

# Death and Dying

## DEP 4930 - Fall 2024

**Instructor:** Dr. Susan Bluck

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**Course:** DEP 4930 (28455)

**Place:** Matherley 0007

**Time:** Tuesdays, Period 7 - 9 (1:55 pm – 4:55 pm)

**Required texts/books:**

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie*. New York: Doubleday.

Callanan, M. & Kelley, P. (1992). *Final Gifts*. New York: Bantam.

Kastenbaum & Moreman (2018). *Death, Society, and Human Experience, 12<sup>th</sup> Ed.* Routledge.  
Available online. Used versions available.

**Required research articles:** See article readings on course site.

**Office hours:** I am very happy and interested to meet with you!! Wednesdays 10 – 12 is best. Please feel free to contact me to set up an individual appointment for discussion or help with assignments. I am also happy to meet with groups of students preparing class presentations.



**Course overview.** Death marks the end of aging, the end of our life cycle. It comes to all of us, but it is something most of us spend little time thinking about. How are death and dying represented in the media, in literature, and in scientific research? How are they experienced in our own lives? This course examines death and dying in our society from multiple perspectives, using a variety of sources. We touch on medical and clinical issues, but largely take a psychosocial view of death. The class is run as a lecture/seminar and will involve **in-depth reading, with lots of in-class interaction**. A required textbook will be used to introduce students to basic theories and concepts surrounding death and dying. Original research articles examining different methods used to study death and dying, and what has been discovered about this process, are required reading. Death and dying will also be critically examined as represented in popular culture (e.g., films, popular books). Students are encouraged to learn about death and dying from these multiple sources and must be willing to examine their own beliefs and feelings about this...life and death...topic.

**Required Reading:** Students are responsible for **all** of the required reading. You must complete the assigned readings (text/books and research articles) **prior** to class. I will sometimes review parts of the text in class lecture but much of the time you will be reading the text to build your own knowledge. Class discussion, participation and final exam performance depend on your completing all the readings. Brief quizzes will be given each week in which readings from the text are assigned.

## Teaching philosophy and course objectives:

### **Philosophy.**

- I. Tell me and I will forget.  
 Show me and I may remember.  
 Involve me and I will understand.  
 - *Chinese proverb*

II. “Scholars at the University of California at Berkeley have found that ...the Web alone now reaches over a half-billion pages, and the volume is growing by more than 7 million pages daily. No wonder we can't keep up with it all! In the flood of information, it's helpful to step back and ask ourselves, 'What are we doing as university educators?' An answer: our job as teachers is NOT to provide 'more information' but rather to help students understand how to make sense of it all, which is another name not so much for knowledge but perhaps for wisdom. At still another level, we can call it 'learning how to learn.' Whatever we call it, we know what it is and what it always has been: opening the mind, learning to ask the right questions.” - *Teaching Gerontology Newsletter*

III. Death and dying is not something that any one of us can ever be an expert on. We've never done it! This class will however broaden our knowledge and understanding. Death is an emotional topic and one that brings out and sometimes challenges our feelings and values. Be prepared to **share your own feelings and values**, but also to **accept other's feelings and values** concerning the spiritual, moral, legal, and political aspects of death and dying.

### **Objectives.**

Through text, lectures, books, original research articles, literary and film sources, and community speakers, this course will introduce you to major issues and concepts relevant to death and dying. Specifically, the objectives of this course are:

1. To gain an awareness of death and dying as a personal, social, and psychological issue.
2. To appreciate how death and dying are experienced at individual, family, and cultural levels.
3. To be introduced to research and research methods used to study death and dying.

### Class Policy re Devices

Addicted to your phone? This isn't a good class for you. Cell phones, laptops, or other portable devices are not allowed in the classroom. Such devices must be kept in your knapsack, purse, etc., and not be taken out during class. This class requires in-person listening, interaction and discussion.

### University Policies

Academic dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating, etc.) will not be tolerated and will be handled according to UF policy. Don't even think about it. It could ruin your career. Students requiring accommodation should contact the Office for Students with Disabilities, 392-1261, ext. 143. That office will provide documentation to the Instructor concerning accommodation of student needs.

### Stress

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575 or visit site.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Call 352-392-1575, visit site, for info on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

**Grading and Evaluation - Exams and Assignments:** The **Final Exam** will be short essays based on required readings, lectures, research presentations, guest speakers, and class discussions. The Final Exam will cover important constructs and major themes from across the semester, but will *not* focus on details. There will also be eight **Text Reading Quizzes** throughout the semester. These will be multiple choice (7-8 questions) based directly on the week's text readings. Besides the final exam and quizzes there will be several class assignments as outlined below.

