

**PSY 371– DEATH & DYING**

TR 1:30-2:45 PM, SB G20

<b>Instructor</b>	Dr. Lesa Rae Vartanian, Assistant Professor
<b>Office</b>	Neff Hall 380D (Department of Psychology Office = NF 388)
<b>Office Hours</b>	Mondays, 3:30-4:30 p.m., Wednesdays, 3:30-5:30 p.m. (other times by appointment)
<b>Phone Number</b>	481-5786 (Voicemail available)
<b>E-mail</b>	<a href="mailto:Vartanil@ipfw.edu">Vartanil@ipfw.edu</a> (please do not send email through WebCT, and please do not send messages in HTML format)

**Course Website:** (hosted thru WebCT) - log in at <http://courses.ipfw.edu:8900/>

**\*\* Please access our website, the course calendar in particular–on a regular basis. This is where you will find week-to-week schedule information.**

**Course Texts:**

DeSpelder, L. A., & Strickland, A. L. (2002). *The last dance: Encountering death and dying* (6<sup>th</sup> edition). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Dickinson, G. E., & Leming, M. R. (2002). *Annual editions: Dying, death, and bereavement*. Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

**Course Description:** PSY 371 Death & Dying is a multidisciplinary, empirically-based consideration of emotions, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes related to death and the process of dying. Topics include: cultural and historical differences in concepts of death, dying, grief, and bereavement; individual differences related to preparation, adjustment, and coping, as well as discussion of special topics (e.g., hospice and palliative care, physician-assisted suicide, media coverage of death and dying, etc.). PSY 371 is an Area 6 Analysis and Inquiry General Education Course; as such, one of its main purposes is to help students further develop and refine critical thinking skills and other skills that will facilitate life-long learning.

**Goals for Student Outcomes:**

1. To gain an appreciation of death and the process of dying as natural components of the lifespan, and to appreciate how an awareness of mortality contributes to the construction of meaning in one's life;
2. To understand death and the process of dying from a multidimensional, multidisciplinary perspective–to appreciate how culture, history, and individual differences contribute to understanding of, preparation for, and coping with death and dying;
3. To become acquainted with theoretical, scientific, and practical knowledge relevant to issues pertaining to death, dying, grief, and bereavement, and to integrate that knowledge in such a way that facilitates personal growth and development;
4. To become more comfortable and skilled in reading, summarizing, and evaluating the results of empirical research and scholarly writing, and to increase confidence in skill in expressing the self in an academic context via writing and speaking.

**Professor's Expectations of Students:** The official prerequisite for this course is that you have had 6 credits in psychology. In addition, it would be to your benefit to be comfortable with writing assignments and class discussions, and to know how to use the library databases.

Students enrolled in this course should be genuinely interested in the course material and be willing to engage in active participation and collaborative learning. I expect that students will attend each and every class meeting unless doing so is *absolutely* impossible for some unforeseen event that is wholly outside of their control. Also, given the nature of our course topic, it is inevitable that many, if not all, of us will have emotional reactions to our discussions from time to time. Although I understand that not everyone will be willing or able to share personal experiences or express emotions in the same way, I do expect ALL of us to be respectful, mature, and supportive of one another when one chooses to do so.

**Class Format:** This course will be run mainly as an upper-level undergraduate seminar. I want to do as little "lecturing" as possible; I would rather have us engaged in discussion about the material in the text and the *Annual Editions* reader, the video presentations, our "field trips," etc. My plan is to present brief overviews of the text chapters, highlighting the major issues. As stated above, my expectation is that students will come to class fully prepared for the day's event(s) and be ready, willing, and able to contribute to meaningful discussion on a more detailed level.

### Overview of Course Assignments

There will be a total of 1000 points in the course, comprised from the assignments and assessments of learning as listed below. A conventional grading scale will be used to determine final course grades based on the percent of total points earned (i.e., 90% and above = "A," 80-89% = "B," etc.).

