

Course Syllabus
KNP3502 – Dying and Suffering Across Cultures
Knox College
Toronto School of Theology
Winter 2024

Instructor Information

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Course Identification

Course Number: KNP3502
Course Format: *In-class*
Course Name: Dying and Suffering Across Cultures
Course Location: Classroom 5 (or TBA on main floor). Knox College
Class Times: Wednesdays 11:00am – 1:00pm
Prerequisites: None

Course Description

Seminar on Care at the End of Life: This course will provide an opportunity for students to discuss and reflect on the contemporary realities of medical practice which challenge some basic assumptions as to when death occurs and when is a person “dead”. In addition, students will examine contemporary efforts to rediscover old wisdoms concerning care for dying patients and ways in which communities of faith might reclaim some of the ancient practices of *ars moriendi*, the “art of dying.” Students examine the phenomena of chronic illness, suffering and dying from a variety of historical, biblical, theological, pastoral care, medical-physiological, psychosocial from a cross cultural perspective. Students also examine contemporary modalities of care for persons at the end of life, including hospice and palliative care, medical assistance in dying, and allowing natural death. Course goals include developing the student’s ability to care for persons with chronic and terminal illness in ways that are shaped by a variety of theological and religious-cultural understandings of suffering, dying and death. To do so with integrity, students will also explore dimensions of what constitutes health and wholeness, as well as grief and mourning and burial rituals from various religious-cultural perspectives.

Course Resources

Required Course Texts/Bibliography

- Kellehear, Allan (2014). *The Inner Life of the Dying Person*. Columbia University Press
- Coward, Harold and Stajduhar, Kelli (2012). *Religious Understandings of a Good Death in Hospice Palliative Care*. SUNY Press.

- Kalanithi, Paul (2016). *When Breathe Becomes Air*. Random House.

The Kellehear book will be purchased for you and available for purchase on the first day of class. If it can be sourced online for you, a link will be provided on the Quercus site for the course.

The Coward and Stajuhar book is available on Amazon and Indigo but also on online used book sites.

The Kalanithi book is available new or used on Amazon and Indigo as well as online used book sites.

Required Readings posted through the Knox Library on Quercus:

- Anderson, D., & De Souza, J. (2021). The importance and meaning of prayer rituals at the end of life. *British Journal of Nursing (Mark Allen Publishing)*, 30(1), 34–39. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2021.30.1.34>
- Brooks, David (2023). The Canadian Way of Death. *The Atlantic, June: Vol 331 – No 5*, pages 84-95.
- Chochinov, Harvey Reading - TBA (*Will be from Dignity Therapy (2009) or Dignity in Therapy (2022)*)
- Centofanti J, Swinton M, Dionne J, et al. (2016). Resident reflections on end-of-life education: a mixed-methods study of the 3 Wishes Project. *British Medical Journal Open*;6: e010626. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010626
- LeBaron VT, Cooke A, Resmini J, Garinther A, Chow V, Quiñones R, Noveroske S, Baccari A, Smith PT, Peteet J, Balboni TA, Balboni MJ. (2016). Clergy Views on a Good Versus a Poor Death: Ministry to the Terminally Ill. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. Dec;18(12):1000-7. doi: 10.1089/jpm.2015.0176. Epub 2015 Aug 28. PMID: 26317801; PMCID: PMC4842946.
- Pfiefer, M. and Head, B (2018). Which Critical Communication Skills Are Essential for Interdisciplinary End-of-Life Discussions? *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 20(8):E724-731. doi: 10.1001/amajethics.2018.724.
- Swinton, John and Payne, Richard (2009). *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End of Life Care*. Chapter One – Practicing the Presence of God. Chapter Two – Dying Well. William Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Course Website(s)

- Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> . Students who have trouble accessing Quercus should ask [insert college contact] for further help.]

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Knox College

Basic Degree Students are registered in the MDiv, MTS and MPS degrees. Graduate Degree Students are in the MA and DMin degrees.

BD Level

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes. (Not all categories will be required for all courses.)

(A) IN RESPECT OF GENERAL ACADEMIC SKILLS

- Describe the attitudes and cultural practices of death and dying in three or more cultures including Canadian society.
- Develop awareness of what dying people want and how to care for the dying.
- Knowledge of significant issues around end-of-life care including medical assistance in dying (MAID), the contemporary funeral industry, and where we die.
- Develop skill and awareness of how to speak with people at end of life about matters of significance and spirituality.
- Engage key questions on living significantly from Dignity Therapy.

(B) IN RESPECT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENT OF ONE OR MORE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

- Reflect upon the teachings of the student's own theological tradition as it informs ideas of suffering, dying, and care of those at end of life.
- Awareness of Christian theology on suffering, caring for the dying, and teaching on what happens after we die.

