURSE DESIGN

This is a course that is at once academic and personal. We will be dealing with some of the basic stuff of life.

DIALOGUE  
RELATED

*Consequently, successful discussions in this class will depend on each of us being open-minded, sensitive to others, and respectful of everyone's beliefs, values and positions. This does not mean that we will avoid critical reflection. We will always depend on our critical insights. But we can only do so by respecting others, trusting that we will be listened to, and accepting that each of us is on a different life journey.*

## READINGS

Readings are a vital part of this class. You are expected to have completed the reading assignments for any given day before the class session. You will not be prepared to participate in class if you have not done the readings. Furthermore, both my lectures and our in-class dialogues will assume your preparation outside of class has given you a basic understanding of the material and we will not necessarily cover a chapter in its entirety. Simply put, you are responsible for the readings even if we do not discuss them in class.

## ATTENDANCE

Attendance will be taken at each class as required by the College. Your attendance at class is the only way to ensure that you understand the material accurately and fully. Absenteeism will be factored into your final grade. A semester grade of "F" or "I" is the only grades possible after 6 absences, regardless of reason. Simply coming to class, however, does not fulfill the participation portion of your grade.

## PARTICIPATION AND CLASS DYNAMICS

Given the size of our class, we should be able to have lively discussions mixed with the occasional lecture. You are expected to be prepared to discuss the material in class, and should enter discussions freely. An excellent way to meet this goal is to come to class prepared with a question or comment that you've developed from your readings. Consequently, seminar commentaries will be required, and expectations for these are outlined under the evaluation section of the syllabus.





DIALOGUE  
RELATED

*During this class will we routinely work on our Academic Citizenship skills – civil discourse (generously giving each other respect), perspective taking (being genuinely curious about another’s worldview or lived experience), public reasoning (working collaboratively as we engage difficult topics) and self-authorship (finding your own voice and convictions along the journey). We will do our best to “speak to be understood and listen to understand.”*

## ACADEMIC HONESTY:

You have each signed the honor code statement and it is expected that you will internalize and abide by this norm. Cheating and plagiarism are taboo and are considered “serious offenses which can result in dismissal from \_\_\_\_\_ College.” [see your Student Handbook p. 32] Violations will be treated seriously and swiftly, and will be immediately referred to the Honor Council. Come see me if you are in difficulty.

## ACCOMMODATIONS:

\_\_\_\_\_ College is committed to providing all students equal access to the college’s academic programs and activities. Students who have a condition, temporary or permanent, (attention, learning, visual, hearing, physical, psychological or medical), that impacts learning and for which an accommodation may be desired are encouraged to contact the Director of Academic Support, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* or [insert email] to work out accommodation strategies. A letter is required from the Academic Support office, each semester, in order to receive accommodations at \_\_\_\_\_. Assistance can also be provided for temporary needs, such as concussion, surgery, injury, etc.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT:

\_\_\_\_\_ College prohibits sexual harassment, including sexual violence. Under our school policies and procedures, I am a “responsible employee”. That means that I am someone who is required to pass on to the school’s Title IX Coordinator any instances of sexual misconduct that I see or hear about, including things that you may tell me.

The policy is written to ensure that \_\_\_\_\_ College provides a safe environment for everyone and to make sure that we help people who have been subjected to these behaviors. I am a resource for you but I want to know that if you tell me about something that happened to you or someone else, I will keep the information private, but I can’t keep it confidential because I am required to report it to the Title IX Coordinator.

If you want to talk with someone who can keep it confidential, these are the people you can contact:

Counseling Services (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* - [insert name]

Health Services (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* - [insert name]

Chaplain (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* - [insert name]

For more information on the sexual misconduct policy at \_\_\_\_\_ College, please refer to [insert link] or Student Handbook.

