

**Eastern Oregon University  
Division of Distance Education  
Course Syllabus**

**Course Number: SPCH 347**

**Course Title: Communication at the End of Life: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Conversations with the Dying**

“Working with the dying is like facing a polished and fierce mirror of your own reality. You see in it the stark face of your own panic and of your terror of pain. If you don’t look at and accept that face of panic and fear in yourself, how will you be able to bear it in the person in front of you?” Sogyal Rinpoche

**Date and Times: Friday evening 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.,  
Saturday & Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

**Class Format:** Professor will travel to Distance Centers throughout Oregon

**Instructor:**

Dee McDonald  
326 Foote St. N.W. Olympia, Wa. 98502  
(360) 754-6412 [deemcdonaldolympia@yahoo.com](mailto:deemcdonaldolympia@yahoo.com)

**Credit Hours: 2**

**Grading Method:** Letter grade

**Prerequisites:** None

**Class Enrollment:** Limited to 25 students

**Required Readings:**

Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death, and Grief: Diversity in Universality, Donald P. Irish, Kathleen Lundquist, Taylor and Francis, Philadelphia P.A., 1993

Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs and Communications of the Dying. Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelly, Simon and Schuster, New York, N.Y., 1997

Talking with Children About Loss, by Maria Trozzi. A Perigree Book:New York;1999.

Living With Death and Dying: How to Communicate with the Terminally Ill; Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Touchstone Publications, New York, N.Y., 1981

Man's Search for Meaning; Viktor Frankl, Washington Square Press, New York, N.Y., 1984

**Suggested Readings:**

Love Beyond Life: The Healing Power of After-Death Communications, Joel Martin and Patricia Romanowski, Dell Publishing: New York;1997.

No Death, No Fear; Thich Nhat Hanh, Riverhead Books, Berkley Publishing Group, New York, 2002.

Tibetan Book of Living and Dying; (revised and updated version), Sogyal Rinpoche, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, N.Y., 2002

**Course Description:**

This class emphasizes the interpersonal and intercultural communication skills necessary for relating to others in the situation of death. One of the most essential things in life is to establish an unafraid, heartfelt communication with others, and it is never more important than with a dying person. Those who are dying often speak in symbolic language, recognizing this symbolism may enable us to reassure and better understand death as the last stage in our growth.

**Course Objectives:** Expectations which meet with General Education Requirements

- SPCH 347 Communication at the End of Life meets the mission of General Education by challenging students to become critical, creative thinkers in reading, writing and speaking.
- SPCH 347 Communication at the End of Life meets the GE Language, Logic and Culture Component... For outcomes and assessments see below:

Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

1. Examine their own experiences and beliefs about death so as to allow these events to be a resource in supporting and assisting others
2. Develop the ability to assess various cultural, ethnic, and individual attitudes, needs and reactions toward loss, death and bereavement

3. Prepare health care professionals, behavioral health specialists and lay persons to communicate with those who are dying
4. Identify their own style of communication functioning in situations involving loss or grief
5. Develop a communication framework for assisting persons facing death

Means of Assessment: Each assessing all objectives and scored holistically according to attached assessment criteria:

- Participation in class discussion and activities
- Pre-Assignment Term Paper and Presentation

#### Statement on Academic Misconduct:

Eastern Oregon University places a high value upon the integrity of its student scholars. Any student found guilty of an act of academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, or theft of an examination or supplies) may be subject to having his or her grade reduced in the course in question, being placed on probation or suspended from the University, or being expelled from the University—or a combination of these. (Please see the *2005-06 on-line Student Handbook: Campus Citizenship - Academic and Behavior*, at the following web address: <http://www.eou.edu/saffairs/handbook.html>)

#### Statement on Americans with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability or suspect that you have a learning problem and need accommodations, please contact the Disability Services Program in Loso Hall 234. Telephone: 541-962-3081.

#### **Course Content Day 1:**

Communicating the Fear of Death

Cross- Cultural Attitudes Toward Death, Dying and Communication

Dying Among Native Americans

Black and Mexican Traditions

Islamic Customs

The Jewish View of Death: Guidelines for Dying and Mourning

Memorial Services among Quakers and Unitarians

The Death that Ends Death in Hinduism and Buddhism

The Stages of Death

**Course Content Day 2:**

Living Until Death

Special Forms of Communication

Listening and Receiving in Silence

Creating a Safe Place

Words which Give Someone Permission to Die

Deferring Anger and Blame

The Family: Grief Characteristics, Conflicts and Communication

**Course Content Day 3:**

Dying as the Last Stage of Growth

Processing the Death of a Loved One

Attachment, Loss, and the Tasks of Mourning

Children: Making Sense of Separation and Loss

Questions of Humor and Fear, Faith and Hope

Dreaming: The Healing Power of After-Death Communications

Getting Additional Help

**Pre-Assignments:**

Contact your instructor by phone (360) 754-6412 or e-mail

[deemcdonaldolympia@yahoo.com](mailto:deemcdonaldolympia@yahoo.com) \* upon registering for this class\* to clarify and begin the assignments.

