**St. Jerome’s University in the University of Waterloo**

**Department of Psychology**

**PSYCH/HLTH/GERON 218**

**Psychology of Death and Dying**

**Fall 2016**

**6:30-9:20 Thursday, SJ2 1004**

## Instructor and T.A. Information

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## Course Description

## Variations in the meaning and significance of death and dying will be considered from a psychological perspective, with particular attention to the contexts (e.g., cultural, familial, life-span developmental) in which these variations occur.

## Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

I hope you’ll walk away from this course with a psychologically informed understanding of:

1) the pervasive impact that death has on our experience of the world, and

2) how multiple, broader influences (e.g., biological, historical, political, media-related) affect an

individual’s experience of death.

**PLEASE NOTE**: Death is a source of considerable unease for many people. Some deal with it by avoiding any reminders of it. Others deal with it selectively, holding to safe conceptualizations while ignoring others. My approach in this course will be to confront death as frankly and honestly as I am able – this may sometimes involve images, ideas, and discussions that some people might find upsetting. It’s my responsibility to educate; it’s your responsibility to decide whether or not taking this course is in your best interest at this time. Please choose wisely.

Most of us have experienced losses. All of us will die. Reflecting on one’s own experience is thus inevitable and is, indeed, encouraged in this course. We will address loss and the prospect of our own demise in various ways throughout the term. Still, it’s important to note that *this course is neither intended nor designed to serve as group therapy*. Thus, persons (or those with loved ones) who are experiencing significant feelings of anxiety, anger, or grief linked to death-related issues are encouraged to seek out support from qualified mental health professionals.

Confrontation with death often elicits reactions that are intensely personal and individualistic. This diversity can be fascinating, but others’ expressions can sometimes elicit feelings of threat or offense. Please be aware of this potential in yourself and in others, and strive to maintain an atmosphere in which people can respectfully disagree.

**Required Readings and Course Schedule**

Traditional death and dying textbooks take a topical approach. For example, they may offer a chapter on suicide. In this course, we may reflect on suicide in the context of examining death from the perspectives of culture, religion, and family systems, for example. Consequently, I opted for readings ***available as course e-reserves through the UW Library system*** rather than a traditional textbook. I tried to achieve a balance between general/readable and specific/technical, and included specifically Canadian content.

**08 Sep - Introduction; Animate Level**

Kastenbaum, R. (2009). What is death? In R. Kastenbaum, *Death, society, and human experience, 10th ed.*

(pp. 35-69). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

**15 Sep - Species Level; Human Level**

Masson, J. M., & McCarthy, S. (1995). Grief, sadness, and the bones of elephants. In *When elephants*

*weep: The emotional lives of animals* (pp. 91-110). New York: Delta/Dell.

Arndt, J., & Vess, M. (2008). Tales from existential oceans: Terror Management Theory and how the

awareness of our mortality affects us all. *Social Psychology and Personality Compass*, *2*, 909-928.

**22 Sep - Historical/Cultural Level**

DeSpelder, L. A., & Strickland, A. L. (2005). Perspectives on death: Cross-cultural and historical. In *The*

*last dance: Encountering death and dying*, 7th Edition (pp. 87-123). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Northcott, H. C., & Wilson D. M. (2008). Dying and death in Canada today. In *Dying and death in*

*Canada, 2nd ed.* (pp. 39-64). Peterborough, ON: Broadview.

**29 Sep – TEST ONE; Medical Level**

Ashby, M. (2009). The dying human: A perspective from palliative medicine. In A. Kellehear (Ed.), *The*

*study of dying: From autonomy to transformation* (pp. 76-98). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**06 Oct - Legal Level**

Browne, A., & Russell, J. S. (2016). Physician-assisted death in Canada. *Cambridge Quarterly of*

*Healthcare Ethics*, *25*, 377-383.

Vandiver, M., Giacopassi, D. J., & Gathje, P. R. (2002). “I hope someone murders your mother!”: An

exploration of extreme support for the death penalty. *Deviant Behavior*, *23*, 385-415.

**13 Oct –NO CLASS**

**20 Oct – Religious Level**

Hayes, J. C., & Hendrix, C. C. (2008). The role of religion in bereavement. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O.

Hansson, H. Schut, and W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 327-348). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

**27 Oct - Arts/Media Level**

Hilliker, L. (2008). The reporting of grief by one newspaper of record for the U.S.: The *New York Times*.

*Omega*, *57*, 261-278.

Lennon, J. J., & Mitchell, M. (2007). Dark tourism: The role of sites of death in tourism. In M. Mitchell

(Ed.), *Remember me: Constructing immortality* (pp. 167-178). New York: Routledge.

**03 Nov - Political Level**

Unger, R. (2006). Untangling the web: Threat, ideology, and political behavior. In P. R. Kimmel and C.

E. Stout (Eds.), *Collateral damage: The psychological consequences of America’s war on terrorism* (pp. 79-108). Westport, CT: Praeger.

**10 Nov - TEST TWO; Relational Level**

Walsh, F., & McGoldrick, M. (1991). Loss and the family: A systemic perspective. In F. Walsh and M.

McGoldrick (Eds.), *Living beyond loss: Death in the family* (pp. 1-29). New York: W. W. Norton.

