

LSC# \_\_\_\_\_  
Action/Date 11-1-90  
*Approved*

COVER SHEET: Proposal for Section of LS499 Senior Synthesis

SECTION TITLE Death in the Human Experience

PROFESSOR(S) Gordon Thornton & Mary Lou Zanich

PREREQUISITES (Please see instructions) 73 sh

SCHEDULING INFORMATION. When is the earliest semester/summer session that you will be ready to teach the section. Do you anticipate offering this topic repeatedly? If so, how frequently? (Please see instructions)

Earliest semester: Fall, 1991. Because we prefer to team teach this course, we believe that the Fall semester will work best in our schedules. It would be possible for us to teach this course as sole instructor.

SIGNATURES: Professor(s) Gordon Thornton, Mary Lou Zanich  
Department Chairperson(s) BW Schnides  
College Dean(s) W.C. Cal  
Director of Liberal Studies Chad D. ... 11-1-90

PLEASE ATTACH THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS TO THE COVER SHEET

- I. "Synthesis Summary"--one or two pages explaining your proposal, including: (1) your topic, especially its scope and significance; (2) the disciplines (like biology, economics, aesthetics) whose perspectives you will use; (3) the contributions each discipline will make in terms of point of view, theory, and methodology; (4) your pedagogical methods, including the strategies and activities you will employ to enable students to think synthetically.
- II. Syllabus presented in UWUCC format: (1) Course objectives; (2) Detailed course outline; (3) Evaluation methods; (4) Required reading; (5) Special resource requirements, if any; and (6) Bibliography you used in preparing this proposal. Your syllabus must indicate how you will "address the concerns of women and minorities whenever possible."
- III. Publicity Form, to be submitted for publication in the semester-by-semester Undergraduate Course Schedule.

PLEASE NUMBER ALL PAGES. PROVIDE 12 COPIES TO LIBERAL STUDIES COMMITTEE.

PUBLICITY FORM FOR SYNTHESIS SECTION

TOPIC TITLE: Death in the Human Experience

PREREQUISITES: 73 sh completed

PROFESSOR: Gordon Thornton and Mary Lou Zanich

DESCRIPTION (limit 100 words):

In your lifetime you will deal with numerous deaths (of family members, friends, pets), encounter personally at least two life threatening medical situations, and see literally thousands of deaths in the media. This course will focus on how your thinking about, coping with, and reacting to death is affected by culture, religion, race, experiences, and personality. The many ways humans have viewed death through music, the visual arts, and literature will also be explored in contemporary and historical perspectives. Class and group discussions and projects, guest speakers and role play activities will be structured to aid student insight.

READINGS (provide author and short title):

Philippe Aries, Western Attitudes Toward Death.

Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying.

Therese Rando, Grieving: How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies.

Plus additional readings.

## Synthesis Summary

### Death in the Human Experience

Gordon Thornton & Mary Lou Zanich

#### 1. Topic.

Death in the Human Experience will explore the many ways humans have attempted to cope with death, expressed their reactions to dying and death, and developed a meaningful framework for death. Three broad sub-topics will be included: conceptual views about death and dying; coping with dying; and reactions to death including the grieving process. By approaching the topic from both a humanities perspective (art, literature, history) and from a sciences perspective (medicine, psychology, nursing), students will be exposed to a multi-faceted view. During the course students will be expected to synthesize information from many disciplines and to apply general themes and models to their own personal experiences. In addition students will be asked to integrate information from their own academic major to the current death system in our culture.

#### 2. Disciplinary Perspectives:

A number of disciplines will receive major emphasis in this course. For example, the three sub-topics (conceptual views, coping with dying, and reactions to death) will be illustrated by a selected study of the arts and literature. Psychology will be another discipline that cuts across all sub-topics. Because there will be a major emphasis on empirical data and on health care systems, scientific inquiry and applications will also be a common theme.

