

**SW 617, Section 002  
Death, Loss, and Grief**

**Winter, 2013  
Room SSWB 2816  
Thursday 2:00-5:00 p.m.**

**Instructors:**  
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**Office Hours: We are available in the class room prior to and after class to discuss questions and concerns and are happy to make individual appointments as needed.**

**Please allow 24 hours for email response Monday-Friday. Email is not monitored on weekends. Please put SW617 in the subject line.**

### **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.

While some interpersonal practice methods will be discussed, this course is not designed nor designated by the School of Social Work as a methods class.

### **Course Objectives**

Upon completion of the 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, caregivers, and 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. Demonstrate increased 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 and the significance of social groups in bereavement.

7. Examine the variables impacting mourning (e.g. ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation) 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.
9. Identify post traumatic stress disorder.
10. Discuss dominant themes of complicated mourning, including multiple losses, traumatized loss; disenfranchised and stigmatized loss, cultural genocide, and historical transmission of loss.
11. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to death, loss, and grief.

### **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.

### **Intensive Focus on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice (PODS)**

This course integrates PODS content and skills with a special emphasis on the identification of theories, practice and/or policies that promote social justice, illuminate injustices and are consistent with scientific and professional knowledge. Through the use of a variety of instructional methods, this course will support students developing a vision of social justice, learn to recognize and reduce mechanisms that support oppression and injustice, work toward social justice processes, apply intersectionality and intercultural frameworks and strengthen critical consciousness, self knowledge and self awareness to facilitate PODS learning.

### **Class Norms**

1. Attendance and participation are vital to the learning experience and 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 academically sound participation is encouraged and expected.
4. Use of personal computer and phones in the classroom will be limited to course related activities.
5. You are responsible for reading the syllabus and assignment instruction. Class information is also posted on C-Tools.
6. Typed hard copies of all written assignments should be submitted at the beginning of class with all pages stapled together including relevant additional materials as assigned. Assignments not submitted in class will be considered late.
7. Other norms important to the class will be discussed and incorporated.
8. School of Social Work Class Attendance Policy 5.03: It is expected that students attend classes and instructors are encouraged to monitor attendance. Instructors are asked by the school to notify the Associate Dean for Educational Programs if a student has two unexcused absences in a row. More than two absences will require additional completion of assignments.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students needing accommodation for a disability should notify the instructors on the first day of class to ensure needs are met in a timely way. Resources are available (i.e. adaptive technology computing site, Services for Students with Disabilities, etc). Students with disabilities may contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 734-763-3000 or in Room G664 Haven Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations. To the extent permitted by law, information will be treated as private and confidential.

### **Religious Observations**

Students who have conflicts with class attendance due to religious observances should contact the instructors on the first day of to make appropriate arrangements to obtain class materials and to coordinate make-up class activities and assignments.

### **Three Required Course Texts**

DeSpelder, L. & Strickland, A. (2011). *The last dance: Encountering death and dying* (9th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Worden, J. W. (2009). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Irish, D. P., Lundquist, K.F., & Nelsen, V. J. (Eds.). (1993). *Ethnic variations in dying, death and grief*. Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis.

### **Recommended Reading:**

Yalon, Irving (2008). *Staring at the sun*. New York: Jossey Bass.

**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 ASSIGNMENTS AND TO PURSUE YOUR AREAS OF INTERESTS.** In addition, handouts or other materials may be distributed in class or posted on C-Tool for reading.

For those interested in an additional diversity text, you may want to consider: Parry, J. K., & Ryan, A. S. (Eds.) (1995). *A cross-cultural look at death, dying and religion*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall-Publishers.

Additional readings, online articles and reference materials specific to class topics will be discussed throughout the term.

**Assignments and Grading**

While this course has been designed to provide information and learning experiences for you, what you ultimately gain will largely depend on your use of self, your engagement in the class and your commitment to take responsibility for your individual learning. Graduate school standards anticipate that for every hour spent in the classroom, graduate students will need to spend 2-3 hours outside of the class room to complete reading and assignments at a level of mastery (i.e. 6-9 hours for a 3 credit class).

