Course Title and Number: SW 461 Social Services in Death, Dying, and Bereavement

Instructor:

Location:

Days and Times:

Contact Information:

Office Hours:

Credits:

Prerequisites: SW 321

Catalog Description

Examines services for the dying and their families, along with an exploration of attitudes toward death and the associated grief processes from a cultural perspective.

Expanded Description

This course is designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of the processes of dying, death, and bereavement. Emphasis is placed on increasing awareness of the personal, societal, legal, ethical, historical, theoretical, and cultural factors that influence attitudes and behaviors surrounding death. Focus is placed on expanding and refining the knowledge and skills involved in providing supportive and referral services to individuals, families, and communities experiencing loss.

In this course we will explore death, dying, the end-of-life experience for the person dying and their family members. Issues of grief, anticipatory mourning, and bereavement from a variety of cultural perspectives will be explored. More specifically, the social work framework of assessment from the bio-psycho-social-cultural-spiritual perspective will be used to explore the end-of-life experience. A major emphasis of this course will be to explore death and dying from a variety of cultural experiences, as the end of life is one of the major life experiences where cultural practices are expressed. In doing this, we will look at both ethnicity and religion as cultural perspectives. The following topics and cultures are featured in this course:

Topic Areas

- The American way of dying
- Other cultural approaches to dying
- Attitudes about Death and Dying
- End-of-Life Decision-Making
- Family caregiving at the end-of-life
- Services for those who are dying and their families
- Perspectives on death and life after death
• Traumatic Deaths
• Funerals: the business of dying
• Legal aspects of dying
• Coping with loss, bereavement, and grief

Cultures and Religions Featured

• Native American
• Hispanic / Latino
• African and African American
• Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian groups
• Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders
• Christian
• Buddhist
• Hindu
• Muslim
• Your culture

Course Objectives

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

• Articulate the values, beliefs, and attitudes they hold about dying, death, and bereavement and discuss how these viewpoints may influence their interactions with human service clients (as evidenced by: reflective writing assignments and discussion board participation requiring each student to critically examine and integrate various readings, viewpoints, and experiences regarding one’s relationship to death)
• Describe how the stages of grief experienced by a person who is dying resemble and differ from those experienced by the person’s family, friends, and significant others (as evidenced by: discussion board participation and a reflective writing assignment)
• Discuss the various legal and ethical issues that have emerged around “end-of-life” care, such as: living wills, advanced directives, extraordinary measures, physician-assisted suicide, and the Bill of Rights for the Dying Patient (as evidenced by: discussion board participation and a reflective writing assignment)
• Demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical approaches and conceptual stances used in the study of death (as evidenced by: course assignments and discussion board participation.)
• Discuss how perceptions of death and expressions of grief are shaped by life experiences, as well as religious, societal, historical, and cultural factors (as evidenced by: discussion board participation, activities, writing assignments, and a final project/paper)
• Demonstrate a working knowledge of various individual, family, group, and community intervention approaches that can be used by professionals who work with people who are dying and their families, friends, and significant others (as evidenced by: discussion board participation, writing assignments, and a final project/paper)

Required Textbooks

The following textbooks are required and available for purchase from Independent Learning & the UNR Bookstore:


• Note: The 8th edition may be used as well

**Recommended Texts**


**Attendance & Participation**

Attendance is required for all sessions, for the full time period (9:00 – 12:00 noon, Monday – Friday). Missing a full session or any portion of a session will result in loss of 5 pts for the day; missing 3 or more sessions will result in a full grade reduction, plus the missed points. The reason for this policy is that many of the daily assignment require group participation, and are based on presentation materials that cannot be duplicated, so there are no make-ups, no late assignments accepted, and no extra credit for the course. Simply come to class and participate.

