

Middlesex Community College

Fall 2015 - online

Death & Dying - SOC F225-30 – CRN#3918 – 3 credits

Text: *Death & Dying Life & Living*, 7th ed., 2013, Corr & Corr

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Course overview:

This course is a study of death and dying. The field is known as *thanatology*. Topics of study include cultural attitudes toward death, self-confrontation and value identification concerning death and dying, dealing with the dying and the process of death, grief and bereavement, survivors, the impact of death and dying across the life span, suicide, end of life planning, hospice care, euthanasia.

Core competencies:

Middlesex Community College Core Competencies

- 1) Communication Skills: Communication skills include reading, writing, speaking and research. We expect our graduates will have good critical reading skills so that they can discriminate between primary and secondary sources and between more and less important ideas in what they read. We expect our students to write and speak clear, correct expository English to communicate their ideas as well as to frame sensible arguments to support their points of view in an intelligent, thoughtful and civilized way. Communication is an interactive process through which there is an exchange of verbal and/or nonverbal information.
- 2) Conceptual Skills / Critical Thinking Skills: Conceptual skills refer to organized, responsive and critical thought. Many educators and philosophers define critical thinking as skillful, responsible, reflective thinking that facilitates good judgment because it: a) relies upon criteria developed or assessed, b) is self-correcting, and c) is sensitive to context. Critical thinkers can distinguish between fact, inference, and opinion; construct worthwhile questions; arrive at and justify conclusions; prioritize ideas; apply strategies for dealing with error, improbability and ambiguity; value, and access information including that derived from textbooks, lectures and electronic media; give and accept criticism constructively.
- 3) Quantitative Reasoning: Quantitative reasoning helps us learn about reality by applying measurement, mathematics, data collection and evaluation to the study of specific problems. Quantitative reasoning involves several skills or abilities: a) to describe research problems or questions in terms of numerical, symbolic, and visual representation; b) to solve problems by collecting and analyzing data, formulating alternative theories, and making reasonable conclusions based upon a body of evidence; c) to communicate and critique quantitative arguments.
- 4) Technological Literacy: Technological literacy requires us to understand the potential and limitations of technology and to identify and effectively use the appropriate technology to achieve a desired outcome.
- 5) Information Literacy: Information literacy encompasses skills that enable individuals to determine when information is needed, efficiently access information, critically evaluate information and its sources, apply legal and ethical standards in using information, and appropriately apply information to one's needs.
- 6) Aesthetic Perspective: The most elusive area in a well-rounded education is that of aesthetics. Students should be aware of aesthetics both in daily life and in the context of their academic studies. Aesthetics encompasses forms of personal expression both in the natural

world and in the world of man-made things (buildings, objects of art, etc.). In addition, aesthetics can be seen in more abstract, universal constructs such as the symmetry of an equation or the balanced physical structure of an atom. Students should be able to analyze and formulate opinions about the principles of design behind these formal and expressive structures.

7) Understanding of Diversity: Diversity means difference. People may be different with respect to their ethnicity, race, culture, religion or national origin. Or these differences may be social and personal such as class, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or appearance. We hope our graduates are able to recognize and appreciate these and other differences. Psychology embraces a global perspective in presenting issues of diversity concerning cultural awareness, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and age.

8) Values, ethics, and responsible citizenship: Psychology will help the student to recognize and analyze ethical issues, make and defend ethical decisions, demonstrate ethical behavior and social responsibility by engaging in community, social, civic, or cultural service. These core competencies are important personally, academically, and professionally. The learning outcomes, as stated in the syllabus are covered in this course.

Course objectives:

By the end of this course, the student will have a greater understanding of the following:

- a. one's attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about death;
- b. theoretical perspectives regarding the meaning of death;
- c. biomedical approaches to the definition of death;
- d. the death system from a micro and macro perspective;
- e. historic and current causes of death;
- f. theoretical perspectives regarding the process of dying;
- g. hospice and palliative care;
- h. end of life issues and decisions;
- i. the tragedy of suicide;
- j. death due to violence;
- k. euthanasia, assisted death, the right to die;
- l. death in the life of a child;
- m. bereavement, grief, and mourning;
- n. rituals of response to death;
- o. caregiving for those who are dying and those left behind.

