"While I thought I was learning how to live,
I was learning how to die."

Leonardo da Vinci

Life must go on
And the dead be forgotten;
Life must go on,
Though good men die.

Anne, eat your breakfast;
Dan, take your medicine;
Life must go on;
I forget just why.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

"... more light ...

Goethe
(Last words spoken before dying.)

“Life is measured not by its length, but by its depth.”

Mary Fisher
GENERAL INFORMATION:
This course will meet Wednesdays, 9-12. In class, you will receive:

1. an extensive syllabus;
2. a bibliography on books and articles about death, loss and grief;
3. handouts pertaining to theory and clinical practice with the dying and bereaved.

I have an office in the School of Social Work Building (#2798) and maintain office hours there on Wednesdays and Fridays. Please feel free to make appointments with me throughout the semester if you have questions or concerns. I will always be in my office before class, and after class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The 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 OUTLINE:

This course will begin with an overview of the historical treatment of death and bereavement in dominant United States culture. Contemporary attitudes about death and grief will be examined in this context and will include the examination of current themes in understanding dying and bereaved persons. Significant attention will be placed on understanding the diversity of reactions to death, loss, and grief within different religious and ethnic/cultural groups. The impact of poverty on dying and bereavement will be discussed as well as the policy decisions that direct funding as it impacts dying individuals and their families. The ethical debates in the right-to-die movement and social issues about quality of life will be explored. Explanatory models for bereavement and grief will be discussed including: psychoanalytic models, attachment models, stress and crisis models, cognitive and behavior models, illness and disease models, sociobiological models, and holistic models. Developmental approaches to understanding chronic illness, and individual and family functioning while dying will be addressed as well as current standards of care in social work involvement with the dying person and family. The function of health care systems for the dying and funeral care for the dead will be discussed. Social organizations for the dying and bereaved will be explored. Gender differences in grieving, immigration and cultural losses, responses to war and natural
disasters will also be discussed. The theory of complicated mourning will be introduced and will be related both to developmental theory and trauma theory. Examples of complicated mourning will be discussed and will include the phenomena of disenfranchised and stigmatized loss. The identification and assessment of symptoms of complicated mourning will be introduced. Death resulting from violence, like homicide or suicide, and violence in communities and its impact on a person’s capacity to grieve will be explored. Counseling the dying and grieving and its impact on the social worker will be discussed, as well as ways that professionals can care for themselves. The special concerns of children and loss will be examined. Aging, grief, and loss will be discussed and current research about losses in aging will be addressed. Post traumatic stress disorder as a response to traumatized loss will be discussed. The class will also examine broader cultural implications for living with loss, including responses to cultural genocide (both historically and currently). A final exploration into the development of grief responses on an individual and communal level will be made.

COURSE DESIGN:

Lecture and class discussion with video and guest presentations to highlight specific topics.

RELATIONSHIP TO FOUR CURRICULAR THEMES:

Multiculturalism and Diversity Themes are 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 Change and Social Justice are 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 interventions.

Promotion and Prevention are 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 through discussion of intervention theories and health care and social policies which support adaptive responses to loss that enhance later adjustment.

Behavioral and Social Sciences Research informs the course, drawing especially on current research in the following areas: bereavement and complicated mourning, attachment and developmental requirements, response to trauma and maltreatment, and resiliency/coping/adaptation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Understand the implications for practice and policy of the changing patterns of death/dying in the U.S. regarding socioeconomic status, age, gender, and cultural/ethnic patterns.

2. Understand the different meanings of loss, and the impact of loss on those grieving, on caregivers, and on larger social groups.

3. Identify and describe responses and reactions of the various caregivers (including social workers) to death and loss and the impact of these reactions on client systems.

4. Increase awareness of the medical-ethical issues in death and dying.

5. Summarize the different theoretical models for understanding bereavement and grieving.

6. Identify the practical issues and problems that arise for individuals and families following a death or major loss in the family the significance of social groups in bereavement.

