COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do we and should we understand and respond to death, dying, and bereavement in America? This course explores our inheritance of attitudes, vocabularies, social practices, and institutions that cultivate and constrain our actions and thoughts about death. Influential texts and core concepts across a range of disciplines will be introduced and used to analyze and reflect on multiple mediations of death in contemporary society. The class will combine theoretical readings, lectures, discussion, analytical exercises, and experiential components. Students will also volunteer at a local hospice agency and keep a journal analyzing their experiences in light of course materials, themes, and concepts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course will enable the student to do the following:

• Identify and analyze attitudes and practices concerning death, dying, and bereavement in the American context and the historical forces producing the contemporary American death system.
• Understand applications of core concepts to different cultural and ethnic groups
• Apply concepts/ readings to the volunteer work in a culturally competent manner
• Engage in sensitive and respectful conversations about death, dying and bereavement
COURSE MATERIALS:

Book chapters, selected passages, and articles will be made available through OAK.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance / Active Participation

You are expected to attend every class, to read all assignments, listen carefully to others, and contribute proportionately to the conversation. You are expected to contribute to both large and small group activities in class. Each member of the class must show respect for the experiences and ideas of others and take responsibility for his or her own assertions. Talking about death, dying and bereavement can elicit powerful emotions and trigger unexpected memories. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your own grief process, please see one of the course instructors. Class discussions will involve sensitive navigation of topics that allows us to negotiate across different perspectives.

Experiential Component of Class

You will need to volunteer for at least 20 - 25 hours outside class at a designated hospice agency. Please note that if someone close [parent, best friend] to you has died in the last year, hospice agencies generally recommend that you wait until a year has passed before volunteering. You will receive training and orientation sessions as part of the class. You may use one of the automobiles from the Office of Active Citizenship and Service - http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/ to go to your site, but you must go through a training session with them and watch a safety video. Please contact OACS for more information: 343-7878.

Assignments

1. ESSAYS* (60%):

   Essay # 1 (20%): Controversial Practices at the End of Life: Physician-Assisted Suicide
   [Ethical Analysis; 6-8 pages; 1500-2000 words]
   **Due: February 11th**

   In the first half of the paper, respectfully elaborate a position that you do not endorse but think is worthy of consideration. In the second half of the paper, briefly discuss why you do not agree with this position and then present your stance and your reasons for endorsing this position. A short list of readings will be provided to guide your writing.

   Essay # 2 (40%): What is a Good Death?
   [Textual Analysis; 7-9 pages; 1750-2250 words]
   **Due: March 25th**

   In this paper, you need to explore what you consider to be a good death and then critically analyze assigned depictions of death in reference to your conception of a good death. In the first part of the paper, briefly describe features of what you consider to be a good death and the reasons why these are important. The second part of the paper should relate your conception of death to two or more of the readings in the course. [Examples: Harold Brodkey’s, Sharon Kaufman’s, Edwidge Danticat’s, John Song’s depictions of/findings about dying and death.] How do these depictions challenge, reinforce, or expand your understanding of a good death?
*Email papers by 11:59 pm on due date

2. VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION (10%)

Each volunteer visit with patients (does not include orientation sessions) must be documented with a brief progress note to be submitted to the agency and entered into the Volunteer Journal (see below). If you do not submit progress note, your visit will not count. You will write progress note for each patient you visit and the visit will not count unless done on all patients. YOU WILL SUBMIT THESE EVERY TUESDAY IN CLASS.

10-12 visits = 10 points  
7-9 visits = 8 points  
4-6 visits = 5 points  
1-3 visits = 2 points

3. JOURNAL (10%): [6-8 total pages; 1500-2000 words]

Due: April 17

You must keep a journal of your experiences of volunteering at a local hospice agency. You should have a journal entry (progress note) for every volunteer visit you make and for each patient during the visit. Below are instructions for four additional mandatory entries. Please designate which entries are fulfilling these requirements.

Entry # 1: Describe thoughts/feelings/questions about the prospect of becoming a hospice volunteer. Do this before you actually start volunteering.

Entry # 2: Describe your volunteer site noting details that you think are relevant to caring for a dying person. Reflect on why space/place matters to the dying process.

Entry # 3: Describe the persons [patients and/or caregivers] you have interacted with at your volunteer site. Reflect on what you learned about the dying process through their actions and conversations. (To respect HIPAA protections, please remember not to reveal any identifying information about a patient in any context.)

