In this course we will focus on how writers use language to convey love and loss and the ways in which they seek consolation and hope through religion, nature, art, deeds, or memory. We will explore different kinds of love—love of God, family or friends, romantic partner, or self; we will also explore different kinds of loss—loss of religious faith, family or friends, romantic partner, health, or self-respect. The only required text in the course is my book *Death Education in the Writing Classroom* (Baywood: 2012), which is based on the same course that I taught in 2008. (Many of the assignments for this semester’s course will be different from those in the 2008 course.) Copies of the book are available in the university bookstore. I realize the book is expensive, but it is the only book in the course.

Please note that this will be an emotionally charged course, and there may be times when some of us cry in class. How can one not cry when confronting the loss of a loved one? Tears indicate that we are responding emotionally as well as intellectually to loss; tears are usually a more accurate reflection of how we feel than are words. Our course will not be morbid or depressing: there will be more smiles than tears. The only requirement for the course is empathy: the ability to listen respectfully and nonjudgmentally to your classmates’ writings. The class will not be a “support group,” but we will be supportive of each other’s writing. Our aim is to write about the most important people in our lives while at the same time improving the quality of our writing. Throughout the course we will test James Pennebaker’s thesis that “when people write their deepest thoughts and feelings about stressful events, their heart rates slow, their bodies are better able to fight infection, and they experience a general sense of well-being.”

**WRITING REQUIREMENTS**

Writing Requirements: The minimum writing requirement for the course is forty (40) acceptable pages, typed, double spaced. (Please use Times New Roman 12 font with one inch margins). By “acceptable” I mean that in order for a particular piece of writing to count toward the required forty pages, it must be generally well written and free from serious grammatical problems. Everything must be typed, preferably on a word processor so that you can easily make revisions. Plan on submitting an essay every week. I will usually give you specific assignments on which to write, several of which will be based on reading assignments in *Death Education in the Writing Classroom*, but there will still be considerable freedom in the way you handle each assignment. You will have advance notice for each assignment. If you find a writing topic too personal or painful, you can write on another topic of your choice. (Please indicate to me in an email if you are not writing on an assigned topic).

We will run the class as a workshop. For each class, four or five students will be asked to bring in sufficient copies of their assignment for everyone. Assuming that there are twenty-five people in the class, we will discuss each student’s work every three-to-four weeks. You’ll know in advance when it is your turn to bring in copies.

Do not plagiarize!! Do not be tempted to recycle an essay written by a past student: I have a good memory. For a definition of plagiarism, see http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism.

When it is your turn to make twenty-six copies (including one for me), please photocopy, collate, and staple the pages together--otherwise there will be a blizzard of papers when they are distributed. There are several photocopy machines in the library as well as in nearby stores. There's also a photocopy service in the Campus Center. To save space and therefore money, single space the material you are reproducing for the class. One single spaced page equals two
double spaced pages. If you are turning in an essay only to me, not to the entire class, then double space it.

Please note that it is important for you to provide copies of your writings to your classmates on time. For each time you do not have copies available to the rest of us, you will be required to write an additional five pages, above the forty.

You may exercise the "anonymity option" when it is your turn to bring in copies of an essay for the class. If you feel that your essay is too personal or painful to sign with your name, you may bring in a single copy for me, with the word "anonymous" written at the top of the first page. Please indicate whether you allow me to read the anonymous essay aloud, without any discussion, or whether you do not want me to read the essay aloud anonymously. *I will tell you in advance whether you can exercise the anonymity option.* I hope that you will use this option sparingly, since if everyone used it all the time, we would have nothing to talk about in class.

Please keep a folder of all your work. When I return your writings to you, along with my comments, place them in a folder. At the end of the semester, I will ask you to submit your folders to me, so that I can look over your writings again to see how you have progressed as a writer. I will not record how many pages you have written; that's why it is imperative for you to keep all your writings. To complete the course on time, you will need to show me all forty pages on Thursday, May 4, so that I can return them to you on our last class, Tuesday, May 9.

**A GRATITUDE DIARY**

I would like all of you to keep a “Gratitude Diary” as part of the course. I will not grade it, but it’s a requirement of the course, like attendance. Each week I would like you to turn in a one-or-two page (typed, double spaced) diary in which you explore anything that you believe is related to gratitude. For example, you might discuss the people in your life for whom you are grateful, or the events or experiences in your life for which you are grateful. Also feel free to comment on your classmates’ essays or diaries that have heightened your appreciation of gratitude. You might also discuss why you would like to become more grateful—and if so, why.

Your Gratitude Diary is due every Thursday. I will read a few of them aloud, *anonymously*, on the following Tuesday and then hand the diaries back to you. There will be no discussion of the diaries: each of you will draw your own conclusions about the diaries you hear me read aloud. If you do not want me to read your diary aloud, write “No” on the top of the diary. I will assume, if you don’t write the word “No,” that you are giving me permission to read your diary aloud anonymously. **I will not grade the essays on content—the topics on which you will be writing do not have right or wrong answers. Nor will I be grade your essays on the degree of self-disclosure. Rather, I will grade only on the quality of your writing.** Well written essays will have few grammatical errors, especially comma splices, dangling or misplaced modifiers, punctuation errors, and colloquialisms. I will go over in class how to avoid these problems.

Attendance is important. You are allowed three excused absences. If you miss more than three classes without a good reason (such as a documented medical problem or a death in the family), then you will not pass the course. Please try to come to every class, especially when it is your turn to have an essay discussed. If you can't make a class, please email me.

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Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 4:15-5:15 and by appointment