7. Examine the variables impacting mourning, i.e., race, ethnicity, immigration, culture, gender, age, and socioeconomic issues in the experience and expression of grief for the family and/or person facing death and bereavement.

8. Discuss the ways in which violence affects the experience of death or loss, and the impact of layered loss when continually exposed to loss or violence.


10. Discuss dominant themes of complicated mourning including multiple losses, traumatized loss, disenfranchised or stigmatized loss, cultural genocide and historical transmission of loss.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance at all classes.
2. Reading of assignments.
3. Written assignments listed below:
4. Nongraded journal assignments:

Due: 9-11-02. A three-page (or longer if you desire) paper describing your own feelings and understanding about death and loss. This may include a personal experience with death, or your observations about how others close to you have experienced death. You may also find it useful to look at the ways in which your family has responded to past losses and deaths. Some students begin by describing their earliest memories of death and how it affected them. Try to focus on personal and not theoretical...
understanding. (Non-graded)

**Due: 9-11-02.**

- A genogram of your family history, noting significant losses. Genogram should highlight denied loss or unresolved loss that you have noted in researching your own family history. This is a non-graded assignment. If you prefer not to do a genogram of your own family, you may use a client's (protecting anonymity) with whom you have worked.
- Watch (or recall) one movie, of your choice, dealing with the subjects of death, grief, or loss. Write a paragraph or two discussing death and loss themes (theoretical, sociologic or clinical) that you see reflected in the Movie.

**Due: 9-18-02:** Interview one person of your choosing about a loss they have experienced in the past. You should ask their permission, explain that it is for a class and that you would like to ask them about how they coped with a loss they had in their life. Use journalistic style questions (what, when, how, where).
Ask: how did they cope emotionally and practically (remember Worden’s four tasks, remember that there are active and passive ways of coping).
Ask: did anyone help you cope with this loss? What did they do that was helpful?
Write up your experience of doing the interview in a two-page reflection paper.

**Due: 9-25-02:** Ask a colleague, friend, or family member to describe a cultural, religious, or ethnic tradition or ritual that is associated with death and bereavement. For instance, you might ask a Jewish colleague to describe what happens after someone dies and through the first month after the death. Or you might ask a colleague from Asia to describe the funeral and bereavement customs in their country of origin. You may also choose to describe your own religious, ethnic, and cultural traditions or rituals. If you are interviewing someone else, make sure you ask their permission to interview them and tell them that it is for a class.
Write up the description of the traditions in a two-page paper.

**Due: 10-02-02:** Interview an older adult about losses in their life. The older adult must be 55 or over (if you honestly do not have access to anyone over 55, then call me and interview me…I’m 51). Ask their permission to interview them, explain it is for a class assignment.
Ask: How has loss or death impacted your life?
  What helped you cope with the loss?
  Who helped you get through the experience?
  Looking back, how have your feelings about the loss/death changed over time?
  As you look ahead, what is your greatest concern about the future?
  Do you think very much about your own death? Has your thinking about death changed over the course of your life?
Write up your experience of interviewing an older adult in a two-page reflection paper.

**Due: 10-09-02:** Interview a person of any age about the impact of their religion or spirituality on grieving a loss. Ask the person’s permission to interview them, explain it
is for a class, explain that we are discussing that religion or spirituality seems to be an important support for some people who are grieving.

Ask: Can you remember a loss or death where your religion or sense of spirituality helped you cope with grieving?

   How did it help you?

   If you are part of an organized religion, what does that religion discuss about death, afterlife, and suffering?

   Do you feel that talking about your sense of religion or spirituality when discussing loss is helpful to you?

Write up your experience of interviewing someone about their sense of spirituality or religion in a two-page reflection paper.

Graded assignments:

In your graded assignments, please remember that I value an academic presentation to your paper. Always include introduction and conclusion paragraphs. Always check for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Avoid slang. I have placed examples of good papers from past semesters on reserve at the library for your perusal. Feel free to talk with me about your paper before submitting it.