**Semester At-A-Glance Wintermester Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day/Dates Wintermester</th>
<th>Learning Modules</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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</table>
| Day 1:                 | *Introduction: Learning about Death and Dying* | 1) *LD (9th ed)*, chs. 1–2 | **Day 1 In-class assignment:** Introductions  
|                        |                  |          | **Take three Death Measures** |
| Day 2:                 | *Cultural & Historical Perspectives*  
|                        | *Culture: Your Culture* | 1) *LD*, ch. 3  
|                        |                  | 2) Ethnic Var, chs 12 & 13  
|                        |                  | 2) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 1 (optional) | **Video:** Death and Dying in West Africa  
|                        |                  |          | **Day 2 In-class assignment:** Cultural Exploration |
| Day 3:                 | *Physical Perspectives*  
|                        | *Culture: Native American* | 1) *LD*, chs. 4 & 7  
|                        |                  | 2) Ethnic Var. ch 7  
|                        |                  | 3) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 2 (optional) | **Day 3 In-class assignment:** Planning One’s Own Funeral |
| Day 4:                 | *Services for the Dying*  
|                        | *Culture: Hispanic and Latino Cultures* | 1) *LD*, ch. 5  
|                        |                  | 2) Ethnic Var, ch 5; Appendix D  
|                        |                  | 3) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 6 | **Film:** “Death – A Love Story”  
|                        |                  |          | **Day 4 In-class assignment:** Create a list of local social services to assist the
| Day 5:  | **Ethical Issues in Death and Dying**  | 1) LD, ch. 6  
2) *Ethnic Var.*, ch. 4; Appendix C  
3) Supplemental Reading  | **Day 5 In-class assignment:**  
- Discussion - Terri Schiavo Case  
- Midcourse Exam Review (optional Discussion)  |
| Day 6:  | **The Business of Death and Dying**  | 1) LD, ch. 8  
2) *Ethnic Var.*, ch. 6  
3) Supplemental Reading: Japan /China  | **Midcourse Exam (50 pts)**  
*Guest: Mortician  
*Day 6 In-class assignment: Participate in discussion with guest  |
| Day 7:  | **Grief, Loss, and Bereavement**  | 1) LD, ch. 9  
2) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 4 (required)  
3) Supplemental Reading: Hawaiians  | **Video: Grieving Hearts From Hawaii  
*Day 7 In-class assignment:** Assessing Grief  |
| Day 8:  | **Age-Specific Death: Children & Adolescents**  | 1) LD, ch. 10  
2) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 3 (required)  
3) Supplemental Reading: Christianity  | **Film: “Walking on Water”  
*Day 8 In-class assignment:** Children and Death  |
| Day 9:  | **Age-Specific Death: Older Adults**  | 1) LD, ch. 11  
2) *Grief & Loss*, ch. 3 (required)  
3) *Ethnic Var.*, ch. 9  | **Guest: Public Guardian  
* Day 9 In-class assignment:** Five Wishes  |
| Day 10: | **Understanding Issues Associated with Suicide**  | 1) LD, ch. 12  
2) *Ethnic Var.*, ch. 10  | **Guest: Crisis Call Center  
Day 10 In-class assignment:** Practice talking to someone who is suicidal  |
| Day 11: | **Sudden Deaths: Trauma, war, terrorism, or natural disasters**  | 1) LD, ch. 13  
2) *Ethnic Var.*, ch. 8  | **Day 11 In-class assignment:** Most Difficult Deaths  |
<p>| Day 12: | <strong>Perspectives on Life after Death</strong>  | 1) LD, ch. 14  | *Guest Speaker: Stephen Wegner  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 12</th>
<th>Culture: Your Culture (revisited)</th>
<th>2) Grief &amp; Loss, ch. 5 (optional)</th>
<th>(Near-death experience)</th>
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<td>* Day 12 In-class assignment: Discussion - Beliefs about life after death</td>
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**Day 13:**
- *Putting it all Together*
  - *Culture: Your Culture (revisited)*
- 1) *LD, ch 15*
  - 2) *Grief & Loss, ch. 8 (optional)*
  - *Final Paper: A Cultural Comparison (60 points)*
  - • *Final Exam Review (optional Discussion)*
  - • Take 3 Death Measures (again)

**Day 14:**
- *Final Exam*
- *Final Exam (75 pts)*

- LD = the text “Last Dance” (9th edition)

**Assignments & Grading Scale & Point Distribution**

*Attendance & Participation (In-class assignments & discussion) = 5pts/day – 13 days = 65 pts*

*Final Paper = 60 pts*

*Mid-Course Exam = 50 pts*

*Final Exam = 75 pts*

**Total Possible Points: 250 pts**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between 10% - 20%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>Between 20% - 30%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between 30% - 40%</td>
<td>D</td>
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*All % rounded up to the higher grade

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**Grading Scale:**

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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>237 - 225</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>224 - 217</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>174 - 150</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 150</td>
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Final Project/Paper

Due: This paper (10 to 15 pages) is due

Points: This paper is worth 60 points toward your final grade.

Objective: As the larger, culminating assignment, students will prepare a research paper. The paper is to be ten to fifteen pages in length. The requirements are to select a cultural group other than one's own, and compare and contrast their experiences and knowledge from that of the cultural group they select. They will then address six areas of end-of-life issues that were explored throughout the course. This paper requires that the students use studies from literature to support their positions. The six areas to be addressed are:

1. Caregiving for the dying
2. Funeral practices
3. Grief and bereavement practices
4. About children
5. Major religious influences
6. Beliefs about life after death

The purpose of this assignment is to help students recognize their own culture in comparison to another. This deep exploration is needed to be proficient and effective in providing services for people at the end of life, both before a death happens as well as after.

Requirements: Students are expected to write a 10 to 15-page paper on the above topic. The paper should be double-spaced and in, twelve-point font with standard, one-inch margins. The paper should be submitted through the Assignments tool in WebCampus as an attached Microsoft Word document. Students will need to show support for their arguments with literature (a minimum of five journal citations; websites are okay for additional support, but they cannot be part of the five required citations). The paper needs to be formatted to APA style guidelines. The instructor will post an “example” paper to give students some ideas for how to focus their own work.

Grading Categories:

1. Completeness
2. Clarity of writing (including grammar, spelling, and syntax)
3. Quality of response (demonstrates critical thinking)
4. Demonstrated sensitivity to the cultural group featured
5. Service application / application to social work
6. Demonstration of course concepts

Students can earn up to 10 points in each category, for a total of 60 possible points.

Examinations

Due: There are two multiple choice / essay exams in this course: a midcourse exam and a final exam. Both exams will be in-class, closed book exams.

Points: The mid-course exam is worth 50 points toward your final grade; and the Final Exam is worth 75 points. Sample questions will be provided in the study guides that will be posted in the daily learning modules.
Objectives & Scope: Both exams have a combination of multiple choice and essay components. The purpose is to test your knowledge of what you learned from the course readings and lectures. For the midcourse exam, included topics are from the beginning of the class through the midcourse exam; for the final exam, topics include those occurring post–midcourse exam through the end of the course. Students will have two hours to complete each exam. No notes or textbooks will be allowed. The focus of the exam questions will be on major course content, themes, and terminology, with emphasis on the primary textbook readings (“The Last Dance”).

Requirements

Rigorous testing policies and procedures are required of an accredited university; therefore, exams must always be administered in a proctored/supervised, educational setting.

Students are required to complete all proctored exams / writing assignments. Students cannot pass the class without completing all proctored exams / writing assignments.

Exam dates: Refer to the weekly learning modules for scheduled exam dates.

Course Bibliography


