



OTRP *online*

office of teaching resources in PSYCHOLOGY

PSYC 480: Death, Dying, and Grief
Fall 2010, 3 credit hours, CRN # 46466
Instructor: Beth Eckerd, Ph.D.

Class Meetings:
Monday 5:00-7:50 pm, BSS 420

Instructor Contact Information

Office: BSS 424
Telephone: 707-826-3757
E-mail: beth.eckerd@humboldt.edu (often the quickest way to reach me)
Office Hours: Mon. 2-3, Tue. 9-10, Wed. 10-11, Wed. 2-3, Thu. 12:30-1:30, and by appointment

Required Materials

- DeSpelder, L. A., & Strickland, A. L. (2009). *The last dance: Encountering death and dying* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. ISBN #: 9780073405469
- Callanan, M. (2008). *Final journeys: A practical guide for bringing care and comfort at the end of life*. New York: McGraw-Hill. ISBN #: 9780553382747
- Additional readings (posted on Moodle 2 weeks in advance; see complete list at end of syllabus)
- For your paper assignment, you will need to read one of the following books (see p. 4):
 - Lewis, C. S. (1961). *A grief observed*. New York: Bantam.
 - Middlebrook, C. (1996). *Seeing the crab: A memoir of dying*. New York: Basic Books.

Course Description/Class Format

- PSYC 480 counts toward completion of the breadth requirements for psychology majors
- Prerequisite: PSYC 104; upper division psychology major or instructor approval
- Description from HSU catalog: "Topic/problem from experimental, theoretical, or applied psychology."

In this course, we will focus in depth on the psychological experiences of people as they approach death and of loved ones who are left behind. We will also review factual information about death (e.g., how is death defined? what are the major causes of death? what happens physically as people are close to death?). Other topics include an examination of the American "death system" and attitudes about death and grieving; the hospice movement; end-of-life decision-making; funeral customs in the U.S. and elsewhere; a scientifically-based examination of extraordinary experiences related to grief and death; and contemplation of what a "good death" would be.

Class format: I will assume that you have read the assigned material. Class will primarily involve discussion of the readings, videos, and individual and group activities; minimal time will be spent on traditional lecture. Each class will begin with a quiz on the readings for the week. Your thoughtful participation in discussions and sharing of your questions is what will make this an interesting and beneficial course, so please get involved! There will also be guest speakers on approximately two class meetings.

Student Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, the successful student will be able to:

- Identify major causes of death in the United States and historical changes
- Demonstrate knowledge of individuals and institutions involved in the "death system" and functions of this system
- Identify and explain psychological experiences often associated with dying, and describe how dying fits into a lifespan developmental model
- Explain services offered by hospice and the hospice philosophy
- Describe and compare current and historical theories regarding grief
- Explain how specific factors such as age, relationship, traumatic death, etc. can influence the grief experience
- Demonstrate broad familiarity with several religious/cultural approaches to dying, funeral, and bereavement rituals, and demonstrate in-depth familiarity with general U.S. approaches as well as one other religious/cultural approach
- Develop informed views, and defend those views, about controversial issues such as assisted death, suicide, and definitions of death
- Organize and begin to plan for various tasks that can arise at the end of life
- Develop skill, and perhaps comfort, in knowing how to be of assistance to people who are dying or grieving

Broad Course Objectives

I hope that by being an active member of this class, you will develop as a person in ways that reach beyond the specific, more conventional (and important) course objectives above. First, I hope this course will help demystify death, dying, and grieving, and perhaps lessen the anxiety you might have about experiencing these inevitable events. Second, I hope that what you learn in this course will help you know how to help others in your life, and yourself, as they and we negotiate the passages of death and bereavement. Finally, by exploring your attitudes about death, my wish is that you will grow by getting to know yourself better and remaining open to other views.

Important Note

I reserve the right to change this syllabus to make the course more effective at meeting your needs and/or to make it work from a practical standpoint. Any change will be discussed with students in advance, and will be implemented only after we have agreed as a group that it is an acceptable change. We might also need to make changes in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Class Rules: Attendance and Make-up Policy; Late Assignments

Attendance is expected for the entire class period. Part of your grade is based on your attendance and participation. Additionally, you will miss the weekly quiz if you do not attend. Weekly quizzes can be made up only in the event of extenuating circumstances, such as illness or emergency (as determined by the instructor). Make-up quizzes will be administered during final exam week only. Also, please note that you are responsible for announcements made in class whether you attend or not.

Any late assignments will lose 20% of possible points for each day they are late. The 20% is deducted as soon as the assignment is late (i.e., up to 24 hours late = 20% off, 24-48 hours late = 40% off, etc.). Due to its timing in the semester, the final project cannot be made up.