The assignments require class discussion so students are expected to read and otherwise prepare so that they can participate fully in class. You may be asked to think aloud or answer questions during class, to share your experiences, and to read or demonstrate things to the class. Always look ahead in the syllabus to see what readings or assignments are due for the next week. There are **several small assignments** that must be completed, and will be graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. For the more **in-depth assignments**, a letter grade will be given. You must be willing to work responsibly in groups as well as on your own.

Final grades will be based both on the assignments and on the exams as shown by the points system listed below and in site Gradebook. **Late assignments are never accepted.** There will be make-up exams only in documented emergency cases. The nature of this course and the material require that all grading is not of the "right" versus "wrong" answer type. Answers to questions concerning death and dying do not always have "correct" answers, so you will sometimes be graded on your thoughtfulness, insight, creativity, knowledge, and spoken and written ability to communicate.

#### Class assignments - Descriptions and due dates.

Your grade is based on the following assignments and exams. The rubric I use for assignments #3 & 4 appear below and in site Gradebook. The nature of some of these assignments requires grading of not only basic factual knowledge, but your ability to insightfully and creatively integrate materials and ideas. All assignments **MUST** be typed and stapled. When citing references, use APA style, [www.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res\\_strategy/citing/apa.html](http://www.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res_strategy/citing/apa.html) **Total course points = 500**

#### Requirements

#### Evaluation

I. S/U assignments

95 points

*These assignments are graded S/U and will be handed in during class. Attendance at class when this material is discussed is necessary to receive an S. Assignments cannot be handed in outside of class. S will be assigned if a student shows thoughtful, careful, completion of the assignment: If a U is assigned, only half points are given. If not completed, the grade is 0.*

Copy and hand in Self-Inventory #2 & #3 from text: **Due in class: September 3** (30 points).

Book group questions - individual student presentation: **Due various dates** (20 points).

Film review I, II, & III: **Due in class** the day that film is shown (3 x 15 = 45 points).

2. Text reading quizzes x 8

120 points

*There is no midterm but there will be eight quizzes throughout the semester. Check 'week by week' for dates. First Quiz is Sept. 3. These will be multiple choice, 7-8 questions, based directly on the week's text readings, to help you keep up with the reading. We will not discuss the answers in class.*

3. Group research presentation and individual write-up.

120 points

**Due various dates** depending on your group number.

Several research articles concerning aspects of death and dying are listed at the end of the syllabus and are necessary for this assignment. Students will work in groups and be assigned one of these articles on which they will give a presentation. Reviewing the main points of the article forms the core of the group presentation but the entire presentation should last about 50 minutes, and involve the class. That is, the group should think of creative ways to facilitate class discussion and to bring in external material on their topic to the class. For example, students in previous classes have reviewed and presented additional research articles, obtained handouts and information from community agencies, interviewed people and made a video of them, made up games or challenges to stimulate thinking about the topic, showed movie clips that demonstrated certain points, read poetry or literature, played music, that fit with the topic, had students do exercises to explore their feelings. Try to bring your topic to the class as interestingly as possible. You will also be asked to evaluate each of the other members of your own group.

Each individual should also **hand in, on course site, 5 double-spaced typed pages** (12 point font, .5 inch margins) describing the article, on the day that your group will be leading the discussion. This is not group work but your own individual write-up of the main points of the article and your critique of it, as well as its relation to other material on this topic that we have covered in the course, and that you have looked up independently (with references to at least 2 'external sources'). Grades will be based on the group's oral presentation and your own written article critique.

4. RIP: Web memorials, newspaper obituaries, your own obit, poetry **85 points**  
**Due: November 19, in class.**

**Hand in RIP paper** (double-spaced typed pages, 12 point font, .5 inch margins) **and be ready to discuss in class.** Number of pages for this assignment will vary as you need to cut and paste info from websites/newspapers/poetry. *Just the text* will probably be about 5 pages to cover everything you need. Make sure that you thoroughly answer each part of the assignment. See points breakdown to give you a sense of how to use your efforts in completing this assignment.

The focus of this assignment is for you to do a bit of 'research' on how individuals memorialize their loved ones. One way this is commonly done is through newspaper obituaries. More recently however, people have set up memorial websites for their loved ones. Get a newspaper (or a newspaper online) and look at the traditional obituaries found there. Make copies of 3 newspaper obits to hand in with your assignment. Compare, and contrast these three newspaper obituaries. Visit at least 3 memorial websites for *individual* persons (not ones for groups of people), and list the site addresses as well as the name of the individual being memorialized. Cut and paste some info from each website to give a good sense of what it is like. Compare and contrast the 3 websites. Once you have viewed both types of obits (web and newspaper) compare these different media and how they work for memorializing the dead.

The next part of the assignment is more personal. Where would you like your own obit to appear (newspaper or web) and why? Write your own obituary, and find a poem that you think you would like to have read at your funeral. Explain why you chose this poem.