Due: 10-02-02. Read a personal account of someone who faced death, was a caregiver for people dying, or was the bereaved. A suggested book: Tuesdays with Morrie: an old man, a young man, and life’s greatest lesson, by Mitch Albom; or a book you may choose (please clear it with me if not in the bib). This book should be a personal account, first person narrative. Please remember an introductory paragraph introducing your paper and a concluding paragraph summarizing your thoughts. After reading the book, please write 4 or more pages answering the following questions. Please note, even if the book doesn’t specifically address these issues, try to think how the author would handle them:

   What are the possible reactions of the patient, friends, and family to news of a life-threatening diagnosis? Or the reactions of family and friends to news of a death?

   What are three different ways of coping that people might have when facing death or bereavement? When thinking of coping, please use the understanding of coping mechanisms as discussed in class—underlying psychological strategies for preserving a sense of self and not being overwhelmed by loss.

   What are the most difficult aspects of the dying process or bereavement?

   What role does “social support” play in the process of dying or in bereavement?

   How does poverty, discrimination, and social stigmatization affect dying
or being bereaved?

Please react and comment on the following statement in light of the book you just read:

“Death is inseparable from the whole of human experience; the study of death touches on the past, present, and future.” (DeSpelder and Strickland)

**Due 10-30-02** Read and critique one (of the many) self-help books available for the dying and bereaved. (A book on clinical practice may be substituted.) The critique should be at least four pages in length (longer is O.K.). The critique should include:

- why you chose this book. Remember to always begin a paper with an introductory paragraph
- a brief summary (no longer than a paragraph) of the book
- to what readership or specific group (i.e., grieving parents) this book is directed.
- a discussion of the book's strengths: what you liked about the book as a clinician and what will be helpful about this book for its readership.
- a discussion of possible problematic aspects of one book (i.e., perhaps it is directed at a general public readership but is written in sophisticated clinical terminology; or perhaps the book does not meet its stated goal).
- a general summary of the book's utility as a self-help tool, whether it should be used by professionals in their practice, and any cautions about using the book.

This should be a formal academic paper, not a personal reflection. Please avoid lengthy quotes or summaries of the book. If you have questions, please check with me.

**Due: 11-20-02** A research paper (12 pages, longer if you wish) on any aspect of death, loss, grief. Please choose a topic discussed in lecture or in your readings that you would like to learn about in greater depth. Examples might be: adolescent suicide--predictive variables and intervention techniques; or the Hospice movement in the United States; or, current legislation in the Right to Die Movement; or Clinical Issues when counseling a dying child; or The Use of Self-Help Groups with the Bereaved (widows, parents of murdered children, etc.), or socioeconomic and ethnic influences on funeral and grief practices; or post-traumatic stress disorder and Homicide Bereavement. These are just examples of the multitude of topics.

Remember to narrow your topic in order to achieve a focus that goes deeply enough. You can use case studies if applicable to your paper, but they should be used to illustrate the points you are making in your formal paper and the paper should not be one long case study.

Format of paper: I value organization! Please use the standard APA format for references. I.e., “Bereavement theorists eschew a fixed-stage grief theory in favor of a more flexible tasks-of-grief approach (Worden, 1991).” Begin with an introductory paragraph where you state what you will be writing about. Then move into the body of
your paper. Please cover:

I. Overview/definitions of your topic.

II. Discuss research on the specific aspects of the topic you are concentrating on. This may well take up the body of your paper. Use concise sentence structure. Check for spelling errors or awkward sentence construction. You may include brief case examples from your reading or clinical practice. Lengthy quotes or summarized numerical lists should be avoided.

III. Summarize your findings from your readings. Discuss any implications that you might see for the practice of social work.

IV. Write a concluding paragraph where you restate what the topic was, a sweeping summary of your readings, and a final concluding sentence.

