

Religious Studies 358 Death, Dying, and the Afterlife, Spring 2012

Wednesday * 4:00-6:40 p.m. * 3 credits * PG 242

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Office Hours MTuW 10 a.m. - 12 noon, and by appointment. If you need accommodation due to a disability, please let me know right away.

Course Description This course looks at how humans deal with death: religiously, spiritually, socially, culturally, and medically. The ways different religions and cultures view death, and how they conceive of the afterlife and its effect on disposition of remains will be covered. We will also examine our own attitudes toward death and dying in light of others' worldviews. The course uses videos, guest speakers, readings, class discussions, and individual reflection papers to gain an understanding of the multiple meanings death has in our world.

G.E. Course Goals This is an Explorations/Cultural Diversity course in the Humanities and Fine Arts. Completing this course will help you to do the following in greater depth: 1) analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments; 2) describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures; 3) identify issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance; 4) demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

Goals of the Course **What I would like you to learn**

1. The different ways humans approach death: spiritually, ritually, and behaviorally
2. Your own understanding of how death gives meaning to life, and vice versa

What I would like you to learn to do

1. Use the technical vocabulary of religious studies regarding death in the world's large and small religious traditions
2. Articulate orally and in writing the significance of diverse beliefs and practices regarding death, dying, and the afterlife
3. Identify your personal views on death

Texts Antonius C. G. M. Robben, ed., *Death, Mourning and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (also on 2-hour Reserve)
Christopher M. Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold* (sorry, library does not have!)
Readings on Blackboard and online sources

SCHEDULE (always check Blackboard for updates!)
Reading assignments are to be completed by the date assigned.

Jan 18	<p>The Problem of Death</p> <p>Thesis: Our attitudes toward death are shaped by our knowledge, our beliefs, and our experiences.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to identify and articulate their personal feelings about death.</p> <p>Robben: ch 15, Rosaldo</p>
Jan 25	<p>Consciousness of Death</p> <p>Thesis: While children learn about death in many ways, the most important factor is the behavioral model provided by adults.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to describe the various influences that shape individual experiences and understandings of death.</p> <p>Robben: ch 2, Becker Blackboard: Zeller</p> <p>Extra Credit : Signed learning covenant due Tues Jan 31 = Deadline for Drop; Thurs Feb 2 = Deadline for Add</p>
Feb 1	<p>Theories about Religion and Ritual</p> <p>Thesis: There are a number of theories that attempt to explain human beliefs and practices regarding death.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to apply theoretical models to subsequent topics; they will be able to use technical vocabulary when discussing death. Note: Materials from this unit will appear on ALL tests.</p> <p>Extra Credit : Deadline for completing online survey Robben: ch 1, Malinowski; ch 3, Lifton and Olson; ch. 5 Fabian</p>
Feb 8	<p>How We Define Death</p> <p>Thesis: Death and its meaning are culturally-defined, with cessation of biological function being only a single indicator of death.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to describe some of the different ways death is defined based on culture, economics, and theology.</p> <p>Robben: ch 8, Cátedra; ch 9, Lock; ch 19, Suzuki</p> <p>Guest Speaker</p>

Feb 15	<p>How We Define Life</p> <p>Thesis: Life and its meaning are culturally-defined, with biology being only one of many indicators of life.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to describe some of the different ways life is defined.</p> <p>Robben: ch 7, Straus Blackboard: Bond; Annas; Glossary of Terms</p> <p>Guest Speaker</p> <p>Due: 2-3 pp paper that explores a reading between Jan 18 and Feb 15</p>
Feb 22	<p>Test # 1, 4:00-5:15, covers all readings and lectures through Feb 15</p> <p>5:30-6:40, Advance Directives</p>
Feb 29	<p>Death as the End... or the Continuation: From Mesopotamia to Israelite Religion</p> <p>Thesis: Early cultures lacked a well-developed view of the afterlife (except for the ancient Egyptians!)</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to present a number of ideas about the afterlife from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and Israelite cultures.</p> <p>Moreman: ch 1, 2 (up to p. 41)</p> <p>https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/odyssey11.htm (Odysseus goes down to Hades and talks with the dead; read at least through line 260 of the poem) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhrU1Z7m5pY (cheesy video of Odysseus in Hades; be sure to watch long enough to see the Shades come up to Osysseus and the crew) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxLL0_6pHKI (another cheesy video, this time of Saul and the Witch of Endor; why not read the original in the Hebrew Bible -- 1 Samuel 28:3-25 http://www.mircea-eliade.com/from-primitives-to-zen/159.html (excerpts from the Epic of Gilgamesh)</p> <p>Extra Credit: Advance Directive Due</p>
Mar 7	<p>Cosmic Justice and the Goodness of God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam</p> <p>Thesis: The idea of resurrection took centuries to develop, and serves to vindicate God's goodness.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to assess the importance of the idea of</p>

