Course Description

This course addresses the theoretical framework of human loss and grief from a culturally and philosophically diverse perspective. It seeks to provide information about why and how humans grieve and how grieving is affected by type of loss, socioeconomic and cultural factors, individual personality and family functioning. Attention is focused on life span development and the meaning of death and loss at different ages. Various types of loss are discussed from an individual, family and socio/cultural perspective. The importance of understanding trauma and its relationship to grief and loss will be addressed. Coping and resiliency in loss are explored, emphasizing the diversity of human response and focusing on the significance of social groups in integrating loss. The formation and practice of rituals, and diversity in religious and spiritual experience as a component of coping with loss will be discussed.

Course Objectives

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Describe the implications for practice and policy of the changing patterns of death in the U.S. regarding age, sex, and minority group status.
2. Describe the different meanings of death over time, and sudden death (including suicide, homicide, and disaster), for its impact on survivors, caretakers and society.
3. Describe responses and reactions of the various caretakers (including social workers) to death and their influence on medical treatment decisions regarding the patient.
4. Describe the medical-ethical issues in death and dying.
5. Describe the bereavement and grieving process.
6. Describe the practical issues and problems that arise for families following death of a member.
7. Describe the impact of racial, ethnic, and gender issues for the family and/or person facing death or bereavement.
Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes

- **Multiculturalism and Diversity** will be addressed through the discussion of worker-client differences and power/privilege differentials based on culture, ethnicity, race, gender, age, and social class. Social system and case examples, possible interventions, and readings will reflect this theme.

- **Social Justice and Social Change** will be addressed through discussion of differences between problems that are responsive to interpersonal practice interventions and those which result from poverty, discrimination, and disenfranchisement and require systemic as well as individual intervention.

- **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation** will be addressed through identification of ways to provide early intervention, guidance, and advocacy within systems, methods of preventing or mitigating later problems in loss and bereavement, and discussion of intervention theories and health care and social policies which support adaptive responses to loss that enhance later adjustment.

- **Behavioral and Social Science Research** will inform this course, especially current research in the following areas: bereavement and complicated mourning attachment and developmental requirements, response to trauma and maltreatment and resiliency/coping/adaptation.

Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values

Social work ethics and values will be addressed in this course using the NASW Code of Ethics. This course will increase awareness of the medical-ethical issues and decision making in death and dying. In addition, students will evaluate ethical issues involved in death and loss, and discuss the impact of the social worker’s values and reactions to these issues.

Class Norms

1. Attendance and participation are expected.
2. We will begin class promptly and resume class promptly after the designated break, based on mutually agreed upon times to be discussed in the first class session.
3. Approximately one-half to two-thirds of the class will be didactic presentation by the instructor or guest speakers. The remainder will consist of discussion and experiential activities in which participation is encouraged and expected.
4. Other norms which may be important to the class will be discussed and incorporated.

Course Texts

**Required:**


**Additional Readings:**
The amount of required text reading has been designed to provide you with a basic foundation while giving you freedom to individualize supplemental readings. YOU ARE EXPECTED AND ENCOURAGED TO DO LITERATURE SEARCHES AND ADDITIONAL READING IN AREAS OF PERSONAL INTEREST AND IN ORDER TO COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENTS IN A THOROUGH MANNER. Information and suggestions on references will be provided in class. In addition, handouts may be distributed in class for reading.

**Relevant Journals and Organizations:**

- **OMEGA, Journal of Death and Dying**
  Baywood Publishing
  26 Austin Ave. P.O. Box 337
  Amityville, NY  11701
  800-638-7819

- **Illness, Crisis and Loss**
  Sage Publication
  P.O. Box 5084
  Thousand Oaks, CA  91359
  805-499-9774

- **Death Studies**
  Taylor & Francis
  (see address below)

- **Journal of Near Death Studies**
  Human Sciences Press
  233 Spring Street
  New York, NY 10213-0196
  212-620-8000

- **The Thanatology Newsletter**
  c/o Health and Nutrition Sciences
  Brooklyn College
  Brooklyn, NY  11210-2889
  718-951-5553

- **Center for Loss & Life Transition**
  3735 Broken Bow Road
  Fort Collins, CO  80526
  970-226-6050

- **Bereavement Magazine**
  5125 N. Union Boulevard, Suite 4
  Colorado Springs, CO 80918-2956
  719-266-0006

- **Compassion Books**
  477 Hannah Branch Rd.
  Burnsville, NC  28714
  828-675-5909
  www.compassionbooks.com

- **Centering Corporation**
  P.O. Box 4600
  7230 Maple Street
  Omaha, NE  68104
  402-553-1200

- **Journal of Trauma & Loss**
  Taylor & Francis Journals Dept.
  325 Chestnut Street
  Philadelphia, PA 19106
  800-354-1420 x 216
  www.sample-1at@taylorandfrancis.com

Additional books and reference materials specific to class topics will be discussed throughout the term.
Assignments and Grading

1. Readings are considered a foundation of the course and you will be expected to know the content of the readings and to incorporate this knowledge into your assignments. It is expected that assigned readings will be completed prior to each class (including the readings listed for each date) to enhance discussion and interaction. Other course content will be disseminated through lecture, discussion, and experiential activities.