150 pts.	<b>Midterm Exam</b> (15% of final grade) <b>Given during Week 8 or 9</b>
150 pts.	<b>Final Exam</b> (15% of final grade) <b>Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1-3 PM</b>
150 pts.	<b>Group Class Participation</b> (15% of final grade)
200 pts.	<b>Individual Homework Assignments</b> (20% of final grade)
100 pts.	<b>Experiential Learning Points and Reaction Journal</b> (10% of final grade)
250 pts.	<b>Course Capstone Project: Service Learning Project OR Research Proposal</b> (25% of final grade)

### Description of Course Assignments

**Exams:** The 2 exams for this course will consist primarily of short-answer (e.g., list-and-describe, compare-and-contrast, fill-in-the-blank) and integrative essay questions. Exam questions will be drawn from the textbook, *Annual Editions* readings, class discussions, video presentations, guest speaker presentations, etc.

**Group Class Participation:** Approximately each week, we will read and discuss 2-3 articles from the *Annual Editions (AE)* reader. At the beginning of the semester, students will be asked to form small work groups (4 individuals) and choose 6 readings (1 from each of the 6 units of *AE*) that they will be in charge of leading the class discussion. Each of the 6 times a group leads discussion is worth 25 group participation points. We will devote roughly 20-25 minutes to each article discussion (possibly longer if the class desires). The expectation is that the entire class will have read the reading—groups leading discussion will begin with a very brief summary of the article contents, and then will be expected to ask questions that will stimulate meaningful class discussion and will help us to integrate/apply course material.

**Individual Homework Assignments:** I will assign a variety of short written assignments (i.e., 2-3 pages, rarely more than 5) throughout the semester; these assignments will be worth varying amounts of points (e.g., between 5 and 30). In addition, homework assignment points will be awarded for participation in class discussions (as described above) active participation in each discussion will be worth 3 points. "Active Participation" is defined as follows: a) student completes an "Article Evaluation Sheet," b) student is present

and attentive during the discussion, making at least one meaningful comment, question, etc. during the discussion, c) student completes an evaluation form for the group leading discussion before leaving class. Points will be awarded only when components "a," "b," and "c" have been completed.

**Experiential Learning Points and Reaction Journal:** Students must earn at least 60 Experiential Learning Points\*. At present, I have arranged 3 class field trips for us; hopefully more will be possible as the semester progresses. Due to the nature of the places we will be visiting, however, the dates of the visits may change, or, a particular visit may become impossible. I will also suggest experiential learning opportunities that you can do individually, and you are encouraged to think of other opportunities that would complement your learning in this course on your own (note: I must approve your ideas before I will agree to award points for them). Finally, I have arranged for a variety of guest speakers to visit our class. I wholeheartedly believe that these learning opportunities will be extremely interesting and valuable experiences for you. Generally speaking, field trips and attendance/participation on the days we have guest speakers will be worth 15 points each. Individual experiential learning activities will be worth between 5 and 10 points, depending on the nature of the activity itself. Then, each time we go on a field trip or have a guest speaker, or you engage in an individual experiential learning activity, you are to compose a 2-3 page reaction paper, or "reaction journal entry" (each entry is worth 10 points)–at the end of the semester, you will turn in all of your journal entries as one compiled and polished journal (worth 40 points total)\* that also contains a brief but carefully considered summary of your experiences in this facet of the course. I will collect portions of your journal at various times throughout the semester for the purpose of giving you formative feedback.

NOTE: In general, transportation to the out-of-class field trips will be students' responsibility (travel time will be built into the visit). With sufficient advance notice, I could probably provide rides for 3-4 people. Please consider carpooling with each other whenever possible.

\*Students may earn bonus credit (20% of the assignment value) for doing extra experiential learning activities and reaction journal entries.