(C) IN RESPECT OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- Articulate the student's family of origin teaching, cultural influences, and personal attitudes on death and treatment of those who are dying.
- Reflect upon what the student identifies as quality of life and their own advanced care directives, organ donation, funeral planning, and end of life care.

(D) IN RESPECT OF MINISTERIAL AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

- Describe the role of spiritual care provider or faith leader in facilitating end of life care and provision of ritual to promote the process of grief.
- Able to identify the theological, societal and emotional purpose of a funeral and the key components in preparing a funeral service from Christian and other faith traditions.

Graduate Level

Each graduate program has detailed statements of "degree level expectations" (goals and outcomes) found in the respective program Handbooks. The harmonized course goals and outcomes (below) describe the level of knowledge and skill that will be characteristic of a typical graduate of the program. Instructors are required to develop a statement of learning outcomes for each course. These outcomes will provide

benchmarks for course evaluation/grading and program assessment. Doctoral students are typically required to demonstrate higher levels of ability or expertise.

GRADUATE “DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS”	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
EXPECTATIONS: <i>In this course students are expected to demonstrate the following:</i>		
1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge is defined as a set of increasing levels of understanding within a student’s area of specialization, methodologies, primary & secondary sources, historical developments and inter-disciplinarity.	<i>Students in this course will learn, study and discuss issues of faith and dying across cultures so that they can identify the attitudes and practices that promote healthy engagement with the dying and death process.</i>	<i>Lectures, readings, group discussion and in small group discussion, final assignment.</i>
2. Research and Scholarship is defined as the ability to identify a new or unresolved question, to locate that question within a corpus of scholarly research & assess critically the relevant literature, to adopt a methodology(-ies), and to then formulate a thesis and reasoned argument(s) on the basis of the evidence.	Students in this course will engage in research on a topic related to end of life utilizing peer reviewed journals and books as well as other forms of information and engagement and distill the information into a presentation.	Group presentations Final Assignment Leading Small Group Discussion
3. Level of Application of Knowledge is defined as the ability to engage in self-directed or assisted research, and the ability to produce innovative or original analysis within the context of graduate seminars and courses. In some cases this includes the application of a research language.	Students will digest the assigned readings and prepare a summary of the readings to distill knowledge for their peers and prepare thought provoking questions that help to integrate faith or theological understanding with the content of the readings.	Leading Small Group Discussion
4. Professional Capacity or Autonomy is defined as the ability to translate the	Students will connect with practitioners in end of life care	Final Assignment Lectures

GRADUATE “DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS”	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
knowledge gained in other research or professional settings, e.g., to undertake further studies in their area of concentration; or to enter or return to other professional vocations for which an advanced understanding of Theological Studies is necessary or beneficial.	and learn about the practices that support persons spiritually at the end of life. Students will learn how to develop rituals for engaging faith understanding at the end of life and to develop funeral services to promote the integration of faith and hope in those who grieve.	Readings
5. Level of Communication Skills is defined as clear and effective communication in both oral and written forms; the construction of logical arguments; the making of informed judgments on complex issues; and facility with standard conventions of style for scholarly writing. Cohort formation is a component of all graduate programs.	Students will learn how to create space to discuss end of life concerns respecting individual differences in faith understandings. Students will learn communication skills for talking with persons who are dying.	Lectures Group Discussion Exit Ticket Assignments Final Assignment
6. Awareness of the Limits of Knowledge is defined as the recognition that Theological Studies is a complex discipline, comprising: a broad array of subject areas; methods and sources; various ecclesiastical traditions and social contexts; and, insights from other disciplines.	Students will learn about the sacredness of life, the mystery of dying, and how Christian and other faith traditions help to inform and give context to understanding care of the dying and honouring the dead.	Lectures Group Discussion

Evaluation

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in four areas for the Basic Degree students and **five areas for the Graduate Degree Students**. The specific differences for the Graduate degree students are in blue and noted as only for graduate students.

1. **Participation (15%)** – Students are expected to be present **each week in class (this class will not be recorded)**, come to class prepared to engage the readings **assigned for the given day**, and to **participate** in small group and whole class discussions.

Students will submit 'exit tickets' at the end of designated lectures as part of the participation grade.

Students will participate on the Interprofessional Practice Education seminar on Dying and Death on March 18th from 500 – 700 pm as part of their participation grade and will submit an exit ticket at the end.

Please note that the topics discussed in this course are often of a serious and sensitive nature and will cause the student to reflect upon their own experiences and ideas (including faith understanding) with persons who have died that have mattered to them. I caution students who are currently or have recently had a significant death in their circle to evaluate their own readiness to be in this course.

