

# Birth and Death in Chicago

[course name and number deleted], section XXX, Fall Quarter 2013



Professor: Ron Edwards; Student Mentor: XXXXXX XXXXXXXX

Class website: <http://XXXXXX>

**Class times:**

TTh 10:30 am-12:30 pm

**Classroom:**

XXXXXX

**Prof phone:**

(XXX) XXX-XXXX

**E-mail:**

XXXX

XXXX

**Prof office:**

XXXXXX

**Office Hours:**

TTh 9:30-10:30

## The purpose and the point

What is birth, biologically? Why do we do it?

- What are pregnancy and labor like? What health issues are involved? Is pregnancy an illness? What is its relationship to medicine, past and present?
- How many people are born per unit time, globally? Per country? In a U.S. city? In this one?
- What are the demographics of birth?
- What actually is abortion, biologically, ethically, and politically?
- What actually is birth control, biologically, ethically, and politically?
- What actually is infertility technology, biologically, ethically, and politically?

What is death, biologically? Why do we do it?

- How do we define death clinically?
- How many people die per unit time, globally? Per country? In a U.S. city? In this one?
- What are the demographics of death? Of death by specific causes?
- How are dead people dealt with? What kind of health and ethics issues are raised for the living?
- Is death a crime? What defines the various degrees of homicide? Suicide? Assisted-death and euthanasia issues?

Is population size a problem? What policies and institutions are concerned with it?

How do other cultures answer these questions? What are the consequences to ourselves for the way we answer them?

Who are you, personally, in terms of all these issues? Do you care? What about?

## **Making the grade**

Your grade is composed of two parts: Coursework (80%) and Common Hour (20%). There will be no curve, so it's just a matter of earning enough points to make the amount for a given grade. You'll earn points for the course grade as follows:

- In-class assignments 25%
- Field trip reports 30%
- Field trip presentations 30%
- Final position paper 15%

The threshold values for each grade are approximately at 90%, 80%, and 70%, but I'll re-assess our situation at mid-quarter to see what will make the most sense.

## **The field trips**

The majority of your grade is derived from your field trip work, so be sure to understand their schedule and requirements. You will work in groups of 5 students.

Our formal all-group field trips will be held during class time on September 24, to an assisted fertility clinic, and on October 29, to a local funeral home. Your group will turn in a written report almost immediately following each of these, so you must be organized.

You will also conduct self-guided field trips, each group to its own unique destination and with a set of specific questions. Destinations include a variety of birth wards, birthing classes, adoption centers, cemeteries, crematoria, morgues, hospices, and nursing homes. You and your fellow group members will present your findings and interpretations to the class.

## **Some advice**

- *Read the texts* as indicated by the syllabus. Although this is not a "memorize and repeat" course, the material in them is integrated with lectures and in-class assignments. None of this work may be made up, so if you can't answer the assignment questions, you lose those points for good.
- *Know the schedule* of trips and assignments, so that you won't get caught by surprise. You also must download and bring the assignment from the website for each trip.
- *Attend class.* There are no special points to be gained or lost strictly due to attendance. However, the consequences for missing a day are severe - for example, if you miss an in-class exercise, it cannot be made up. If you are going to miss a day which includes in-class work, or when an assignment is due, you *must inform me beforehand* or those points will be lost.
- *Attend office hours* some time during the first three weeks of class. This time is especially valuable for developing study habits, learning more about why and how the course works, and seeing what a professor's life is like. It is perfectly all right just to come and see me, without having some specific problem or hassle.

## **Common Hour**

Like all XXX XXXX courses, this class includes a second seminar called the Common Hour. One hour per week you will tackle issues relevant to your personal and intellectual transition to university life. Your leader is XXXXXX XXXXXXXX, and the topics are presented on her syllabus. You are required to attend Common Hour, and the activities or assignments during that time also count toward your grade.

**Some administrative stuff to know about**

*Advisors.* All of you should take the time during the quarter to visit your academic advisor. This person can help you in literally hundreds of ways, specific to college, and to find him or her, all you have to do is ask your departmental secretary (based on your major).

Which leads me to another point: if you have not yet declared a major, then your advisor is XXXXX XXXXXX, and you should meet with her soon (XXXXXXXXXX).

*Drop dates.* Very few people drop XXXX XXXXXX classes, but sometimes things crop up that can't be controlled. You need to know that before October 29, you are permitted to Withdraw from the class all by yourself (just de-register). But after that, it becomes a lot more difficult, although not impossible.

**Ethics and courtesy policy**

As with all classes, you are expected to conduct yourself according to the Academic Integrity Policy. Please drop by <http://XXXXXXXXXXXX> for the details.

Please arrive at class before the starting time. Cell phones must be turned fully off (not just the ringtone) during class unless there is a medical reason otherwise.

WEEK	TUES 1	TUES 2	THURS*	READINGS
Sept 8			<b>Biology of birth</b>	<i>The Complete Book of Pregnancy and Childbirth</i>
15	<b>Policy and history</b>	<b>Birth control</b> Discussion	<b>Assisted fertility</b> In-class writing	<i>America and the Pill</i>
22	Whole-class field trip Friberg Medical Associates		<b>Natural childbirth</b> Due: group trip assignment	<i>Reclaiming Birth</i>
29	<b>Abortion</b>	<b>Health care</b> Discussion	<b>Population</b> In-class writing	<i>Contested Lives, Reproductive Rights &amp; Wrongs</i>
Oct 6	Presentations for second trip		<b>Birth conclusion</b>	<i>Wrapped in the Flag</i>
13	<b>Transition to Part 2</b>	<b>Biology of death</b>	<b>Available technology</b> In-class writing	<i>How We Live and Why We Die</i>
20	<b>Policy and history</b>	<b>Religion &amp; ritual</b> Discussion	<b>Disposal of bodies</b> In-class writing	<i>Ritualizing the Disposal of the Deceased</i>
27	Whole-class field trip Lakeview Funeral Home		<b>Process of dying</b>	<i>How We Die</i>
Nov 3	<b>Killing</b>	<b>Suicide</b> Discussion	<b>Assisted death</b> In-class writing	<i>Assisted Death: A Study in Ethics and Law</i>
10	Presentations for fourth trip		<b>Death conclusion</b>	<b>none</b>
17	Conclusions and discussion (combined prof/mentor)			<b>none</b>
24	Position paper due November 26 12:00 PM			

\* Common Hour meets 10:30 AM Thursday except for the first day of class.

**All readings are provided in class**

I may add more at any time. You are expected to keep current with the reading assignments and to bring their content into your written work and class discussions.

- The Complete Book of Pregnancy and Childbirth* by Sheila Kitzinger
- America and the Pill* by Elaine Tyler May
- Reclaiming Birth* by Margot Edwards and Mary Waldorf
- Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* by Faye D. Ginsburg
- Reproductive Rights & Wrongs* by Betsy Hartmann
- Wrapped in the Flag* by Claire Conner
- How We Live and Why We Die: The Secret Lives of Cells* by Lewis Wolpert
- Ritualizing the Disposal of the Deceased* by William W. McCorkle (Toronto Studies in Religion)
- How We Die: Reflections of Life's Final Chapter* by Sherwin B. Nuland
- Assisted Death: A Study in Ethics and Law* by L. W. Sumner