



Faculty of Applied Health Sciences

Master of Applied Gerontology (MAG)

Course Number: GERO 5P87

Course Title: Death & Dying in Later Life

Times and Locations:

Day/time: Thursdays 9-12pm *Office hours to immediately follow class

Location: WH311 *Note: A portion of class each week will take place outside; students should dress accordingly

TEAMS Site: For week #1 and in case we need it later ☺ There is a TEAMS site set up for this course click [here](#) to join

Instructor: Pauli Gardner pgardner2@brocku.ca

TA: Melanie Elliott melliott2@brocku.ca

Course Calendar Description:

Experience and quality of life during the end stages of life for older adults. Examination of issues related to death, dying and bereavement by highlighting cultural, ethical, social and spiritual aspects, as well as end of life care.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes:

1. Understand how humans are physically and socially transformed in the process of dying
2. Define a variety of networks that provide for, and contribute to, end of life care including palliative care
3. Identify and critique political and social frameworks that determine end of life policies
4. Describe spiritual, religious and cultural practices related to death, burial and mourning
5. Develop strategies for compassionate communication and support for older adults and family about death and dying
6. Build a toolbox of effective self-care and resilience practices

Pedagogical (Teaching) Approach / Perspectives:

The course content, format, evaluation scheme and learning processes are informed by the following schools of thought:

1. **Critical Reflexive Inquiry** is a form of higher order reasoning that integrates critical thinking (making sense of things through questioning) and reflexivity (active consideration of personal and epistemological beliefs and values).
2. **Social Justice & Equity** is a framework for course development and teaching that requires faculty to begin with their own understanding of the structural roots and causes of inequity and the resulting social conditions and barriers that they and their students encounter in their daily lives. Central to this approach is the ability to make connections between privileges and/or disadvantages as it relates to classism, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, social and cultural capital, and social and economic situations.
3. **Participatory Pedagogy** is an educational approach in which multiple perspectives, opinions, and active creation on the part of learners all contribute to the final context of the learner experience. From this perspective knowledge exchange is considered a shared responsibility among all participants (instructor, TA's and students).

4. **Experiential Learning** is often referred to as ‘learning through action’. In this approach educators purposefully engage students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values.
5. **Mindfulness** is a style of teaching that infuses learning with the experience of present moment awareness. As a particular method of instruction, mindfulness assists students and educators in awakening and opening their minds to new learning possibilities and more effective ways of being in the classroom

KEY TOPIC AREAS

- The process of death and dying - biological, psychological, social and spiritual
- The medicalization of death and dying
- The importance of connection, relationships and communication to the experience of death and dying
- Palliative care and end of life practices and procedures
- The complexity and diversity of lived experience when dying and in death

LEARNING FORMAT

The course consists of 3 components:

1. Readings & Preparation: Weekly assigned readings and class preparation
2. In-class: Short lectures, guest speakers, small group discussion and outdoor activities
3. Application of Knowledge: Online activities, personal reflections, group and field work

READINGS & TEXTBOOK

Required Texts:

Gawande, A. (2014). *Being mortal: Medicine and what matters in the end*. Metropolitan Books: New York, NY.

Roberts, H. (2016). *The Mindful twenty-something: Life skills to handle stress... & everything else*. New Harbinger Publications: Oakland, CA. (Note: The e-book version is available through the Brock Library)

There are other required readings. Be sure to check these regularly as there will be updates and additions.

Readings have been chosen to support and clarify the topics for each week and are considered an essential component of the course. Course lectures are designed to complement the readings. The course instructor may also provide additional recommended readings to facilitate more in-depth learning on particular subjects.

Visual and Auditory Texts:

Throughout the semester students will be assigned films, videos and podcasts. Similar to assigned readings, these are considered “texts” for the course. These visual and audio texts all have a clear connection to the course materials (lectures and assigned readings) and should be used/integrated into discussions and assignments.

EVALUATION

Summary:

Assignments and Assessed Activities	% final grade	Due Date
Participation & Preparedness - <i>In-class & online</i>	10%	Ongoing
Assignment #1 - <i>What is death & dying?</i>	10%	Week 2 - Sept 16
Koru Training & Meditation Logs	15%	Weeks 5-8
Assignment #2- <i>The field of death & dying Research & Presentations (Group Project)</i>	25%	Weeks 8-10
Assignment #3 - <i>My death plan...</i>	15%	Week 11 - Nov 25
Assignment #4 - <i>Personal reflection journal</i>	25%	Ongoing Week 12 - Dec 2

Participation & Online Activities (10%)

Participation is assessed via engagement in lectures, online and in-person activities and participation in small group discussion. Full participation is not possible without being prepared. Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive each week prepared to engage with the material and others.

