

College of St. Joseph
Rutland, Vermont
Spring Semester, 2010

Course Number: GPS560B

Course Title: Death and Dying

Meeting Times: Thursday 7:00 to 9:30 PM, January 14 to April 29

Course Description: This class will discuss the many different ways that our culture wrestles with the concept of death, including some controversial issues. Death, dying, and after death will be explored from the varied perspectives of all those involved. Emphasis will be placed on the meaning-making influence of death and how this meaning-making process affects the way people face death and life. Classroom discussion and student presentations that demonstrate their meaning-making processes will be a strong part of the class. 3 credits.

Instructor: W. David Hoisington, Ph.D.

Contact email: dhoisington@csj.edu

Instructor will remain after class to answer questions. Appointments can be made to meet with the instructor.

Resources for Death and Dying:

Internet resources are located on the website www.CompassionSpace.com (scroll to the bottom to see link to student information, or go to the CSJ extranet and use the link off of my name)

References will be put on reserve at the library:

1- *Handbook of Death & Dying*. Clifton D. Bryant, Editor in Chief. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003.

2- *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, 1969.

3- *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Needs and Communication of the Dying*, Maggie Callanan & Patricia Kelley, 1992.

4- *What Dying People Want: Practical Wisdom for the End of Life*, David Kuhl, 2002.

Students are required to use these references in their assignments.

Students will also supply a handout of reference materials for each assigned topic.

Course Objectives: At the conclusion of this course the student will:

1. understand the basic stages of dying and how they relate to helping others;
2. convey an awareness of one's personal meaning making process with respect to dying and death and the application of this process to living;

3. demonstrate the ability to orally share information on the topic of death and dying with others for the purpose of shared growth and development – including formal presentations of topics assigned;
4. provide an oral and written presentation of a scholarly research paper which integrates theoretical and conceptual knowledge as well as personal viewpoints relating to death and dying;
5. provide an oral presentation of field observations connected to those who are providing care for person's diagnosed as dying.
6. Present, in writing at the end of the course, a description of its relevance to both professional and personal development.

Outline (Methodology): This main focus of this class will be on the *meaning making* of theoretical constructs linked to the concepts of death and dying. The format will be largely Socratic in nature. There will be very few Lectures by the professor. Students will be asked to give presentations supported by research. This class will be mostly student driven within a seminar format. Three papers will be written by each student and each presented orally within the class. The professor will provide regular feedback to the students on the depth of their meaning making process in regard to death and dying. This feedback will occur in class, on the written papers, and in response to the AOLs (see below). The Mastery approach will be used when grading written assignments. Students can meet with the professor by appointment for additional feedback.

Course Requirements/Evaluation:

A.O.L.'s (10% of the grade)

Four short papers will be required where the student writes a personal description of his/her learning in the class. Each AOL should be a minimum of 2 pages double spaced, but can be as long as is necessary. These papers also provide an opportunity for the student to ask questions to the professor and to describe their professional development in response to the class and **MUST** include a reflection on meaning making. Do not simply regurgitate the material presented. These papers are not graded, but they count for **15% of your grade** (not completing them results in a decrease in grade). The final AOL is replaced by the Meaning Making Paper and must present an overview of how the class was relevant to your personal and professional development.

Research Paper (20% of the grade)

Each class member will submit a scholarly paper that reflects current research related to the topic of death and dying and to the student's meaning making process. This paper will be tied to one of the topics listed within the syllabus (see Appendix). This paper will be a minimum of 10 pages (double spaced) and will contain a minimum of 10

supporting references. One of the references **MUST** have the word **COMPASSION** in the title and a copy of this paper submitted with the paper. **The paper should have an introduction, three headings (at least, you can have more) in the body of the text and then finally a summary and conclusions.** This research paper will serve as the foundation for oral discussion in class and the student will supply handouts for the class as part of this presentation.

Interview/Observation (30% of the grade)

The student will observe a practitioner in the field of death and dying, and prepare a report on the techniques, approaches, and theoretical explanations given as support for the techniques observed. The student is expected to critically evaluate the experience in a scholarly manner. This report will be a minimum of 10 pages (double spaced) and will contain a minimum of 10 supporting references. **The paper should have an introduction, three headings (at least, you can have more) in the body of the text and then finally a summary and conclusions.** This paper will be presented for oral discussion in class.

Class Participation (20% of the grade)

Because this class will be mostly student driven within a seminar format, absence from the class will negatively affect your grade. In addition many learning models will be demonstrated within the class. Not participating, speaking out, commenting, engaging in class discussions, will also negatively affect your grade. Be prepared to be called on to speak at any time.

Meaning Making Summary (20% of the grade)

At the end of the semester each student will present a summary paper containing a thoughtful reflection on the student's personal meaning making development during the class. Material and topics discussed in class must be referenced. This paper will be a minimum of 6 pages double spaced and must include a discussion of how the student will apply the material learned – citing specific real life examples. It is also to include thoughtful reflection on how the class related to the student's understanding of death and dying. The headings in the paper will be as follows: Introduction, Class Participation (use your 3 AOLs), Personal Development, Professional Development, and a Summary. This paper will be the foundation for a non-formal oral presentation to the class.

Mission Statement – Writing Across the Curriculum: Dedicated to the proposition that the ability to write effectively is an important life skill, the faculty of the College of St. Joseph advocates writing across the curriculum for all students as a vehicle to develop good writing habits. Writing across the curriculum enhances student success by encouraging writing to learn and learning to write in all academic disciplines, recognizing a diversity of needs in society. Developing these skills is incorporated in course work throughout the curriculum in a manner which promotes writing as a valuable and enjoyable means of learning.