Entry # 4: Describe an event/interaction during your volunteer experience that informs your conception of a good death. Reflect on how the event/interaction relates to your conception of a good death.

4. GROUP PROJECT (15%):

More details will be provided midway through the semester.

5. MINOR ASSIGNMENTS (5%) [1-2 pages; graded as check or minus]

Personal Account of Death  
Advanced Directive  
Obituary Exercise

Grading Percentages:

Essay I 20%  
Essay II 40%  
Volunteer Participation 10%
Volunteer Journal 10%
Group Project 15%
Minor Assignments/Participation 5%

**GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES**

**Finding Sources:** Apart from ACORN (the library’s search function), several databases will be particularly useful for you: PubMed, Web of Science, and Pro-Quest are a few. There are many others as well. You can select databases by subject area through the library’s website: http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/heard/artdb.shtml. When searching PubMed, it may be better at first to try limiting your search words to article titles or titles/abstracts. You can do this by going to “Limits” and then specifying the scope of the search under “Tag Terms.” The reference librarians will be pleased to help you with your searches and with choosing appropriate search engines and techniques. You may come to my office hours as well.

**Citation Format and Style:** Sources should be cited appropriately using AMA, Chicago Manual, or APA style. See http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/central/ref/rr_styleguides.shtml for additional information, and consult the reference librarians for assistance if you need help. Always create a “Works Cited,” “Bibliography,” or “References” list of your sources in the format appropriate to the citation style you choose.

**The Importance of Good Writing:** Writing is important in any class. Multiple deficiencies in form, style, logical structure and flow, mechanics, usage, or citation format will result in the grade on any written assignment to be lowered between one step (e.g. B to B-) and one full letter grade (e.g. B to C), depending on the severity of the problems. Please review your work carefully, make use of your peers, or visit Vanderbilt University’s Writing Studio, located in 117 Alumni Hall. Appointments may be scheduled by calling 343-2225.

**Some General Guidelines for All Assignments:**
- Clear thesis statements and topic sentences are important, as are logical flow, coherence, and transitions between paragraphs.
- Your assignments should analyze, evaluate, argue, and use evidence to support your points and chosen subject matter while taking into account counterarguments and counterevidence. Mere summary, description, and assertions of opinion are insufficient.
- Quotations should be used judiciously and analytically to emphasize, elucidate, or amplify points when necessary. Strings of quotations linked by a few sentences are not a paper.
- Make certain that quotations are used correctly and exactly, are properly cited, and use ellipses if words are omitted. In addition, make certain that you paraphrase in your own words, that you give credit to your sources, and that your writing differentiates your ideas and arguments from your sources.

Format for All Assignments: typed and double-spaced, with 1” margins and in 12-point font