Method of evaluation: Total points 500 = 100%

1. **Movie review - 25 points**
2. **Projects (2) - 75 points (obituary 25; death experience 50)**
3. **Position paper -100 points**
4. **Weekly Discussions - 300 points (20 points each)**

Movie Review:

View the movie *Tuesdays with Morrie* (available at the MXCC Library). Write a 400 – 500 word review addressing the following questions: 1. What is your initial reaction to this movie? 2. What lessons did Mitch and Morrie learn from each other? 3. What is said in the movie about the difficulty of facing death? 4. Did you see any of the coping tasks individuals use to help the dying person from chapter 7? 5. How does Mitch change? **Due date: 10/23/15. Submit through assignment drop box.**

Projects:

#1 Obituary: Write your own obituary for use by a newspaper upon your death. For this assignment, you are to write a 200-300 word obituary that would be submitted to the newspaper upon your death (in the future – not at your current age.) What would you want an obituary about you to state? How do you want to be remembered? Once you write the obituary, you will *write a concluding paragraph or two* that provides an introspective reflection on these questions: how did it feel to write this obituary? What does the final product tell you about how you want to be remembered? Does the obituary reflect who you are now or who you are aspiring to be or a little bit of both? Be detailed and specific.

Due date: 9/25/15. Submit this paper in the assignment drop box.

#2 Recollection of Death Experiences: The purpose of this 2 – 3 page paper is to explore your personal experiences with death and how these experiences have shaped you and your attitudes toward death. This paper will cover one death or loss that you have experience on a personal level. For this event, you will provide the following: 1.) a detailed description of the event, (who died, how old you were at the time, how the person died, circumstances surrounding the death, etc.); 2.) your reflections of your **physical, cognitive, and emotional responses** to the event; 3.) your understanding of how the event impacted others around you, family members, friends, and the community if applicable; 4.) the funeral/memorial service planning process, if you were privy to it; 5.) the funeral/memorial service; 6.) the short and long term effect on you and your family and friends; 7.) and, finally, in a concluding paragraph, you will discuss how your attitudes and reaction to death have changed since your first experience to now. Do you believe your reactions to your death experiences reflect a “healthy” response? Why or why not? Do you feel a need to change your response pattern and, if so, what resources do you need to assist you with this? ***Please note: While this paper should concentrate on death experiences, (the loss of a family member, friend, neighbor, pets,) you may describe other events of loss or separation such as divorce.*** This paper should be between 2 - 4 pages. The contents of the paper will remain confidential. Though this paper will be written as a narrative, it **must** reflect college level writing, (e.g. correct grammar and spelling,) and should reflect your reading material.

Due date: 11/6/15. Submit through assignment drop box.

#3 Position paper:

This 5-6 page paper can be on any topic related to death and dying that particularly interests you. This can be a controversial issue or a personal value or belief that is important to you. You will need to do your research, gather your information from reliable, scholarly sources, and write clearly about what you found in the research. Your research should support your opinion or point of view. You must use at least three scholarly, peer-reviewed resources (this excludes most web sites such as Wikipedia and ask.com). Citations of resources within the body of your paper and on your reference page must be in MLA or APA format.

Due Date: 12/4/15. Submit the paper in the assignment drop box.

