Course Description:
Social Work 245 is a course designed to provide opportunities for students to conduct an investigation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with death, dying and the grieving process. Terminal illness and suicide and its impact on families, individuals and communities, euthanasia, last rites, legal aspects, death anxiety, cross-cultural beliefs and various theoretical and philosophical views on the phenomenon of death are explored. Philosophical, theoretical and practice perspectives will be explored.

Required Text:


Additional Readings handed out from time to time during semester

Course Outcomes:
The students will, through written assignments/projects/exams/ and outside readings understand, integrate, and apply knowledge on the following:

1. Introduction to Thanatology
   - background of the study of death and dying;
   - methodological considerations;
   - evaluate the usefulness of death education and thanatology;

2. Attitudes toward Death
   - identify historical antecedents of current Western attitudes toward death;
   - contrast cross cultural views of the relationship between life and death;
   - discuss personal and social assumptions about loss and death;
   - explain how attitudes concerning death are expressed in mass media, language, and the arts;
discuss what factors have influenced emotional and physical distancing from death;

3. The Fear of Death
- discuss psychoanalytic theory perspectives;
- explain theories of trauma and separation;
- understand existential theories and give examples;
- describe learning theory explanations;

4. Learning about Death: Sociocultural Influences
- describe the components of a mature concept about death;
- discuss the relationship of early experiences with death and understanding death;
- contrast sociatal response to death using functionalist, symbolic interactionism, conflict theory and social learning theory;
- describe how varieties of subcultures develop diverse approaches to understanding death and contribute to death customs and mourning rituals;

5. Dying as a Process
- understand the Kubler-Ross stage model;
- discuss Weisman’s series of small deaths model;
- Explain Bluebond-Langer and dying children;
- Evaluate alternative models of dying process;
- Delineate between various death trajectories;
- Understand and be able to discuss what dying people want;

6. Caring for the Terminally Ill
- describe the philosophies and programs of hospice as an approach to caring for the dying;
- assess the benefits and risks of alternative therapies;
- weigh the personal and social costs of terminal illnesses;
- provide examples of losses that occur through institutionalization of the dying process;

7. Death and the Family
- describe children’s perceptions of illness and death;
- identify factors influencing children’s experience of grief;
- contrast approaches of various grief support groups;
- illustrate ways to help children cope with death;
- distinguish the factors influencing the response to a death of a parent;
- discuss various types of bereavement (i.e. parental, spouse, child, relative);
- discuss individual and family adjustment and re-organization;
- contrast “normal” and “morbid” death reactions;

8. Volitional Deaths
- identify potential suicide victims and suicidal ideations;
- explain risk factors associated with suicide;
- discuss the history of suicide and theoretical typologies and compare causal theories;
- contrast diverse cultural beliefs about suicide;
- identify myths about suicide;
- describe suicide intervention techniques;

9. Technology and Death
- describe benefits and costs of truth-telling in terminal cases;
- explain issues regarding competencies;
- contrast four approaches to the definition of death;
- discuss euthanasia and ethical considerations of one’s “right-to_die”;
- define self-determination and informed consent;
- name at least five medical technologies that may prolong lifespan;

10. Last Rites, Interment and Death Rituals
- describe the psychosocial aspects and function of rituals;
- contrast costs of various funeral and interment rituals;
- discuss the historical changes in U.S. death rituals;
- compare diversity of cultural approaches to death rituals;

11. Morbidity and Mortality Risks
- describe risks of death for various age groups, genders, racial groups;
- evaluate the impact of AIDS and other emerging diseases;
- discuss the impact of disasters on those who survive;
- identify the effects of war and its aftermath on combatants and noncombatants;

12. Legalities of Death
- describe the role of the coroner and medical examiner;
- appraise one’s own death in terms of advance directives;
- identify the types, content, and purpose of wills and living wills;
- discuss the stipulations in the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act;
- describe the legal stages with respect to legal matters pertaining to a terminally ill person.

Course Evaluation:
Evaluation will be based on the Following:
Class Attendance and Participation: 15% of your grade
(You will be dropped from the course after a third absence without reasonable explanation—missing ½ a class will be counted as an absence).
Two in-class essay exams 65% of your grade
In-class Debate of ethics of euthanasia 05% of your grade
Personal paper on life/death/grief 15% of your grade
(to be discussed 1st day of class)
### Fall 2006

