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 vital to the learning experience and are expected. If absent, you are responsible for what is covered and any class announcements/additional assignments.
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.

Three Required Course Texts


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 ASSIGNMENTS AND TO PURSUE YOUR AREAS OF INTERESTS. 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

Death Studies
Taylor & Francis
(see address below)

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

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

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

Mortality
Taylor & Francis Ltd.
4 Park Square
Milton Park
Abingdon, OX14 4RN  UK
www.tandf.co.uk/journals

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

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

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

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

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

Please refer to Internet list and to grief resource catalogs provided for additional reference materials.

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

The goal of the course assignments and grading system is to promote integration and meaning of the material. You are empowered to learn and assign much of your grade and to choose topics of interest to you. Late completion of assignments will result in a deduction.

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. Each class there will be an opportunity to earn 3 points based on class attendance, completion of readings, participation & sharing of pertinent information and completion of written assignments for a total of 36 points over the course of the semester (approximately 1/3 of final grade.)

Weekly one page single spaced written assignments are designed to help integrate course readings and class discussions. Students should be prepared to share ideas and reactions from readings in class discussions.

Students are responsible for copying and completing a “Weekly Participation Sheet.” To avoid lost papers, turn in the sheet STAPLED to the written assignment each week AT THE END OF EACH CLASS. Self scoring is based on an honor system and empowerment model which focuses on each student determining their learning and grade.

3. Diversity Paper/Class Presentation 32 Points

Group class presentation paper focusing on diversity issues related to death, loss and grief. Each group will be responsible for making a ½ hour group presentation and writing an 8-10 page group paper with references.

Integrate the assigned readings, lecture and discussion materials and your own additional literature review into your analysis. Additional references beyond course readings are expected. APA style reference notation is required.

Grading will be done based on depth and effectiveness of addressing these areas:

- Analysis of death, loss, grief issues of a particular ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious, etc. diverse population or topic.
- Specific assessment and intervention issues relevant to the chosen diversity topic regarding grief and bereavement.
- Provide one page handout of resources/reference materials to class members on your specific diversity topic.
- Application of course readings, lectures and discussion to illustrate self-awareness of diversity issues.
- Creativity of class presentation. I encourage each group to be creative and use a variety of formats including lecture, group exercises, discussion, videos, handouts, music, art, role plays, food, costumes, etc. Be creative and have fun!
4. Final Integration Paper  
   This is your opportunity to select a specific area of interest and research it more in depth in keeping with the philosophy of self-empowerment in learning.  
   7 – 10 page double spaced paper which focuses on reflecting course concepts learned and your ability to apply them. You will be expected to use APA format and referencing and to use the texts and a minimum of 5 other credible references to support your analysis.

You may choose from the following options:

- Watch a movie of your choice which focuses on death/loss.
- Listen to music which addresses death/loss in the lyrics.
- Consider a current or past news story about death.
- Visit a card shop and review the sympathy cards.
- Visit a museum and focus on are representations of death.
- Choose a specific topic of interest and discuss it with me.

Grading will be based on the depth of integration and application of course materials to the following:

1. What themes/images are portrayed about death/loss which relate to class material/the literature?
2. What attitudes, values, beliefs, practices – both cultural and individual are expressed?
3. How do Worden’s theory, complicated grief, diversity issues, ethical issues, developmental stages, course concepts, etc. apply to your chosen topic?
4. How does your paper reflect what you have learned and your ability to apply course concepts?
5. Final Grades will be based on the total accumulation of points earned. 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.

6. Written assignments: written skills are essential to effective social work practice. Graduate level writing skills will be expected in this course. Writing labs are available through the Sweetland Writing Clinic in Angel Hall for any graduate student and through the social work office of student services for students whom English is a second language.

I have provided written assignment grading sheets to clearly explain assignment expectations and point values.

**Course Outline and Assigned Readings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sept. 9</th>
<th>Our Attitudes Towards Death and Dying</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Historical Perspective and Present Views</td>
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<td>Factors Impacting Attitudes</td>
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*Readings:*
- DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 1; Chapter 3 (93-102); Chapter 2 (41-69)
- Irish: Chapter 1

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<tr>
<th>Sept. 16</th>
<th>The Dying Process</th>
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<td>#2</td>
<td>Living with Dying: Life Threatening Illness</td>
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<td>Care of the Dying</td>
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<td>Health Care Systems</td>
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*Readings:*
- DeSpelder & Strickland: Chapter 6
- Irish: Chapter 3

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<th>Sept. 23</th>
<th>The Experience of Grief and Mourning</th>
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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Process and Tasks of Mourning</td>
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<td>Variables Influencing Grief</td>
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*Readings:*
- DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 8
- Irish: Chapters 2
- Worden: Chapters 1 & 2

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<th>Sept. 30</th>
<th>Complicated Grief Reactions</th>
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<td>#4</td>
<td>Theories of Complicated Mourning</td>
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<td>Definitions, Symptoms, and Syndromes</td>
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*Readings:*
- Worden: Chapter 4
- Irish: Chapter 4
Oct. 7  Death and Grief in Adulthood  
#5  Models of Adult Bereavement  
Life Stage Issues  

Readings:  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 11  
Irish: Chapter 5  

Oct. 14  Death and Grief in Childhood and Adolescence  
#6  Developmental Issues  

Readings:  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 10  
Irish: Chapter 6  

Oct. 21  Clinical Intervention with Grievers  
#7  Issues in Assessment and Treatment  
Counseling Principles in Facilitating Grief  

Readings:  
Worden: Chapters 3, 5 and 7  
Irish: Chapter 8  

Oct. 28  Special Types of Loss and Grief  
#8  Risks and Clinical Implications  
Risks of Death in Today’s World  
Violence, Disasters and War  
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 (70-85) and 3 (87-92; 103-123), Chapters 12 & 13  
Worden: Chapter 6  

Nov. 4 &  
Nov. 11  
#9 and  
#10 Diversity Class Presentations  
Readings:  
Irish: Chapters 7, 10 & 11  

Nov. 18  Ethics and Legal Issues  
#11 Medical Ethics and Technology  
Rights and the Dying  

Readings:  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 4 (125-146); Chapters 5, 7  
Irish: Chapter 12
Dec. 2

Final Integration Paper Due

#12
Coping Mechanisms for Survivors/Rituals and Funerals/
Honoring the Dead
Spirituality and Finding Meaning

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 9 and 14
Worden: Chapter 9
Irish: Chapter 9

Dec. 9

Personal and Professional Issues Related to Death, Loss, and Grief

#13
Caring for Self
Concluding Thoughts

Readings:
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 4 (147-150); Chapter 15
Worden: Chapter 8
Irish: Chapter 13