Assignments (75%)

More detailed information about individual assignments will be provided. Students will also have the opportunity to ask questions about assignments prior to the due dates.

Assignment #1: *What is death and dying?* (10%)

It is valuable and important for each student to thoughtfully consider their personal 'starting point' related to their own beliefs about the process of dying and death itself. For this assignment students are asked to take time to: a) reflect on - '**what IS death**' and '**what is dying**', '**what do I know or think I know about death and dying**' and '**where do my beliefs and assumptions come from**'? and, b) describe, in one page and in their own words, their ideas, beliefs and understandings. This is NOT a research paper but a reflective exercise; there is no right or wrong answers for this assignment. **Students will be assessed on:** a) their thoughtfulness of the subject and depth of thinking and, b) the quality of their writing (clarity, flow, spelling/grammar).

Students should adhere to these format guidelines: Full Name (in the header); Title (be creative - top of page); 1 pg. (MAX), single spaced, 11pt Arial font, ¾" margins on all sides. Submit to 'Assignments' on Sakai (1 page only/no title page).

Assignment #2: *The Field of Death & Dying, Research & Presentations - Group Project* (25%)

The field of death and dying is broad and opportunities to work in the area diverse. In this assignment students will learn about the many areas of the field and spend time examining one in depth (including its history, cultural, economic and political influences, and the day to day experience of those working in the area).

This is a group project. Students will be organized into groups of 2 or 3 and together identify and research a particular area of work related to the field of Death and Dying in Later Life. As part of their research they will locate someone working in this area to interview in order to learn about what this particular work ‘looks like’ including duties and responsibilities, training and skills required, and a ‘day in the life’ of this person. All groups should have their idea approved by the TA and are asked to be creative and think broadly when making their selection. For example student groups could research and interview death dula’s, death café organizers, palliative care nurses, medical assistance in dying (MAiD) workers or policy makers, geriatricians, hospice staff, nursing home administrators, PSW’s, social workers, funeral directors, crematorium staff, and hospital chaplains. Students will present what they learn online via Sakai (student pages) and in person by hosting a 20 minute presentation and discussion on the topic to the class.

Assignment #3: *My death plan...* (15%)

In this assignment students will integrate learnings from the course (readings, reflections, discussions) to create a death plan for themselves. Plans should be very detailed and include the year leading up to death (palliative care instructions & medical decisions), instructions for the death itself, and post-death wishes. Any specific programs and policies required to enable the final care and death plans to be followed must be explained. Plans are meant to illustrate the culmination of learning from the course; personal reflection journals will be incredibly important and helpful to this writing.

Assignment #4: *Personal Reflection Journal* (25%)

Critical reflection is key to transformative learning and a core aspect of this course. Students will maintain a reflective journal throughout the semester based on their experience in the course. Journals are to be written in the first person and entries can include images and drawings as well as written text. Organization, format, structure and length are determined by the student. Students will be asked periodically to share their reflections and experiences with others in the class. **All students will purchase and use a ‘hard copy’ journal for this assignment and should bring these to class every week.** The final version will be submitted for grading and then returned to students.

Koru Training & Meditation Logs (15%)

All students in the course will complete the KORU Mindfulness Training. The training consists of 4 weekly 75 min classes (weeks 4-7) and meditation practice, readings, and daily reflection logs as homework. The training is integral to the course content, supports learning about the topic area, provides students with a toolkit of self-care practices, and adds a highly relevant skillset to their professional resume and future employment applications.

COURSE AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Late Submission Policy:

- You have 2 “grace days” (self-granted extensions) that you can use to give yourself extra time without penalty. You must notify the TA if/when you use these grace days. Grace days cannot be used for group projects or Koru Meditation Logs.
- Instructor-granted extensions are only considered after all grace days are used and only given in exceptional situations. See Medical Exemption Policy Below.
- Late submissions after you have run out of grace-days are not accepted.

