

RELS 264W: Death, Dying and the Afterlife

M/W/F 10-10:50

Fall 2021

Instructor: Sarah Gagnebin

Email: sgagnebin@csuchico.edu



Course Objectives

Our assumptions color the way we view our own experiences and those of others, therefore an awareness of our assumptions is important as we approach the study of worldwide death ways. Death is an important lens by which our lives, religious attitudes, and cultural experiences can be assessed. In turn, as our personal lives change, religious attitudes transform, and cultural experiences transition, our concepts of death change. We can explore personal and worldwide experiences, religious attitudes, and cultural notions through the lens of death.

Certain religious attitudes and cultural changes (including the medicalization of death and the professionalization of the funerary industry) have placed death increasingly behind closed medical doors leaving many people culturally, ritually, and religiously removed from the death and dying process and the existential crisis of meaning that it facilitates. Interestingly there is a swift cultural development toward increasing access to virtual and cinematic death through popular movies and video games.

By focusing on a diverse range of world religions (including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and others) and the ritual, theological, and cultural attitudes therein, we will cover the shared questions: Why do we die and how? What happens after we die? In which ways do we grieve and mourn death? How do our attitudes and actions surrounding death reflect and inform our religious notions? How does death affect the living? What can we learn about different cultures and ourselves by investigating these questions?

This course will answer these questions and more. Since the class is part of both the Diversity Studies Pathway and the Global Development Studies Pathway, we will examine how religious perspectives from India, Tibet, China, Mexico, the United States, Israel and the Muslim world shape beliefs and practices about death, the afterlife, and the overall meaning of life.

This class meets the Diversity Studies Pathway Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also meets the Global Development Studies Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also fulfills the Global Cultures requirement. There will be several short writing assignments and I will give you feedback on your writing to help you improve. Other GE SLOs this class addresses are discussed below.

Each Module is 1 week long and Includes:

- 1-3 Readings
- 2-3 Lectures/PowerPoints
- 1 Activity/movie/video
- 1 HW post

Required Texts

- All readings/essays posted on Blackboard

Assignments and Grading (1000 point scale)

1) 3 Quizzes	250 points (85/85/80 points each)
2) 2 Short Papers	100 points (50 points each)
4) HW journal assignments	200 points (20 points each)
6) Participation	150 points
5) Final paper	300 points
	-2 pg. final paper proposal (50)
	-Meeting with prof. (50)
	-Final paper (200)

Grading will be on a 1000 point scale. 935 or more points, A; 895-934 points, A-; 875-894 points, B+; 835-874 points, B; 795-834 points, B-; 775-794 points, C+; 735-774 points, C; 695-734 points, C-; 675-694 points, D+; 595-674 points, D; below 595, F.

Quizzes: 250 points

There will be three small quizzes in this class which will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions. The multiple choice section will cover major concepts, terms, and figures from the religious traditions we're studying; I will give you a study guide with the vocabulary you need to know. Quizzes cannot be made up except in cases of severe illness or other significant emergencies (e.g. death in the family), and you must notify me in advance if you have such an emergency.

Participation/Attendance: 150 points

Class attendance is mandatory and you can acquire participation points by showing up for class. Other ways to earn participation points include activity sheets, watching movies, sending me class related emails and check-ins, commenting on the HW posts of peers, receiving peer edits on papers, coming to office hours, etc.

Homework: 200 points (20 points each)

In order for our class discussions to be interesting, it is essential that everyone complete the required readings and reflect on them. To ensure this, there will be brief homework assignments almost every week.

For each week's readings, write a journal entry that covers in 2-3 paragraphs:

1. The week's main thesis or focus point (as covered in class and in readings) in your own words.

2. Two to four important ideas that support the thesis; use at least two quotes from the readings (Author, pg.#).
3. One question that comes up for you regarding the information presented during the week.

These questions are due on Blackboard each Friday by midnight, and should be turned in via the Blackboard Discussion tool (not via email!)

Homework questions will be worth 20 points each. If you submit an assignment late, you will receive up to half-credit for it—this will be true even if you are sick or have to miss class for a university-sponsored event. In both cases you should still submit the assignment online.