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC/ACTIVITY</th>
<th>READINGS/HANDOUTS/ASSIGNMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 7</td>
<td>Introduction of Course</td>
<td>HANDOUTS: Course Syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Handouts/Resources</td>
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<td>January 9</td>
<td>My Own Death</td>
<td>HANDOUTS: Hospice Volunteer Packet&lt;br&gt;READING: [OAK]&lt;br&gt;Harold Brodkey, <em>This Wild Darkness</em>, pp. 171-177&lt;br&gt;MINOR ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE:&lt;br&gt;Write a brief account of an experience of death, dying, or bereavement from your personal history [250-500 words]. Bring hardcopy to class and send electronic copy to Dr. Fanning copy by end of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 16</td>
<td>Preparing for My Death</td>
<td>READING:&lt;br&gt;Martin et al, <em>The Lancet</em>, “Planning for the End of Life,” Vol 356:November 11, 2000, 1672-1676.&lt;br&gt;MINOR ASSIGNMENT #2:&lt;br&gt;1. Fill out an advance directive [OAK] and then reflect on the deliberative process in 250-500 words. Turn in hard copy at the end of class.&lt;br&gt;2. If you are from a state other than Tennessee, bring the advanced directive form from your state (you do not have to fill it out)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<td>January 23</td>
<td>Hospice Training: What is Hospice? What is the Role of the Volunteer?</td>
<td>TB test will be read</td>
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<td>READING: 1. Atul Gawande, “Letting Go,” New Yorker, Finish the article 2. PDF of Alive Hospice Volunteer Manual [Focus on Sections 8 – 9] [OAK]</td>
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<td>SOME STUDENTS MEET AT HOSPICE AGENCY</td>
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<td>January 23</td>
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<td>January 28</td>
<td>Providing Care to a Dying Person: Perspectives from a 20-year Hospice Volunteer:</td>
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<td>February 6</td>
<td>Withdrawing Treatment: The Case of Terri Schiavo</td>
<td>READING: [OAK] 1. Lawrence Gostin, “Ethics, the Constitution and the Dying Process: The Case of Theresa Marie Schiavo,” vo. 293, no. 19, 2403-2407 2. Groups will be assigned separate readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Assignment/Handout</td>
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<td>February 20</td>
<td>Dying Vulnerable</td>
<td>ASSIGNMENT: Come ready to discuss Entry # 2 from your journal.</td>
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<td><em>Class will start at 12:30</em></td>
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<td>February 27</td>
<td>Dying in a Research Protocol: Discussion of &quot;Wit&quot;</td>
<td>HANDOUT: List of Topics for Group Project</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td><strong>S</strong>PRING BREAK</td>
<td><em>Please communicate with your volunteer site that you will be on break this week.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>How do/should we treat the bodies of persons who have died?</td>
<td>READE<strong>INGS:</strong> Sherwin Nuland, <em>How We Die:</em></td>
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<td>March 11</td>
<td>From Dying to Dead: Transitional Times and Spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<td>March 13</td>
<td>Organ Donation</td>
<td><strong>Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter</strong> &quot;The Strangled Heart,&quot; pp.3-19</td>
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<td>March 18</td>
<td>The American Funeral: A Retrospective</td>
<td><strong>Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter</strong> &quot;The Strangled Heart,&quot; pp.3-19</td>
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<td>March 20</td>
<td>Perspective of a Funeral Director: John Phifer, Certified Funeral Director, Celebrant and Embalmer</td>
<td><strong>Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter</strong> &quot;The Strangled Heart,&quot; pp.3-19</td>
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<td>Question 4</td>
<td>How do/should we grieve/mourn persons who have died?</td>
<td><strong>Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter</strong> &quot;The Strangled Heart,&quot; pp.3-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>The Concepts of Bereavement, Remembrance, Grief, and Mourning</td>
<td><strong>Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter</strong> &quot;The Strangled Heart,&quot; pp.3-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
April 3
Religious Ritual and the Practice of Mourning

READING: [OAK]

April 8
Is Grief Black and White?

READING: [OAK]

April 10
Group Presentations

Group Assignment Due on Date of Final Exam

April 15
Group Presentations

Group Assignment Due on Date of Final Exam

April 17
Final Reflections

ASSIGNMENT:
1. Journal Due
2. Come ready to discuss entries three and four in your journal

May 1 –3:00 pm
GROUP ASSIGNMENT DUE

COURSE POLICIES


Late Paper/Assignment Policy: It is your responsibility to keep up with deadlines. The essays are due by 11:59 p.m. on due date. After that your grade will be reduced by one step (e.g. B to B-) for each additional calendar day late unless you have a documented, excused absence for that day.

Absence and Participation Policy: Since your participation is an important component of this class, attendance is required. You are, however, allowed two unexcused absences. After that, each absence that is not documented as excused will result in your final grade being reduced by one step for each absence (e.g. B to B-). It is your responsibility to sign the class roll each day. Final grades may also be reduced for students who do not participate in class discussion and exercises. If you are uncomfortable participating in group exercises or speaking in class, please see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work out alternative.

Electronics: Please turn off all cellular phones, blackberries, and pagers during class. Computers in class should be used to take notes, not to surf the internet, check e-mail, or update your Facebook profile!
**E-mail policy:** In general I will respond to e-mails within 24 hours during weekdays. E-mails should be written in a format that employs standard writing conventions, including a salutation and a closing.

**Timeliness:** Classes will begin on time. Late arrivals are distracting, particularly for guest lecturers, so please be on time. If you arrive late, please enter the classroom as quietly as possible. Multiple late arrivals may affect your final grade.

**Plagiarism, Cheating and the Honor Code:** Please review the Honor Code, especially "The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers" and its guidelines for quoting and paraphrasing from your sources. Plagiarism or cheating will result in an “F” for the assignment and may be reported to Honor Council for further action.

**Return Policy on Assignments:** I will grade and return your essays within three weeks of receiving them.

**Disability Accommodations** - If you have learning disabilities that require accommodations, please discuss with me and we will consult Vanderbilt’s Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office. For more information about this office, you can go to http://www.vanderbilt.edu/odc/ds_students.html.