

The theme of this course, which underlies all the readings and assignments, is:

Constructing Death: Unpacking Life

<u>Class Meeting</u>	<u>Subject Matter</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>
Mon Jan 24	Introduction to Religious Studies and to this course What is the mission and role of Religious Studies in a public university? Can “death” be both an academic subject studied objectively and also one that is existentially gripping? How can we make this classroom community a safe place for discussion, argument, and human vulnerability to sensitive issues? What does it mean to say that constructing death involves unpacking life?	
Wed Jan 26	Death and Dying Today Changes in the last hundred years: life expectancy and morality rates, home to hospital, medicine. Attitudes and representations, music and visual arts. Death awareness movement since 1960s: Denial to acceptance? Horse on dining room table!	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 1
Mon/Wed Jan 31-Feb 2	How we are socialized into death Stages of development as children develop a mature concept of death How socialization works, functions of religion Three theories of society, individual, and culture Ethnicity, pluralism, and postmodern life	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 2
Mon/Wed Feb 7-9	Cross-cultural and historical perspectives on death Early, pre-historic ritualizations of death Mythologizing death, its origins, causes, and power Western culture: stages, deathbed scene, rituals and burial Native American, African, Mexican, Asian, Celtic case studies	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 3
Mon Feb 14	The context of modern death: health care systems Modern health care: financing, rationing, limits, “quality of life years” Hospice care: origins, style, goals Dying at home: opportunities, support, problems Elder care and nursing homes Trauma and emergency care and issues	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 4
Wed Feb 16	Elements of a “Death System” Defining death, reasons and approaches Heart and respiration, whole brain (integration), higher brain (interaction) Uniform Determination of Death Act Organ transplantation and donation Death certificates and autopsies	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 5
Mon/Wed Feb 21-23	What if it’s YOU who are dying? What is it like to face and live with a life-threatening or terminal illness? Awareness, coping, adapting Treatment options you are likely to face if you have cancer Pain management The dying trajectory—an uphill or downhill path?	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 6
Mon/Wed Feb 28-Mar 2	End-of-Life Ethics Medical ethics: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice	<i>Last Dance</i> , chapter 7

Informed consent: competent, freely, adequate understanding and disclosure
 “Right to die” and withholding and withdrawing treatment
 Physician-assisted suicide debate
 Advance directives and Patient Self-Determination Act
 Wills, insurance, death benefits

Mon-Wed Mar 7-9 **Loss and Mourning** *Last Dance*, chapter 8
 Definitions of bereavement, grief, mourning
 Grief: course, duration, complications, broken heart
 Models of grief: hard work, tasks, staying connected
 Variables influencing grief: personality, context, perceived relationship, values and beliefs
 modes of death, social support, unfinished business, rituals

Wed Mar 9 TAKE-HOME MID-TERM DUE IN CLASS

Spring Break March 14-18

Mon Mar 21 **The Art of Dying** *Last Passage*, chapter 3
 A once-upon-a-time art
 “Great Deaths” could show the way
 The likelihood of achieving a “death of our own”

Wed Mar 23 **Dying as a Last Career** *Last Passage*, chapter 4
 Accepting and not declining a last career
 The practice of “life review”

Mon Mar 28 **Death as the completion of a Life Story** *Last Passage*, chapter 5
 The promise and possibility in storytelling
 Storytelling as archaeology, eschatology, and myth-making
 Dying and Death as Religious Quest

Wed Mar 30 **Funerals and Bodies: the basics** *Last Dance*, chapter 9
 Field Trip to Mortuary

Mon/Wed Apr 4-6 **Ritualizing death** (and other things) *Last Passage*, chapter 6
 Where is the American Funeral going?
 Bothering with ritual
 What is the potential and the future of ritual?