No late work will be accepted after 5 pm on the last day of regular classes.

General notes on writing assignments

- **This is a Writing Intensive class.** There will be short writing assignments and I will give you feedback on your writing to help you improve. There will also be opportunities for peer review. We will spend some time in class working on common writing problems and the craft of writing good essays. The content of this class is interesting; take the time and attention to write interesting papers and reflections.
- All assignments other than homework assignments and the self-reflection paper should be accompanied by a bibliography or works cited page (APA or MLA is fine), in addition to citations you use in the text. For homework assignments it is sufficient to use in-text citations, e.g. (Rinpoche, 47), without a works-cited page.
- I do accept late homework and papers but I DO NOT offer make-up quizzes/tests unless there is a documented serious and compelling reason. Papers will receive a 20% late penalty if submitted late. Homework journal entries will be accepted late for half credit. I will accept late work until 5 pm on the last Friday of regular classes. No late work will be accepted after this time.

The below Course Calendar is listed by day to keep you organized and aware of due dates.

As long as you turn in your HW responses by Midnight on Fridays, and turn your papers and Quizzes in on time, you will do fine!

MODULE ONE

Introduction

Date: Monday 8/23	Readings: -Read Class Syllabus pg. 1-4 -Poke around our class Blackboard page	Lecture: -Blackboard Tour

Orientation and Self-reflection

Date: Wednesday 8/25	Readings: -Lundquist, " <i>Personal Reflections on Death, Grief and Cultural Diversity</i> "	Lecture: -Self-Reflection -Morbid Curiosity game
Have this reading done before class today		

Overview

Date: Friday 8/27	No Readings	Lecture: What's up next week
NO Online HW question due this week		

Participation points this week: Class, Follow me on Social

MODULE TWO

Reminders

9/3 self-reflection due (Supporting Materials, Turnitin Link) and

9/3 HW response due (Course Materials, Module 2, Friday folder)

Defining Deathways

Date: Monday 8/30	Readings: -- Seeman, Erik R. <i>Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800</i> , University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.	Lecture: -What are Deathways?

Nothing is normal

Date: Wednesday 9/1	Readings: - Doughty, Caitlin <i>From Here to Eternity</i> pgs. 1-15	Lecture: -Getting comfy with death by exploring your own Deathways

Overview

Date: Friday 9/3	No Readings	Lecture: -HW Practice and Peer work on Self-reflection paper

Participation: Class, Watch *Groundhog Day* & attach film sheet to HW response, Peer work on Self-reflection paper

MODULE THREE

Hinduism Introduction (LABOR DAY NO CLASS)

Date: Monday 9/6	Readings: -Murata, " <i>Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America.</i> "	Lecture: - Hindu death Rituals (Video Lecture)

Hindu Death Philosophies

Date: Wednesday 9/8	Readings: -Easwaran, " <i>A Dialogue with Death</i> "	Lecture: -Preya and Shreya

Cremation in a New Era

Date: Friday 9/10	Readings - Doughty <i>From Here to Eternity</i> pgs. 16-41	Lecture: -Crestone Colorado
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Participation: Class, you could Email me or come to office hours

MODULE FOUR

Buddhism Introduction

Date: Monday 9/13	Readings: - Wilson, " <i>The Great Matter of Life and Death</i> :"	Lecture: -The 4 Sights (of suffering and death)

Buddhism and Preparing for Death

Date: Wednesday 9/15	Readings: -Rinpoche, <i>The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying</i> chapters 1-2	Lecture: -Practicing death

Navigating the Bardos

Date: Friday 9/17	Readings: -Rinpoche, chapters 3 and 6	Lecture: -The Bardo States

Participation: Class, Watch Jacob's Ladder & attach film sheet to HW response

MODULE FIVE

***Reminder: Quiz Due by midnight Friday 9/24.**

See Supporting Materials and Quiz Folder*

Chinese Traditions

Date: Monday 9/20	Readings: -Shuang, Li " <i>The Funeral and Chinese Culture.</i> " (Blackboard) -Ludwig, " <i>The Confucian story</i> " and " <i>Rituals in the life cycle in China</i> "	Lecture: -Superstitions and taboos

