

SYLLABUS

Death and Dying HSE K171

**Monday 6:30pm – 9:15pm
Room MO 104**

**Three Rivers Community College
Norwich, Connecticut 06360**

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Course Description

This course is designed to familiarize you with attitudes toward dying, death, loss and grief. You will be given an opportunity to understand approaching death from several perspectives. These issues will include the organizational context of dying, historical, religious, and cultural perspectives, and the personal struggle of terminally ill people and their families.

Course Objectives

You will be able to:

1. Understand society's definition of death and dying from a variety of perspectives including philosophical, cultural, social and individual.
2. Challenge and increase awareness of how personal attitudes and beliefs about dying and death develop, impact one's approach to dying and death and influence the grief process.
3. Recognize and describe concerns of individuals and their families facing life-threatening illness.
4. Appreciate and become sensitive to cultural and religious diversity in understanding death and grief related issues.
5. Analyze and synthesize concepts, belief systems, ethical issues and coping skills to assist ones self and others to become more aware and competent in successfully working through death, loss and grief.
6. Demonstrate an ability to provide a climate for self-disclosure, self-evaluation, group interaction and exploration of beliefs and reactions concerning death-related issues.

Methods of Teaching and Evaluation

You will have an opportunity to learn through a variety of teaching methods. One of the most important will be open discussion. It is hoped that the class period will be time for dialogue rather than monologue. Other approaches will include written explorations of the subject matter, individual and small group exercises and discussions, field trip, outside speakers and audio visuals.

Attendance

You should plan on regular attendance. Material presented in class through discussions, speakers and in-class activities will contribute significantly to your understanding and appreciation of the course topic. Over the span of a semester I expect to become familiar with the attendance habits of individual students. Therefore, these habits cannot help but be a factor in my evaluation of class participation and student contribution.

~ **Required Text:** Morrie: In His Own Words, by Morrie Schwartz

~ **Highly Recommended Texts:** tuesdays with Morrie, by Mitch Albom and On Death and Dying, by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

* **Supplemental readings (for your interest & research needs) supplied by instructor are on "in-library only" reserve at the Mohegan Branch Library.**

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Learning about Death

* Attitudes, Sociocultural forces, historical perspectives

Time Frame: August 28 – September 25, 2003

2. Facing Life-Threatening Illness / Facing Death

* Adults and Children's experiences

Time Frame: September 25 – October 16; (October 16 – Assignment #1 due)

3. The Health Care System & Medical Ethics

* Patients, Staff and Institutions

Time Frame: October 23 & 30 (October 30- Assignment #2 due)

4. Last Rites / Legal Issues and Death

* Ceremony and Body Disposition, Advanced Directives, Last Will & Testaments

Time Frame: November 6 & 13; (November 13 – Assignment #3 due)

5. Grief and Bereavement

* Adults and Children's Experiences of Grief

Time Frame: November 20, 27, December 4

6. Beyond Death / After Life

* Concepts of Life after Death, Near Death Experiences

Time Frame: December 4 & 11 (December 4 - Final Assignment Due)

Course Summary / Evaluations

ASSIGNMENTS:

All papers are to be typed and double-spaced. Write in complete sentences and well organized paragraphs. Punctuation, spelling and grammar usage **COUNT!** Consult Three Rivers Community College's Writing Center for help.

Assignment # 1 – due October 16

Trip to a Funeral Home, Crematory or Morgue: In a dyad or small group of your classmates, you will take a field trip. You or one of your group members will need to take the lead and make an appointment to visit one of the following:

- **Funeral Home** (of your choice): You will gather information and ask for a tour of the funeral home including the parlor, the embalming room, and the coffin display room.
- **Crematory** (of your choice): You will gather information and ask for a tour of the facility.
- **Morgue** (of your choice): You will gather information and ask for a tour of the facility.

You will write a (4) page paper **INCLUDING**, but not limited to these questions. Write your responses in narrative form not just paragraphs of question answers

1) How many of you went? 2) How did your group decide on how would make the arrangements to go? 3) What was it like for you to go with a group? 4) Was this your first time ever to this type of facility? And what was this like? 5) Who asked the questions; you, other classmates? 6) What was it like for you to ask these types of questions? 7) What were the reactions of those with you? 8) What do you think are some factors influencing other's reactions to this experience? 9) What was your personal reaction to this assignment: Thoughts and feelings (physical and emotional) that you may have had making the appointment or anticipating the field trip, touring the facility. What factors do you think have influenced the reaction you have to this experience? 10) Remember the first time, if it was other than this field trip that you have been to a funeral home. Why you were there and how old were you? 11) What was that experience like for you? 12) What effect did this field trip have on you? 13) What personal, social, cultural factors do you think influenced your experience?

Questions for the director of the facility to include in your paper: 1) When did you know that you wanted to be in your field, etc? 2) What prompted you to choose this career over another one? 3) What allows you to handle so much exposure to death? 4) How do you cope? 5) What is the average age of the deceased? 6) What is the preferred mode of disposition of a loved one's body? 7) What is the number of bodies that can be viewed (funeral), held (morgue) or cremated (crematory) at one time? 8) What is the average age of people coming in ahead of time to prearrange funerals and what does this include? 9) Would you describe the embalming process? 10) Is it required by law? If so, under what circumstances? 11) Can refrigeration substitute for embalming? 12) Would you say something about body viewing? Do you think it's always beneficial for survivors? 13) What kinds of personal rituals do survivors request? 14) What has been the most unusual request made? 15) Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Assignment # 2 – due November 13

Interview: You are to interview a professional staff person from the following list. See me if you have another professional in mind. You will then write a (3) page paper summarizing your interview.