**Course Capstone Project: Service Learning Project OR Research Proposal:** Students may choose to engage in a service learning project at one of two sites (see information on Options A and B attached) OR to author an original research proposal on some topic related to the course (see attached). **Students must firmly commit to one of these two options by the end of class on Thursday, January 24.**

**\*\*Professor's Plug:** Although either option you choose will provide you with a challenge, I urge you to seriously consider the Service Learning Project. The Service Learning opportunities will facilitate your learning in the course, but will also give you meaningful opportunities for personal and emotional growth. I love research, but I don't think writing a paper is a novel experience for any of you, nor will it challenge you on the same levels as the service learning. Please also consider that the service learning option(s) will a) help you develop/refine skills that will be invaluable to you in any line of work you should decide to enter, b) build your resume in terms of potential job-related experiences/training, and c) will help you build a network of references.

## Course Capstone Project Service Learning Option A: Erin's House



*Erin's House for Grieving Children was established in 1993 in loving memory of Erin Farragh, a Fort Wayne daughter and sister who died in 1989 at age six. Erin's House provides support services to promote healing and recovery of children and teens affected by death. Through partnerships with schools and community organizations, Erin's House works with families to prevent the negative consequences of unresolved grief.*

Students who choose Erin's House as the site for their PSY 371 Service Learning Project will spend a total of 34 hours in service to Erin's House. Most of that service will consist of active participation in the Facilitator Training Seminar– a 20-hour training program that takes place over two consecutive weeks (see below for the Spring 2002 training schedule). During the Seminar, students will learn the guiding philosophy of Erin's House and the 3 tasks of a grieving child, they will learn specific communication tools and techniques (e.g., reflective listening, use of "I wonder" questions), and will examine their own grieving patterns and learn how to step outside of their own loss experiences to best attend to the children's needs.

After completion of the Facilitator Training Seminar, students may choose to be considered for a volunteer position as a Group Facilitator. In addition to successful completion of the training seminar, potential Facilitators must undergo an interview process, a criminal history check, and MUST be willing to commit to 1 year of service (5:30-9:15 PM twice a month). Students who do not wish to, or are unable to become Facilitators may complete their PSY 371 Service Learning Project by donating 14 additional hours of service to Erin's House (e.g., office assistance, cleaning, etc.). Successful completion of the 34 required hours will comprise 50% of the student's grade for the service learning project.

As the semester progresses, the course instructor will be in contact with the Executive Director or her designee to track students' progress on the service learning project. Progress reports will comprise 30% of the student's project grade. During the final week of the course, all students who completed service learning projects at specific sites will be asked to give a brief oral report to the entire class based on their experience (e.g., panel discussion, and by Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4:30 PM, students will turn in a 5-7 page paper based on their experience(s) with their service learning project. The paper/oral report together will comprise 20% of the service learning project grade.

### Spring 2002 Facilitator Training Seminar Schedule:

Friday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 -9:30 PM (Central City location)

Saturday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 9 AM - 5:30 PM (Central City location)

Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 - 9:30 PM (Parkwest location)

Tuesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 - 9:30 PM (Central City location)

**Erin's House for Grieving Children, Inc.**, Agnes Y. Griffey, Director

website: [www.erinshouse.org](http://www.erinshouse.org)

3811 Illinois Road (Parkwest location)  
Suite 210  
Ft. Wayne, IN 46804  
219-423-2466

2809 Holton Avenue (Central City location)  
Ft. Wayne, IN 46806  
219-745-7318

## Course Capstone Project Service Learning Option B: Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice



*"You matter to the last moment of your life, and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but to live until you die."*

– Dame Cicely Saunders (founder of the first modern hospice in London, 1968)

VNSH provides hospice care for terminally ill patients—either in the patient's home, or at the 11-room residential facility on Homestead Rd. In general, hospice is a special kind of care for dying people, their families and their caregivers. Hospice seeks to treat the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of patients and their families. Hospice care focuses on making patients as free of pain and as comfortable as possible—the fundamental belief of hospice is that quality of life is as important as length of life.

Students who choose VNSH as the site for their PSY 371 Service Learning Project will spend a total of 34 hours in service to VNSH. Most of that service will consist of active participation in the Volunteer Training Course—a 20-hour program that typically involves four 5-hour sessions. Through this course, students will learn the guiding philosophy of hospice care, how to communicate appropriately and effectively with hospice patients and their families, and how to provide support for the terminal patient and his or her loved ones as they go through the grieving process.