From HSU website: "It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements regarding class work in those cases where the student's absence is because of participation in inter-collegiate athletics, forensics, drama festivals, music tours, and the like." Let me know **in advance** if you must miss class due to such an activity, and I will be glad to make alternate arrangements with you. Documentation may be required.

Students with Disabilities

Persons who wish to request disability-related accommodations should contact the Student Disability Resource Center in Library 055, 826-4678 (voice) or 826-5392 (TDD). Some accommodations may take up to several weeks to arrange. Please talk to me by the second class meeting, earlier if possible, if you think you will require any accommodations, and I will be happy to work with you. Here is the link: <http://www.humboldt.edu/disability>.

Course Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

You get out of a course what you put into it. Policy requires that I provide you an estimate of the time expected for this course, so I estimate that you should plan on an average of approximately 6 hours per week outside of class meetings, or 2 hours per credit hour. Individual students might find that they can do well with less time, or that more time is required to master course material.

Weekly Quizzes. Except for August 23 and December 13, there will be a quiz each week, consisting primarily of multiple-choice and short answer questions, and usually one short essay question. Approximately 60-75% of quiz material will be on the reading assigned for that day; 25-40% will be on topics from the previous week's class. Each quiz is worth 12-13 points, or approximately 2.5% of your final grade. We will have 13 quizzes, but only 12 count toward your grade, so you can miss or drop one with no penalty. All together, weekly quizzes count for 150 points, or 30% of your final grade.

Attendance/participation: Each week, you will earn 5 points if you are (a) present for the entire class session (3 points), and (b) engaged with class activities and discussion (2 points). If you arrive late or leave early, two (2) points is the maximum you can obtain for that day. We will discuss the specifics at our first class meeting. Each week's 5 attendance/participation points are worth 1% of your final grade; therefore, complete attendance/participation for all 15 weeks is worth 75 points, or 15% of your final grade in the class.

Cross-cultural day. Our **October 18** class meeting will be devoted entirely to discussion of death, dying, and grief-related beliefs and practices of various cultures and religious groups. Students, working in groups of two or three, will present information about their culture/religion's views, and we will compare and contrast these views together at the end of the class session. Deadlines along the way are to: (1) select partner(s) by **September 27**; (2)

turn in an outline and list of sources by **October 11**; (3) turn in answers to specific questions on **October 18**. All together, this project is worth 50 points, or 10% of your final grade. A detailed written assignment for this project will be posted on Moodle shortly.

Final Project. Students, working alone or in groups of no larger than 3, will prepare a research-based presentation on a course-related topic of their choice (subject to instructor approval), on our final exam date (December 13). Each group will prepare a poster on their topic, as well as a brief power point presentation (5 minutes maximum) on the highlights of their project. Similar to a conference poster session, students will visit each other's posters and ask questions about each other's work. Detailed instructions for this assignment will be posted on Moodle shortly. Note that there are several deadlines to meet along the way: (1) **November 1**: topic and partner(s); (2) **November 15**: list of sources and draft of outline; (3) **December 6**: detailed final outline. All together, all parts of this assignment count for 100 points, or 20% of your final grade.

Paper: Students will read one of two fairly short books: "A Grief Observed" or "Seeing the Crab." In the paper, you will be asked to describe and analyze the author's experiences and put them in the context of what you have learned this semester about dying or grieving. There is no page minimum or maximum, but your paper will likely need to be approximately 6-8 pages to adequately respond to the questions you will answer. A detailed paper assignment will be posted on Moodle shortly. **Due date is Thursday, December 2, by noon.** The paper is worth 75 points, or 15% of your final grade.

Reaction papers (Moodle). Five times during the semester, I would like you to turn in, via Moodle, a paper sharing your reflections on a particular class-related topic. These papers should be about 400-500 words (about 2 typewritten pages) and will ask for your thoughts on specific questions, as well as for more open-ended personal reflection. The paper topic and instructions will be posted on Moodle as soon as the relevant course material has been discussed. Due dates are: **September 20, October 4, October 25, December 6, and December 13.** Each paper is worth 10 points, or 2% of your grade; together these papers count for 50 points or 10% of your final grade.

Class Participation Bonus: If, based on all of the above, you are very close (5 or fewer points) to a higher grade, class participation and attendance can help. In this situation only, I reserve the right to raise your grade if you have regularly attended class (defined as not missing more than one class) and been an active participant in discussion throughout the semester. This possible bonus is just that, a possibility – as the instructor, it is my decision.

