

CAPITAL COMMUNITY TECHNICAL COLLEGE

PSY 250 PSYCHOLOGY OF DYING AND DEATH

3 credits

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION: Study of dying, death, and bereavement in American society. Topics include the social meaning of death, the dying process, a developmental approach to understanding death attitudes, and the funeral as an expression of bereavement. A unit on personal coping focuses on personal death awareness, children and dying, and the hospice approach. *Prerequisite: PSY 101*

COURSE OBJECTIVES: After successfully completing PSY 250, the student will be able to:

understand the social meaning of dying and death, including death-related behavior;
delineate the dying process, its deviance in the medical setting, and the issue of the "Right to Die";
compare conceptualizations of death in the life cycle;
identify specific issues regarding children and dying;
examine the hospice approach as an alternative to institutional death;
compare cross-cultural patterns of bereavement behavior;
study American burial practices and the funeral in both historical and contemporary settings.

COURSE CONTENT:

1. The American Way of Dying:

Current Interest in Thanatology
Defining Death
Denying Death
Mortality Statistics
Coping With the American Way of Dying

2. Understanding the Social Meanings of Dying and Death:

The Social Nature of Meaning
A Social Science Understanding of Dying and Death
The Sociological Approach To Understanding Dying and Death
The Social Factist Paradigm
The Social Definitionist Paradigm

3. Developmental Perspective on Dying and Death: Adolescence through Older Adulthood:

Adolescence
Introduction to Adulthood
Young Adulthood
Middle-Aged Adulthood
Older Adulthood

4. Religion and Death Attitudes:

Death and the Origin of Religion
Religion As a Means of Providing Understanding of Death
Religious Interpretations of Death
Temporal Interpretations of Death
Afterlife Experiences by the Clinically Dead
Death Anxiety and Fear

5. The Dying Process:

Death Meanings and Their Effects on the Dying Process
Physicians and the Dying Patient
Dying As Deviance in the Medical Setting
Relating to the Dying Patient
The Autopsy

6. The Hospice Approach: Alternative Care for the Dying:

The History of the Hospice Movement
The Nature of the Contemporary Hospice
Models of Inpatient Hospice Care
Hospice Issues
Evaluation of Hospice Programs

7. Euthanasia and Biomedical Issues:

Sanctity and Quality of Life
Passive and Active Euthanasia
Public Policy

8. Suicide:

Theoretical Perspectives
Social Factors, Signs, and Methods
Adolescent Suicidal Behavior

Suicide and the Elderly

9. Children and Death:

Children's Understanding of Death
Explaining Death to Children
The Dying Child
Parents of the Dying Child
Siblings of the Dying Child
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

10. Cross-Cultural Understanding of Dying, Death, and Bereavement:

Societal Management of Death-Related Emotions
Why Study Cross-Cultural Death Rituals?
Death As a Rite of Passage
The Ritual of Mourning of Death
Attitudes toward Death
Customs at Death
Burial Rites

11. The History of Bereavement and Burial Practices in American Culture:

Living Death, 1600-1830: The Reformed Tradition
The Dying of Death, 1830-1945
The Resurrection of Death, 1945 to the Present

12. The Funeral: Expression of Contemporary American Bereavement:

Social and Cultural Roots of American Funeralization
Early American Funeral Practices
The Contemporary American Funeral
How the Funeral Meets the Needs of the Bereaved
The American Practice of Funeral Service
Alternatives to the Funeral
Funeral, Final Disposition, and Related Expense
Preneed Funerals: A "New" Trend in Planning Funerals

13. The Bereavement Process:

The Bereavement Role
The Grieving Process

The Four Tasks of Mourning
Assisting the Bereaved
Grieving Parents and the Loss of an Infant
The Death of Pets: A Special Kind of Grieving

14. Epilogue: Practical Issues Relating to Dying and Death:

Wills
Organ Donations
Life Insurance
Life Extension
Death Education

APPROPRIATE ASSIGNMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATE CRITICAL THINKING:

Group exercises and test questions require the students to apply concepts that have been studying in novel situations, thus going beyond rote learning. The research paper requires students to apply concepts studied in the course to material different than what is explicitly discussed in the course.

Occasional guest lecturers are invited to share their expertise. These might include an attorney discussing wills, a physician discussing the "high tech" attempts to delay death, a staff member from a hospice. The class also visits a funeral home.

EVALUATION: Evaluation is based on the cumulative point total of quizzes, final exam, and research paper. There are five quizzes. The lowest score is dropped. If a student misses a test, that counts as the "Drop", as no make-up tests are provided. Beginning with the third test, short answer questions are added to the multiple-choice format. These questions are better evaluative instruments for how well a student understands the material, as the mechanism tapped is recall, the student having to apply concepts to novel contexts contained in the question.

The research paper provides opportunity for the students to explore in depth a particular topic that interests them. The topic chosen must be approved by the instructor. Students are taught the APA style of manuscript preparation, listing references in the text, and preparing the References page.

Attendance is assumed to be acceptable - no more than four classes during the semester. The instructor reserves the prerogative of administratively withdrawing students from class for excessive absenteeism.

Occasionally, in class group exercises are introduced. These groups are assigned by the instructor, on the basis on test scores - mixing stronger and

weaker students. These group exercises provide good review of the material, and give the students opportunity to work together in a cooperative manner, often with student of different ethnic backgrounds than they have had opportunity to interact with previously.

TEXTS:

Leming, M. R., & Dickinson, G. E. (1994). Understanding dying, death, and bereavement. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Nuland, S. (1994). How we die. New York: Knopf. .