Important Dates:

Students are responsible for recognizing Important Dates as outlined by the Registrar’s Office at <https://brocku.ca/important-dates/graduate-studies/#fw-mg> . The following dates include, but are not limited to:

- Registration close date - September 22nd at 11:59PM
- Last day to withdraw without academic penalty or to change from audit to degree status or vice versa November 5th, 2021

Academic Integrity:

Academic misconduct is a serious offence. The principle of academic integrity, particularly of doing one’s own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students should consult Section VII, “Academic Misconduct”, in the “Academic Regulations and University Polices” entry in the Graduate Calendar, available at <http://www.brocku.ca/webcal> to view a fuller description of prohibited actions, and the procedures and penalties. Information on what constitutes academic integrity is available at <https://brocku.ca/academic-integrity/>

Graduate Academic Regulations

Evaluation of Student Performance at the Graduate Level - The following grades are awarded for graduate courses:

- A+ - 90-100
- A - 80-89
- B - 70-79
- C - 60-69
- F - 59 or lower

For graduate courses the grades A+, A, B, C, F, IN (Incomplete), IP (In Progress), Pass/Fail, CR/NC (Credit/No-Credit), SA/UN (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory), NW (Not Withdrawn), or AG (Aggregate standing) will be recorded on the transcript.

Intellectual Property Notice:

All slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other course materials created by the instructor in this course are the intellectual property of the instructor. A student who publicly posts or sells an instructor’s work, without the instructor’s express consent, may be charged with misconduct under Brock’s Academic Integrity Policy and/or Code of Conduct, and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.

Academic Accommodation:

As part of Brock University's commitment to a respectful work and learning environment, the University will make every reasonable effort to accommodate all members of the university community with disabilities. If you require academic accommodations related to a documented disability to participate in this course, you are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services in the Student Development Centre (4th floor Schmon Tower, ex. 3240). You are also encouraged to discuss any accommodations with the instructor well in advance of due dates and scheduled assessments.

Academic Accommodation due to Religious Obligations:

Brock University acknowledges the pluralistic nature of the undergraduate and graduate communities such that accommodations will be made for students who, by reason of religious obligation, must miss an examination, test, assignment deadline, laboratory or other compulsory academic event. Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious obligation should make a formal, written request to their instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements.

Medical Exemption Policy:

The University will accommodate students whose studies become interrupted, or who may be unable to complete academic work, due to an incapacitating medical condition. In these situations, the student must complete the [Brock University Student Medical Certificate](#) (or in case of a concussion, the Brock University Student Health Services Medical Concussion Certificate) and include any relevant medical documentation to support his/her request for academic accommodation based on medical grounds. The University may, at its discretion, request more detailed documentation in certain cases. Given our challenging times related to COVID-19, requests for extensions on assignments due to illness or caring for others with illness will be given on a case by case consideration.

Reading/Writing Services:

This is a reading and writing intensive course. Students who require assistance will find support - including workshops and individual tutoring - through Brock University's A-Z Learning Services (at the Student Development Centre). For more information: <http://www.brocku.ca/learning-skills>.

Student Sexual Violence Support:

The Brock Student Sexual Violence Support Centre (A Safer Brock) - supports and advocates for people who have experienced sexual violence. A full list of services can be found at <http://www.ASaferBrock.org>. If you or a friend needs support or have questions you can text 289-990-SAFE (7233). All services are available 24-hours and are anonymous, confidential, and free.

Mental Health Services:

Mental health is a priority at Brock. There are a range of services available (free of charge and completely confidential) to help you through the semester and to support your positive mental health. To learn more about the mental health services offered on campus through Student Wellness and Accessibility Center visit: <https://brocku.ca/mental-health/> or <https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/> Good2Talk is a service specifically for post-secondary students, available 24/7, 365 days a year, and provides anonymous assistance:

<https://good2talk.ca/> or call 1-866-925-5454. For information on wellness, coping and resiliency, visit: <https://brocku.ca/mental-health/wellness/resiliency/>

International Student Services:

Brock offers a wide range of services to support International students. These include academic coaches, peer support and other consulting services. For appointment booking information, interactive resources and contact information visit: <https://brocku.ca/international/current/international-services/>

Other Student Services:

Additional student support services including personal counseling and support for aboriginal students are available through the Student Success Centre and Student Wellness and Accessibility Centre. For more information: <https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/>