Bibliography:
Please include a bibliography of your references. Have at least eight sources. Please do not have more than 33% of your sources as website information. I want you to use journal articles and books as they are usually more rigorously peer reviewed than websites.

Note: I am not fond of long lists of “bulleted” items and would rather have you address fewer issues, but taking time to discuss each. For instance, rather than list all the possible signs of suicidality in a client, I’d rather have you take four or five of the signs and discuss them, giving them a paragraph each. You could then say, “Other signs that may represent suicidal tendencies are: a, b, and c. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these issues.”

Grade will be based on organization, following the terms of the assignment, clarity of writing and accurate understanding of concepts.

Grading for the term:
Class attendance and completion of nongraded assignments: 15%
Critique I: 25%
Critique II: 25%
Final Paper: 35%

The required texts are:

The required texts are: 1. Worden, William. Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy (2002)
Suggested for purchase:  
1. Lund, D.A. Men Coping with Grief.  
2. Rando, Therese. Treatment of Complicated Mourning.  
   (Rando: TCM)  
4. Irish et al, Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief: Diversity in Universality  
5. Albom, Mitch, Tuesdays with Morrie: an old man, a young man, and life’s greatest lesson.  
6. Figley, Bride and Mazza, Death and Trauma: The Traumatology of Grieving.  

They are on reserve in the library, and are available for purchase through Shaman Drum Bookstore located on State Street in Ann Arbor. Required readings are noted each week and are for that week.

Summary of Lectures: September-December 2002

1. 9-4-02  
   A. Death in our Culture - Past and Present.  
   B. A Theoretical Overview: Death, Dying, and Bereavement.  

2. 9-11-02  
   A. Trauma, Loss, and Memory: A Social Work Perspective on Private and Public Responses to Bereavement  
   B. Ethics and the Right to Die Movement  
   Assignment Due

3. 9-18-02  
   A. Hospice  
   B. Integrating Theory into Clinical Practice: Therapeutic Responses  
   Assignment Due

4. 9-25-02  
   A. Health Care Systems: Dying and Bereavement.  
   B. Developing Sensitivity to Ethnic and Cultural Differences When Death is Imminent or Has Just Occurred.  
   Assignment Due

5. 10-2-02  
   Children and Death.
Assignment Due

6. 10-09-02  A. Complicated Grief and Special Types of Losses & Grief  
      B. AIDS: Challenges in Treatment for Patients and those close to them. Invited Speaker: Living with Life-Threatening Illness.

Assignment Due

7. 10-16-02  Class does not meet. School of Social Work Day Meetings

8. 10-23-02  A. Counseling the Dying and Bereaved: Impact on the Mental Health Professional  
      B. Disenfranchised Grief

9. 10-30-02  Homicide and Suicide.

Assignment Due

10. 11-06-02  Aging and Loss.

11. 11-13-02  Maladaptive Grief: When Death or Loss is Unresolved: A "P.T.S.D." Model for Treatment.

12. 11-20-02  The Cultural Problems of Living with Loss: Violence, Genocide and Human Response.

Assignment Due

13. 11-27-02  Traumatized Loss-Grief Responses on an Individual and Communal Level

14. 12-04-02  Some Final Notes on Death, Loss, and Grief

Lectures and Reading Assignments:

1. 9-04-02  Introductory Information  
      A. Lecture: Death in Our Culture--Past and Present  
      B. A Theoretical Overview: Death, Dying, & Bereavement

Readings Assigned:  DeSpelder, S: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9  
                  Worden: Chapters 1, 2, 3
Suggested Readings: Irish, ch. 1  
Shapiro: Chapters 1, 2, 3

2. 9-11-02  
A. Trauma, Loss, and Memory: A Social Work Perspective on Private and Public Responses to Bereavement  
B. Ethics and the Right to Die Movement  

Assignment Due  
Readings Assigned: Despelder: Chapter 7, 11

Suggested Readings: Shapiro: Chapters 11, 12, 13  
Lund

3. 9-18-02  
A. Hospice  
C. Integrating Theory into Clinical Practice: Therapeutic Responses  

Assignment Due  
Readings Assigned: Despelder: Chapter 4  
Worden: Chapters 4, 5, 7

Suggested Reading: Figley, ch 1,2,3  
Rando: Treatment of Complicated Mourning, Chapters 3, 12, 13, 14  
Shapiro: Chapter 4

4. 9-25-02  
A. Health Care Systems: Dying and Bereavement.  
B. Developing Sensitivity to Ethnic and Cultural Differences When Death is Imminent or Has Just Occurred.  