Extra credit: Students may earn up to 25 points of extra credit in 3 ways: (a) participating in a brief research study that will be available in class early in the semester (assuming it is approved by the IRB); (b) participating in psychology department research studies posted at the psychology subject pool website; and (c) sharing death- and grief-related material in "pop culture," such as songs, TV programs, and movies. The 25 points of extra credit can boost your grade by ½ grade level (5% of total points). See specific instructions posted on Moodle.

Grading

Grades will be decided using the cutoffs below. Please note in advance that there will be no deviation from these cutoffs for any circumstances, except as described above regarding class participation and attendance.

A:	460 points or above (92-100%)	D+:	340-349.9 points (68-69.9%)
A-:	450-459.9 points (90-91.9%)	D:	300-339.9 points (60-67.9%)
B+:	440-449.9 points (88-89.9%)		

B:	410-439.9 points (82-87.9%)	F:	299.9 points or below (below 60%)
B-:	400-409.9 points (80-81.9%)		
C+:	390-399.9 points (78-79.9%)		
C:	360-389.9 points (72-77.9%)		
C-:	350-359.9 points (70-71.9%)		

Points are distributed as follows:

Weekly quizzes (12 @ 12-13 points each)	=	150 points
Final research project	=	100 points
Paper on book	=	75 points
Cross-cultural panel project	=	50 points
Reaction papers (5 @ 10 points each)	=	50 points
Participation/attendance (15 weeks @ 5 points each)	=	75 points
Total possible points	=	500

Miscellaneous Important Points

• **Add/Drop policy:** Students are responsible for knowing the University policy, procedures, and schedule for dropping or adding classes. Here is the link:

<http://www.humboldt.edu/~reg/regulations/schedadjust.html>

• **Emergency evacuation:** Please review the evacuation plan for the classroom (posted on the orange signs), and review the following site http://studentaffairs.humboldt.edu/emergencyops/campus_emergency_preparedness.php for information on campus Emergency Procedures. During an emergency, information can be found campus conditions at: **826-INFO** or www.humboldt.edu/emergency

• **Academic honesty:** Students are responsible for knowing policy regarding academic honesty: http://studentaffairs.humboldt.edu/judicial/academic_honesty.php or <http://www.humboldt.edu/~humboldt/catalogpdfs/catalog2007-08.pdf>. ***Please note that I take academic honesty very seriously, and will pursue the maximum penalty in the rare and unexpected instance that a student does not uphold the academic honesty standards.***

• **Attendance and disruptive behavior:** Students are responsible for knowing policy regarding attendance and disruptive behavior: http://studentaffairs.humboldt.edu/judicial/attendance_behavior.php

• **Classroom etiquette:** We will discuss some ground rules for our class discussions. I want us together to create a comfortable classroom environment that is focused on learning and that has appropriate boundaries around sharing personal experiences so that everyone feels safe. We will discuss and decide as a group what these boundaries are.

• **Pet peeves:** We all have them—here are mine. Please do not do any of the following during class; I don't want to call you out in class for doing these, but I will: (1) using your cell phone (have it turned off); (2) using a laptop computer for anything other than taking notes; (3) engaging in side conversations while someone else has the "floor"; (4) sleeping; or (5) reading, unless a class activity calls for it. ☺

Course Schedule and Assignments

The schedule below will be followed as closely as possible, but is subject to change due to the availability of guest speaker and, of course, if unexpected circumstances occur. Changes to this schedule will be posted on Moodle and announced in class. Please note that you are responsible for being aware of any changes made to this schedule/reading assignments announced during class. **Readings should be done before the Monday class meeting for the date assigned. All assignments are due at the beginning of class.**

Readings from sources other than the DeSpelder & Strickland and Callanan texts will be posted on Moodle 2 weeks in advance. These readings will be removed from Moodle after the week in which they are discussed. Full citations are provided on the last page of the syllabus.

Week/Date	Reading Assignment (read before class)	Other Assignments (due 5pm)	Class Topics
1: Aug. 23	*D&S: Ch. 1, pp. 1-29 *Callanan: Intro		*Course overview and introduction *Attitudes about death and theoretical explanations
2: Aug. 30	*Self-care and coping *D&S: Ch. 1, pp. 29-46 *D&S: Ch. 4		*The "death system" *Causes of death *Defining death
Sept. 6			No class: Labor Day Holiday
3: Sept. 13	*D&S: Ch. 12 *D&S: Ch. 13		*Suicide *Horrendous death
4: Sept. 20	*D&S: Ch. 7 *Callanan: Part I *Peachey (1992) *Kastenbaum (2009)	Reaction paper #1	*Coping with life-threatening illness *Dying as last stage of development *Psychological models of dying
5: Sept. 27	*D&S: Ch. 5 *Callanan: Parts V & VI	Partner(s) for cross-cultural project	*Dying: physiological aspects *Health care system *Movie: "Wit"
6: Oct. 4	*Callanan: Parts III & IV	Reaction paper #2	*Caring for a dying person *Hospice (guest speakers)
7: Oct. 11	*D&S: Ch. 8 *Basler (2004)	Sources/outline for cross-cultural project	*Funerals in the United States (probable guest speaker and/or field trip)
8: Oct. 18	*D&S: Ch. 3 *D&S: Ch. 14, pp. 491-511	Answers for your religion/culture	*Cross-cultural attitudes, beliefs, and customs regarding death and the afterlife
9: Oct. 25	*D&S: Ch. 6 *Callanan: Part II *Callanan: Appendices A, B, C *Quindlen (2005) *Wilson (2005); *Cohen & Kass (2006) *ODWDA information	Reaction paper #3	*End of life decision making *Oregon Death with Dignity Act

