

PSYC 0108 - PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH AND DYING

Catalog Description

Formerly known as PSYC 8

Hours: 54 lecture

Description: An investigation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with death, dying and bereavement. Terminal illness, suicide, euthanasia, last rites, legal aspects, death anxiety, cross-cultural beliefs and various philosophical views on the phenomenon of death are explored. (CSU, UC)

Course Student Learning Outcomes

- CSLO #1: Evaluate the importance of death education and major aspects of the death and dying process.
- CSLO #2: Assess how attitudes toward death have changed over time.
- CSLO #3: Evaluate how current interest in death, dying and caring is affecting contemporary society.
- CSLO #4: Identify and describe the resources for people dealing with terminal illness.
- CSLO #5: Explain different models of the death and dying process.

Effective Term

Fall 2022

Course Type

Credit - Degree-applicable

Contact Hours

54

Outside of Class Hours

108

Total Student Learning Hours

162

Course Objectives

1. Introduction to thanatology
 - a. discuss the state of the art;
 - b. evaluate the usefulness of death education and thanatology;
2. Attitudes toward death
 - a. identify historical antecedents of current Western attitudes toward death;
 - b. contrast cross cultural views of the relationship between life and death;
 - c. discuss personal and social assumptions about death;
 - d. explain how attitudes concerning death are expressed in mass media, language, and the arts;
 - e. discuss what factors have influenced emotional and physical distancing from death;
3. The fear of death
 - a. discuss psychoanalytic theory perspectives;
 - b. explain theories of birth trauma and separation anxiety;
 - c. contrast existential theories;
 - d. describe learning theory explanations;
4. Learning about death: socio-cultural influences
 - a. describe the components of a mature concept about death;
 - b. discuss the relationship of early experiences with death and understanding death;
 - c. contrast a society's response to death using structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and social learning theories;
 - d. describe how varieties of subcultures contribute to death customs;
5. Dying as a process
 - a. explain the Kubler-Ross stage model;
 - b. discuss Weisman's series of small deaths model;
 - c. explain Bluebond-Langer and dying children;
 - d. evaluate alternative models of the dying process (e.g. Task, Corr, & Rando);
 - e. delineate between various death trajectories;
6. Caring for the terminally ill
 - a. describe the varieties of hospice programs;
 - b. assess the benefits and risks of alternative therapies;
 - c. list the personal and social costs of terminal illnesses;
 - d. summarize pain management strategies;
 - e. provide examples of losses that occur through institutionalization;
7. Death and the family
 - a. describe a child's perception of illness and death;
 - b. identify factors influencing a child's experience of grief;
 - c. contrast approaches of various grief support groups;
 - d. illustrate ways to help a child cope with death;
 - e. distinguish the factors influencing the response to a death of a parent;
 - f. describe disenfranchised grief;
 - g. discuss the types of parental bereavement;
 - h. identify the factors influencing spousal bereavement;
 - i. discuss family adjustment and re-organization;
8. Volitional death
 - a. identify potential suicide populations;
 - b. define suicide;
 - c. explain risk factors associated with suicide;
 - d. discuss the history of suicide and typologies;
 - e. contrast cross-cultural beliefs about suicide;
 - f. compare casual theories;
 - g. describe suicide intervention techniques;
 - h. identify myths about suicide;
9. Technology and death
 - a. describe benefits and costs of truth-telling in terminal cases;
 - b. explain issues regarding competencies;
 - c. contrast four approaches to the definition of death;
 - d. discuss euthanasia and ethical considerations;
 - e. evaluate arguments pro and con physician-assisted suicide;
 - f. discuss the right-to-die;
 - g. define self-determination and informed consent;
 - h. name at least five medical technologies that may prolong lifespan;
10. Last rites and interment
 - a. describe the psychosocial aspects and function of rituals;
 - b. contrast costs of various funeral and interment rituals;
 - c. discuss the historical changes in American rituals;
 - d. evaluate the economics of the rituals;
 - e. compare cross-cultural rituals of funerals and interment;
11. Morbidity and mortality risks
 - a. describe risks of death in the modern world;
 - b. evaluate the impact of AIDS and other emerging diseases;
 - c. discuss the impact of disasters on those who survive;

- d. identify the effects of war and its aftermath on combatants and noncombatants;
12. Legalities of death
- describe the role of the coroner and medical examiner;
 - appraise one's own death in terms of advance directives;
 - identify the types, content, and purposes of wills;
 - discuss the stipulations in the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act;
 - argue a position on living wills;
 - and describe the legal stages with respect to legal matters pertaining to a terminally ill patient.

