

**EDCD 797:003 Death, Dying, and Grief**  
Spring 2004

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**COURSE DATES/TIMES/LOCATIONS:**

April 5                    5:45-7:10 p.m.;    West 255  
April 12, 19, 26    4:30-7:10 p.m.;    West 255  
May 3                    4:30-7:10;            Everly Funeral Home: 10565 Main Street, Fairfax

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

To develop conceptual frameworks and cognitive theories about death, dying, and grief. To increase affective development and sensitivity to issues concerning death, dying, and grief. To become aware and sensitized to one's personal assumptions, biases, attitudes, and reactions to death, dying, and grief. To increase death competency and lower death anxiety in order that one demonstrates increased sensitivity, awareness, and skills in

- coping with loss and bereavement
- supporting others in their struggle to deal with death issues
- finding meaning and personal growth through encounters with death, loss, and grief.

**STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

- Identify potential loss events occurring throughout the lifespan, including non-death situations.
- Describe issues involving dying, death, and loss from theoretical, developmental, and cultural perspectives.
- Describe strategies for coping with dying and bereavement within the context of individual and cultural variations.
- Identify the ethnic, gender, and cultural factors that affect individual responses to loss-related situations.
- Describe, plan, and implement appropriate interventions and strategies to help individuals, families, and groups cope with loss and grief.
- Identify community and national resources to deal with death, grief, and loss.
- Identify factors that influence normal and complicated reactions to dying and grief.
- Demonstrate increased death competency.
- Recognize personal strengths and limitations in grief counseling.

**NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY**

Course delivery will be through lectures, cooperative learning groups based on learning theorists, and case study groups linking student learning to program/student outcomes. To meet course objectives, the delivery of EDCD 797 is accomplished through a combination of experiential learning activities, in-class collaborative work groups, and lectures designed to help meet the needs of all learners and learning styles. These include:

- *Presentations* (i.e., lectures often assisted by Power Point and other visuals);

- *Discussions* (i.e., active involvement of students in learning by asking questions that provoke critical thinking and verbal interaction);
- *Cooperative learning* (i.e., small group structure emphasizing learning from and with others);
- *Guest lectures; site visit*
- *Blackboard 5* web-based course management and portal system.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Worden, J. W. (1991). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* (3rd Ed.). New York: Springer Publishing.

## **RELATED RESOURCES**

American Psychological Association (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Journals:

*Death Studies, Thanatology, Omega, Hospice Journal, Journal of Gerontology, Journal of Palliative Care, Journal of Near Death Studies, or Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*

## **VII. HONOR CODE**

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of George Mason University and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the members of George Mason University, have set forth the following code of honor: Any individual who is caught in the act of cheating, attempting to cheat, plagiarizing, or stealing will be brought forth before a council of their peers. In the event that the individual is found guilty, he or she will be punished accordingly. For further information, please refer to the University Catalog or Website at [www.gmu.edu](http://www.gmu.edu).

## **STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Students who require any special accommodations or those with disabilities that may affect their ability to participate fully in the course are encouraged to work with the instructor to ensure their successful participation.

This syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the series, programs, or activities of all state and local governments. Under ADA a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as: learning, working, walking, speaking, hearing, breathing, and/or taking care of oneself. If a student has disability and needs course adaptations or accommodations because of that disability, it must be established with the faculty, in writing, at the beginning of the semester so arrangements can be made. Please call the Disability Resource Center for required documentation (703-993-2474).

## **VIII.**

## **IX.**

## **X. PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITION**

Refer to dispositions as posted on C&D homepage:

<http://gse.gmu.edu/programs/counseling/policies.htm>

## **XI.**

## **XII. COURSE REQUIREMENTS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA**

All students must obtain and use an electronic mail account with access to the Internet. GMU makes such accounts available and provides training at no cost to the student.

### **1. CLASS PARTICIPATION (15%)**

Attend each class and complete reading assignments for class. As a graduate student, you are expected to arrive on time and stay for the entire class period. Missing one class could result in failing the course. Active participation in weekly case studies, being a responsive audience participant for each discussion, personal awareness exercises, and developing a personal learning contract are essential to each student's learning. **Criteria for evaluation:** regular and thoughtful evidence of case preparation and asking of higher order questions related to the readings and exercises; and regular and thoughtful participation in in-class discussions and experiential learning.

### **2. CRITICAL JOURNAL WRITING (20%)** 1<sup>st</sup> Due April 26; 2<sup>nd</sup> Due May 3

Each student will prepare **two written critical responses** to selected readings in journal articles from either Death Studies, Thanatology, Omega, Hospice Journal, Journal of Gerontology, Journal of Palliative Care, Journal of Near Death Studies, or Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. . Critical responses that provoke thinking about why and how questions should be between 2-4 pages. They must reflect what your readings *mean to you* as a counselor, *how you relate to the ideas of the author*, and how and why you *can or cannot apply* these ideas into your current or future practice. Each response should *describe, analyze, and interpret* the content, and reflect on its meaning to you in your current professional role. Your description should be no more than ONE paragraph.