## EXPECTATIONS:

My expectation is that by enrolling in this class, you have agreed to abide by the above ground rules for the course. As a college student, I expect that you are assuming adult responsibilities for your own education. This includes meeting deadlines or making special arrangements with me in advance if you need an extension. (Late work, without prior approval, will not be accepted.) If you are confused or unclear at any time, ask for clarification. This is your education and you must take the initiative in making it work for you. My role as your instructor is to support and facilitate you in this process.

It is only fair that if I have expectations of you, that you will have certain expectations of me. In my role as instructor, I will provide you with timely and meaningful feedback of your work. I will be regularly available to discuss the material, sociology in general, or any other matters with you.

I also appreciate constructive feedback, so if you have concerns or suggestions that you feel would improve the learning experience in our class, please do not hesitate to speak with me. My office hours are listed on the first page of the syllabus, or you may call to schedule an appointment. I look forward to meeting each of you and getting to know you individually. You are welcome to talk with me at any time (during office hours or by appointment) if you have questions about the material, your written work, or other concerns.





# EVALUATION:

**4 REACTION PAPERS:** 5 double spaced typed pages.  
[4 X 100 points each. = Total 400 points].

I will provide you with guiding questions for each paper (prompts are posted on Canvas). Success on these reaction papers will depend upon your ability to combine textual analysis, personal insights, and a continuing synthesis of our course discussions.

**FINAL EXAM:** [100 points.] An in class essay, that will be based on an integrative question that you will be given prior to the exam date.

**SEMINAR COMMENTARIES:** Credit for participation will be based on your active involvement in the class discussion. You will earn these points by submitting TEN seminar commentaries during the semester. Commentaries are due during the class discussion of a particular article. [10 x 10 points = 100 points]. However, you are welcome to turn in more, and I will record your top 10 submissions.

Guidelines and a commentary sheet for developing seminar questions are attached at the end of the syllabus. Your commentaries need to address the primary scholarly readings. While you may draw connections to the other readings, such as the NPR radio transcripts or NY Times articles, you may not use the transcripts as the central focus of your commentary. The commentary worksheet appears on the class Canvas page so that you can easily prepare your questions and comments. Seminar Commentaries should always be turned in on Canvas prior to the beginning of class.

**DIALOGUE SCRIBE:** During our seminar discussions, one class member will serve as the scribe. The role of the scribe serves two specific purposes: 1) to help each class member improve their note taking skills during the seminar. 2) to have one person at the end of the class session offer the full group a summary of the discussion thread or the key "take-aways" that each member should carry from the day's dialogue. [25 points]

DIALOGUE  
RELATED



**4 REACTION PAPERS**  
4 x 100 points = 400 points



**FINAL EXAM**  
100 points



**DIALOGUE SCRIBE**  
25 points



**10 COMMENTARIES**  
10 X 10 points = 100 points

**TOTAL POINTS AVAILABLE = 625**

A	=	581 - 625
A-	=	562. - 580.55
B+	=	550 - 562
B	=	518.5 - 549.5
B-	=	500 - 518
C+	=	487.5 - 499.5
C	=	456 - 487
C-	=	437.5 - 455.5
D+	=	425 - 437
D	=	393.5 - 424.5
D-	=	375 - 393
F	=	0 - 374

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

Davis-Floyd, Robbie. Ways of Knowing About Birth: Selected Writings by Robbie Davis Floyd [WKB]. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 202018. ISBN: 978-1-4786-3362-4

Irish et. al., editors. Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief [EVDG]. Washington D.C.: Taylor and Francis Inc., 1993. ISBN: 1560322780

Kalanithi, Paul. When Breath Becomes Air. London: Penguin Random House, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-784-70199-4

### IN ADDITION:

You will be asked to routinely access articles and material found on Moodle or the World Wide Web.

### SUPPLIES:

N/a



# READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS



## Week 1

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T. 1/9	Introduction to Course	
TH. 1/11	Dimensions of Death: (selected articles from Part 1 of Death: Current Perspectives including Kastenbaum, Weisman, Gorer and Kears) [On Canvas]	ON MOODLE (pp. 9-30)

### INTRODUCTION TO OUR IDEAS ABOUT DEATH:

Tell a story of the first time you remember personifying death.