Japanese Traditions

Date: Wednesday 9/22	Readings: -Doughty pgs. 152-188	Lecture: -Katsugue and Ruruden Columbarium

Quiz one due by Midnight in Supporting Materials

Date: Friday 9/24	Readings: -No Readings	No Lecture: -QUIZ REVIEW
No Online HW question this week		

Participation: Class, quiz review

MODULE SIX

Mechoopda Deathways

Date: Monday 9/27	Readings: Hill, Dorothy <i>The Indians of Chico Rancheria</i> excerpt	Lecture: -Mechoopda History and Deathways

Pagan Deathways

Date: Wednesday 9/29	Readings -Ceisiwr Serith, " <i>The Pagan Family</i> " Ch. 11 <i>Death</i> .	Lecture: -Modern Pagan Deathways

Indigenous religions in context

Date: Friday 10/1	No Readings	Lecture: -Why should we study this?
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Participation: Class, Virtual Campus Tour from Office of Tribal Relations

Extra Credit: Mechoopda Tour

MODULE SEVEN

Judaism: Death Rituals

Date: Monday 10/4	Readings: -Samuel Heilman, "Shiva: Seven Days of mourning" -Kushner, <i>When Bad Things Happen to Good People</i> Intro & Ch. 1	Lecture: -Shiva and grieving

Judaism: Theodicy

Date: Wednesday 10/6	Readings: Kushner, chapters 3 & 7	Lecture: -The Problem of Suffering

The Story of Job

Date: Friday 10/8	Readings: -Book of Job (you can read it online at www.biblegateway.com)	Lecture: -Asking questions does not equal giving up
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Participation: Class, you can always comment on the HW response of a peer

MODULE EIGHT

Catholic and Orthodox

Date: Monday 10/11	Readings: - Boisclair, " <i>The Rituals for Dying and Death among Catholics and Orthodox Christians.</i> " (Blackboard)	Lecture: -Same God, Different Deathways

African American Christian Spirituality

Date: Wednesday 10/13	Readings: -Armstrong, " <i>African and African-American Traditions in America.</i> " (Blackboard)	Lecture: -Guest Lecturer

Different denominations

Date: Friday 10/15	Readings: -Readings on various other Christian traditions. (Blackboard)	Lecture: -What makes it "Christian?"
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Participation: Class, Guest Lecture

MODULE NINE

***Reminder: Quiz Due by midnight Friday 10/22.**

See Supporting Materials and Quiz Folder*

Islam And Beyond

Date: Monday 10/18	Readings: - Webb, " <i>When Death Occurs: Islamic Rituals and Practices in the United States.</i> "	Lecture: -Gentle passages and Epic Judgements

South Sulawesi

Date: Wednesday 10/20	Readings: -Doughty pgs. 42-76	Lecture: Religion and Culture

Quiz Two due by Midnight in Supporting Materials

Date: Friday 10/22	Readings: -No Readings	No Lecture: -Quiz Review
No Online HW question this week		

Participation: Class, Quiz Review

MODULE TEN

***Reminders: Watch Coco this week and
Turn in paper Two Friday 10/29 by midnight***

Introducing Material Culture

Date: Monday 10/25	Readings: - Haley and Fukuda " <i>The Day of the Dead</i> " Chapters 1 & 3 (Book)	Lecture: -Digging through peoples' stuff
Watch Coco this week at home		

"Reading" Material Culture of Dia De Muertos

Date: Wednesday 10/27	Readings: --Haley and Fukuda, Chapters 4 & 5 (Book)	Lecture: -Indigenous roots and Popular piety

Indigenous Roots

Date: Friday 10/29	Readings: --Haley and Fukuda, Chapter 8 (Book)	Lecture: -Modern celebrations of Day of the Dead
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight.		