A number of disciplines will have special roles within a sub-topic. For instance, in studying conceptual views, historical and cross-cultural perspectives will be explored. Religious and philosophical perspectives will be studied under the topic of reactions to death. For certain topics, very specific disciplinary issues will be addressed (e.g. ethics and the right to die, economics and the American funeral, etc.).

### 3. Pedagogy:

Because many disciplines provide an important knowledge base, the study of death, dying and bereavement should be synthetic. A variety of activities are planned to increase the synthetic thinking of students. Students will be challenged to think critically about many pre-conceived ideas about death and about major ethical dilemmas. To make students more active in the learning process they will be expected to provide resource material for the class.

a. Group projects (e.g. finding examples of gallows humor, poetry on dying, music about death) will facilitate student interaction and cooperation and make students sensitive to a variety of perspectives.

b. Mini-group discussions will encourage students to apply knowledge to their personal experiences and to express themselves orally.

c. Three essay tests will have students synthesize their knowledge to answer applied or conceptual questions. In addition to, measuring retention and understanding of assigned material,

the tests will assess the student's ability to argue and justify a point of view.

d. A death "collage" will be constructed by small student groups. Each week students will gather materials which represent some aspect of death, dying or bereavement. Materials may include newspaper articles, songs, cartoons or personal encounters. Students will be expected to provide a written interpretation of the collage. The interpretation will synthesize this personal material with the general themes and concepts discussed in the course.

e. Case studies will be utilized to have students analyze a concrete example using a multi-disciplinary approach.

f. Field trips and guest speakers will add novel perspectives and provide valuable insights into death and dying.

h. "My Major and Our Death System" will be a required paper designed to have students appreciate the relationship between their major and the topic of death.

## Syllabus

## Death in the human experience

## I Course description (publicity description)

In your lifetime you will deal with numerous deaths (of family members, friends, pets), encounter personally at least two life threatening medical situations, and see literally thousands of deaths in the media. This course will focus on how your thinking about, coping with, and reacting to death is affected by culture, religion, race, experiences, and personality. The many ways humans have viewed death through music, the visual arts, and literature will also be explored in contemporary and historical perspectives. Class and group discussions and projects, guest speakers and role play activities will be structured to aid student insight.

## II Course objectives

a. to expose students to the variety of ways humans have dealt with death and dying.

b. to provide students with a historical and cross-cultural foundation for understanding current Western conceptual views about death.

c. to interface general models and themes with personal and idiosyncratic reactions.

d. to develop a more mature personal philosophy about death by synthesizing a multitude of perspectives.

e. to develop critical thinking about the medical-social-personal dilemmas encountered in death and dying.

f. to explore gender and cultural differences in reactions to death

h. to explain and model synthetic thinking so that students will be able to achieve a synthesis in their understanding to death, dying, and grief.

### III Course outline

Topic	Reading Assignment
A. INTRODUCTION (1 week)	
1. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER	
2. EXPLAINING SYNTHESIS	
A. CONCEPTUAL VIEWS ABOUT DEATH (3 weeks)	
1. CURRENT ATTITUDES	Kubler-Ross(1,2)
SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES	
a) How we hide death (mini-group discussion)	
b) Gender, race, and religious differences in death anxiety (questionnaire)	
c) Sympathy card analysis (individual project)	
d) Gallows humor (group project)	
2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES	Aries(1-4)
SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES	
a) Music reflecting historical periods 'e.g. Verdi (Dies Irae), Listz (Totentanz)	
b) Language/visual arts representing the periods of death attitudes (group project)	
c) Cemetery visit (field trip)	

3. CROSS-CULTURAL VIEWPOINTS Corcos & Krupka

SUPPORTING ACTIVITY

- a) Creating a myth (group project)

4. CONCEPTUAL VIEWPOINT AND DILEMMAS

SUPPORTING ACTIVITY

- a) How we conquer death: euthanasia & transplantation  
(mini-group discussion)