**17 Nov - Individual Level 1 (Developmental Considerations)**

Griffith, T. (2003). Assisting with the “big hurts, little tears” of the youngest grievers: Working with

three-, four-, and five-year olds who have experienced loss and grief because of death. *Illness, Crisis, & Loss*, *11*, 217-225.

Crenshaw, D. A., & Hill, L. C. (2009). Therapy for adolescents experiencing prolonged grief. In D. E.

Balk and C. A. Corr (Eds.), *Adolescent encounters with death, bereavement, and coping*. New York: Springer.

**24 Nov - Individual Level 2 (Personality Considerations)**

Kastenbaum, R. (2000). Dying: Toward a psychological perspective. In R. Kastenbaum, *The Psychology*

*of Death* (pp. 207-251). London, UK: Free Association Books.

**01 Dec - TEST THREE**

## Course Requirements and Assessment

TEST 1 = 35%; TEST 2 = 40%; TEST 3 = 25%. All tests are multiple choice. Bring pencils/erasers on test days. ***Be prepared to present identification (your WAT card) during tests***. Tests are weighted based on how much material they cover; they are not cumulative. All material covered in class and in the assigned readings is testable. Class will resume after a break following Test 1 and Test 2. Test marks will be posted on LEARN as soon as possible. In order to be fair to everyone, ***the mark received for a test stands*** – it will not be dropped or re-weighted. There is no final exam.

**Extra Credit**: Up to 4% extra credit is available via SONA research participation. Detailed instructions appear in the SONA instructions available for download on LEARN. As an active researcher myself, I would ask that you **PLEASE TAKE ANY RESEARCH PARTICIPATION SERIOUSLY** – careless completion of a study’s materials is a waste of everyone’s time and seriously undercuts the research process.

**UW Policy regarding Illness and Missed Tests:** UW Examination Regulations ([www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf](http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf)) state that: 1) A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at [www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health\_Services/verification.html](http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html).2) If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.3) The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations. 4) Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Thus, you are entitled to test rescheduling for *legitimate* medical, compassionate, or religious grounds. Alternate test dates/times will not be granted because you forgot, overslept, were in a bad mood, had a plane to catch, didn’t come to class or read the course outline, had a bird poop on your head, etc. Whenever possible, please inform me PRIOR to the scheduled test to arrange an alternate writing time. A make-up test should be written as quickly as possible upon your return to classes, with the obvious provision of access to missed material (see Class Attendance below). When arriving to write a make-up test, please have the appropriate documentation in hand to support a medical, compassionate, or religious claim. Make-up exams may differ in format from the original.

## Attendance Policy

***This is not a web-based or distance education course***. Thus, although whether or not you choose to attend class is entirely up to you, you are responsible for all material covered. Should you miss class, for whatever reason, it is your responsibility to find a classmate who would be willing to provide you with the notes you missed. If your absence is *legitimate*, then I will be happy to answer questions about the missed material once you have consulted with a fellow student. To make the most of consultation time outside of class, come prepared with specific questions regarding whatever material you may be having trouble with, and be prepared to discuss what you know (or think you know) about a topic -- that can speed up and simplify the clarification process tremendously.

## Electronic Device Policy

In-class use of any electronic devices for non-class-related purposes is discouraged, as it distracts other students and interferes with your own ability to absorb the material.

## Other Important Information

**Academic Integrity:** To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

[**Academic Integrity Office (UW)**](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/)**:** A resource for students and instructors.

***I think cheating is lazy, disrespectful, and immoral, and I find it very sad that some people may try to get a course mark without having earned it honestly. I hope you’re not one of them****.*

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline](https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm).

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf).

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf).

**Note for Students with Disabilities:** The [AccessAbility Services](http://uwaterloo.ca/disability-services/) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

**How to Do Your Best:**

0) Make the decision to do your best and commit yourself to this! There is no substitute.

1) Come to class! Be alert, ask questions – either in class or later. Do more than mindlessly write down whatever appears on an overhead: *Think* about the material – try to come up with your own examples and illustrations by applying the material to people you know, media happenings, etc.

2) Do the readings! Ideally, read them at least once before the relevant week’s lecture, and at least once after that lecture. Don’t mindlessly run a highlighter over the words: *Think* about the material – write down questions, observations, possible examples, etc. as you read.

3) Look for connections! We will deal with a lot of specific phenomena, but there some big themes will keep recurring throughout the term. Look for them. Look also for connections between lecture and assigned readings. Think about what *this* theorist might say about *that* topic, etc. – even if we’ve never addressed this in class.

4) Test yourself! Don’t assume that certain concepts are “easy” or “common sense” – often, they are not. Can you explain an idea to someone, without reciting your notes, in a way that that person will understand? If given a blank page, could you reproduce the structure of ideas I use to organize my lectures? Can you create a structure of ideas that accurately summarizes a reading’s main points? Can you recognize sets of information in lectures or readings that might make good multiple choice options, and can you explain how members of a set are similar or different?

These may sound difficult, especially if you have gotten by with plain old memorization in the past. Having said that, I strongly suspect that you WILL do better in this class if you put the above suggestions into practice. ***I have also prepared the “MC Survival Guide” (downloadable through LEARN) that offers you specific tips for preparing for my tests***. Remember: I am happy to see you succeed, but YOU have to do the work.

**Final Words:** Good luck! I hope that this course is a worthwhile experience.