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.

The purpose of this course is to examine death phenomenologically 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


A. Recommended Texts


B. Other Recommended Resources and Media


Last Rights: How to Discuss Death and How to Ensure Your Wishes Are Obeyed [http://www.last-rights.com/](http://www.last-rights.com/)

The Center for Thanatology Research and Education [http://www.thanatology.org/](http://www.thanatology.org/)
C. **Course Assignments**

   **Personal Obituary Assignment**
   Instruction for completing this assignment will be provided in class

   **Mid-Term (in class)**

   **Personal Advanced Directive Assignment**
   Complete (or if extant, review) your living will and durable power of attorney for the jurisdiction in which you reside and your ethical will. In doing the advanced directives (living will, durable power of attorney, and ethical will) talk with the person you identified as your durable power of attorney and discuss your wishes and desires with him/her. 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 put your values, hopes, experiences, etc.. What was it like discussing your wishes with this person? Hand in the process paper, the living will, the durable power of attorney, and the ethical will.

   **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 you and 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.

D. **Grading Policy**

   Grades will be based on the University grading system as described in the Graduate Announcements.

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

   Please refer to CUA Announcements or Program Handbooks for Academic Requirements that include scholastic and behavioral requirements.

E. **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

A. Scholastic Expectations
Please refer to NCSSS Announcements, or appropriate Program Handbook for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. 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. 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 and appropriate Program Handbooks.

C. 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, please arrange a meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.
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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topics and Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Introduction To The Course and each other</strong></td>
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| 2     | **Attitudes Toward Death And Dying**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 1 & 2 |
| 3     | **What is Death: Cross-Cultural, Historical, and Definitions**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 3 & 5 |
| ☀     | *Personal Obituary assignment due* |
| 4     | **Where We Die and the Care We Received**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 4 & 9 |
| ☀     | *Personal Process Journals due* |
| 5     | **Preparing for Death: Anxieties, Issues and Tasks**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 6 & 7  
Recommended Reading: Steinhauser et al., (2001) |
| 6     | **Death in the 21st Century**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 13 |
| 7     | **Honoring the Dead and Comforting the Living**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 8  
Recommended Reading: Saldinger & Cain, (2004) |
| 8     | **Midterm Exam (in class)** |
| 9     | **The Work of Mourning**  
☀ *Personal Process Journals due* |
| 10    | **Death, Dying, and the Child and Adolescent**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 10 |
| 11    | **Death by Suicide**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 12  
Recommended Reading: Nuland, pp. 140-162  
☀ *Personal Advanced Directive assignment due* |
| 12 | **Death, Adulthood and a Parent’s Tears**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 11 |
| 13 | **Death and Spirituality**  
Required Reading: DeSpelder & Strickland, Chapters 14  
Smith (1995) |
| 14 | **Review and Reflections** |
|      | ☀ Personal Process Journals due |