

# Charles Bosk, SAS and PSOM

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DEATHS | PRINT



*Charles Bosk*

Charles L. (Chuck) Bosk, professor of sociology in the University of Pennsylvania's School of Arts & Sciences and professor of anesthesiology and critical care at the Perelman School of Medicine who worked at Penn for over 40 years, died August 30 from a sudden heart attack.

Dr. Bosk grew up in Baltimore, earned a BA from Wesleyan University in 1970, and an MA in sociology in 1974 and a PhD in sociology in 1976 from the University of Chicago.

Dr. Bosk's work focused broadly on the culture of medicine. He published numerous books and articles on how healthcare professionals make sense of experiences in which time-pressured decisions are required in situations filled with un-resolvable uncertainty. He joined Penn in 1976 as an assistant professor in the department of sociology. He was promoted to associate professor in 1981 and became a full professor in 1991. He served as chair of the graduate group in sociology for several years. Dr. Bosk was also a professor in PSOM's department of medical ethics from 2003 to 2012. In 2012, he became a professor of anesthesiology and critical care in PSOM. He also was a senior fellow at Penn's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics and served as a faculty associate for the Center for Bioethics. Dr. Bosk was among the core faculty for the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars' Program and a steering committee member for the for the Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholars Program.

Dr. Bosk received a Provost's Award for Distinguished PhD Teaching and Mentoring (*Almanac* September 19, 2006 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v53/n04/award-provost.html>)). He served in various capacities for the Faculty Senate. In 2013, he was elected to the National Academy of Medicine (*Almanac* October 29, 2013 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v60/n11/pdf/102913.pdf>)) and he received the Leo G. Reeder Award from the American Sociological Association for distinguished contributions to the field of Medical Sociology (*Almanac* March 19, 2013 ([https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v59/n25/pdf\\_n25/031913.pdf](https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v59/n25/pdf_n25/031913.pdf))). The award announcement recognized him "as one of the leading sociologists of his generation, [who] has produced original, persuasive and enduring theory and research that have changed the way we sociologists think about issues of professionalization, socialization, mistakes at work, and social problems." He also received the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Investigator Award in Health Policy Research.

Dr. Bosk was the author of three books, including 1979's *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*, a classic in the field that he wrote after spending months embedded in the surgical wing of a hospital. In 2018, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship for a book project entitled *The Price of Perfection: The Cost of Error* (*Almanac* April 17, 2018 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/articles/charles-l.-bosk-charles-yang-guggenheim-fellows>)). At the time of his death he was working on a manuscript, *What is a Medical Mistake? Forty Years Wondering*, synthesizing his decades of research on the U.S. medical system.

He is survived by his brother, Harry (Dana); wife, Marjorie; children, Emily (Ethan) and Abigail; grandsons Milo and Finn Schoolman; and five nieces and nephews.