Assignment Due.  
Readings Assigned: Despelder: Chapter 5

Suggested Readings: Rando: TCM, Chapters 1, 2, 4  
Shapiro: Chapters 7, 8, 9

5. 10-02-02  
Children and Death  

Assignment Due  
Readings Assigned: Worden: Chapter 7  
DeSpelder: Chapter 10

Suggested Readings: Rando, TCM, ch. 13  
Shapiro, ch. 4,5,6,10  
Emswiler and Emswiler
6. 10-09-02
   A. Complicated Grief and Special Types of Losses & Grief
   B. AIDS: Challenges in Treatment for Patients and those close to them. Invited Speaker: Living with Life-Threatening Illness.

Assignment Due

Readings Assigned:  Despelder: Chapter 13 (pgs 489-499)
                  Worden: Chapters 6, 7

Suggested Readings: Shapiro: Chapters 10, 14

7. 10-16-02
   No class. School of Social Work meetings all day.

8. 10-23-02
   A. Counseling the Dying and Bereaved: Impact on the Mental Health Professional
   B. Disenfranchised Grief

Readings Assigned:  Worden: Chapters 8, 9
Suggested Readings: Rando: Treatment of Complicated Mourning, Chapters 14, 19.

9. 10-30-02
   Homicide and Suicide

Readings Assigned:  Despelder: Chapter 12, 13 (pgs 455-488)
Suggested Readings: Rando: Treatment of Complicated Mourning, Chapters 10,11, Figley, ch. 8

10. 11-06-02
    Aging and Loss

Readings Assigned:  Worden: Chapters 4, 5
                   DeSpelder: Chapter 11

11. 11-13-02
    Maladaptive Grief: When Loss or Death is Unresolved: A "P.T.S.D." Model for Treatment

Suggested Readings:  Rando: TCM, Figley.

12. 11-20-02
    The Cultural Problem of Living with Loss: Violence, Genocide, and Human Response

Assignment Due

13. 11-27-02
    Traumatized Loss: Grief Responses on an Individual and Communal Level

14. 12-04-02
    Some Final Notes on Death, Loss, & Grief
I wish I had known about the therapeutic value of talk when Martin was dying. Because today I would insist on talking. I would talk to him about death and terror and pain as well as love. It is what you don't see, don't talk about, that terrifies you. The things that go bump in the emotional night. Talking dispels the phantoms. In helping Martin, I would have helped myself. I would have learned to talk about my feelings. And after Martin died, I could have talked about him. And talked about him and talked about him. Until I finally knew that he was dead and I was alone--starting a new life. I would have emerged from grief sooner. And so would the children.

Lynn Caine, Widow

Only people who avoid love avoid grief. The point is to learn from it and remain vulnerable to love.

John Brantner

All those years I fell for the great palace lie that grief should be gotten over as quickly as possible and as privately. But what I’ve discovered since is that the lifelong fear of grief keeps us in a barren, isolated place and that only grieving can heal grief; the passage of time will lessen the acuteness, but time alone, without the direct experience of grief, will not heal it. San Francisco is a city in grief, we are a world in grief, and it is at once intolerable and a great opportunity. I’m pretty sure that it is only by experiencing that ocean of sadness in a naked and immediate way that we come to be healed—which is to say, that we come to experience life with a real sense of presence and spaciousness and peace...

Anne Lamott

“when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

John Muir