Assignments are designed to use a variety of evaluation methods including written papers, oral presentations, classroom discussions and in-class quizzes to allow opportunities to address strengths and preferences of diverse individual students.

Hard copies of written assignments are to be submitted at the beginning of the class on the date due. If you are unable to submit written assignments, please make other arrangements to get a hard copy of your paper to class. Late completion and submission of assignments will result in grading deductions as defined in assignment descriptions.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

**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. Students should be prepared to be called on in class to contribute their understanding, ideas and reactions from readings in weekly class discussions including assigned journals. The engagement and quality of these responses will be used as a part of grading for class participation.

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

Written skills are essential to effective social work practice and as professionals we will be continually assessed and judged on our ability to express ideas clearly and professionally on behalf of our clients, our organizations, our profession and ourselves. Graduate level writing skills will be expected in this course including appropriate grammar, in-text citations, references, organization of thought, clarity of expression and creativity in your writing.

Writing labs are available through the Sweetland Writing Clinic in Angel Hall (<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/>). The SSW Career Center offers writing assistance services for MSW students including proofreading, spelling edits and addressing basic argument flow issues. To make an appointment, contact [ssw-cso@umich.edu](mailto:ssw-cso@umich.edu). APA format is the definitive source for standardized writing in the behavioral and social sciences and is required with assignments requiring referencing. Deductions will be made for failure to follow this format. Please refer to the APA Style manual in various UM libraries or the following sites:

[http://guides.lib.umich.edu/content.php?pid=39340](http://guides.lib.umich.edu/content.php?pid=39340;) ;  
<http://apastyle.apa.org/manual/>  
<http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/brief-guide.aspx>  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

### **Ethics and Plagiarism**

Social work students are held to the highest standards of academic and professional conduct. The Code of Academic and Professional Conduct applies to all students enrolled in the School of Social Work. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the relevant assignment and is grounds for expulsion. You are responsible for understanding the meaning for plagiarism and can refer to the Student Guide to the Master's in Social Work Degree Program for further information.

### **Distribution of Papers to Students**

The federal informational privacy act prohibits anyone other than the student access to that student's papers. This means that papers cannot be left where anyone can have open access. Papers should be returned by the instructor directly to or mailed to the student. During the semester, papers will be returned directly to students. Papers submitted at the end of the term may be returned by mail to the student, if the student supplies a self-addressed, self-stamped envelope to the instructor no later than the last day of class for return by U.S. Mail.

### **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

#### **1. Written application & discussion assignments                 7 assignments /28 points total**

**Journals : Read/Think/Analyze/Notice**     1 point late deduction

These written assignments are designed to help integrate course readings and class discussions. **Students should be prepared to be called on to share ideas and reactions from journals in weekly class discussions.** Please see separate sheet for specific journal assignment topics and questions.

#### **Written Journal assignments should:**

- illustrate reading and comprehension of all assigned material)
- address assigned questions (see specific questions below) integrating your own thoughts, feelings, reactions to readings illustrate ability to analyze, compare/contrast, and integrate various reading assignments from week to week throughout the course
- include any thoughts regarding the readings/class and what you've noticed related your learning about loss and grief

#### **2. Ethics Debate   16 points**

Specifics of this assignment are detailed in a separate document.

**3. Clinical Interview** **20 points** (2 points late deduction) This assignment gives you the clinical opportunity to interview someone about a loss in his/her life while applying and integrating your understanding of course concepts along with your personal insights and awareness into a 8-10 page paper. Specifics of this assignment are detailed in a separate document.

**4. Three In-Class Competency Quizzes** **Total of 26 points**  
This is your opportunity to demonstrate reading and understanding of course concepts and your ability to apply them. The quizzes will cover concepts from the readings and class discussions. Please see separate handout for details. See “Core Competency and Quiz Study Guide” handout.