2. **Book Reflection on When Breath Becomes Air (20%)** (6 pages, double spaced, One inch margins, 1500 words)

Due on January 24, 2024 – except for group one presentations which is Due on Feb 7.

- a) Summarize the content of the book
- b) Reflect upon how the content impacted you and integrate your faith understanding about preparing for dying and supporting the dying person.
- c) Discuss several important take aways that you will bring into your practice of spiritual caregiving or will inform your practice?

Following only for Graduate Degree Students

- d) *How does this book fit into the genre of pastoral care/spiritual care books? And what are the strengths, weaknesses or limitations of the book? (May take up to 2000 words)*

Following assignment is only for the Graduate Degree Students

*(3) **Discussion Leading Assignment** - (10%)- This assignment is only for the graduate students. Lead one of the reading discussion sections of the class by presenting a brief summary of the readings to the class (10 minutes) and then preparing three discussion questions for students to reflect upon in their small groups. And then wrap up after break out groups. Finally, Individually write a 1000 word reflection paper on how the readings impacted or influenced your*

understanding of death and dying and integrate your own faith perspective (theological reflection). A sign up sheet will be provided to you in the first class.

(4) Group Presentation (30% for Basic Degree and 25% for Graduate) – Due dates are on the signup sheet

Students will choose among nine topics for a two-person led group presentation. This assignment is to develop skills in researching, distilling knowledge, collaborating with others, development of thought-provoking questions, and ability to communicate knowledge in effective ways. Student groups will receive one group grade.

Topic selection will occur on the first day of class.

- a) Prepare a twenty-minute presentation on the topic that is informative and creative (both students are expected to participate in the preparation and in delivering the presentation)
- b) Provide students with a one-page handout that summarizes the content and includes websites for further resources or helpful organizations.
- c) Lead the class in a five-to-ten-minute exercise to integrate the material (discussion, activity, etc.).
- d) Ensure you integrate a spiritual and/or theological perspective into the content.

(5) End of Life Integrative Project (Interview and Analysis) (35% for Basic Degree and 30% for Graduate) – Choose one of the following three options and prepare an 8 page paper, double spaced with appendices and references. Use APA style for referencing in your paper.

Due on Friday April 4, 2024

Option One - Prepare a funeral service. In your paper, discuss the cultural and theological purpose of the funeral (minimum of four pages). Prepare resources for talking with the family about their grief and funeral preparation (one page). Prepare a detailed outline of a funeral service (Order of Service) including prayers and readings. Excluding a homily or eulogy (two to four pages single spaced as appropriate). This assignment will require you to talk with a funeral home director (go in person if able), to interview two clerics who have conducted funerals, and to speak with someone who has had a family member die and they were part of the funeral planning. In the appendices of your paper include the questions you asked at the funeral home the clerics, and the grieving individual – the death should not be a recent death. Be as creative as you would like.

Option Two - Write a creative verbatim using questions and practices from Chochinov's Dignity Therapy. Read one of Chochinov's three books on Dignity Therapy (Dignity Therapy, Final Words in Final Days, or Dignity in Care (2022)). Research articles on communication with people at end of life. Interview a spiritual care practitioner or a psychospiritual therapist who

has had end of life clients. Your verbatim will include a brief background section on the patient, and then four to five pages of a verbatim that are single spaced for the speaker and include the physical gestures (i.e. pausing for about ten seconds, tears, with forceful speech, looking away toward the door). In your appendices include the questions you asked of the spiritual care practitioner. Also include one page summary of using questions from Dignity Therapy/Dignity in Care. Be as creative as you would like.

Option Three - Prepare an end-of-life ritual to do with a family or with the person who is dying. In your paper, discuss the importance of ritual (e.g. in promoting connecting to one's faith and with community and inner healing) and the role of ritual in end of life care. Discuss the role of ritual from a theological perspective (your faith tradition). (four to five pages). Describe in detail the ritual you prepared so that it is repeatable by another (Three pages). This section may be single spaced. Reflect on this experience (one page). This assignment requires you to include reference to peer reviewed research articles and books. In your appendices, include the questions you asked of the spiritual care practitioners. Be as creative as you would like.

Grading System - Basic Degree Students

1000, 2000 and 3000 level courses use the following numerical grading scale (see section 11.2 of the BD Handbook):

90-100 (A+)	Exceptional
85-89 (A)	Outstanding
80-84 (A-)	Excellent
77-79 (B+)	Very Good
73-76 (B)	Good
70-72 (B-)	Acceptable
0-69 (FZ)	Failure

Grading System - Graduate Degree Students

5000, 6000 and 7000 level courses use the following alpha grading scale;

A+	(90-100)	Profound & creative
A	(85-89)	Outstanding
A-	(80-84)	Excellent
B+	(77-79)	Very Good
B	(73-76)	Good
B-	(70-72)	Satisfactory at a post-baccalaureate level
FZ	(0-69)	Failure

Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc).