**Tentative Course Calendar:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK/Date</th>
<th>TOPIC &amp; READINGS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1.</strong></td>
<td>Introduction to Thanatology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 7</td>
<td>Communication patterns regarding Death</td>
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<td>Movie: <em>Trip to Bountiful</em></td>
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<td><strong>Week 2.</strong> Western Attitudes Toward Death</td>
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<td>Sept. 14</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 1 and Ch 3 of MainText to pg. 103</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td>Diverse Cultural Views of Death</td>
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<td>Sept. 21</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 2, pgs. 103-120, and Ch 14, pgs. 501-518</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
<td>The Fear of Death—Psychological Theories</td>
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<td>Sept 28</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 1 &amp; 2 &amp; 5 of Kuhl</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td>Learning About Death: Sociocultural Influences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 2 (pgs 70-top of pg. 85) of Main Text</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td>The Greiving Process</td>
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<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 8 of MainText</td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Midterm In-class Exam</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 19</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td>Death in the Lives of Children and Adolescence</td>
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<td><strong>Oct 26</strong></td>
<td><strong>Readings: Ch 2 (pgs 41-70) &amp; Ch 10 of Main Text</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Weeks 9</strong></td>
<td>Death in the Lives of Adults</td>
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<td>Nov 2</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 11 of Text</td>
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<td><strong>Week 10</strong></td>
<td>Dying as a Process/Living with a life-threatening Illness</td>
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<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>Readings: Ch 5 &amp; 6 of Main Text and Chs 6-8 of Kuhl</td>
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<td>Wear Costumes</td>
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<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
<td>Health Care Systems: Caring for the Terminally Ill</td>
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<td>Nov 16</td>
<td>Movie: <em>Wit</em> Readings: Ch 4 of Text &amp; Ch 4 of Kuhl</td>
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<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
<td>Medical Ethics: Technology, the Dying Process &amp; Rights</td>
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<td>Nov 23</td>
<td>Jeopardy Game Readings: Ch 7 of Text</td>
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<td><em><strong>Personal Reflection Paper Due</strong></em></td>
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Week 13  Volitional Death and Suicide Prevention
Nov. 30  In-class Debate on Euthanasia
Readings: Ch 12 of Text

Week 14  Last Rites, Body Disposition and Legal aspects of Death
Dec 7  Readings: Ch 8 & Ch 9 of Text & Chs 9 and conclusion of Kuhl
Come to class dressed as you would for a funeral or memorial service that you would plan for a loved one

Week 16  ***  Final In-class Exam
Dec 14

Personal Reflection of Death and Dying-- should be about 5-8 or so pages long & to meet this requirement, choose one of the following:-Due Week 12, Nov. 16

1. Write letters to friends, family members or acquaintances who have died. What unexpressed thoughts or feelings would you have liked to have shared with these people? What feelings are coming up for you as you are thinking about these people? What has triggered each feeling? What unmet needs do you think the person had as they were dying? How might those needs have been met? Do you see yourself, life and others differently as a result of having taken this class? How so?

2. Analyze the poetry or prose of at least ten contemporary or classic authors as to their depictions of death. Give examples, your interpretations and your personal reactions to their views. How would you categorize the way death is viewed in each case?

2. Write a critical review of a book dealing with death, dying, or ideas directly related. You may choose from books referenced in your textbook. Each review should be about 5 pages and should emphasize your reactions to the material read.

3. Attend a funeral of someone whom you do not know. Write a description of how the rituals seemed to be serving the people involved, and observe their reactions. What are the historical, cultural, religious, or personal purposes of each ritual? What feelings come up for you as you observe and reflect on these rituals? Write a description of what you would like to have happen after you die in terms of rituals.

4. Interview a person with a life-threatening illness as to their feelings and insights about their condition. What feelings come up for you and how would you handle a similar life-threatening illness were it to happen to you. How would such an event change you? Write a 5 page paper describing your feelings, observations and knowledge about the dying process and the reality of death.
5. Interview a person who works in a helping profession that has regular contact with dying people. Perhaps, you might visit a hospice, funeral home or oncology unit of a hospital for a tour as well as an interview. Find out the service provider’s attitudes toward death, the dying, and changes in their personal attitudes as they have worked with this population. What personal feelings come up for you as you hear about this work and how would you hypothetically handle the challenges were you to do the same work? What would be basic approaches, skills and knowledge you would need to do this work?

6. Do a content analysis of the ways that death is portrayed on the evening news and or TV shows or in the movies. Keep a record over a two week period of every time that death is mentioned. Under what circumstances if death being discussed, how is it treated and toward what purpose is the discussion aimed? Do these portrayals encourage open, direct communication about death that is helpful or unhelpful in promoting understanding, mutual support, deep meaning and peacefulness? If not, how might this be changed?

7. Imagine your own dying process. Suppose that you are diagnosed with a terminal illness. How would you cope over the course of the illness and during the dying process? How would you tell your loved ones? What would you ask of them in terms of support? How would you interact with health professionals and with what medical resources (i.e. insurance coverage for various options, hospitalization, long-term care, hospice, family, documents to protect your wishes, etc.)? How do you imagine the dying process might change you spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, physically, etc. Create rituals for your memorial or funeral or other ways to commemorate the final disposition of your body. What would you want your eulogy to sound like? Obituary? What might you want on your headstone (if any)? How would you want your property disposed of?