- Nurse, Social Worker or Bereavement Staff of a Hospice Program
- Veterinarian staff person regarding death and pet loss
- E.M.T. / Paramedic / Fireman / Police Officer
- Hospital Emergency Room Nurse, Doctor, or Social Worker
- Hospital Intensive Care Unit Nurse or Social Worker
- Hospital Cardiac Intensive Care Unit Nurse or Social Worker
- Any Staff Member of an AIDS Project
- Staff at a Skilled Nursing Facility
- Cancer Center or Oncology Nurse or Social Worker
- Social Worker on a Special Care or Intensive Care Unit for Newborns

Design your questions to **discover** and **incorporate** the following: **1)** The philosophy and mission of the organization **2)** The interviewee's belief system and attitudes toward life threatening illness, death and grief **3)** The concerns and struggles of the client/patient/family members seen there **4)** Benefits for an individual or family being involved with this particular organization or service. **5)** In what ways do you think this organization and its services view the experience of dying and death? **6)** In what ways does this organization promotes death awareness and education to the public?

Also include more personal questions of your interviewee such as **1)** What draws you to this type of work? **2)** What allows you to handle so much exposure to death/terminal illness? **3)** How do you cope? **4)** Does your organization offer you support services to help you cope? **5)** How are you in your profession perceived by the public? **6)** Did you receive training in death/grief education or counseling? Do you have any thoughts about it if you didn't? **7)** What is a typical day like? **8)** What is the hardest/most rewarding part of your work? **9)** What might be some problems of the organizational system you work for when it comes to dying and death?

Lastly, **include your own reactions** to this interview: Thoughts and feelings (physical and emotional) you may have experienced about going to the particular organization you've chosen; about the particular kind of work done at this organization and by your interviewee; any personal experience with this organization's services; How you view those individuals who choose this type of profession; and how and why you may/may not like doing this kind of work.

Assignment # 3 – due November 27

Obituary/Funeral Service: This is a (3) part paper: **Part 1:** Consider your own death and if you are to die tomorrow. Review a newspaper obituary section to get an idea of format and general information given then write your own obituary. **Part 2:** Think about your plans for funeral/memorial services then write your own plan.

You must include the following:

- What do you want people to remember most about you?
- Indicate how you expect to die.
- Identify the type of service you want. What might be an appropriate service to celebrate your life?

- Will there be a theme?
- Who will participate and what will they say?
- Will you include music? What kind, specific lyrics, etc.?
- Identify what, if any, kinds of reading you will have
- Is there a special meaning you want your service to convey?
- Identify where any of your funeral or service will take place.
- What clothing would you like to be buried with?
- Do you want flowers or instead donations sent to where?
- Will you be buried, cremated, entombed, or cryogenic suspended?

3rd Part: Write a separate paragraph about what thoughts, emotional or physical feelings emerged for you as you prepared your own obituary, funeral or service.

Assignment #4 – Due December

Final Paper is a Course Review – Review the various topics we have covered. Choose at least three personal learnings that you identified for yourself during the course of the semester. For example, a personal learning could involve a new understanding of why it may be so difficult to visit with a friend or family member in the hospital or a bias or judgment held against someone for the way in which they express their feelings of grief.

Also choose at least three learnings of broader social importance. For example, having an understanding of the varying degrees of control we have over events that lead to accidents or having a better understanding of treatment options facing someone with a terminal illness and the resources available to them.

Each learning should be supported by examples from readings, class discussions, activities, field trips, guest speaker’s presentations, etc. It is important to identify the sources, extent and effects of your learning. Also include what, if any, difference this learning has and will make in how you handle yourself, relate to others and view yourself and others. The paper should be written in the form of “I” statements; I learned, I relearned, I was surprised, I feel, I got a handle on, I noticed about myself, etc.

Assignment #5 – On Going

Take home vocabulary words, Questionnaires and short articles

Course Evaluation

Class participation/Attendance	15%
Assignment # 1 – due October 16	20%
Assignment #2 – due October 30	20%
Assignment #3 – due November 13	20%
Assignment #4 – due December 4	20%
Assignment #5 – On Going	<u>5%</u>
	100%

<u>Grades</u>	<u>Equivalent</u>	<u>Quality Points</u>
A-	90 – 93	4.0
A	94 – 100	3.7
B+	87 – 89	3.3
B	83 – 86	3.0
B-	80 – 82	2.7
C+	77 – 79	2.3
C	73 – 76	2.0
C-	70 – 72	1.7
D+	67 – 69	1.3
D	63 – 66	1.0
D-	60 – 62	.7
F		0.0

Disabilities Statement

If you have a hidden or visible disability that may require classroom modifications, please see me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, you may choose to notify and consult with John Perch, who is coordinating services to students with disabilities. You may also contact Chris Scarborough, Disabled Student Counselor.

Cellular Phones and Beepers

Please be respectful of both myself and your fellow students. Cellular phones and beepers must either be turned off or turned to a silent mode to be allowed in class. Under no circumstances are phones to be answered in class. When there are extenuating circumstances that require you to be available by phone or beeper, please speak to me prior to class so that together we can arrive at an agreement.

Statement on the Penalty for Academic Dishonesty or Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words or ideas in your writing. Whether conscious or not, plagiarism is a serious offense. Evidence that you did not write material, which you submit under your name, can result in failure for the entire course.