What was the image you recall and where do you think this image came from?

## Week 2

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T. 1/16	Conceptualizations of Death: Robben [On Canvas]	pp. 19-39
TH. 1/18	Historical Perspectives on Death: Robben [On Canvas] <a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980125.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980125.death.html</a>	pp. 40-61

## Week 3

### Cross-Cultural Experiences with Death

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T. 1/23	"Kinds of Death and the House" Maria Catedra in Robben [On Canvas]	pp. 77-90
	"Mexican American Perspectives Related to Death" <a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971114.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971114.death.html</a>	pp. 67-77
TH. 1/25	To Honor the Dead and Comfort the Mourners: Traditions in Judaism [EVDG]	pp. 113-123
	Islamic Customs Regarding Death [EVDG] <a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980308.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980308.death.html</a>	pp. 137-144
F. 1/26	Reflection Paper #1 Due	

## Week 4

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T. 1/30	Death and Dying in Buddhism [EVDG]	pp. 125-135
	Hmong Death Customs: Traditional and Acculturated [EVDG] <a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980110.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980110.death.html</a>	pp. 79-99
TH. 2/1	Native Americans: Adapting, Yet Retaining [EVDG]	pp. 101-111
	"The Meaning of Death in Northern Cheyenne Culture" Anne Straus in Robben. [on Canvas]	pp. 71-76

## Week 5

### The Diversity of American Funerals

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T. 2/6	Mourning and Funeral Customs of African Americans [EVDG] <a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980402.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980402.death.html</a>	pp. 51-65
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TH. 2/8	<p>"The American Way of Death"</p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980310.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980310.death.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980203.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980203.death.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971208.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971208.death.html</a></p>	pp. 163-168
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#### AMERICAN FUNERARY RITUALS:

Tell a story of how you would want to honor a loved one at the time of their death.  
 Tell a story about how you would want to be honored at the time of your death.  
 Where do you see commonalities and tensions between these two stories?

#### Week 6 Dying in Various Settings

T. 2/13	<p>"The Ritual Drama of Mutual Pretense" [On Canvas]</p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980104.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980104.death.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980211.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/980211.death.html</a></p>	pp. 118-129
TH. 2/15	<p>"Social Death and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Sudnow Revisited" [On Canvas]</p>	pp. 453-472
F. 2/16	<p>"Displacing Suffering" Lock in Robben [On Canvas]</p> <p>Reflection Paper #2 Due</p>	pp. 91-107

#### Week 7 Dying in Various Settings

T. 2/20	Kalanithi, <u>When Breath Becomes Air</u> , Prologue through Part 1,	pp. 3-117
TH. 2/22	Kalanithi, <u>When Breath Becomes Air</u> , Part 2-Epilogue.	pp. 117-227

#### Week 8 Dying in Various Settings ~ Grief and Bereavement

T. 2/27	<p>"One Man's Quest to Change the Way We Die," by Jon Mooallem</p> <p><a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/03/magazine/one-mans-quest-to-change-the-way-we-die.html?_r=0">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/03/magazine/one-mans-quest-to-change-the-way-we-die.html?_r=0</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971211.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971211.death.html</a></p> <p>Unequal Lives, Unequal Deaths New York Times</p> <p><a href="http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/dying-at-home-when-youre-poor/?ref=topics&amp;_r=0">http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/dying-at-home-when-youre-poor/?ref=topics&amp;_r=0</a></p>	
TH. 3/1	<p>"Disenfranchised Grief" ON MOODLE</p> <p>A Father, a Dying Son, and the Quest to Make the Most Profound Videogame Ever:</p> <p><a href="http://www.wired.com/2016/01/that-dragon-cancer/">http://www.wired.com/2016/01/that-dragon-cancer/</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971125.death.html">http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971125.death.html</a></p> <p>My Marriage Didn't End When I Became a Widow.</p> <p><a href="http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/my-marriage-didnt-end-when-i-became-a-widow/">http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/my-marriage-didnt-end-when-i-became-a-widow/</a></p>	pp. 202-215

SPRING BREAK





## Week 9 Grief and Bereavement

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| T. 3/13 | "Grief and the Head Hunters Rage" in Robben [On Canvas]<br>"Death Without Weeping" in Robben [On Canvas] | pp. 167-178<br>pp. 179-193 |
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### GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT:

Tell a story of a time when you were angry.

