I. COURSE PURPOSE

Death is the last frontier that life offers. It is an event/state that none of us can avoid regardless of our attempts. At birth each of us becomes a mandated pioneer, and yet we fear the exploration. Confronting our own mortality may cause us discomfort in ways that we have not been trained to identify and therefore may be affecting our clinical practice, regardless of the setting. One can never be totally prepared to face death, but by exploring the concept of death, a level of comfort may be developed that enhances our ability as practitioners. Death will be explored not only in terms of the death of a person but also as related to other beginnings and endings that can result in emotional or existential distress.

The purpose of this course is to examine death, beginnings, and endings through knowledge development and self-exploration. It considers the fear of death and the impact of confronting one’s mortality as a function of professional social work practice.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the history of death as a phenomenon, to include the various definitions and perspective of death currently held by society.

2. Demonstrate knowledge of the impact of the fear of death on individuals, groups, cultures, and society.

3. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the death process, stages, phases, and tasks – including stage theory and critiques of stage theory.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of when, how, and where people die.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of Living Wills and Advanced Directives.
6. Become aware of the process and result of confronting one’s personal mortality.
7. Recognize and acknowledge the various ways in which differing cultures approach death.
8. Develop the ability to see one’s own fear of death and how this may influence daily interactions, both professionally and personally.
9. Recognize ways in which we culturally honor the dead and comfort the living.
10. Be able to differentiate between normal grief and mourning and complicated grief.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Text:


B. Required Readings:


Additional articles and reading will be assigned over the course of the semester by the instructor.
Other Recommended Resources and Media

The Death Clock http://www.deathclock.com/
Last Rights: How to Discuss Death and How to Ensure Your Wishes Are Obeyed http://www.last-rights.com/
The Center for Thanatology Research and Education http://www.thanatology.org/

A. Course Assignments

Personal Obituary Assignment
Write your obituary and a short paper on the process of going through this exercise.

Mid-Term (in class)

Personal Advanced Directive Assignment
Complete (or if extant, review) your living will and durable power of attorney. In doing the advanced directive (living will, durable power of attorney) talk with the person you identified as your durable power of attorney and discuss your wishes and desires with him/her. You will be expected to use the resources posted on Blackboard developed by the ABA Commission on Law and Aging. Write a process paper of what it was like to think about what you want done when you are unable to speak for yourself, how it felt to ask someone to agree to pull the plug or not pull the plug, how it felt to explore your values, hopes, experiences, etc. to come to the decision you made. Also what it was like discussing your wishes with this person? Only the process paper is turned in, though it is expected that you will have completed the advanced directive.

Personal Process Journal
Over the course of the semester you will write a process journal of what happens during the class, while you are doing the readings, and the assignments. You will write three journal entries to be handed in over the semester. Each entry will be on a topic of your choosing. This journal will be read only by the instructor. Please be honest with yourself about what you are feeling and thinking; what your beliefs are; what is changing in you and what is not. This assignment is a big part of confronting your own mortality in order for you to be able to be present with your clients now and in the future.
B. Grading Policy

Personal Obituary Assignment 10%
Mid-Term 25%
Personal Advanced Directive Assignment 15%
Personal Process Journals 30%
Class Participation 20%

Grading System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Numeric Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 94</td>
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<tr>
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<td>87 – 89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80 – 82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 - 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 - 69</td>
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C. Preparation, Attendance & Participation

Students are required to attend classes and are expected to participate meaningfully in class discussion/exercises and online forums as required. The class participation grade will be determined by the instructor’s perception of the student’s preparation for and contributions to class discussion/activities. Different students will make different kinds of contributions. Some will have an easy time with spontaneous interactions while others will be more comfortable making planned statements about key ideas from the readings or other sources. Both types of contributions are valued.

