



University of Maryland School of Public Health

Death Education (AKA Seize the Day!)—HLTH476

Semester/Section: Fall, 2018 / 0101
Room and Time: CHE 2136 T/Th. 11 AM - 12:15 PM
Course webpage: <https://www.elms.umd.edu/>

Instructor: Sharon M. Desmond, Ph.D.

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Course Description

This course examines the genesis and development of present day death attitudes and behaviors, using a multidisciplinary life cycle approach. The underlying premise of the course is that people across the lifespan need accurate information and thoughtful dialogue to make important decisions related to death, dying and living. We will learn about and examine a number of critical issues, including dying with dignity, suicide, cultural perspectives on dying and death, coping with grief, hospice care, and green funerals, among others.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completing this course, the student will be able to:

1. Identify and express your personal beliefs and attitudes related to death, dying and living.
2. Understand how our culture influences our attitudes and behaviors toward death and dying.
3. Discuss basic themes and constructs of death and dying, including grief, mourning, suicide, the right to die, children's perceptions of death, and funerary practices, among others.
4. Describe how the sociological, psychological, educational, legal, medical and ethical aspects of death and dying are interrelated.

Required Texts and Other Readings

- Kastenbaum, R. & Moreman, C. (2018). Death, Society and Human Experience (12th ed.) 978-1-138-29239-0.
- **Journal Articles:** All assigned journal, newspaper and website articles are available in Canvas modules.

Recommended Books

You will choose ONE of the books listed below for an in-class book club.

1. Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom (1997)
2. The Legacy Letters by Carew Papritz (2013)
3. Being Mortal by Atul Gawande (2014)
4. The Fault in Our Stars by John Green (2014)
5. Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl (2006)
6. Stiff by Mary Roach (2014)
7. The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch (2008)

Course Requirements and Expectations

Course instructional methods include: class discussions, viewing videos, writing short reaction papers, keeping a journal and listening to lectures. **YOUR PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT will make or break the course**—it is essential you come to class and participate! Your thoughts, ideas, questions and comments are important and will enrich everyone's experience. Thoughtful and moving discussions, interesting and dynamic guest presentations, and personal growth and development are planned! You do not want to miss out and we do not want to miss out on you and all you have to offer—come to class! Unexcused **In-class** activities and assignments cannot be made up. Please complete all readings **prior to** our class meeting time.

Cell phone use is **not permitted** during class. Please make certain your phones are on silent and put away during class time (i.e., not on your desk or in your lap). Computer and tablet use is also **not permitted** during class time unless needed for DSS accommodations. Research has demonstrated that writing out lecture notes and refraining from Internet use during class helps with retention and performance (Mueller and Oppenheimer, 2014; Ravizza, Uitvlugt, and Fenn, 2017). Lecture power points will be posted to Canvas after each class meeting.

All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in 11-point font, and submitted electronically via Canvas; occasionally a hard copy may be requested. Additional information about each assignment is provided on Canvas under the "Assignments" tab. Make certain you read this information and review the grading rubric prior to completing each assignment.

Course Communication Information regarding important and timely announcements (i.e. class cancellation, room change, inclement weather, university closings, etc.) will be sent via email and Canvas announcements. Please link your phone, computer and other devices in Canvas to ensure you receive these notifications immediately.

Special Accommodations / Disability Support Services / Learning Assistance Services If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations for test taking or other needs, you will need documentation from Disability Support Service (301-314-7682). If you are ill or encountering personal difficulties, please let John or me know as soon as possible. Other resources available to you include the Student Health Center (301-314-8180) and/or the Counseling Center (301-314-7651). If you are experiencing difficulties keeping up with the academic demands of this course, contact one of us and/or the Learning Assistance Service (301-

314-7693). Their educational counselors can help with time management, reading or math learning skills, note taking and exam preparation skills. All their services are free to UMD students.

Religious Observances

The University System of Maryland policy provides that students will not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs; you will be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up (within a reasonable time) any academic assignment missed due to your participation in religious observances. **It is your responsibility** to inform us in advance of any intended absences for religious observance. Thank you.

Academic Integrity

The University's code of academic integrity is designed to ensure that the principle of academic honesty is upheld. Any of the following acts, when committed by a student, constitutes academic dishonesty:

- **CHEATING**: intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in an academic exercise.
- **FABRICATION**: intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
- **FACILITATING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**: intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate any provision of this code.
- **PLAGIARISM**: intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise.

For more information regarding academic integrity, please see <http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>.

The Honor Pledge is a statement we are asking you to please write and sign on examinations, papers, or any other academic assignment you submit. The Pledge reads:

I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination. Your Signature

Course Evaluations

Your evaluation of this course is greatly appreciated. Your feedback is confidential and important to the improvement of teaching and learning in this course as well as to the promotion and tenure process. Please complete the course evaluation for this class at www.courseevalum.umd.edu at the end of this semester. Thank you very much!

University Course Related Policies: Please review campus policies at <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>, in particular the section on “student rights regarding undergraduate courses.” However, there are many additional policies described, including information about academic integrity, code of student contact, sexual misconduct, non-discrimination, accessibility, attendance, absences and missed assignments, official UMD communication, mid-term grades, complaints about course final grades, copyright and intellectual property, final exams, course evaluations,

and campus resources. This information is beneficial to you as a student here at Maryland—please read it.