What did you most need or value in that moment?

If you were able to return to that moment, what concrete actions do you wish you had taken or do you others had taken?

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| TH. 3/15 | State Terror in the Netherworld" Robben in Robben [On Canvas]<br>Reflection Paper #3 Due | pp. 134-148 |
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### MEMORIES, MEMORIALS AND NATIONAL MONUMENTS:

## Week 10 A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction

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| T. 3/20 | Martin: Woman in the Body: Chapters 1 & 2<br>"America's Shocking Maternal Deaths"<br><a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/04/opinion/sunday/american-shocking-maternal-deaths.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/04/opinion/sunday/american-shocking-maternal-deaths.html</a> | pp. 1-25 |
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| R. 3/22 | Davis-Floyd: Chapter 1 - The Technocratic, Humanistic, and Holistic Paradigms of Birth and Health Care | pp. 3-43 |
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## Week 11

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| T. 3/27 | Davis-Floyd: Chapter 2 - The Rituals of Hospital Birth: Enacting and Transmitting the Technocratic Model | pp. 45-70 |
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| TH. 3/29 | Davis-Floyd: Chapter 3 – "The Technocratic Body and the Organic Body: Hegemony and Heresy in Women's Birth Choices" Also read: American Way of Birth, Costliest in the World <a href="http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/07/01/health/american-way-of-birth-costliest-in-the-world.html">http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/07/01/health/american-way-of-birth-costliest-in-the-world.html</a> | pp. 71-105 |
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## Week 12

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| T. 4/3 | Davis-Floyd: Chapter 4 – "Medical Training as Technocratic Initiation"<br>(Founder's Day—Modified Schedule) | pp. 107-139 |
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| TH. 4/5 | Davis-Floyd: Chapter 5 – "The Paradigm Shift of Humanistic and Holistic Obstetricians" | pp. 141-161 |
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Week 13 Midwives, Culture, Ideologies and Birth

T. 4/10 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 6 - American Midwifery: A Brief Anthropological Overview pp. 165-187



**MIDWIFERY AND HOMEBIRTHS:**

Tell a story of a time when you experienced pain.

What did you discover about yourself during in the midst of dealing with this pain?

What support did you wish for (if any) and what kind of support did you receive or what might you have wished for instead?

TH. 4/12 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 7 – Intuition as Authoritative Knowledge in Midwifery and Homebirth pp. 189-220  
 “Why Is American Home Birth So Dangerous?” by Amy Tuteur,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/opinion/sunday/why-is-american-home-birth-so-dangerous.html> see also the May 7, letters to the editor that followed Tuteur’s piece.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/opinion/sunday/how-safe-is-home-birth.html>  
 FRI. 4/13 Reflection Paper #4 Due

Week 14

T. 4/17 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 8 – Daughters of Time: The Postmodern Midwife. pp. 221-264  
 TH. 4/19 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 9 – Mutual Accommodation or Biomedical Hegemony pp. 265-282

Week 15

T. 4/24 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 10 – Homebirth Emergencies in the US and Mexico: The Trouble with Transport. pp. 283-321  
 T. 4/26 Davis-Floyd: Chapter 11 & 12 – The Midwifery Model of Care and Renegade Midwives. pp. 323-358  
 Review for final exam

**FINAL EXAMS**

T. 5/1 Final Exam 8:00am – 10:00am.

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