ESSAY TEST

B. COPING WITH DYING (5 weeks)

1. MODELS OF THE DYING PROCESS: ADULTS Kubler-Ross(3-8)

SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- a) Viewing film excerpts (All that Jazz, Until I Die)  
b) Telling the news about a terminal illness (role  
play)  
c) The spiritual needs of the dying (guest speaker)

2. THE FAMILY INTERFACE Kubler-Ross(9-12)

Rando (12 xeroxed)

SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- a) Hospice (field trip and guest speaker)  
b) Hospice interdisciplinary team (role play)  
c) Expressions of dying through the arts (group  
project)

3. THE DYING PROCESS: CHILDREN Bluebond-Langner

SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- a) Self help groups, Compassionate Friends (guest  
speaker)



- b) Music (e.g. Mahler (Kindertotenlieder) and literature (e.g. The shroud) about children's death literature: The Shroud
- c) Cross-cultural explorations (use of local community for interviews)

### ESSAY TEST

#### C. REACTIONS TO DEATH (3 weeks)

##### 1. TRANSCENDENCE

Toynbee

Becker(1-10)

Chidester

##### SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- a) Why is there death (mini-group discussion)
- b) Constructing near-death experiences (group project)
- c) Themes about death and immortality (use of art and literature; e.g. excerpt from Bambi)

##### 2. RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Becker (11)

##### SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- a) Personal religious viewpoint (individual project)
- b) Analysis of eulogies, epitaphs, or obituaries (group project). Particular focus will be on gender, religious and cultural differences.
- c) Artist's representation (individual project)
- d) Hymns (group project)
- e) Suicide (mini-group discussion)

##### 3. CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Huntington & Metcalf

##### SUPPORTING ACTIVITY

a) Funeral customs (guest speakers)

4. THE GRIEF PROCESS

Rando (book)

Doka (article)

SUPPORTING ACTIVITY

a) Funeral home (field trip)

b) Disenfranchised grief (case study)

ESSAY TEST

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

A death collage will be constructed as a small group exercise. A written description of the collage which synthesizes the various aspects of the collage with course material is required.

A 5-7 page paper investigating how the student's major relates to our death system. Discussion with the instructors will help to clarify this assignment. Students will be permitted an alternative topic, if necessary.

IV. Evaluation

Collage 15%

Tests 30%

Group projects 15%

Major paper 15%

Class assignments, field trips, role plays 25%

V. Required reading Approximately 1300 pages.

Aries, Philippe. (1974). Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. ISBN 0801817625

- Becker, Ernst. (1973). The Denial of Death. NY: Free Press. ISBN 0029023106
- Bluebond-Langner, Myra. (1977). Meanings of death to children. In Herman Feifel (Ed.) New Meanings of Death. NY: McGraw-Hill. ISBN 0070203490
- Bluebond-Langner, Myra. (1978). The Private Worlds of Dying Children. (Chapter 2). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chidester, David. (1990). Patterns of Transcendence: Religion, Death, and Dying. (Chapter 1). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. ISBN 053411730
- Corcos, Alain. & Krupka, Lawrence. (1983-1984). How death came to mankind: Myths and legends. Omega: Journal of Death and Dying, 14, 187-199.
- Doka, Ken. (1987). Silent sorrow: Grief and the loss of significant others. Death Studies, 11, 455-469.
- Huntington, Richard & Metcalf, Peter. (1979). Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual. (Chapter 2 & 3) NY: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521295408
- Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. (1969). On Death and Dying. NY: Macmillan.
- Rando, Therese. (1984). Grief, Dying, and Death. (Chapter 12) Champaign, IL: Research Press. ISBN 0878222324
- Rando, Therese. (1988). Grieving: How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies. Lexington, MA: Lexington ISBN 0669170216

Toynbee, Arnold. (1968). Man's Concern with Death. (pgs 59-94)

London: Hodder & Stoughton.

In addition, supplemental articles and readings may be required.