**5. Class Participation, Class Attendance and Professional Use Self** **10 points**  
Class attendance, participation and professional use of self are core behaviors that are highly valued in this class and are a part of the learning experience which has relevant application to future professional practice. As social workers and other helping professionals, it is important to be able to speak out to advocate for clients and to address issues. Class participation involves sharing and discussing class concepts and their application to our work. Participation is not simply talking and sharing your opinions. The quality of participation is important and effectively comes from reading the assigned texts, analyzing theories and concepts and then noticing how to apply them to working with clients and organizations. Expectations regarding these are detailed below and in a separate handout.

#### Guidelines for Evaluating Class Participation

**Outstanding Contributor (10):** Contributions in class reflect exceptional preparation. Ideas offered are always substantive and provide thoughtful insights which significantly contribute to new ideas for class discussion. Integrative ideas and questions are well substantiated, persuasively presented and with excellent comportsment and respect for others. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly. Exemplary behavior in experiential exercises demonstrating on target behavior in role plays, small group discussions, and other activities.

**Good Contributor (9):** Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation. Ideas offered are usually substantive and provide good insights which contribute new ideas for class discussion topics. Integrative ideas and questions are well substantiated, often persuasive, and presented with excellent comportsment and respect for others. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished. Good activity in experiential exercises demonstrating behavior that is usually on target in role plays, small group discussions, and other activities.

**Adequate Contributor (8):** Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation. Ideas offered are sometimes substantive and provides generally useful insights that occasionally contribute new ideas for class discussion. Ideas and questions are sometimes presented, fairly well substantiated, and are sometimes persuasive with good comportsment and respect for others. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished somewhat. Adequate behavior in experiential exercises demonstrating adequate engagement in role plays, small group discussions, and other activities.

**Infrequent Contributor (7):** Contributions in class reflect partial preparation. Integrative ideas offered are infrequently substantive and provides some insights for discussion. Ideas and questions are sometimes presented, and are sometimes persuasive with adequate comportsment and respect for others. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished slightly. Behavior in experiential exercises is occasionally sporadically on target demonstrating inconsistent engagement in role plays, small group discussions, and other activities.

**Non-Active Participant (6):** This person says little or nothing in class but appears to be listening and observing. Preparation for class is unknown due to lack of active participation. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would not be changed. Listens attentively, but is silent and does not participate actively in exercises, small group discussion or other class activities.

**Unsatisfactory Contributor (5 or less):** Contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. Ideas offered are seldom substantive; provides few if any insights and never a constructive direction for the class. Integrative ideas and questions are absent. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of the class discussion would not be changed. Does not engage in exercises and detracts from the experience of others.

6. Final Grades will be based on the **total accumulation** of points earned. Letter grades defined by the School of Social Work as follows:

**A grades** Given for **exceptional individual performance** and **superior mastery** of the material. The use of A+ (100), A (95-99), and A-(90-94) should distinguish the degree of superiority.

**B grades** Given to students who demonstrate mastery of the material.  
B+ (87-89) indicates performance just above the mastery level but not in an exceptional manner. B (84-86) and B- (80-83) indicate just below the mastery level.

**C grades** Mastery of the material is limited.  
C- is the lowest grade which carries credit. C+ (77-79), C (74-76) and C- (70-73).

**D grades** Indicate deficiency and carry no credit. (below 70)

**E grades** Indicate failure and carry no credit.

### **Special Circumstances**

**I grades** Incomplete grades can be given in rare situations in which significant, extraordinary and compelling reasons prevent completion of work **AND** there is a **definite plan** and **date** for completion pre-approved by the instructor. In fairness to all students, incomplete grades will not be given based on requests for time extensions to complete assignments without a compelling reason beyond having multiple deadlines and limited time. Students are responsible for initiating advanced contact with the instructor to request an incomplete grade and to establish a plan for completion. If no contact has been initiated by the student with the instructor regarding incomplete work and/or no plan has been established to complete work by the last day of class, a grade will be given based on the completed work submitted thus far. This may potentially result in a grade which carries no credit.