2. Written assignments (Instructions will be outlined in separate handouts).

   A. 1 page paper September 13 Pass-Fail
   B. 5-7 page paper October 18 20%
   C. 5-7 page paper November 8 20%
   D. 5-7 page paper November 22 20%
   E. Reading Journal ongoing 25%

3. In class participation will account for 15% of your grade. Factors considered: attendance, completion of readings, sharing of pertinent information, participation in small group exercises. More details provided in “Assignments and Course Requirements”.

4. Out of fairness and respect for all class members, late receipt of the work will result in a 1/2 letter grade deduction. Exceptions will be made only in RARE and COMPELLING situations. A specific plan for completion of missing work must be agreed to by the instructor and the student.

5. Final Grades will be letter grades defined by the School of Social Work as follows:

   A grades  Given for exceptional individual performance and mastery of the material. The use of A+, A, and A- should distinguish the degree of superiority. The grade of A should be given only on rare occasions.

   B grades  Given to students who demonstrate mastery of the material. B+ indicates performance just above the mastery level but not in an exceptional manner. B- indicates just below the mastery level.

   C grades  Mastery of the material is limited. C- is the lowest grade which carries credit.

   D grades  Indicate deficiency and carry no credit.
E grades  Indicate failure and carry no credit.

DR  Unofficial drop.

I  Incomplete when illness or other compelling reason prevents completion of work and there is a definite plan and date for completion approved by the instructor.

Students are responsible for initiating contact to establish this plan. If no plan has been established to complete work by the last day of class, an E grade will be given.

Course Outline and Assigned Readings

September 6  
#1  Our Attitudes Towards Death and Dying
Historical Perspective and Present Views
Factors Impacting Attitudes

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 1; Chapter 2 (47-57); Chapter 3 (77-104)
Irish: Chapter 1

September 13  
#2  ASSIGNMENT – 1 PAGE PAPER DUE
The Dying Process
Living with Dying: Life Threatening Illness
Care of the Dying
Health Care Systems

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 4 and 5
Irish: Chapter 3

September 20  
#3  READING JOURNAL #1 DUE
The Experience of Grief and Mourning
Process and Tasks of Mourning
Variables Influencing Grief

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 7 (223-257)
Worden: Chapters 1 and 2
Irish: Chapter 2
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| September 27 | Complicated Grief Reactions  
Theories of Complicated Mourning  
Definitions, Symptoms, and Syndromes | *Readings:*  
Worden: Chapter 4  
Irish: Chapter 4                                                                |
| October 4   | Death and Grief in Adulthood  
Models of Adult Bereavement  
Life Stage Issues     | *Readings:*  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 11  
Irish: Chapter 5                                                                 |
| October 11  | READING JOURNAL #2 DUE  
Death and Grief in Childhood and Adolescence  
Developmental Issues  | *Readings:*  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 10  
Irish: Chapter 6                                                                 |
| October 18  | ASSIGNMENT DUE – 5-7 PAGE PAPER  
Clinical Intervention with Grievers  
Issues in Assessment and Treatment  
Counseling Principles in Facilitating Grief | *Readings:*  
Worden: Chapters 3 and 5  
Irish: Chapter 8                                                                 |
| October 15  | Cultural and Diversity Perspectives on Death  
Variation in the Experience, Expression, and Understanding of Grief  
Applying a Sociocultural Perspective | *Readings:*  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 2 (41-47; 57-76) and 3 (105-115)  
Irish: Chapter 7                                                                 |
November 1
#10
**READING JOURNAL #3 DUE**
Ethics and Legal Issues
Medical Ethics and Technology
Rights and the Dying
Public Policy Issues
Legal Issues and Concerns

*Readings:*
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 6 and 9
Irish: Chapter 9

November 8
#11
**Assignment DUE: 5-7 page paper**
Specific Types of Death and Grief
Risks and Clinical Implications

*Readings:*
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 12
Worden: Chapters 6 and 7
Irish: Chapter 10

November 15
#12
Risks of Death in Today’s World
Violence, Disasters and War

*Readings:*
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 13
Irish: Chapter 11

November 22
#13
**ASSIGNMENT DUE – 5-7 PAGE PAPER**
Coping Mechanisms for Survivors/Rituals and Funerals/
Honoring the Dead
Spirituality and Finding Meaning
Life After Death/Grieving Over a Lifetime

*Readings:*
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 7 (257-264); Chapters 8, 14
Worden: Chapter 9
Irish: Chapter 12

November 29
**NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK**
December 6
#14

READING JOURNAL #4 DUE

Personal and Professional Issues Related to Death, Loss, and Grief
Caring for Self
Concluding Thoughts

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 4 (127-130); Chapter 15
Worden: Chapter 8
Irish: Chapter 13