5. Final exam, in class **December 3.** **80 points**

**Rubric for assignments #3-4.****Assignment #3: Group research presentation and individual write-up**In class group presentation (individually graded)Review of article and critique \_\_\_\_\_/20

External sources \_\_\_\_\_/15

Creativity \_\_\_\_\_/15

Ability to stimulate class discussion/involvement \_\_\_\_\_/10

Individual write-up (handed in; individually graded)

Review of article \_\_\_\_\_/25

CRITIQUE \_\_\_\_\_/15

Use of external sources (at least two) \_\_\_\_\_/15

Formatted list of references (APA style) \_\_\_\_\_/5

Total \_\_\_\_\_/120

**Assignment #4: RIP: Web memorials, newspaper obituaries, your own obit, poetry**

3 newspaper page obits submitted \_\_\_\_\_/5

Compare and contrast the 3 newspaper obits \_\_\_\_\_/15

3 memorial websites visited: site info and names, url submitted \_\_\_\_\_/5

Compare and contrast the 3 memorial sites \_\_\_\_\_/15

Compare website to newspaper obits/memorials \_\_\_\_\_/15

Where would you like your own obit to appear and why? \_\_\_\_\_/5

Write your own obit \_\_\_\_\_/10

Submit a reading/ poem/song, with reference, for your memorial service \_\_\_\_\_/5

Why did you choose this poem? \_\_\_\_\_/10

Total \_\_\_\_\_/85

**Grades**

A = 90.00%+

A- = 89.00 – 89.99

B+ = 87.00%-88.99%

B = 80.00%-86.99%

B- = 79.00 – 79.99%

C+ = 77.00%-78.99%

C = 70.00%-76.99%

D+ = 67.00%-69.99%

D = 60.00%-66.99%

F = less than 60.00%

## Death and Dying - Week by Week

### August 27: Introduction to each other and to death...

Review syllabus

Why are we here? Class introductions

Film: Surviving Death

Assignment for next week: Do Self-Inventory #1-4 from Kastenbaum Chapter I. Bring copy of Self-Inventory 2 and 3, to *hand in during class*.

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum text, Chapter I.

### September 3: Thinking about death

*Text reading quiz*

Lecture

Self-Inventory 2 & 3: Discussion and *hand in*.

Studs Terkel reading (in class)

Organization of small groups for book discussion/group presentations.

Assignment for next week: Next week's theme is "People killing people." Part of your homework is to visit memorial sites for Sept 11 and be ready to talk about your feelings about the terrorist attacks. You can find multiple sites for Sept 11 on the web, but particularly watch the news vid at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HcX3iffQcI> and the memorial vid [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dks\\_EQOJ33o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dks_EQOJ33o)

What are your emotional reactions to this news report and memorial video?

Reading for next class: Kastenbaum text, Chapter 8.

### September 10: September 11 and beyond: people killing people

*Text reading quiz*

Lecture: September 11

Student's views on 9/11/and reaction to 9/11 websites

Lecture: Murder and violence

Studs Terkel reading, p. 45 (in class)

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum text, Chapter 7.

### September 17: Suicide: people killing themselves

*Text reading quiz*

Film: Harold and Maude

Film review I in class and Discussion

Assignment for next week: Think about whether you are in favor of, or against, legalizing physician assisted death. What are the pros and cons of having a 'right to die'?

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum text, Chapter 9; Research Articles: Assisted dying around the world: a status questionis.

### September 24: Euthanasia and Medical Assistance in Dying

*Text reading quiz*

Lecture: The 'right to die'?

Group Research Presentation #1: **Assistance in Dying**

Reading for next week: Final Gifts, pp. 1 - 112; Research Article: Adult-Child Caregivers' Family Communication Experiences after an Older Parent's Blood Cancer Diagnosis: A Survey Exploring Their Openness, Avoidance, and Social Support.

### **October 1: Final Gifts I: Caring for the dying, learning from the dying**

**Guest Speaker:** Susie Gilson (she/her/hers), Manager Clinical Volunteer Services, Haven Hospice, [www.havenhospice.org](http://www.havenhospice.org)

*Final Gifts* Discussion Groups: Focus questions - student presentations (Student #1)

Group Research Presentation #2: **Caregiver Communication in Serious Cancer**

Reading for next week: Final Gifts, pp. 113 - 231; Research article: When a parent dies - a systematic review of the effects of support programs for parentally bereaved children and their caregivers.