### **3. PERSONAL AWARENESS EXERCISES (30%)**

#### **I. Deathography: Due April 12**

As a result of experiences with loss and grief, each of us develops our own unique style of dealing with these issues. Understanding your attitudes, values, assumptions, beliefs, reactions, and unfinished business (if any) is an important task of self-awareness. The goal of this assignment is to facilitate your reflection about how these issues present themselves and relate to your personal coping style as well as your interactions with others coping with loss and grief. (Typed, double-spaced, 3-5 pgs.)

Part I: Construct a loss history graph which represents the loss events in your life, including non-death related losses such as loss of dreams, loss of job, loss of home, etc.

Part II: Discuss the impact of these events upon the following:

- a) your interest in issues of grief and loss as well as personal goals for this course;
- b) your personal style of dealing with loss i.e. how has your upbringing, culture, religion, ethnicity influenced your coping style? And how do you cope with issues of death and non-death loss in your life?
- c) your comfort levels in dealing with different issues of grief, and different kinds of loss with others i.e. are there specific kinds of losses that you feel will be particularly challenging to work with?; do you have experience with specific groups of people or specific illness or events that have proven to be difficult in the past?; do you have any value-oriented or ethical conflicts with certain issues, people, events?

## II. Film Review: Due April 19

You will view a film on your own (see suggestions at end of syllabus) and write a reflection paper (2-3 pgs.) about any issues, needs, conflicts, theories that you have learned in the readings or class discussion to date. If you have viewed this film for a second time, note what new insights and awareness you have based on the readings and discussion. What did the film say about death, dying, loss, and grief? What was missing from the reality of death as we have studied the subject?

## III. Will, Eulogy, Memorial, Directives: Due May 3

This project is to encourage you to plan for the end of your life and put it in writing. Reflect and write a will, and a eulogy or memorial to be used at whatever kind of death ceremony you choose. In addition, write out advanced directives or a living will concerning what medical care and interventions you want and do not want executed on your behalf. Share these with a friend or family member, and open discussion about your plans and wishes.

## 4. FINAL EXAM (35%): May 3

Examination will cover materials from class lectures and readings. Exam will include multiple

### Grading Scale:

Grading on written work will take into account the following factors: quality of written work, knowledge of content area, APA format, and adherence to requirements of assignments. As a graduate student, it is expected that all your work will be turned in on the assigned dates. If an assignment is accepted at a later date, it is subject to a penalty of 10% of the award for every day it is overdue.

A = 97-100   A- = 94-96   B+ = 91-93   B = 87-90   B- = 84-86   C = 83-80   F = 79-0

### PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ACTIVITY/ TOPICS</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u>
<b>April 5</b>	Introduction to course Goals and Objectives/ Class Needs and Goals Defining Loss	Death Anxiety Scale Death Competency
<b>April 12</b>	Theoretical Perspectives of Grief Complicated & Pathological Grief Disenfranchised Grief	<u>Worden</u> Ch. 1,2,3 Deathography
<b>April 19</b>	Death and loss across the lifespan Children and Adolescents Adults and Elderly	<u>Worden</u> Ch. 4, 5 Film Review
<b>April 26</b>	Facing Death: Living with Terminal Illness Strategies for helping the dying and bereaved Multicultural Variations	<u>Worden</u> Ch. 6, 7 Critical Journal Writing #1
<b>May 3</b>	Funeral Practices: excursion to funeral home Final Exam	Wills, Eulogy, Directives, Memorials Critical Journal Writing #2

## EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS

### Critical Journal Responses

**Objective:** To engage learners thoughtfully and meaningfully with current writings in the field of thanatology research and theory, and to apply their emergent analyses and reflections to counseling practices and application.

Critical journal responses engage students in a thoughtful process that will help them become critical consumers of the research literature on bereavement and thanatology, and will bring current course readings and additional research in the field together with counseling practice. They will require that you formulate thoughts on paper and connect those thoughts to current research. Short article Critical Journal Responses should be between 2-4 pages. They should reflect what your readings *mean to you* as a counselor, *how you relate to the ideas of the author*, and how and why you *can or cannot apply* these ideas into your current or future practice. Each response should be comprised of three parts (or levels):

- 1) *description*,
- 2) *analysis, application, and interpretation, and*
- 3) *reflection* on the content and its meaning to you in your current/future professional role.

#### ***Details to guide you in your analysis:***

**Level One, Description:** Describes the article in around a paragraph in length. This tells briefly **what or which** the article is about. One to two paragraphs in length only.

**Level Two, Analysis, Application, and Interpretation:** This section is where you, the analyzer, apply your knowledge to comment on the theory(ies), core ideas, or research described and discussed in the article. It concerns your interpretation of the material based on your readings to date. This section tells **how or why**. In this section, utilize at least *two supporting sources* from your readings, using correct APA style. Cite references within the journal and include a References page at the end of your journal critique. These citations may be taken from your text, other supporting articles read for class, or articles you may have read on your own.