Course Policies:

1. Absences in excess of one class will result in a significant penalty to the student's final course grade. Extenuating circumstances may be considered. This class is based on student participation. Punctuality is considered to be an indicator of responsible professional behavior. Consequently, 3 late arrivals will be considered one complete absence.
2. Missed assignments (written), and/or class presentations, may only be made up for excused absence (approved in advance) or at the discretion of the instructor for extenuating circumstances.
3. ***Late submittal of assignments** will result in a grade penalty of one full letter grade for each day late. Qualitative evaluation will then be rendered. Example: 1/2 day late = A- highest possible grade before Mastery evaluation of actual assignment by instructor. It is important to note that the Mastery approach relies on papers turned in on time.
4. Any instances of plagiarism will result in a grade of "F" for the assignment. Additional action as outlined in the student handbook will also be taken.
5. All written work submitted for course credit should be retained by the student for the duration of the course.
6. Divisional Policy on Professional Behavior. It is expected that during all aspects of their involvement with the College and Division of Psychology and Human Services programs, services, and activities, all faculty, staff, and students will display appropriate professional demeanor; including active listening skills, respect for divergent views and opinions expressed by others, and sensitivity to the feelings of other members of the College community. Unprofessional behavior will not be accepted and will be addressed as appropriate with any person engaging in such behavior in accord with the College handbook, student handbook, and other course policies and may result in removal from class and/or group meetings, course failure, referral to the appropriate undergraduate or graduate committee, and/or to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. For matriculated students at the College, a pattern of such behavior may be cause for recommendation of termination or dismissal from their program of study.
7. Divisional Policy on Course Syllabi. Given that licensure boards and other accreditation agencies, as well as some employers, colleges and universities are increasingly asking applicants to supply copies of course syllabi in order to assist in their assessment of applicant qualifications, students are encouraged to keep copies of all of their course syllabi, as part of their own professional portfolio (in addition to a current resume, letters of recommendation, copies of certifications, recognitions, writing

samples, and other pertinent information), for future professional use. While the Office of the Vice President and the Division of Psychology make every effort to maintain copies of course syllabi, maintaining your own set of course syllabi will ensure their timely availability in the event that they are needed in order to support your professional development.

8. Grievance Policy: A student who has concerns regarding any aspect of this course is encouraged to seek a resolution by implementing the following process in the order outlined.
- Consult with the instructor to resolve the issue in question.
 - If not resolved, address the issue with the Division Chair.
 - If a resolution is still not attained, consult the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs.
- Should the student so desire, he or she may seek the guidance of his or her academic advisor to facilitate the process outlined above.

School Closing Information: When there are severe winter weather conditions, you can get information concerning school closure from the following:

Television: Channel 15 WPTZ Channel 5

Radio: Z97(WZRT)FM97.1, WSYBAM1380, WJJR98.1, Cat Country 95.1, 94.5 WEBK, 105.3FM

Proposed Course Schedule (all assignments due on the class day cited below):

Below is a list of topics that might be covered in the class on death and dying. Each student will prepare a presentation to be given on the topic for that class day. This list is likely to change after the students select their topics (see Appendix).

Class1 (01/14/10): Introductions and Our culture's attitudes toward death:

Existentialism and the meaning of death
Movie: "Flight from Death"
The media and its portrait of death
Stages of Dying handout given to students.

Class 2 (01/21/10): Death versus dying (timing, age, context)

Kubler-Ross stages of dying (movie)
Pro's and cons of stage theory
Faith and moving through the stages. **Students choose topics.**

Class3 (01/28/10): How do we die? Examples

Discussion of Interview/Observation.
Movie on dying – "Wit"

Class 4 (02/04/10): Whose death is it?

Documentary case study on dying – "Death: A Love Story".
PBS show? Hospice Film?

Our culture's views to be discussed.

Class 5 (02/11/10): Near Death Experiences – what do they have to say about death and dying? **AOL #1 Due.**

Class 6 (02/18/10): Reincarnation
Burial Rites Across Cultures

Class 7 (02/25/10): **Research Paper Due.**
Ghosts.
Heaven and Hell, Angels and Spirit Guides (PBS movie?)

Class 8 (03/04/10): **AOL #2 Due.**
Suicide
Traumatic Death

Class 9 – 03/11/10
The Grieving Process - Stages of grief
Care for the dying: Past, present and future
Counseling Strategies

Spring Break (03/18/10)

Class 10 (03/25/10): Student observation presentations. **Paper Due.**
Class 11 (04/01/10): Student observation presentations **AOL #3 Due.**
Class 12 (04/08/10): Student observation presentations

Class 13 (04/15/10): Student meaning making processes. **Paper Due.**
Class 14 (04/22/10): Student meaning making processes. **AOL #4 is replaced.**
Class 15 (04/29/10): Student meaning making processes. **Final**

Appendix: Topics for the Research Paper and Class Discussion

Euthanasia

Reincarnation

Burial Rituals Across Cultures

The Medical Definition of Death, Legal Issues, “pulling the plug”

Ghosts, Spirits and Myths

The Grieving Process

Heaven and Hell – and related concepts

Near Death Experiences

Care for the Dying – history, present and future.

Suicide

Martyrdom – The mind of a suicide bomber

Counseling Encounters – What to do with a client’s death and dying issues?

War and Traumatic Death