



DDD11

Early Career Scholar Event



At the 11th International Death, Dying and Disposal Conference (DDD11) hosted by the Open University (5th-8th Sept 2013), an Early Career Scholar event was led by Shelia Harper and Julie Ellis. The event was kindly sponsored by ASDS.

Three experienced academics from the field of Death Studies were invited to informally present on three key themes affecting early career death studies scholars. *Professor Jenny Hockey* on having a successful career in Death Studies; *Dr Carol Komoromy* on Death Studies and dealing with the media and *Professor George Dickinson* providing an international perspective on Death Studies.

Group discussion points: having a successful career in Death Studies



Theme lead: Jenny Hockey

Theme scribe: Erica Borgstrom

JH was asked if she would be an academic again if she had the chance – she explained that there has been very little in her academic jobs that she hasn't enjoyed.

You should give thought to the kind of person/ academic you are.

Recognise the different characteristics required for different tasks. E.g. whilst you might enjoy writing, you need to demonstrate an ability to produce other kinds of output. Enhances your employability.

Be confident and publish.

Where possible think about working in teams. When working with others you can complement each other's strengths. Remember there are so many requirements in academic jobs now – but you personally don't have to be great at everything.

Therefore it is important to ask self - how can I fit into a team? Do I? How do I learn to fit in?

Look for relationships with others that share your interests. Conferences are excellent for this – but keep in touch! Make the effort.

If you have networks around you, there is a team ready if opportunities (e.g. funding) come up.

Tie your interests into funding opportunities.

In an age of impact, you need to think about how you can convince funders that what you enjoy/are interested in is important and worth studying. This requires you to work at it (your dream project may not get funded immediately).

Think carefully about the wider issues/ concerns involved with the topic – or linked routes into it that might be of significance.

This involves a 'selling' mentality when writing proposals – say explicitly why we need to know this.

Remember also that there are lots of interesting ideas in people's feedback.

Remember that research ideas can come out of previous projects – through fusing of ideas and 'cross fertilisation'.

Group discussion points: dealing with the media



Theme lead: Carol Komaromy

Theme scribe: Cara Bailey

Can be about putting yourself 'out there' - often in a way you don't want to.

Be aware that the media wants sound bites.

Liaise with the communications team at your institution to protect 'your interests'.

Say what you are prepared to talk about and what you are not prepared to talk about (e.g. "I am not an expert in that field but what I can talk about is..."). Protect your research identity – they can't expect you to be a generalist.

Make what you are talking about accessible – simplify!

Get feedback on your media 'performances'.

Convey the essence of who you are – be yourself and not someone else.

Be cautious as press can often want to sensationalise.

CK – things learnt from speaking on radio:

- Do sound bites

- Bring the dialogue back to what you want to say

Use stories – these are very powerful and they ‘capture’ audience attention
Give illustrations – what does what you are talking about mean in ‘reality’?

But remember to protect the identities of your research participants.

It is terrible to feel unprepared and ‘on the spot’ – especially when live on air – so get scripts/ questions in advance where possible.

When talking about your work, don’t be afraid to say “I did not find that” or “that’s interesting but not what I found”.

Group discussion points: an international perspective on Death Studies



Theme lead: George Dickinson

Theme scribe: Meridith Burles

George was asked about key advice for less experienced academics: he stressed the importance of contact with others – e.g. if you meet people at conferences – approach, ask in person – don't be shy!

On publishing he said: look at a journal's most recent articles – see if your argument/work fits. If a piece is rejected consider other journals which may be more suitable – rewriting based on any feedback (some editors may even be willing to suggest where you could send it next). If rejected 3 times – move onto something else.

George was asked if academia is different in the US: he explained Death and Dying as a speciality isn't so present – it is 'lumped' into Medical Sociology. In the UK he feels that Death and Dying is more present as a speciality. He suggested that in terms of ethical issues re palliative care and death, the UK is perhaps more open than the US – where things are more conservative – litigation culture (except issue of assisted suicide which is legal in 3 US states).

On surviving as an academic in the current UK and US markets George said: be persistent! Be assertive (not aggressive!). Contacts are important – referrals are most helpful.