D. Course and Instructor Evaluation

NCSSS requires electronic evaluation of this course and the instructor. At the end of the semester, the evaluation form may be accessed at http://evaluations.cua.edu/evaluations using your CUA username and password. Additional, informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests.
IV. CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements, or appropriate Program Handbook for Academic Requirements (http://ncsss.cua.edu/courses/index.cfm), including scholastic and behavioral requirements.

NCSSS is committed to creating an open and inclusive learning environment where all members - including students, faculty, administrators, and staff – strive to listen to and learn from one another. We recognize that in a multicultural society, it is inevitable that issues or tensions relative to diversity and different life experiences will arise. It is how we handle these events that matters. Therefore, when such issues occur – inside or outside of the classroom - we agree to engage in respectful and productive discussion with one another until learning is enhanced and understanding is deepened by all involved.

A. Scholastic Expectations
All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, adhere to APA format, and should be carefully proof read by the student before submission to the instructor for grading.

B. Behavioral Requirements:
Students are expected to maintain accepted standards of professional conduct and personal integrity in the classroom. Students should:

- Attend all classes and contribute constructively to the classroom culture
- Recognize and avoid behavior that jeopardizes the learning/teaching environment of other students or the instructor
- Demonstrate competence in planning academic activities and in following through on those plans
- Reasonably respond to and respect others’ reactions to one’s comments or actions in the classroom
- Use an appropriate level of class time and instructor’s time and attention in and out of class
- Behave in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of the social work profession.
C. **Academic Honesty**
   Joining the community of scholars at CUA entails accepting the standards, living by those standards, and upholding them. Please refer to University Policy ([http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/currentstudents/academintgrt.cfm](http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/currentstudents/academintgrt.cfm)) and appropriate Program Handbooks.

D. **Confidentiality**
   Each student is expected to adhere to the Confidentiality Agreement that is signed at the beginning of every semester. This agreement covers “practice materials” in classes, supervisory sessions, case conferences, seminars, and other educational settings within the NCSSS BSW or MSW programs are for **professional learning purposes only** and are subject to strict professional standards of confidentiality. These same standards of confidentiality also extend to various forms of written communication and peer consultation.

   Adherence to these standards means all students refrain from communicating beyond the classroom setting about practice material that is presented in class. I will also refrain from using social media outlets (blogs, twitter, Facebook, etc.) or email to discuss practice settings, program responsibilities and projects with individuals who are not in teaching or supervision roles directly related to the situation.

E. **Accommodations**
   Students with physical, learning, psychological or other disabilities wishing to request accommodations must identify with the Disability Support Services (DSS) and submit documentation of a disability. If you have documented such a disability to DSS that requires accommodations or an academic adjustment, you must present that documentation to your instructors and arrange a meeting with as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.

F. **Use of Electronic Devices**
   **No laptops or other electronic devices are permitted in the classroom,** unless you have a specific documented learning disability. Please turn off all cell phones or other devices that would disrupt the learning environment of the classroom and put them away and removed from the classroom environment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topics and Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction To The Course and each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2     | Studies about Death And Dying  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapter 1 |
| 3     | What is the process of dying  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapters 2 & 3  
   Kellehear, A. (2008)  
   ☀ Personal Obituary assignment due |
| 4     | Where We Die and the Care We Received  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapters 4 & 5  
   ☉ Personal Process Journals due |
| 5     | Preparing for Death: Anxieties, Issues and Tasks  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapter 8 & 10  
| 6     | Death in the 21st Century  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapter 6 & 7 |
| 7     | Honoring the Dead and Comforting the Living  
| 8     | Midterm Exam (in class) |
| 9     | The Work of Mourning  
   ☉ Personal Process Journals due |
| 10    | Death, Dying, and the Child and Adolescent  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapter 10  
| 11    | Death by Suicide  
   ☀ Personal Advanced Directive assignment due |
| 12    | Death, Adulthood and a Parent’s Tears |
| 13    | Death and Spirituality  
   Required Reading: Kellehear, Chapter 9 & 11 |
| 14    | Review and Reflections  
   ☉ Personal Process Journals due |