COURSE SCHEDULE			
Week	Date	Topic & Readings	In-class Activity
1	Sept 9	Introduction to the course and each other	*ONLINE - TEAMS Introductions; Syllabus review; Introduce Assignment #1; Q&A
2	Sept 16	Introduction to the topic & Reflective Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Being Mortal</u> - Introduction 	Mindfulness; Listening Activity (M. Singer); Discussion; Introduce Assignment #4; Outdoor activity; Q&A Assignment #1 Due
3	Sept 23	Aging I - The Body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Being Mortal</u> - Ch. 1 & 2 • The Medicalization of Death & Dying - <i>How Do Medicalization and Rescue Fantasy Prevent Healthy Dying?</i> https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/how-do-medicalization-and-rescue-fantasy-prevent-healthy-dying/2018-08 • Why do our bodies age? TED Talk https://www.ted.com/talks/monica_menesini_why_do_our_bodies_age/transcript?language=en 	CLASS CANCELLED

4	Sept 30	Aging II - The Mind & Gerotranscendence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Being Mortal</u> - Ch. 3 & 4 & 5 • Theory of Gerotranscendence: An Analysis (Rajani, F. & Jawaid, H.) • Spring & Arnaud Film 	Mindfulness Practice; Discussion; Guest Speaker; Introduction to Assignment #2 & Groups; Outdoor Activity; Q&A
5	Oct 7	Dying I - Living while Dying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Being Mortal</u> - Ch. 6 & 7 • <u>The Mindful Twenty-Something</u> - Introduction & Part I (Ch. 1 & 2) 	KORU Training - Week 1 Discussion; Guest speaker; Koru Training and Evaluation Details; Outdoor Activity; Q&A
Fall Break - Oct 11-15 (no class) Work on Group Project			
6	Oct 21	Dying II - End of Life Care I - Palliative Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Being Mortal</u> - Ch. 8 & Epilogue • <u>The Mindful Twenty-Something</u> - Part 2 & 3 (Ch. 3-12) • Palliative Care in Canada https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/palliative-care.html 	KORU Training - Week 2 Discussion; Guest speaker; Outdoor Activity; Q&A
7	Oct 28	Dying III - End of Life Care II - Hospice / Awake at the bedside <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Mindful Twenty-Something</u> - Part 4 (Ch. 13-16) • End Game Documentary • Awake at the bedside https://soundcloud.com/the-jcc-in-manhattan/awake-at-the-bedside 	KORU Training - Week 3 Discussion; Guest Speaker; Outdoor Activity, Q&A
8	Nov 4	Death I - Talking about Death / Death Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Mindful Twenty-Something</u> - Part 5 (Ch. 17-20) • Family communication at the end of life https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/7/3/45 • <i>Where do we go from here? Healthcare delivery in the age of racial reckoning</i> - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8WolGalIB4 	KORU Training - Week 4 Course announcements, reminders and updates; Introduction to Assignment #4; Outdoor Activity, Q&A Assignment #2 Due (some groups)

9	Nov 11	<p>Death II - Ethical and Legal Conditions / MAD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html • Dementia and Medical Assistance in Dying - The Sunday Edition https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1630826563886 	<p>Mindfulness Practice; Group Seminars; Q&A</p> <p>Assignment #2 Due (some groups)</p>
10	Nov 18	<p>Death III - Grief and Bereavement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief and Bereavement https://www.cancer.org/treatment/end-of-life-care/grief-and-loss/grieving-process.html • Supporting families in end-of-life care and bereavement in the COVID-19 era https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.library.brocku.ca/core/journals/international-psychogeriatrics/article/supporting-families-in-endoflife-care-and-bereavement-in-the-covid19-era/E5C9BBE36E9F438937C15B931B3A2DF6 • Alternate Endings - HBO Documentary 	<p>Mindfulness Practice; Alternate Endings Discussion - Group Seminars; Guest Speaker; Q&A</p> <p>Assignment #2 Due (some groups)</p>
11	Nov 25	<p>Culture, Death & Dying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing the Circle: Elders speak about end-of-life care with Aboriginal families in Canada (Hampton, M. et al.) • Cultural Safety Course 	<p>Mindfulness Practice; Death Plan Discussion; Guest Speaker; Cultural Sensitivity Training; Q&A</p> <p>Assignment #3 Due</p>
12	Dec 2	<p>Post-death</p>	<p>Mindfulness Practice; A Celebration of Life; Death Plans; Guest Speaker; Q&A</p>
Assignment #4 - Death Plans - Due December 9			