

Psychology 456, Fall 2010
Death and Bereavement
Instructor: Barbara A. McDonald, Ph.D.
(bamcdonald.psych@gmail.com)
Office: 24K Life Sciences, 594-6293
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-2pm and by appointment

Purpose of the Course:

This course will provide an overview of topics related to death, dying and bereavement. We will study the objective aspects of death and the personal responses to death, grieving and how this impacts our lives. We will study overall attitudes toward death, cultural aspects of death and bereavement, information about how people die, death at different age periods, death by suicide or trauma and death by Alzheimer's Disease and AIDS. We will also cover living with life-threatening illnesses, current health care and public policy, and laws governing death and body disposition.

Textbook(s):

Kastenbaum, R.J.: *Death, Society and Human Experience, 10th Ed.*, Required
Nuland, S.: *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter* Optional

Using Blackboard:

This course will use Blackboard. To access it, go to <http://blackboard.sdsu.edu>. You will use Blackboard to access the syllabus, the lecture outlines, study guides and any announcements I think might help you. This is the way I will communicate with you.

You should check Blackboard before every lecture to download and print notes.

You should check Gradebook every week also to make sure your points are accurately recorded and you know how you are doing in the course.

Your Grade: Your grade will be based on three exams, nine group discussion reports (ten opportunities, drop one), one group presentation and one paper. The points for each are listed below.

Course Points

		Points Each	Points Total
EXAMS	3 Tests	100	300
In-class Assign	10 exercises (drop one)	10	90
On-line Surveys	3	5	15
Group Presentation		10	10
Papers	1 paper	50	50
Total			465

Test and Grading Policies

Tests must be taken when scheduled. If you cannot take an exam due to a very serious reason AND you contact me about this prior to the exam, you may make it up. Grades are based on percentage of course points received, with 90% and above = A- to A; 80-89% = B-, B, or B+; 70-79% = C-, C or C+; 60-69% = D-, D or D+; and below 60 = F.

Group Discussions and Assignments

You will be assigned to a group. There will be ten in-class assignments, worth 10 points apiece. They will be given every class period there is not an exam. As already mentioned, one will be dropped giving a total of 90 possible points. (So, if you have to miss a class, this is the in-class you will drop). Group discussions are a very important part of the class and are intended to foster a sense of belonging, critical skills in listening and leadership roles in facilitating group discussions. Group discussion topics will be announced on Blackboard along with the notes. . The in-class assignments will be a group discussion about a topic or activity relevant to the issue we are studying. Except for the first class, **each group assignment will require one member of the group to take responsibility for coming up with the questions to be asked, follow-up questions to be asked and inclusion of all group members.** The group leader will take notes on the responses to questions and all other group members will report on how the group discussion went and what they thought about the topic. Learning to facilitate a good group discussion will be valuable in your professional life. As for the time necessary to conduct a good group, it will require AT LEAST twenty minutes and probably more to complete a detailed group discussion. If it seems that ten minutes is sufficient, this is because the group facilitator does not have enough issues to discuss. Any group discussions that take place in less than twenty minutes will get a score of 4. A good group discussion will get at least an 8, and a very detailed group report will gain your group members the full 10 points.

There will be one brief group presentation, to be announced during the semester. You will prepare for it in group one week and present the information the next week.

HERE IS THE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT GETTING YOUR POINTS:
You will turn in your group response papers to the TA for your group. All of the group papers should be turned in as a group. IF YOU DO NOT turn in a Group Response Paper, your I WILL NOT GIVE YOU POINTS. BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN POINTS, CHECK BLACKBOARD EVERYWEEK TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE GETTING YOUR POINTS AND CONTACT your GROUP TA IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DON'T GET THE POINTS YOU EXPECT. Please do not contact me several weeks later to say that you were in group but did not get your points.

Paper

The paper will be approximately 3-5 pages and will include academic references. I will discuss the format I wish you to follow in class. Your paper will be about one of two topics, either the influence of media on attitudes toward death, OR the influence of culture on the attitude toward death. Your paper will include 1) the main theme you wish to discuss, 2) the academic point of view on this topic (your references), 3) an example of what you are talking about (either from a media source or an example of culture from the real world), and a conclusion. The 50 points for the paper will include a proposal in which you will turn in one page detailing what you plan to write about. That will be worth 10 points. Once that is approved, you will write and turn in the paper for the remaining 40 points. **A word of caution: we will be checking for plagiarism.** In the Psychology department, we take plagiarism seriously and if you are found to have copy and pasted information from your article(s) or any other source into your paper you will receive an F on the paper and be reported to the department and face an ethics panel.

Communicating with me

Office Hours: Office hours are on Tuesdays from 1-2 in LS 24K. You can also contact me by email but be sure to indicate in subject line who you are and that you are writing about the class. My email is bamcdonald.psych@gmail.com.

Our TAs are:

Nancy Chavez (nchavez@rohan.sdsu.edu)

Xenia Altamirano (tinkiexenie@yahoo.com)

Class Schedule:

3:30-4:45 Lecture

4:45-5:00 Break

5:00-6:10 Finish lecture, group discussion, or other activity

Please note that the course schedule that follows is subject to change and if there are any changes they will be announced in class and on Blackboard

Course Schedule: Stay tuned for any changes to syllabus.

Reading should be done before lecture.

Date:	Topic/Assignments
Reading*	

WEEK ONE

Thu 9/2	Introduction; important theories Overview of issues, research, terms
Chapter 1	

*Assignment: Take surveys on Blackboard
before Saturday noon for 5 points apiece*

WEEK TWO

Thu 9/9 Cultural, historical views of death
Chapters 2&3
Defining death

WEEK THREE

Thu 9/16 How we die: Heart attack, Stroke, Cancer,
How We Die
Alzheimers Nuland
& Chap 4

WEEK FOUR

Thu 9/23 Life Threatening Illness, Adult Death
Nuland's book
1 page paper proposal DUE

WEEK FIVE

Thu 9/30 Finish information from previous lectures
and review for exam
TEST ONE, Scantron: Skinny Green # 882

WEEK SIX

Thu 10/7 Health care, hospice and palliative care,
Chapter 5
insurance coverage

WEEK SEVEN

Thu 10/14 End of life issues and decisions, Legal
aspects Chapter 6
of death including capital punishment,
assisted suicide

WEEK EIGHT

Thu 10/21 Funerals & body disposition
Chapter 12

Paper DUE

WEEK NINE

Thu 10/28 Bereavement, Grief, Mourning
Chapter 11
*Assignment: Paper on Interview with person
who has lost someone*

WEEK TEN

Thu 11/4 **TEST TWO, Scantron: Skinny Green #882**

WEEK ELEVEN

Thu 11/11 Child & Adolescent Death
Chapter 10

WEEK TWELVE

Thu 11/18 Suicide & PTSD Chapter 7
Online survey to be completed before
Saturday noon

WEEK THIRTEEN

Thu 11/25 Happy Thanksgiving!

WEEK FOURTEEN

Thu 12/2 Life after death: cultural and religious
beliefs Chapter 13

WEEK FIFTEEN

Thu 12/9 **TEST THREE, Scantron: Skinny Green # 882**
This is our last class, there is no final exam