

EDITORS' NOTES

Bereavement is a life transition or crisis faced by a significant number of undergraduates. Researchers have found that at any one point in time, approximately 25 percent of college students are in the first year of bereavement and almost 50 percent have experienced the death of a family member or friend within the past two years (Balk, 2001; Hardison, Neimeyer, and Lichstein, 2005). Death loss experiences and grief reactions have the potential to affect the day-to-day functioning and overall development of bereaved college students.

In addition, campuses experience the deaths of members of their student body. The mortality rate for individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, when combined for both sexes and all races, is about 1 per 1,000 (Anderson and Smith, 2005). The rates are even higher for the older age groups that comprise the adult learner population (Minino and others, 2007). Despite the prevalence and significance of death issues on campus, the topics of death, grief, and bereavement are seldom addressed in the student services literature.

Coping with Death on Campus, edited by Ellen Zinner, was published in the New Directions for Student Services series in 1985. It was a landmark contribution because it focused on college students as a unique group of grievers and provided practical guidance to student affairs professionals. The volume continues to be cited by researchers in the fields of higher education and thanatology (the study of death and dying), but it is now out of print.

What's more, the Zinner volume is more than twenty years old. In the intervening years, considerable theoretical, empirical, and clinical literature on death and dying has been produced. Although much of that literature has implications for work with college students, it has not been compiled and applied to them systematically.

Our goal in creating this sourcebook was to bring together perspectives from the fields of higher education and thanatology and to provide a mix of theoretical, research, and practice perspectives for coping with death and bereavement on campus. Of course, institutions have unique characteristics, and the composition of student populations differs widely. The materials and guidelines presented in this book should therefore be considered in light of these contextual factors.

Chapters One, Two, and Three set the stage for a consideration of bereavement among college students. In Chapter One, David E. Balk discusses the implications of the consistent findings that between 22 and 30 percent of undergraduates are in the first year of grieving the death of a family member

or a friend. In Chapter Two, Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty-Seib use student development theory as a lens through which to consider the ways in which students cope with death. Although many student development theories focus primarily on traditional-age students, the authors have indicated where their insights might be applied to older students. In Chapter Three, Robert A. Neimeyer and his colleagues bring together the findings of several studies on how bereaved college students make meaning in the face of loss and offer guidance for assisting bereaved students.

Chapters Four and Five focus on the use of workshops and training to provide both direct and indirect support to bereaved students. In Chapter Four, Craig J. Vickio presents information and guidelines for grief workshops for bereaved students. In Chapter Five, Heather L. Servaty-Seib and Deborah J. Taub describe how two groups in the campus community who have frequent contact with students—faculty members and resident assistants—can be trained in ways to understand and support grieving students.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight shift attention to administrative responses to death. In Chapter Six, Heidi Levine examines the dynamics of emotional responses to death by suicide in the campus community as well as beneficial ways for campuses to respond after a suicide. Lou Ann Hamilton, in Chapter Seven, draws from her experiences at Purdue University to provide guidelines for death notification. Finally, in Chapter Eight, Cheryl M. Callahan and Erin K. Fox give practical guidance regarding a broad range of considerations in the aftermath of a student death.

Death is a fact of life for college students, whether they are traditional-age or adult learners, undergraduates or graduate students, full-time or part-time students, or on-campus residents or commuters. Members of the higher education community need to be ready to respond with support and assistance when death touches the lives of students. We hope that this sourcebook provides useful guidance for a caring response.

Heather L. Servaty-Seib
Deborah J. Taub
Editors

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HEATHER L. SERVATY-SEIB is associate professor of educational studies at Purdue University, first vice-president of the Association for Death Education, and a counseling psychologist in private practice.

DEBORAH J. TAUB is associate professor of higher education and coordinator of the graduate program in higher education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.