Graded Assignments

Journal (65 points): Each student is responsible for keeping a journal or notebook for this class, to personally reflect on death, dying and living. In the journal, you can discuss:

- The assigned readings;
- Your own thoughts and feelings about death;
- Dreams which seem to have to do with death;
- Articles from newspapers, magazines or websites which talk about death and dying;
- Poems, stories, works of art or music that reflect your feelings about death;
- Movies that include scenes or thoughts about death and dying; or
- Experiences in your own life that remind you of death of any kind (i.e. loss).

Journals will be graded based on variety, quality and quantity. Approximately midway through the semester we will collect and grade your journals (30 points) and then you will submit your entire journal at the end of the semester. You are free to write as many entries as you like, but you must have a minimum of 12 500-word reflections.

In-class Discussions (10 points each; 60 points total): Multiple in-class discussions are planned and six of these discussions will be graded (although which ones will not be announced ahead of time). Most discussions will occur in small groups with your peers. Your grade will be based on completeness and thoughtfulness. In-class discussions cannot be made up unless you have an excused absence, as you must be present to earn points—this assignment is participatory in nature.

Book Club (100 points total): In groups of 5 you will participate in a book club—reading one of the books listed above under recommended readings. Individually each person will write up a 500-word paper about the book (30 points, an outline will be provided) and then as a group you will present a “creative book report” to the class (70 points). Each group will have 20 minutes for their creative book report. Specifics on what a creative book report is will be discussed in class.

Midterm (50 points) and Final Exam (60 points): Both the midterm and final exam consist of multiple-choice, matching, true false and short answer items. The final is comprehensive.

Graded Assignments	Possible Points	Final Grade %
Death Education Journal	65	18
In-class Discussions	60	15
Book Club	100	21
Midterm	50	15
Final	60	18
Total Points	335	100

The total number of points students can earn is 335. Below are the corresponding grades for the number of points earned. It is departmental policy that extra credit is not provided in any BCH course.

335 – 326	A+	301 – 292	B+	267 – 258	C+	233 – 224	D+	≤ 199	F
325 – 312	A	291 – 278	B	257 – 244	C	223 – 210	D		
311 – 302	A-	277 – 268	B-	243 – 234	C-	209 – 200	D-		

Course Sessions Outline	
Session 1	Tuesday/8-28
Welcome! Introductions, Course Expectations and Syllabus Review	
Session 2	Thursday/8-30
Half hour discussion—could not view video. Sorry! ☹	
Session 3	Tuesday/9-4
Death Makes Life Possible Documentary (2013, 1 h 4 m)	
Session 4	Thursday/9-6
Introduction to Death Education Required reading: Chapter 1	
Session 5	Tuesday/9-11
What is Death? The “Death System” in the US Required reading: Chapters 2 and 3	
Session 6	Thursday/9-13
Dying: Transition from Life Required reading: Chapter 4	
Session 7	Tuesday/9-18
Dying: Transition from Life (cont.)	
Session 8	Thursday/9-20
Hospice and Palliative Care Required reading: Chapter 5	
Session 9	Tuesday/9-25
Hospice and Palliative Care (cont.) Prison Terminal Documentary (2013, 40 m)	
Session 10	Thursday/9-27
The Living Will; Advanced Directive; Organ Donation Required reading: Chapter 6	
Session 11	Tuesday/10-2

Guest Speaker Assignment: Upload journal (or turn in hard copy for feedback.)	
Session 12	Thursday/10-4
Suicide Required reading: Chapter 7 and MMWR Preventing Suicide (2016)	
Session 13	Tuesday/10-9
Suicide (cont.) Kevin Briggs: The Bridge Between Suicide and Life (2014, 14 m) Required reading: Czyz et al. (2013); Arria et al. (2011)	
Session 14	Thursday/10-11
The Right to Die and Assisted Death Required reading: Chapter 9 Required video: Frontline The Suicide Plan (2012, 1 h 30 m)	
Session 15	Tuesday/10-16
The Right to Die and Assisted Death (cont.) Peter Saul: Let's Talk about Dying (2011, 13 m) Required reading and viewing: Washington Post article; NBC Report; Brittany Maynard short videos; Compassion and the True Meaning of Empathy (2010, 13 minutes)	
Session 16	Thursday/10-18
Midterm	
Session 17	Tuesday/10-23
Death in the World of Childhood Required reading: Chapter 10	
Session 18	Thursday/10-25
Death in the World of Childhood (cont.)	
Session 19	Tuesday/10-30
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Required reading: Freidman and James (2008) article. Required video: To Live Until You Die: Interview with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1983, 54 m)	
Session 20	Thursday/11-1
Responding to Loss: Grief, Bereavement and Mourning Guest speaker Required reading: Chapter 11	
Session 21	Tuesday/11-6
Grief, Bereavement and Mourning (cont.) Alyssa Monks: The Beautiful Awful Ted Talk (2017, 14 m) Peta Murchinson: Finding Hope in Hopelessness Ted Talk (2016, 14 m)	

Session 22	Thursday/11-8
Violent Death Required reading: Chapter 8	
Session 23	Tuesday/11-13
Death Related Beliefs and Practices Across Religions Guest Speakers	
Session 24	Thursday/11-15
The Funeral Process; Green Burials; Guest speaker Required reading: Chapter 12	
Session 25	Tuesday/11-20
The Undertaking documentary (2007, 55 m 34 s)	
Session 26	Tuesday/11-27
Caregiving and Death Education Required reading: Chapter 14	
Session 27	Thursday/11-29
Book Club Creative Book Reports (4 groups)	
Session 28	Tuesday/12-4
Book Club Creative Book Reports (3 groups)	
Session 29	Thursday/12-6
Good Life, Good Death—Making Sense of It All Required reading: Chapter 15	
Final Exam	8 AM – 10 AM Wednesday 12-12