	<p>justice and the creation of meaning in life by considering the resurrection and other ideas of an afterlife.</p> <p>Moreman, ch. 2 (from p. 42), 3, 4</p>
Mar 14	<p>Asian Conceptions of Death: Death as an Opportunity</p> <p>Thesis: Many religions view death as an opportunity for personal advancement or social regeneration.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to describe the ways in which some cultures see death as the gateway for personal or social advancement</p> <p>Robben: ch 21, Parry Moreman: ch 5 and 6</p>
Mar 21	<p>Asian Conceptions of Death, continued: Chinese Religion Research into Experiences of an Afterlife</p> <p>Thesis: Many efforts to prove or demonstrate the existence of an afterlife have been inconclusive.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to evaluate the validity and credibility of various demonstrations of an afterlife.</p> <p>Due: 2-3 pp paper that explores a reading between Feb 29 and Mar 21</p> <p>Moreman: ch. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11</p>
Mar 28	Spring Break, No Class
April 4	<p>Disposing of Bodies</p> <p>Thesis: Beliefs about the afterlife drive mortuary rituals. Sub-thesis: Geography also drives mortuary rituals.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to identify the variables in belief systems that dictate different mortuary rituals.</p> <p>Robben: ch 17, Hertz; ch 20, Conklin</p>
April 11	<p>Test # 2, covers readings from Feb 29 to March 21, but NOT April 4!</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Melissa Bolthouse (forms of Memorialization)</p>
April 18	<p>How We Remember the Dead</p> <p>Thesis: Memorialization is much more than grave markers, especially in the digital age.</p>

	<p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to enumerate a number of different memorialization practices, and be able to provide the reasons why there is so much variety</p> <p>Blackboard: Marchi; Moore; Hawkins -- You will find these readings under the Study Guides for April 18</p> <p>Extra Credit: Poem on the Five Tasks of Hospice Nurses due</p> <p>Guest Speaker : Fielding McGehee (Memorialization of Jonestown Victims)</p>
April 25	<p>How We Mourn</p> <p>Thesis: Practices for mourning and grief are culturally-dictated and culturally-defined.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to assess the impact of culture upon death and mourning rituals</p> <p>Robben: ch 13, Radcliffe-Brown; ch 14, Danforth; ch 16, Scheper-Hughes</p> <p>Extra Credit: Ethical Will due</p> <p>Guest Speaker : Eric Putt, Thresholds</p>
May 2	<p>Death and Mourning at Sites of Terror; Martyrdom</p> <p>Thesis: Violent and sudden death, whether by homicide, suicide, accident, or natural disaster, undermines belief in an orderly cosmos. Sub-thesis: Human sacrifice, whether to appease the gods or to wage war, finds its justification in transcendent causes.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to articulate the ways in which violent death is justified (e.g., capital punishment), as well as to describe the various ways in which victims of violence respond. They will be able to differentiate between political violence, natural violence, and personal violence.</p> <p>Thesis: Martyrdom, or self-sacrificing death, indicates the triumph of human will over fear of death.</p> <p>Learning Outcome(s): Students will be able to explain why some individuals and cultures believe in self-sacrificing death</p> <p>Robben: ch 10, Evans-Pritchard; ch 12, Robben; ch 21, Lienhardt, ch 23, Verdery</p> <p>Due: 2-3 pp paper that explores a reading from April 4 to May 9</p>
May 11	<p>Optional Review Sessions for Test # 3, Friday, May 11: 9-10; 10-11; 2-3. You must sign up in advance to attend, because space is limited.</p>

May 16	Test # 3, 4:00-6:00 p.m., covers all readings and lectures from between April 4 and May 2, inclusive
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Grades and Grading Policies