General Education Information

- Approved College Associate Degree GE Applicability
 - AA/AS - Behavioral Sciences
- CSU GE Applicability (Recommended-requires CSU approval)
 - CSUGE - D9 Psychology
 - CSUGE - E1 Lifelong Learning and Self-Development
- Cal-GETC Applicability (Recommended - Requires External Approval)
- IGETC Applicability (Recommended-requires CSU/UC approval)
 - IGETC - 4I Psychology

Articulation Information

- CSU Transferable
- UC Transferable

Methods of Evaluation

- Essay Examinations
 - Example: (A) What is meant by the idea that, in illness, there is a "biopsychosocial concern"? Give examples. (B) Using examples from the cross-cultural research on grieving, discuss the ways in which culture may shape the experience of loss.
- Objective Examinations
 - Example: Which of the following may increase the likelihood that a person's emotional process will be considered "complicated grieving?" A) the death was someone old and infirm B) the death was unexpected C) there was pain associated with death following a chronic illness D) the deceased left a will
- Projects
 - Example: Instructor posts videos showing experiences from the point of view of doctors, nurses and family members of those that have died. Students are assigned to DB groups to discuss how the persons role can affect their experience of the death. Each student in the group will choose one role (i.e., doctor, nurse, hospice worker/volunteer, or family member) to do more in-depth research on to better understand the effects from interacting with a dying person. Students will be asked to research and report back to the group on the role and the effects. Students as a group will make a slide lecture presentation to share with the class regarding their findings about how role affects the experience of interacting with a dying person.

Repeatable

No

Methods of Instruction

- Lecture/Discussion
- Distance Learning

Lecture:

- Students will view the film "Mar Adentro: The Sea Inside (2004)" based on the factual story of Spaniard Ramon Sampedro, who fought a thirty-year campaign in favor of euthanasia. Following the film, the instructor will lead a class discussion on the question "Is suicide prohibition essentially a religious dictate?"
- For the following class period, instructor will assign students to either support or refute the statement above and will be asked to research the positions of three major religions and report back to class with their information. During their research, students should also familiarize themselves with "death with dignity" legislation. During the next class session, students from opposing viewpoints will pair-up and generate a summary of 5 points of discussion. Students will be graded on their collective and individual participation as well as their ability to think critically on the topic at hand.

Distance Learning

- Instructor posts videos showing experiences from the point of view of doctors, nurses and family members of those that have died. Students are assigned to DB groups to discuss how the persons role can affect their experience of the death. Each student in the group will choose one role (i.e., doctor, nurse, hospice worker/volunteer, or family member) to do more in-depth research on to better understand the effects from interacting with a dying person. Students will be asked to research and report back to the group on the role and the effects. Students as a group will make a slide lecture presentation to share with the class regarding their findings about how role affects the experience of interacting with a dying person.

Typical Out of Class Assignments Reading Assignments

- Read the chapter on suicide and be able to identify risk factors and interventions for the prevention of suicide and be prepared to discuss in class.
- Read the chapter on Alzheimer's disease and be able to summarize risk factors, development, etiology, and treatments for Alzheimer's Disease and be prepared to discuss in class.
- Read the textbook chapter titled "How to Know if you are Dead" and be able to discuss some of the physiological signs of death.

Writing, Problem Solving or Performance

- Consider the many funeral and body disposition options available as discussed in the Mitford article (The New American Way of Death). Create a meaningful and personal "last rites will." Include all major aspects from body preparation to ceremonial rituals.
- Read the chapter on Culture and Death Perspectives. Utilizing a social, psychological, and cross-cultural perspective, contrast three major conceptions of immortality. In each example, discuss why the cultural belief would be particularly beneficial for the society.

Other (Term projects, research papers, portfolios, etc.)

Research and Position Paper: Take a stand on the practice of doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia. A) Support your stand by preparing a short position paper emphasizing medical ethics. B) Use legal and historical evidence to support your claims. C) List and briefly discuss how your own personal upbringing, culture, religion, and morals influence your

position. Students must reference and include at least three reputable, scientific, and academic resources.

Required Materials

- The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying
 - Author: L. DeSpelder and A. Strickland
 - Publisher: Mc Graw Hill
 - Publication Date: 2020
 - Text Edition: 11th
 - Classic Textbook?:
 - OER Link:
 - OER:
- Helping Grieving People - When Tears are not Enough
 - Author: J. Shep Jeffries
 - Publisher: Routledge
 - Publication Date: 2011
 - Text Edition: 2nd
 - Classic Textbook?:
 - OER Link:
 - OER:
- Death & Dying, Life & Living
 - Author: Corr, Corr, Doka
 - Publisher: Cengage
 - Publication Date: 2019
 - Text Edition: 8th
 - Classic Textbook?:
 - OER Link:
 - OER:
- Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers
 - Author: Mary Roach
 - Publisher: Castle House
 - Publication Date: 2003
 - Text Edition: 1st
 - Classic Textbook?:
 - OER Link:
 - OER:
- Being Mortal
 - Author: Atul Gawande
 - Publisher: Metropolitan Books
 - Publication Date: 2014
 - Text Edition: 1st
 - Classic Textbook?:
 - OER Link:
 - OER:

Other materials and-or supplies required of students that contribute to the cost of the course.