

Summer Institute in Educational Gerontology: Aging, Death, and Bereavement (HRD 559)

June 27 - July 1, 2005

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Course Description

This course examines the phenomenon of death in modern society, with a special emphasis on implications for older persons. Issues such as the meaning of death, the dying process, survivorship, and suicide are treated. Special attention is paid to the role of the professional in death education.

Goal of the Institute

HRD 559 is designed to increase content knowledge and personal awareness of issues related to aging, death, and bereavement. Facts and theories will be learned with the goal of deepening students' personal understanding of death and strengthening their practice as educators and human service professionals.

Course Objectives

1. Participants will achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the "death system," from its historical, psychological, and sociological perspectives.
2. Learners will be able to critically discuss questions and concerns about death that related to everyday living.
3. Members of the institute will learn how death and bereavement affect the lives of older persons.
4. Participants will be challenged to integrate theories and research into their professional practice.
5. Learners will grow in their understanding of the importance of death education and will explore their own roles as professionals vis-à-vis death education.

6. Students will plan and write a workshop curriculum for a professional audience of their choice in the area of aging, death, and/or bereavement.
7. Members of the institute will explore in depth some specific aspect of gerontology-thanatology. They will communicate this research in written form.

Required Reading

Tolstoy, Leo (1960). *The death of Ivan Ilych*. New American Library.

Sarton, May (1973) *As we are now*. W.W. Norton.

Lewis, C.S (1961). *A grief observed*. Bantam.

Albom, Mitch (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Doubleday.

In addition to the four “core” books above, students will choose and read one of the following:

Rinpoche, Sogyal (1992). *The Tibetan book of living and dying*. Harper.

Lynch, Thomas (1997). *The undertaking*. Penguin Books.

Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth (1997). *The wheel of life: A memoir of living and dying*. Touchstone.

Callanan, M. and Kelley, P. (1993). *Final gifts: Understanding the special awareness, needs, and communications of the dying*. Bantam.

Recommended Reading

Byock, Ira (1997). *Dying well: The prospect for growth at the end of life*. Riverhead.

de Henezel, Maria (1997). *Intimate death: How the dying teach us how to live*. Vintage.

Hosanksy, Anne (1993). *Widow walk*. Donald Fine.

Moody, H.R. (1993). *Ethics in an aging society*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wiesel, Elie (1969). *Night*. Avon/Discuss Books.

Additionally, there are a number of periodicals in the U.S.M. library that are also worth consulting. Two that specialize in the field of thanatology are *Omega* and *Death Studies*, both located in the Portland campus library. Gerontologically-oriented journals include *The Journals of Gerontology* (Portland), *The Gerontologist* (Portland), *Generations* (Gorham), *The Journal of Gerontological Social Work* (Portland), *The Journal of Gerontological Nursing* (Portland), *Research on Aging* (Gorham) and *Educational Gerontology* (Gorham).

Selected books and articles will be recommended throughout the duration of the institute. Members of the course are also encouraged to share with their classmates readings and other resources related to aging, death, and bereavement they know about and value.

Course Projects

There will be two written projects required of each institute participant who is seeking to earn three graduate credits.

1. Each student will plan and write a workshop for an audience of her/his choice in one aspect of death, dying, and bereavement. While it is highly preferred that either the subject matter or the target audience involve older adults, some students have no contact with older persons in their professional lives and may have compelling reasons to focus attention on another age cohort. Examples of workshop designs that have been developed by participants in former institutes include a program on death awareness for nursing home personnel, a unit on aging and suicide for community mental health professionals, a death education intervention for local school teachers, a short course on ethics and dying for a local public school adult education program, and an orientation to grief and loss for a church group.

The plan for the workshop, at minimum, ought to consider the following factors:

- Who is the audience?
- Who is sponsoring the workshop?
- What specific aspect of aging, death, and/or dying is being addressed and why (in other words, the theoretical rationale)?
- A detailed outline of activities (e.g., list of objectives, course plan, etc.).
- A listing of hand-out materials (please include samples), films, and other learning aids.
- A bibliography of references.