You will be graded on the following assignments:

Three in-class tests comprising matching, short answer, and essay questions	
Test # 1	20
Test # 2	40
Test # 3	60
Three short (2-3 pp) papers (20 points each)	60
Reading Responses (6 @ 10 points each)	60
Participation (in-class assignments only)	10
Total	250

The following percentage grading scale will be used:

	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+	59% or less = F
95-100 = A	84-86 = B	74-76 = C	64-66 = D	
90-94 = A-	80-83 = B-	70-73 = C-	60-63 = D-	

To calculate your standing in the class at any time simply take the number of points currently available, divide this figure into the number of points you have earned, and look at the percentage chart above to see what your grade is.

Grading Criteria (from 2011-2012 University Catalog, p. 461)

Grade of A = outstanding achievement; available only for the highest accomplishment

Grade of B = praiseworthy performance; definitely above average

Grade of C = average; awarded for satisfactory performance; the most common undergraduate grade

Grade of D = minimally passing; less than the typical undergraduate achievement

Grade of F = failing

Extra Credit Projects: Details appear on Assignment Sheet under “Extra Credits”

1. **Sign** Covenant for Learning (1 point) due Jan 25
2. **Complete** anonymous survey (1 point) due Feb 1
3. **Complete** an Advance Directive and **type** a 1-2 paragraph explanation for your choices (2 points) due Feb 29
4. **Type** your own poem, following the model of The Five Tasks of Hospice Nurses (2 points) due April 18
5. **Type** a one-page Ethical Will (2 points) due April 25

The Bold Print

1. No electronic devices of any kind are allowed in class unless you have explicit permission of Student Disability Services.
2. If I see you text messaging I will ask for your phone until the end of the class period. Same for computers.
3. I do not accept any papers via email. They must be submitted directly to me in hard copy.
4. You have exactly one week (seven days) to take a missed exam or to turn in a paper late. Regardless of the reason for being late, you have an unfair advantage over students who complete the work on time, or take the test in the appointed hour, therefore you will be docked 10% points for late papers and exams. If you fail to talk with me or to make other arrangements regarding make-up work within one week, then you will receive a zero on the assignment. No exceptions!
5. Academic Honesty: If I suspect you of cheating on a test, or of presenting a paper as your own which you have not written, I will confront you with my suspicions. In the case of an exam, I will confiscate your cell phone or any other suspicious item. In the case of papers, I will ask you to provide documentary evidence that either you have not cheated (e.g. you provide a complete set of notes) or that the paper is your own (e.g. a rough draft, evidence of original work, notes.) If you are caught cheating--by which I mean if I find similar material on the Internet--you will receive a zero on the assignment, with no opportunity to do make-up work. Please read the guidelines on academic honesty, and the consequences of cheating by looking at my website, <http://kali.sdsu.edu/honesty.html>. If I decide it's not worth the hassle, I will simply turn over your paper and evidence of my own suspicions to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, and let them deal with the issue.

6. Statement on What I Can and Can't Do To Assist You

I will do everything within reason to actively support your learning. I will also do everything possible to make this class as well-organized and straightforward as possible. My concern is for ALL of the students in the class, making sure that everything is fair, and that everyone has the opportunity to earn the highest grade possible. I strive to provide a diversity of learning strategies to meet a variety of student learning preferences from online learning to experiential opportunities.

7. For those who would seek special treatment

Over many years of teaching I have found that the number of students who seek special consideration at the end of the semester has increased dramatically. This practice is especially common among students who have missed assignments or done poorly on the exams. Seeking special favors is not fair to all the hard-working students who have kept up with the course work over the entire semester and reflects a lack of integrity. Furthermore, university policy does not allow professors to change grades or permit individual students to earn extra points without that same opportunity being available to every student in the class. ***If you are concerned about your grade the time to do something about that is right now at the beginning of the class and throughout the semester.*** If you must have a certain grade in the class to meet eligibility requirements for a major, a scholarship, athletics, or graduate school then it is your responsibility to see that you earn that grade. Out of respect for hard-working and honest students in the class, and university policy, I cannot provide special treatment for individual students. Although it is my hope that everyone is successful, that is ultimately up to each of you. The course is designed to reward your efforts. If you want to do well in the class you will.