**Level Three, Reflection:** This is a section where you will connect the article you are analyzing to yourself and your own counseling practice. What does this article mean to you? You will reflect on the reading by synthesizing the material personally and evaluating your description and analysis, stating what this means to you as a counselor. Tell what you would/might do **similarly** or **differently**, and **why**, to help clients grieve or cope. Or, you may want to talk about what you learned through the article that will help you in the future in your particular environment. This section personalizes the description, analysis, and interpretation to your individual situation.

## **FILM SUGGESTIONS**

The Doctor  
To Dance with the White Dog  
Terms of Endearment  
Dead Poet Society  
Steel Magnolias  
Silence Like Glass  
My Life  
'Night Mother  
Death of a Salesman  
Fat Boy, Little Man  
Philadelphia  
Roomates  
Longtime Companion  
Death Takes a Holiday  
On Borrowed Time  
Topper  
Ordinary People

## Death Attitude Profile- Revised

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Education \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire contains a number of statements related to different attitudes toward death. Read each statement carefully, and then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree. For example, an item might read: "Death is a friend." Indicate how well you agree or disagree by circling one of the following; SA = strongly agree; A = agree; MA = moderately agree; U = undecided; MD = moderately disagree; D = disagree; and SD = strongly disagree. Note that scales run both from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* and from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

If you strongly agreed with the statement, you would circle SA. If you strongly disagreed you would circle SD. If you are undecided, circle U. However, try to use the Undecided category sparingly.

It is important that you work through the statements and answer each one. Many of the statements will seem alike, but all are necessary to show slight differences in attitudes.

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- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Death is no doubt a grim experience.                                    | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 2. The prospect of my own death arouses anxiety in me.                     | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 3. I avoid death thoughts at all costs.                                    | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 4. I believe that I will be in heaven after I die.                         | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 5. Death will bring an end to all my troubles.                             | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 6. Death should be viewed as a natural, undeniable, and unavoidable event. | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 7. I am disturbed by the finality of death.                                | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 8. Death is an entrance to a place of ultimate satisfaction.               | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 9. Death provides an escape from this terrible world.                      | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 10. Whenever the thought of death enters my mind, I try to push it away.   | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 11. Death is deliverance from pain and suffering.                          | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 12. I always try not to think about death.                                 | SD D MD U MA A SA |

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 13. I believe that heaven will be a much better place than this world.             | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 14. Death is a natural aspect of life.   | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 15. Death is a union with God and eternal bliss.                                   | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 16. Death brings a promise of a new and glorious life.                             | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 17. I would neither fear death nor welcome it.                                     | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 18. I have an intense fear of death.   | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 19. I avoid thinking about death altogether.                                       | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 20. The subject of life after death troubles me greatly.                           | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 21. The fact that death will mean the end of everything as I know it frightens me. | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 22. I look forward to reunion with my loved ones after I die.                      | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 23. I view death as a relief from earthly suffering.                               | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 24. Death is simply a part of the process of life.                                 | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 25. I see death as a passage to an eternal and blessed place.                      | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 26. I try to have nothing to do with the subject of death.                         | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 27. Death offers a wonderful release of the soul.                                  | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 28. One thing that gives me comfort is my belief in the afterlife.                 | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 29. I see death as a relief from the burden of this life.                          | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 30. Death is neither good nor bad.   | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 31. I look forward to life after death.  | SD D MD U MA A SA |
| 32. The uncertainty of not knowing what happens after death worries me.            | SD D MD U MA A SA |



## Counselor-Related Death Self-Efficacy Scale

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Education \_\_\_\_\_

For each of the items below, rate how certain or uncertain you are that you can perform each one, using this scale (in units of 10):

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	
Highly uncertain				Moderately certain				Completely certain			

### Rating

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Understand the limits of your role as a counselor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Be sensitive to the needs of the client and his or her family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Buy life insurance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Allow the client and his or her family to support you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Handle the death of a grandparent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Listen to the concerns of a dying client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Listen to the family of a dying client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Touch a dead body.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Identify the concerns of a dying client and his or her family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Communicate with a hospice team about your client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Get a medical checkup.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Handle the illness of your child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Handle knowing that a family member has a fatal condition.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Provide physical care for a terminal client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Assist in transporting a terminally ill client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Prepare your will.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Run errands for a terminally ill client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Listen to a news report of multiple deaths.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Communicate with a dying client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Ask someone close to you if he or she has a terminal illness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. Allow a client to communicate fully.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Purchase your own cemetery plot.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. Cope with the death of your mother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. Ask whether you have a terminal illness.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. Cope with the death of your father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. Visit a dying friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. Provide emotional support for the client's family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. Care for a terminally ill friend so that the family can have some respite.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. Go to a morgue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. Write a Living Will.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. Understand the philosophy of hospice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. Plan your funeral service.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. Sign a card to be an organ donor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. Attend a funeral or wake in which the casket is open.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. Understand bereavement and grief.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. Cope with the death of your child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. Handle the death of your spouse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. Cope with the death of a friend the same age as you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. Tolerate spiritual and religious differences.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. Cope with the death of a pet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41. Care for yourself if you are experiencing stress in counseling a dying client.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 42. Be with a person at the time of death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43. Be with a person experiencing unpleasant physical symptoms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44. Prepay your funeral.