8. **Written assignment descriptions and grading rubrics have been provided to clearly explain assignment expectations and point values. Please review these prior to completing your assignments.**

**Course Outline and Assigned Readings**

**Jan. 10**      Our Attitudes Toward Death and Dying  
**#1**            Historical Perspective and Present Views  
*Leads: Kathy and Debbie*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 1; Chapter 3 (85-103)

Irish: Chapter 1

**Jan. 16**      **First Experience of Death Paper Due**  
**#2**            Health Care Systems  
                 Palliative Care and Hospice Care  
*Lead: Kathy*

Readings:

DeSpelder & Strickland: Chapters 5 and 7

Irish: Chapter 2

**Jan. 24**      **Journal 1 Due**  
**#3**            Grief Models and Theories  
*Lead: Kathy*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 9

Irish: Chapter 3

Worden: Chapters 1, 2 & 3

**Jan. 31**      **COMPETENCY QUIZ 1**  
**#4**            Complicated Grief Reactions  
                 Theories of Complicated Mourning  
                 Definitions, Symptoms, and Syndromes  
*Lead: Debbie*

Readings:

Worden: Chapters 5 & 6

Irish: Chapter 7

**Feb. 7**        **JOURNAL 2 DUE**  
**#5**            Legal Issues  
                 Decision Making  
*Lead: Debbie*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 4 (144-174); Chapter 6 (211-229)



- Feb. 14**            **JOURNAL 3 DUE**  
#6                    Death and Grief in Adulthood  
                         Models of Adult Bereavement; Life Stage Issues  
*Lead: Kathy*
- Readings:  
                         DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 11  
                         Irish: Chapter 5
- Feb. 21**            **Quiz 2**  
#7                    Death and Grief in Childhood and Adolescence  
                         Developmental Issues  
*Lead: Debbie*
- Readings:  
                         DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 2 (47-78); Chapter 10  
                         Irish: Chapter 6
- Feb. 28**            **JOURNAL 4 DUE**  
#8                    Risks of Death in Today's World  
                         Violence, Disasters, War, Genocide, Terrorism,  
                         Traumatic Death and PTSD  
*Lead: Debbie*
- Readings:  
                         DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 4 (133-143); Chapter 13  
                         Irish: Chapters 10
- March 7**            **SPRING BREAK**
- March 14**          **JOURNAL 5 DUE**  
#9                    Diversity Issues  
                         Cultural and Diversity Perspectives on Death  
                         Variation in the Experience, Expression and Understanding Grief  
                         Applying a Sociocultural Perspective  
*Lead: Kathy*
- Readings:  
                         DeSpelder and Strickland: Chap. 2 (78-82); Chap. 3 (103-130) and Chap. 15  
                         Irish: Chapters 9 and 13
- March 21**          **CLINICAL INTERVIEW PAPER DUE**  
#10                   Clinical Intervention and Counseling Principles in Facilitating Grief  
                         Psychosocial-spiritual Assessment  
*Leads: Kathy and Debbie*
- Readings:  
                         DeSpelder & Strickland: Chapter 5 (183-208)  
                         Worden: Chapters 4 & 8; Appendix (283-284)  
                         Irish: Chapter 8

**March 28**  
**#11**

**JOURNAL 6 DUE**

Coping Mechanisms for Survivors/Rituals and Funerals  
Honoring the Dead; Finding Meaning  
*Leads: Debbie*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapters 8 and 14  
Irish: Chapters 4 and 11

**April 4**  
**#12**

**ETHICS DEBATE ASSIGNMENT**

Ethical Issues

*Lead: Kathy*

Readings:

Chapter 5 (178-182) & Chapter 6 (231-253)  
Irish: Chapter 12

**April 11**  
**#12**

**Quiz 3**

Disenfranchised Grief

Special Types of Loss: Suicide; Pregnancy Loss

*Lead: Kathy and Debbie*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 12  
Worden: Chapter 7

**April 18**  
**#14**

**JOURNAL 7 DUE**

**USE OF SELF/CLASS PARTICIPATION GRADING RUBRIC DUE**

Personal and Professional Issues Related to Death, Loss, and Grief

Caring for Self; Compassion Fatigue and Resilience

Review and Wrap-up

*Leads: Kathy and Debbie*

Readings:

DeSpelder and Strickland: Chapter 5 (205-208)  
Worden: Chapter 9