Weekly discussions: Each week, you will be assigned a 4-5 part discussion question that requires your response. You are required to post a response to each discussion question **and** to **two** of your classmates or a classmate and your professor in the discussion

section of blackboard. Your responses must reflect the reading in the text and other lecture notes or links as assigned. Furthermore, your responses must reflect the standard of college level writing, be free of grammatical and spelling errors, (obviously, no “instant messaging”/texting lingo or spelling,) and incorporate citation as appropriate. The discussion grading rubric can be accessed from the course home page. **Discussion questions are assigned on the Monday of each week, (except for the first week,) and your initial response is due the following Thursday at 11:59p.m; your two additional responses are due by Sunday 11:59pm.** The weekly discussion assignments are worth **20 points each.**

Reading assignments and due dates

<u>Class:</u>	<u>Topic:</u>	<u>Assignments:</u>
Week 1 - 8/31	Overview; getting acquainted	See “weekly assignments” Discussion
Week 2 – 9/7	Education about Death, Dying and Bereavement Goals of death education	Chapter 1 Discussion
Week 3 – 9/14	Changing Encounters with Death Causes of death; death rates Changing Attitudes toward Death Patterns of attitudes	Chapter 2 Chapter 3 Discussion
Week 4 - 9/21	Death-Related Practices & The American Death System Human induced death; death and media <i>Project #1 Obituary due 9/25</i>	Chapter 4 Discussion
Week 5 - 9/28	Cultural Patterns & Death A look at death among various cultures	Chapter 5 Discussion
Week 6 - 10/5	Coping with Dying Skills and approaches, living with Life-threatening illnesses	Chapter 6 Discussion
Week 7 - 10/12	Coping with Dying: How Individuals Can Help Guidelines; communication, burnout	Chapter 7 Discussion
Week 8 - 10/19	Coping with Dying: How Communities Can Help Hospice and palliative care <i>Movie review: Due 10/23</i>	Chapter 8 Discussion
Week 9 - 10/26	Coping with Loss and Grief	Chapter 9

	Mourning; anticipatory grief; Complicated grief Coping with Loss & Grief: How Individuals Can Help	Chapter 10 Discussion
Week 10 – 11/2	Coping with Loss and Grief: Funeral Practices Rituals and Memorials <i>Project #2 Death experience paper due 11/6</i>	Chapter 11 Discussion
Week 11 - 11/9	Children Concepts in childhood; attitudes; Children with illness Adolescents Concepts in adolescence; attitudes Homicide and suicide	Chapter 12 Chapter 13 Discussion
Week 12 - 11/16	Young and Middle-aged adults Encounters with death; attitudes	Chapter 14 Discussion
Week 13 - 11/23	Older Adults Attitudes; illness; loss of partner Legal, Conceptual, and Moral Issues Advanced directives; organ donation	Chapter 15 Chapter 16 Discussion
Week 14 - 11/30	Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior Patterns of suicide; intervention Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia Arguments and social policy <i>Project #3 Position paper due 12/4</i>	Chapter 17 Chapter 18 Discussion
Week 15 - 12/7	The Meaning & Place of Death in Life Afterlife; near-death experiences	Chapter 19 Discussion
Week 16 – 12/14	Alzheimer’s Disease Dementia, Alzheimer’s & related disorders	Chapter 20 Discussion

ADDITIONAL SYLLABUS INFORMATION

For information about the college's policies and procedures regarding academic honesty, accessibility/disability services, attendance, audio-recording in the classroom, grade appeals, plagiarism, religious accommodations, weather/emergency closings, and more, please go to the following website: www.mxcc.edu/catalog/syllabus-policies/

IMPORTANT COLLEGE POLICIES!! PLEASE READ CAREFULLY!

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NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Middlesex Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, age, sex, national origin, marital status, ancestry, present or past history of mental disorder, learning disability or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or genetic information in its programs and activities. In addition, the College does not discriminate in employment on the additional basis of veteran status or criminal record. The following people have been designated to handle inquiries or complaints regarding non-discrimination policies and practices:

- Primary Title IX Coordinator Dr. Adrienne Maslin Dean of Students/Title IX and Section 504/ADA Coordinator amaslin@mxcc.edu; 860-343-5759; Founders Hall Room 123|
- Secondary Title IX Coordinator Ms. Queen Fordham Coordinator of the Meriden Center Welcome Desk qfordham@mxcc.edu; 203-608-3011