

**WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE**  
**LIBERAL ARTS DIVISION**  
**GENERAL COURSE OUTLINE**

PHI Course Prefix	210 Course Number	Death and Dying Course Title	3-0 (Lec-Lab)	3 Semester Hours
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Presents an interdisciplinary approach to the meaning of death. Focuses on biological, psychological, legal, philosophical and religious aspects of the phenomena of death and dying.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE**

- I. Introduction to Interdisciplinary Approach: Assumptions and Methodology
- II. Biological Aspects of Death and Dying
  - A. Medical-biological understanding of death: definitions and assumptions
  - B. Medical understanding of dying process
- III. Legal considerations
  - A. Problems regarding certification of death
  - B. Rights of the deceased
  - C. Disposal of the dead
  - D. Funeral industry
- IV. Sociology of Death
  - A. Analysis of American attitudes toward death
  - B. Nursing homes and geriatric centers
  - C. Post-retirement attitudes and prospects
- V. Psychology of Death, Dying and Grief
  - A. Bereavement, death and emotion
  - B. Attitudes toward death and funerals
  - C. Structure of grief process
  - D. Psychic phenomena and death
  - E. Death as an event in the psyche
- VI. Philosophical Considerations
  - A. Ethics of suicide
  - B. Existentialism and death
  - C. Death as absurdity, as absolute fact, as mystery
  - D. Death as culmination and fulfillment
- VII. Religious Approach to Death
  - A. Primitive religions and death
  - B. Eastern religions and significance of death
  - C. Western religions: ideas and practices
  - D. Immortality: survival, resurrection, reincarnation
  - E. My death

**METHODS OF PRESENTATION**

1. Lecture
2. Class discussions
3. Films
4. Visiting speakers (lawyer, coroner, mortician)

**STUDENT OUTCOMES:** (*The student should . . .*)

Attitudes:

1. take personal responsibility for learning.
2. demonstrate appreciation and utilization for the multi-culturalism that enriches American society.

3. be willing to learn from many sources.
4. develop a moral perspective on life and death.
5. develop a meaningful philosophy of life and death for their own personhood.

**Skills:**

6. read, write and speak critically and effectively about ethical issues in health care.
7. be able to explore and express their own feelings on death and dying.
8. be able to write about and share their experiences connected with death and dying:

**Knowledge/Content:**

1. be aware of the current state of knowledge in this discipline.
2. demonstrate an ability to integrate theory and practice by writing a ten-page term paper on a topic related to the field of thanatology.
3. learn that in the human life cycle, encounters with personal mortality, life-threatening situations, dying, loss, and bereavement are centrally important.
4. understand and be able to express how personal mortality, life threatening situations, dying, loss, and bereavement impact individuals in their psychological, physical, spiritual, intellectual, behavioral, social, and cultural development.
5. recognize that while death, loss, and a threat to life are often experienced as unpredictable, unchosen, and uncontrollable, there are still forms of choice and control available to persons. The student should be able to identify forces that influence these experiences and suggest means to counter such forces, identify possible choices, and recover hope through promotion of choice and control.
6. address the importance of individual coping, suggest a range of alternative coping responses, and the value of a social support system for effective coping.
7. understand the global issues in death and dying (e.g., nuclear processes and dangers, terrorism, world hunger, and population growth).
8. understand that to make choices has consequences which affect both the quality and quantity of life. This class will address the moral responsibility for these ethical issues. Examples- of topics to be addressed:
  - a) accepting or refusing, providing or withholding, life-saving treatment
  - b) a survey of present theories of suicide
  - c) active euthanasia
9. know the implications of proxy decision making.
10. address HIV and AIDS issues.
11. become acquainted with the financial aspects of medical care for terminal illness.
12. become an informed consumer of medical and funeral services.

**METHODS OF EVALUATION**

1. Final examination over assigned readings and lectures
2. Personal project (non-verbal as in a term paper, or verbal as in a story, drama, videotape, painting, etc.) reflecting on the meaning of death

**TEXTBOOKS/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

Despelder, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., McGraw Hill, 2010

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Semester   Fall   Year   2015