You will not be expected to actually conduct this workshop. A written plan is sufficient. However, if your situation allows it, carrying out the education/training would be an added bonus. You may do this anytime in the future.

2. Each participant will prepare one of the following options:

- (a) Write a traditional, library-researched term paper. Select a specific theme within the parameters of gerontology-thanatology of interest to you, read on this subject, and write a paper discussing the major findings of your research. Be sure to include a bibliography of your references.
- (b) Write a position paper on one of the important ethical issues in the field of death and bereavement. The preferred medium here is “essay.” Begin with your thesis and develop arguments (from literature as well as your own professional experience) that defends your position. Include a bibliography.
- (c) Keep a personal journal. The major purpose of this option is to enable people to work on a deeply personal level to integrate materials from the course into their own lives and professional practice. However, several rules guide this option:
 - Integrate readings (those we have explored in the institute as well as others things you have been reading along the way) with your own experiences and reflections in at least a portion of the entries.
 - Start either during the institute week or soon thereafter and maintain a degree of consistency with your journal entries. For example, having your first entry on July 3 and your second one on July 29 is not acceptable.
 - Include at least 12 dated entries.
- (d) Develop a creative or artistic project, incorporating theories, ideas, and feelings experienced in this course. Examples of creative projects may be writing a short story, developing a sequence of poems, writing a play, producing a slide presentation or short film, etc.

Both the workshop curriculum and the written product are due on **Friday, August 12, 2005**. For those who are working exclusively with word-processed text, sending your materials as an e-mail attachment is acceptable. Otherwise, please deliver them to my mailbox in 400 Bailey Hall or mail them to the address on the top of the first page of the syllabus.

Grading Policy

This is a graduate course and the range of acceptable grades is B– through A. Students will earn an A or A– if they attend all days of the institute, participate appropriately in group discussions, and do creditable work in their post-institute written projects. In this context “creditable” means making an honest effort to interpret ideas raised in the course and integrate these themes and questions into one’s personal and professional life. Paying attention to the usual rules of writing English also helps. Otherwise, while this is a course on the themes of death and grief I wish nobody to experience any trauma over grading 😊 .

Accommodations

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. I shall be as flexible as possible to help you succeed in this course of study. Other kinds of assistance are available at various units with the university. For information about learning disabilities, please contact the Office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities, 242 Luther Bonney Hall (780-4706). Tutoring may be obtained through The Learning Center, 253 Luther Bonney Hall (780-4228). Personal counseling may be arranged through the Counseling Center which has two locations: 105 Payson Smith Hall in Portland and 110 Upton Hall in Gorham (780-4050).

Relationship Between HRD 559 and CEHD Mission

Reflection and Critical Inquiry - This course invites students to critically examine themes related to aging, death, and bereavement within the context of their own personal and professional lives.

Diversity - Ideas and issues involving gender, age, race, religion, and ethnicity will be addressed at various points in the institute. Additionally, students may choose to focus specific attention on issues related to diversity in their choice of additional readings and their post-institute project(s).

Connections and Partnerships - It is not the goal of this course to be field-based or to extend connections into the community. However, students are encouraged to take the knowledge they acquire in HRD 559 and make contributions to individuals and agencies of their choice. This invitation expressly relates to the workshop design activity.

Performance Assessment - Learners will be assessed through their overall participation in the institute's activities and discussions as well as two written post-institute projects.

Course Outline

- Monday, June 27 (AM) Introduction to the course
Personal awareness exercises
- (PM) Death in contemporary America
The demography of aging and death
- Tuesday, June 28 (AM) Death and history
Stage theories of dying
- (PM) Small group discussion of Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych
Film: "W;t"
- Weds., June 29 (AM) Introduction to death and old age
Film: "Dying"
- (PM) The death of a spouse
Guest speakers: Karen Day and Nancy Payne
- Thursday, June 30 (AM) Foundations of suicide
Suicide and the elderly
- (PM) Panel from Hospice of Maine
Field trip to funeral home
- Friday, July 1 (AM) Bereavement
Film: "Shadowlands"
- (PM) Bereavement (continued)
Personal expressions/reflections on aging,
death, and bereavement
Course Evaluation