**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. 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 SOME ASSIGNMENTS.** 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)

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

- 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

- 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-lat@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. Weekly one page written assignments which are designed to help integrate course readings and class discussions will be assigned.

3. Each class there will be an opportunity to earn a maximum of six (6) points based on class attendance, completion of readings, participation & sharing of pertinent information and completion of written assignments for a total of 72 points over the course of the semester.

   Students may miss one (1) class and written assignment without penalty. Those who are present for every class and complete all written assignments have the opportunity to earn six (6) extra credit points.

   Students are responsible for copying and completing “Weekly Participation Sheet” and turning it in STAPLED to written assignment each week AT THE END OF EACH CLASS.

4. Diversity Paper/Class Presentation 28 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 and 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.

   Areas to address:

   — Analysis of death, loss, grief issues of a particular ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, religious, etc. diverse population.
   — Specific assessment and intervention issues relevant to the chosen diverse group regarding grief and bereavement.
   — Application of course readings, lectures and discussion to illustrate self-awareness of diversity issues.
   — For the 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!
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, a 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.

**Course Outline and Assigned Readings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan. 7</th>
<th>Our Attitudes Towards Death and Dying</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Historical Perspective and Present Views</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factors Impacting Attitudes</td>
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</tbody>
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**Readings:**
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 1; Chapter 2 (47-57); Chapter 3 (77-104)
Irish: Chapter 1
Jan. 14  
**The Dying Process**  
*#2 Living with Dying: Life Threatening Illness*  
*Care of the Dying*  
*Health Care Systems*

**Readings:**  
DeSpelder & Strickland: Chapters 4 & 5  
Irash: Chapter 3

Jan. 21  
**The Experience of Grief and Mourning**  
*#3 Process and Tasks of Mourning*  
*Variables Influencing Grief*

**Readings:**  
DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 7  
Irish: Chapters 2  
Worden: Chapters 1 & 2

Jan. 28  
**Complicated Grief Reactions**  
*#4 Theories of Complicated Mourning*  
*Definitions, Symptoms, and Syndromes*

**Readings:**  
Worden: Chapter 4  
Irish: Chapter 4

Feb. 4  
**Death and Grief in Adulthood**  
*#5 Models of Adult Bereavement*  
*Life Stage Issues*

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

Feb. 11  
**Death and Grief in Childhood and Adolescence**  
*#6 Developmental Issues*

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

Feb. 18  
**Clinical Intervention with Grievers**  
*#7 Issues in Assessment and Treatment*  
*Counseling Principles in Facilitating Grief*

**Readings:**  
Worden: Chapters 3 and 5  
Irish: Chapter 8
Feb. 25  No Class – Spring Break

March 3  Cultural and Diversity Perspectives on Death
          #8  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

March 10, March 17  Diversity Class Presentations
          #9 & 10

March 24  Special Types of Loss and Grief
          #11  Risks and Clinical Implications
          Risks of Death in Today’s World
          Violence, Disasters and War

          Readings:
          DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 12, 13
          Worden: Chapters 6 and 7
          Irish: Chapter 10 and 11

March 31  Coping Mechanisms for Survivors/Rituals and Funerals/
          #12  Honoring the Dead
          Spirituality and Finding Meaning

          Readings:
          DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 8 and 14
          Worden: Chapter 9
          Irish: Chapter 9

April 7  Ethics and Legal Issues
          #13  Medical Ethics and Technology
          Rights and the Dying

          Readings:
          DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 6; Chapters 9
          Irish: Chapter 12

April 14  Personal and Professional Issues Related to Death, Loss, and Grief
          #14  Caring for Self
          Concluding Thoughts

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