Mon/Wed Apr 11-13 **Elements of death ritual** *Last Passage*, chapter 7
 The body and embodiment
 The community and the social context of death
 Where should ritual happen
 Moving death along: dancing and processing and gathering

Mon/Wed Apr 18-20 **Elements of death ritual** *Last Passage*, chapter 8
 Music
 Visuals
 Dance and Drama
 Words
 The posture of hope

Mon/Wed Apr 25-27 **Afterlife** *Last Dance*, chapter 14
 Last Passage, pp. 58-69
 Traditional concepts about life after death
 Jewish, Classical, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu beliefs

Secular concepts
 Near-Death experience: what do they mean
 What about you: is death a wall or a door

Mon/Wed May 2-4 **Suicide** *Last Dance*, chapter 12
 Read chapter 12 carefully and then write a 3 page essay in which you explore and analyze your own contemplation of suicide, your own attempt at suicide, or the suicide or attempted suicide of someone you know or have read or heard about. After briefly presenting the facts, you must discuss four dimensions discussed in this chapter: interpretive or explanatory theories to account for suicide; the type; the relevant risk factors; what might have helped to prevent it.

Mon/Wed May 9-11 **Risks of death today** *Last Dance*, chapter 13
 Read chapter 13 carefully and then write a 3 page essay on one of the following: Risk taking, Natural disasters (tsunami in South Asia), Violence in America, War in Iraq, Terrorism (9-11 or middle-East), AIDS. This is not to be a general or political analysis, but one that links the topic specifically to your own view of death and to death as we have encountered it in this course.

Mon May 16

FINAL

6-8 p.m.

Course Requirements and Student Responsibilities: Attendance, Assignments and Class Requirements

Getting to know you. During the first week of class, scope things out and decide where you would like to sit. Then sit there for the rest of the semester so that I and your classmates can learn your name. By the beginning of the second week, I **require a 3X5 card with a personal photo** (passport type) in the upper right corner, together with your name, address, phone, email, major, and anything else you want to tell me.

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every session. You are granted one excused absence, so save it for a very important reason. Beyond that, expect a serious penalty. Every class is divided between lecture by me and discussion by you. Learning is a joint venture between faculty and students. Once a week or oftener, a brief quiz will promptly begin the class, in order to help you gauge your comprehension and progress. Occasionally, there will be in-class writing and formal debates. Complete all assigned readings before class and don't forget to bring the texts to class with you. Some of the reading is quite difficult, so we will engage in close interpretation of the texts and I will help you follow the argument. A learning community, especially in an ethics class, must be a safe community: I will see to it, and you must see to it, that we create a climate of respect for the opinions of others.

- A missed exam will result in 0 points unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor, or there is evidence of a serious and compelling reason.
- **If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for coordination of your academic accommodations.** DSS is located in Building E. Building E is adjacent to Meriam Library and Bell Memorial Union (BMU). The DSS phone number is 898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 898-4411. Visit the DSS website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>.

- Students are responsible for handling the necessary paperwork for adding or dropping this class. University guidelines for dropping classes are strictly adhered to.
- No food is allowed in my classroom.

Grading for this Class

Quizzes and in-class participation: 30%

Two five-page reflection papers: 25%

Mid-term: 20%

Final: 25%

If there is evidence that you have been involved in any form of academic dishonesty, you will receive an “F” grade for the course, be locked from WebCT, and a report will be provided to Student Judicial Affairs for further action.

Other Important Information

It is recommended that students make and keep a copy of all assignments and papers submitted to the instructor.

Expected Student Behavior in the Classroom

- Students turn off all pagers, cell phones and other electronic devices during class.
- Students fully participate in class meetings.
- Students do not read other materials (newspapers, magazines) during class.
- Students remain in class during the entire session.
- All class participants exhibit respectful behavior to other students and the instructor.
- All students have the right and privilege to learn in the class, free from harassment and disruption.
- Children of enrolled students are not allowed in the classroom.
- Inappropriate language or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.
- The class follows the standards set in the *Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities (EM 96-38)* and students are subject to disciplinary action for violation of that code.