Late work (BD). Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. [The instructor should stipulate the penalty for late work.] The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner.

This penalty is not applied to students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness); students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor and request an SDF. The absolute deadline for obtaining an SDF for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of examination week, whichever is sooner. An SDF must be requested from the registrar's office in the student's college of registration no later than the last day of exam week in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Late work (Graduate). The prima facie deadline for the completion of work in a course is the last day of the examination week for the trimester in which the course is taken. Students are expected to meet the course deadlines of the instructor offering the course and are advised to plan their research projects accordingly. Students who find themselves unable to meet deadlines for completing coursework can, under certain conditions, receive extensions for completing the work after the dates set by the college in which the course is offered.

The authority to grant an extension for the completion of work in a course beyond the original TST or college deadline (whichever is earlier) for that course rests with the student's college Graduate Director, not the instructor of the course. Nevertheless, the instructor's signature is required for course extension requests to be processed. Students will petition their college Graduate Director for extensions, using a standard form provided by TST on its website. See Section 7.11 of the Conjoint Graduate Degree Handbook.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-26-2012>, policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Policies

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code->

[behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019](https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/). A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges:
<https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Wed. January 10, 2024

Course introduction and welcome to one another

What does Living Well and Quality of Life really mean? What Makes a life worth living?

Reading – Kalanithi, Paul “When Breathe Becomes Air” (2016)

Week 2

Wed. January 17, 2024

Section One: RELIGIOUS and CULTURAL THOUGHTS ABOUT DYING

What Happens When We Die?

How is Death Determined in a Contemporary Context?

What are the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the dying?

Reading - Kalanithi, Paul “When Breathe Becomes Air” (2016)

Reading – Swinton, John and Payne, Richard – Chapter 1-2

Week 3

Wed. January 24, 2024

Religious Understandings of a Good Death
Where do we die? What is hospice and palliative care?
Is there something more?
What is death anxiety?

Reading – Coward and Stajduhar – Chapters 1, 13

Reading - LeBaron VT et al (2016). Clergy Views on a Good Versus a Poor Death: Ministry to the Terminally Ill. J Palliat Med. 2015 Dec;18(12):1000-7.

Book Review is Due (Group Presentation One has an extension of two weeks)

Week 4

Wed. January 31, 2024

Non-Western Attitudes Toward Death and Bereavement
Group 1 Presentation

Reading – Coward and Stajduhar – Chapters 2, 9, 11

Week 5

Wed. February 7, 2024

Jewish, Christian and Islamic Views on Death and Bereavement
Group 2 and Group 3 Presentation

Reading – Coward and Stajduhar – Chapters 4, 5, 6

Week 6

Wed. February 14, 2024

Modern Western Attitudes and Experiences with Death
Group 4, 5 and 6 Presentations
Death portrayal in the media; Funeral Industry today
Advanced Care Directives/Living Will, Power of Attorney, Organ Donation

No Assigned Readings – Group Presentation Day

Week 7

Wed. February 28, 2024

Section Two: PRACTICAL, MEDICAL/ETHICAL DIMENSIONS ASPECTS

The Inner Life of the Dying Person

Reading – What Dying People Want

Reading - Kellehear – Chapters 4-7

Week 8

Wed. March 6, 2024

The Problem of Suffering and Theological Reflection

Reading – TBA

- Kellehear – chapters 1-3

Week 9

Wed. March 13, 2024

Challenging deaths - Medical Assistance in Dying - Suicide – Children and traumatic deaths

Group 7, 8 and 9 Presentations

Reading – Kellehear Chapters 8-9

Reading – Brooks, David (2023). Essay: The Canadian Way of Death in The Atlantic, June 2023

Monday March 18th – Participate in the Dying and Death Workshop with the Interprofessional Education at UofT. 500 – 700 pm. More information in class.

Week 10

Wed. March 20, 2024

Section Three: SPIRITUAL CARE OF THE DYING

Talking with the Dying

Reading – Harvey Chochinov “Dignity Therapy”, pages -
-Pfeifer and Head (2018) What Communication Skills are needed...
Kellehear – Chapters 10- 12

Week 11

Wed. March 27. 2024

Creating Rituals With and For The Dying Person

Reading – Centofaniti et al (2016) ...Three Wishes Project

Reading – Anderson and De Sousa (2021) The Importance of Prayer and Ritual

Week 12

Wed. April 2, 2024

Final Goodbyes - Christian Funerals and Other Traditions

Final Assignment is Due on Friday April 4th. Please feel free to submit before this date.