**Pre-Assignment # 1: Term Paper**

Students will complete 2 pre-assignments related to the theories, competencies and skills attained in this course. Project details will be provided to students following their enrollment in the class. The first pre-assignment consists of conducting several interviews, analyzing situations and developing a short communication plan to effectively assist a person in the dying or in the bereavement process. Students can elect to work with a person who is dying, or with a person who has experienced grief from loss of a loved one. Suggestions:

- A. Visit a hospice, conduct interviews
- B. Visit an old age home, conduct interviews
- C. Witness a birth
- E. Interview someone who is "dying"

Use your text and readings from the required and suggested reading list to stimulate your thinking about the interviews for your research paper. Your paper should be 10-15 pages in length. There are many different ways you may approach

- this paper. Please clear your topic with me ahead of time. **Students should demonstrate mastery of course materials in the final drafts.**

**Pre-Assignment # 2: Cross-Cultural Competency**

Using your text, Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief, chose one of the represented cultures from chapters 4 through 11 and answer the questions about that specific culture (found in Appendix B) compare/contrast with your own cultural traditions.

- \* You will use information from one of these papers (your choice) to give a 15 minute presentation to the class. On the last day of class, turn your revised papers in to the instructor. **Students should demonstrate mastery of course materials in the presentation and final drafts.**

Means of Assessment: Each assessing all objectives and scored holistically according to the following assessment criteria and:

- Participation in class discussion and activities
- Pre-Assignment

**Assessment Criteria**

<b>POOR PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently	<b>AVERAGE PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently	<b>EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Communication</b></p> Unclear Rambling Poorly organized conceptual flow Errors in spelling, punctuation & grammar  Presentation poorly conceived	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Communication</b></p> Clear Concise Well organized Correct spelling, punctuation & grammar  Presentation neat and well organized	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Communication</b></p> Clear Concise Correct Spelling, punctuation and grammar Well organized  Presentation neat and well organized Presentation uniquely and/or creatively conceived
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND SELF UNDERSTANDING</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND SELF UNDERSTANDING</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND SELF UNDERSTANDING</b></p>
Superficial self-reflections evidenced by vague descriptions, a lack of examples or unrelated examples  Failure to integrate readings, class lectures and personal experiences into written assignment	Adequate self-reflection and the identification of personal insights, strengths and areas for growth  Integration of readings and class lecture information and personal experiences into written assignment	Deep self-reflection and the identification of personal insights, strengths and areas for growth  Integration of readings and class lecture information and personal experiences into written assignment  Engaged in deep self-learning

<b>POOR PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently	<b>AVERAGE PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently	<b>EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE</b> Student demonstrates consistently
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<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>
Evidences knowledge of one or two theories and/or concepts presented in course lectures and reading  Fails to evidence a growing knowledge and ability to utilize theories and concepts from multiple worldviews in written work and oral discussion	Demonstrates a growing understanding of and ability to utilize many of the theories and concepts explored in the course in written work and oral discussions.  Solely uses the technique of comparison to illustrate the similarity between either personal experiences and/or theoretical/worldview perspectives explored in course lectures and reading material.	Demonstrates a knowledge of and ability to use most course theories and concepts.  Uses the technique of comparison to illustrate the similarity between either personal experiences and/or theoretical/worldview perspectives explored in course lectures and reading.  Uses the technique of contrast to illustrate simultaneously the similarities and differences between personal experience, and/or theories/worldviews.  Poses questions that facilitate deep thinking and learning by all
<b>CONNECTING THEORY WITH PRACTICE</b>	<b>CONNECTING THEORY WITH PRACTICE</b>	<b>CONNECTING THEORY WITH PRACTICE</b>

Provides no evidence in written assignment or oral presentation of how theoretical learning is being connected to behavior in the real world (personal and professional).	Provides illustrations in written assignment, and/or oral presentation that theoretical learning is being applied to personal and/or professional practice.	Illustrates in written assignment and oral presentation that theories and concepts presented in class lectures or course readings are being utilized in the real world (personally and professionally).
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<b>UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY</b>
Fails to demonstrate in written assignment, oral presentation or class discussion a growing understanding of how course lecture/reading material is illustrated in society or can be used to affect social change.	Occasionally demonstrates in written assignment, oral presentation or class discussions a growing understanding of how course lecture/reading material is illustrated in the society and can be used to affect social change.	Consistently demonstrates in written assignments, oral presentation and class discussions a growing understanding of how course lecture/reading material is illustrated in the society or can be used to affect social change.