**In order to take part in the Volunteer Training, students must do the following:**

- undergo a complete physical examination (paid for by VNSH)
- have a TB test (paid for by VNSH)
- undergo a criminal history check
- complete an application
- provide 2 references
- provide a copy of their current driver's license and insurance

Following the 20-hour Training Course, students will provide an additional 14 hours of service to VNSH\* – volunteers are needed for a variety of tasks. Volunteers may perform services for at-home clients like running errands, picking up prescriptions and dropping them off at the home, or just sitting with a patient and keeping him/her company. At the Homestead Road facility, help is needed in the office and in the reception area (e.g., answering phones)—ESPECIALLY IN THE EVENINGS AND ON WEEKENDS. Volunteers may also help with meal preparation, or spend time with patients. Successful completion of the 34 required hours will comprise 50% of the student's grade for the service learning project.

As the semester progresses, the course instructor will be in contact with the Volunteer Coordinator or her designee to track students' progress on the service learning project. Progress reports will comprise 30% of the student's project grade. During the final week of the course, all students who completed service learning projects at specific sites will be asked to give a brief oral report to the entire class based on their experience (e.g., panel discussion, and by Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4:30 PM, students will turn in a 5-7 page paper based on their experience(s) with their service learning project. The paper/oral report together will comprise 20% of the service learning project grade.

**\*Because training volunteers comes at considerable cost to VNSH (e.g., time, your physical and TB test), more than 34 hours' service from volunteers is highly desired and greatly needed (e.g., 6 months). PLEASE assess your interest in serving this agency seriously.**

**Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice**, Marlene Cooper, Volunteer Coordinator

Hospice Home of Northeast Indiana

5910 Homestead Rd.

Ft. Wayne, IN 46814

219-435-3222

Website: [www.vnsh.org](http://www.vnsh.org)

## Course Capstone Project: Original Research Proposal

### Overview:

The assignment is to do a **focused, evaluative** review of **recent** research on a **specific** topic pertaining to this course that will lead you to **propose an original (i.e., new) empirical study on that topic**. In essence, this assignment will require you to become a budding “expert” on some very specific subject matter that pertains to death and dying, loss, grief, bereavement, etc as you learn to read, evaluate, and integrate research findings and their implications.

### General Info on Length/Format of the Paper:

Your finished paper will be written in APA-format and will consist of a) a title page, b) an abstract, c) the body of the paper, and d) a reference list. (I will provide details on the basics of APA style and format later as the semester progresses.) The body of your paper itself should be between 15-20 pages (i.e., not including the title page, abstract, or references). Roughly 12-15 pages of the body will consist of your evaluative literature review—that is, your discussion of how previous research on your topic has been done, what it has uncovered, and what issues/questions it leaves unanswered and/or what weaknesses it contains. The remaining 5-8 pages will consist of your research proposal—that is, based on the previous research you’ve reviewed and the limitations/unanswered questions you’ve commented upon, you will suggest an original study that will serve as a step toward addressing those issues/limitations.

### Choosing and Getting Approval for Your Topic:

**You must submit your topic choice to me for approval by Thursday, January 31.** In addition to submitting a “Preliminary Topic Approval Sheet,” you must also submit 3 abstracts of research papers on your topic (you may or may not decide not to use those articles—I simply want to see that your literature search is underway; the 3 abstracts may come from search engines—you do not have to have the actual articles in hand). Once your topic has been approved by me, you may not change topics (although I will allow you to adopt a more narrow focus within the topic domain you have chosen). This means you need to make an informed choice early on, and do sufficient scanning of the available research in order to choose a “good” topic. A “good” topic is something that truly interests you, and one for which you will be able to locate and obtain appropriate references in a timely fashion. **TAKE CARE TO CHOOSE A TOPIC THAT IS NOT TOO BROAD OR GENERIC** – for example, if you try to do a literature search on “grief,” you are going to find yourself absolutely overwhelmed by the number of references available. You might first scan your textbook or the Annual Editions reader for ideas of specific research topics. For example, “differences in the experience of perinatal loss” would be a much more focused, and thus more manageable, topic.