### **October 8: Final Gifts II ... and Children and death**

*Final Gifts* Discussion Groups: Focus questions - student presentations (Student #2)

Group Research Presentation #3: **Children & Death**

**Guest Speaker:** Emily Sullivan, Director, UF Streetlight Program, Department of Pediatrics <http://streetlight.ufhealth.org/>

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum text, Chapter 10

### **October 15: Death in childhood: losing a child**

*Text reading quiz - Answers*

**Guest Speaker:** Gay Hale, former member, *Compassionate Friends Support Group*, <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/home.aspx>

Film: Founding of the Compassionate Friends

Lecture: The dying child

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum text, Chapter 4 & 5; Tuesdays with Morrie, pp. 1 – 40.

### **October 22: Adulthood. Dying I: The Pathway to Death**

*Text reading quiz - Answers*

Lecture: Dying.

**Guest Speaker:** Cathy Silloway, LCSW, ACHP-SW, Palliative Care Consult Team, UF Health

Reading from Tuesdays with Morrie - student to be selected

Tuesdays Discussion Groups: Focus questions - student presentations (Student #3)

Reading for next week: Tuesdays with Morrie, pp. 41 – 129; Research Article: Factors Considered Important at the End of Life by Patients, Family, Physicians, and Other Care Providers.

Website: Feel free to visit <http://theconversationproject.org/> to begin thinking about how people make plans for the end of life.

### **October 29: Dying II: "A 'Good' Death?"**

Reading from Tuesdays with Morrie - student to be selected

Tuesdays Discussion Groups: Focus questions - student presentations (Student #4)

Group Research Presentation #4: **What is a "Good Death?"**

Reading for next week: Tuesdays, pp. 130 – 192; Research Article: Reflecting on death: Priorities for living well. *Death studies*, 1–8. Website: Check out Before I Die walls, <https://beforeidieproject.com/>

**November 5: Dying III...”Planning to die...thinking about death.”**

Group Research Presentation #5: **Thinking about Death**

Reading from Tuesdays with Morrie - student to be selected

Tuesdays Discussion Groups: Focus questions - student presentations (Student #5)

Reading for next class: Kastenbaum, Chapter 11 & Chapter 12

**November 12: Disposing of the body; funerals and memorials**

*Text reading quiz*

Film: Death, An Overview

Film review II in class with Guest Speaker Dana Lucas, *Lic. Funeral Director, Embalmer, State Anatomical Board*, <http://anatbd.acb.med.ufl.edu/>

Lecture: The funeral process

Final exam information and hand-out.

Reading for next week: Kastenbaum, Chapter 13

**Due November 19:** ‘RIP.’ Students should come to class prepared to read from and discuss your paper.

**November 19: Remembering the dead. Do we survive death?**

*Text reading quiz – Answers*

Student discussion/hand-in: ‘RIP Assignment’

Film: Beyond Life and Death

Film review III and Discussion

**November 26: No class. Happy Thanksgiving!**

**December 3: Final exam in class.**



Group research presentations: Research articles on Course Site

Group #1 Research Presentation: **Assistance in Dying**

**Reading:** Mroz, S., Dierickx, S., Deliens, L., Cohen, J., & Chambaere, K. (2021). Assisted dying around the world: a status quaestionis. *Annals of palliative medicine*, 10, 3540–3553.  
<https://doi.org/10.21037/apm-20-637>

Group #2 Research Presentation: **Caregiver Communication in Serious Cancer**

Wright, K. B., Bylund, C. L., Vasquez, T. S., Mullis, M. D., Sae-Hau, M., Weiss, E. S., Bagautdinova, D., & Fisher, C. L. (2023). Adult-Child Caregivers' Family Communication Experiences after an Older Parent's Blood Cancer Diagnosis: A Survey Exploring Their Openness, Avoidance, and Social Support. *Cancers*, 15(12), 3177. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cancers15123177>

Group #3 Research Presentation: **Children & Death**

**Reading:** Bergman, A. S., Axberg, U., & Hanson, E. (2017). When a parent dies - a systematic review of the effects of support programs for parentally bereaved children and their caregivers. *BMC palliative care*, 16(1), 39. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-017-0223-y>

Group #4 Research Presentation: **What is “a Good Death?”**

**Reading:** Steinhauser, K.E., Christakis, N.A., Clipp, E.C., McNeilly, M., McIntyre, L., & Tulsky, J.A. (2000). Factors Considered Important at the End of Life by Patients, Family, Physicians, and Other Care Providers. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 284, 2476-2482.  
doi:10.1001/jama.284.19.2476 <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/193279>

Group #5 Research Presentation: **Thinking about Death**

**Reading:** Cogdill-Richardson, K., Bluck, S., & Mroz, E. L. (2024). Reflecting on death: Priorities for living well. *Death studies*, 1–8. Advance online publication.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2023.2300008>

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Group membership

I am in Group \_\_\_\_\_. List the names and email of your ‘groupmates’ including your own name. Everyone in your group should list the names in the same order; i.e., everyone needs to agree on who is Person 1-6.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Email, txt, or other contact info</u>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		