Week/Date	Reading Assignment (read before class)	Other Assignments (due 5pm)	Class Topics
10: Nov. 1	*Rando (1991) *D&S: Ch. 9, pp. 311-331 *Callanan: Ch. 37, Ch. 38 *Maciejewski et al. (2007)	Topic/partner for final project	*Grief: symptoms; theories and models
11: Nov. 8	*D&S: Ch. 10 *D&S: Ch. 11 *Callanan: Ch. 39 *Balk (2001), pp. 67-76 required, 76-84 optional		*Children and grief *Grieving particular relationships *College students and grief
12: Nov. 15	*D&S, Ch. 9, pp. 331-347 *Doka (2008) *Neimeyer (2008) *Neimeyer et al. (2010)	Sources/draft outline for final project	*Factors affecting one's grief experience *Disenfranchised grief *Prolonged grief disorder *Grief counseling
Nov. 22			No class: Thanksgiving holiday
13: Nov. 29	No reading assignment	Paper is due Thu. 12/2 by noon	*Movie: "Moonlight Mile" (117 minutes)
14: Dec. 6	*D&S: Ch. 14, pp. 511-522 *Callanan: Ch. 30, Ch. 31, Ch. 40 *Parker (2005) (optional) *D&S: Ch. 15	Detailed outline for final project Reaction paper #4	*Extraordinary experiences: near-death experiences, "nearing death awareness," post-death contacts *The "good death"
15: Dec. 13	No reading assignment	Reaction paper #5	Final projects

Citations for Non-Text Readings

September 20:

Kastenbaum, R. J. (2009). *Death, society, and human experience* (10th ed.) (pp. 137-140). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Peachey, N. H. (1992). Helping the elderly person resolve integrity versus despair. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 28, 29-30.

October 11:

Basler, B. (2004). Green graveyards—A natural way to go. In G. E. Dickinson & M. R. Leming (Eds.), *Annual editions: Death, dying, and bereavement 09/10* (11th ed.) (pp. 125-126). New York: McGraw-Hill.

October 25:

Quindlen, A. (2005). The culture of each life. *Newsweek*, April 4, 2005.

Wilson, J. Q. (2005). Killing Terri. *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2005.

Cohen, E., & Kass, L. R. (2006). "Cast me not off in old age." In G. E. Dickinson & M. R. Leming (Eds.), *Annual editions: Death, dying, and bereavement 09/10* (11th ed.) (pp. 40-44). New York: McGraw-Hill.

ODWDA information: Go to the Oregon.gov Death with Dignity Act website and read the FAQs; here is the link:
<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/faqs.shtml>

November 1:

Rando, T. A. (1991). *How to go on living when someone you love dies* (pp. 25-46). New York: Bantam.

Maciejewski, P. K., Zhang, B., Block, S. D., & Prigerson, H. G. (2007). An empirical examination of the stage theory of grief. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 297*, 716-723.

November 8:

Balk, D. E. (2001). College student bereavement, scholarship, and the university: A call for university engagement. *Death Studies, 25*, 67-84. PAGES 67 THROUGH TOP OF 76 REQUIRED; PP. 76-84 OPTIONAL.

November 15:

Doka, K. J. (2008). Disenfranchised grief in historical and cultural perspective. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, H. Schut, & W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 223-240). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Neimeyer, R. A. (2008). Prolonged grief disorder. In C. Bryant & D. Peck (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of death and the human experience*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Neimeyer, R. A., Burke, L. A., Mackay, M. M., & van Dyke Stringer, J. V. (2010). Grief therapy and the reconstruction of meaning: From principles to practice. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 40*, 73-83.

December 6:

Parker, J.S. (2005). Extraordinary experiences of the bereaved and adaptive outcomes of grief. *Omega, 51*, 257-283. RECOMMENDED, NOT REQUIRED.