### Working Outline, Annotated Reference List, and Rough Draft:

**A Working Outline and Annotated Reference List for your paper are due on March 5.** I would expect your outline to be about 4-5 pages in length (in other words, roughly half of the length of the final paper). The purpose of having you do this outline is so that I can provide you with feedback that will help you prepare the final paper, so this outline needs to be fairly detailed. The annotated reference list should provide the APA-style reference citations for each of the articles you’ve reviewed thus far (at least 5), followed by a short paragraph that summarizes the article and makes clear how you plan to use it in your paper. **A rough draft of the body of your paper will be due April 5 (by 4:30 pm.).**

Although you are required to do only 1 rough draft, you are strongly encouraged to do multiple rough drafts, and to seek feedback early and regularly. Writing is a process—not a one-time event! **You are also strongly encouraged to seek the services of the IPFW Writing Center (Kettler Hall 234, 481-5740).**

### Locating References:

As you can tell from the description of the assignment thus far, you will need to conduct a well-thought-out search of the literature. You cannot just take the first dozen references you come across—they may not fit well with one another in your paper. Web links listed on our class website can help you to use PSYCHLIT, the

best source of references for your paper. You might also check out the citations listed in your textbook and other readings to help you locate appropriate references. **Do not procrastinate!** If you can obtain appropriate references on-line (using something like EBSCOHOST) more power to you! However, it is highly likely that many articles you will want/need will have to be obtained through the library's Document Delivery Services, and that can take a week or more. You must use at least 9 references for your paper (it is likely that you will use a few more than that), and no more than 4 of them may be dated prior to 1994. You may use your textbook as a reference, but it will not count as one of the 9. I can try to help you with your literature search, and offer advice as to which references from many might be best to emphasize in your paper. **You may use information from websites in your paper, but the information you use must be in your own words, cited appropriately, and will not count as one of your 9 references.** The 9 required references must be empirical research articles (this means that they report on actual studies that were conducted by the authors) from scholarly journals.

**I will provide you with additional materials and support for the writing of your paper as the semester progresses. The key to success, however, is getting an early start, and doing some amount of work on this assignment each week.**

**Grading Criteria: Your paper will be assessed in terms of the following general criteria:**

- **Timely Completion of all Preliminary Assignments** (Did you meet all deadlines associated with paper? This is worth 10% of your final paper grade, and is an "all-or-none," yes/no proposition.)
- **Overall Presentation and Mechanics** (Is it easy to read? Does it make sense? Does the paper have good logical flow from section to section? Did you follow APA format? Does it appear that you worked hard on it or slopped through it?)
- **Integrity of Authorship** (Have you cited your sources appropriately? **NOTE: Any and all instances of plagiarism will result in a penalty of 65% of points available for the paper. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, ASK. Otherwise if I find you have plagiarized, I will assume you did so willfully.**)
- **Strength of Introduction and Clarity of Thesis** (Do you make clear the topic you're covering and its significance/relevance/importance? Do you have a coherent, appropriate thesis? Do you support it throughout the paper?)
- **Strength and Depth of Literature Review** (Do you leave the reader with a strong understanding of recent research in this area? Have you neglected crucial research or theory? Have you integrated/related studies together, or have you just presented one study after another without sufficient connection between/among them and to your thesis? Have you provided appropriate rationale for the original study you have proposed? That is, based on your literature review, is the need/rationale for your study clear?)
- **Strength of Research Proposal** (Is it clear how your proposed study addresses the limitations you covered in your literature review? Have you given thought to basic methodological issues (i.e., how data will be collected and from whom, ethical treatment of human subjects, plan for analysis)? Have you conveyed a clear hypothesis that is justified or makes sense in light of your literature review?)

**DEADLINE FOR FINAL PAPER: BY 4:30 P.M., FRIDAY, MAY 3rd, 2002**