Participation: Class, Watch Coco & attach film sheet to HW response

Extra Credit: Samhain to Halloween

MODULE ELEVEN

Music and Death

Date: Monday 11/1	Readings: -Guilford, <i>The Devil's Interval: What makes music sound scary?</i>	Lecture: --Deathways represented in music

Art and Death

Date: Wednesday 11/3	Readings: -Martin, Colin <i>Death Becomes Art</i> , The Lancet. Volume 385, Issue 9983, 30 May–5 June 2015, Page 21-42	Lecture: -“Reading” art for Deathways aka Art Gallery Day featuring prints from the Janet Turner Print Museum

Food and Death (OR Media and Death?)

Date: Friday 11/5	Readings: -Rojak, Intro in <i>Death Warmed over</i> (Blackboard)	Lecture: -Food and Death: Yes, this is a thing.
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight.		

Participation: Class, Group listening party, Art gallery day

Extra Credit: Quinn Winchell lecture on Cinema and Death

MODULE TWELVE

Nineteenth-century America burial practices

Date: Monday 11/8	Readings: - Colleen McDannell, " <i>The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill Cemetery.</i> "	Lecture: -Cemeteries; The New and the Abnormal

Funeral Industry

Date: Wednesday 11/10	Readings: -James Farrell, " <i>The Modernization of the funeral service.</i> "	Lecture: How did we get our modern Funeral Industry?

Looking toward the final paper

Date: Friday 11/12	Readings: -Info from local funeral directors	Lecture: -Choosing a final paper topic
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Participation: Class

Extra Credit: Cemetery Tour, Guest lecture: Covid and funeral directors

MODULE THIRTEEN

***Reminder: Quiz Due by midnight Friday 11/18.**

See Supporting Materials and Quiz Folder*

Medicalization of Death

Date: Monday 11/15	Readings: -Marilyn Webb, <i>A Good Death</i> , "The Sorcerer's Apprentice"	Lecture: -Medicalization of death

Modern Deathways and paperwork

Date: Wednesday 11/17	Readings: -"Five Wishes" Document.	Lecture: -Modern Deathways and planning your own death

Quiz three due by Midnight in Supporting Materials

Date: Friday 11/18	Readings: -No Readings	Lecture: -Checking in: How is everyone doing? -Quiz Review
No Online HW question this week		

Participation: Class, Quiz review, 5 Wishes document

FALL BREAK

MODULE FOURTEEN

Reminder: 2 page final paper proposal due Friday 12/3. Email to prof. by midnight

Euthanasia and Religion

Date: Monday 11/29	Readings: --S. Cromwell Crawford, " <i>The Ethics of Euthanasia.</i> "	Lecture: -World religions and Euthanasia

Physician Assisted Suicide

Date: Wednesday 12/1	Readings: - P.A.S. Fact Sheet	Lecture: -What exactly is P.A.S?

The future of P.A.S.

Date: Friday 12/3	No Readings:	Lecture: -Peer work on paper proposal
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight. Last one!!!		

Participation: Class, post a song you want played at your funeral, Watch *Guzaarish* & attach film sheet to HW response, **peer work on paper proposal**

MODULE FIFTEEN

***Reminders: All late work must be turned in by 5PM on Fri 12/10/21**

***Final paper due by 5pm on Friday 12/17/21. Use the Turnitin Link on Blackboard**

Going Green

Date: Monday 12/6	Readings: -Doughty pgs. 105-136	Lecture: -"Recompose" aka composting your body

Class Wake

Date: Wednesday 12/8	-No Readings	Activity: Finish late work, work on final, say goodbye, groove to a "death playlist"

No Class, 10 minute meetings

Date: Friday 12/10	-No Readings	Activity: -10 minute meetings with prof. (See sign-up sheet)
No Online HW Due Enjoy!! All late work and extra credit due today by 5pm		

Finals week 12/12/21-12/17/21: Final paper due 12/17/21 by 5pm

***All late work must be turned in by 5PM on Fri 12/10/21**

Fine Print

- This class meets the Diversity Studies Pathway Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also meets the Global Development Studies Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also fulfills the Global Cultures requirement. There will be several short writing assignments and I will give you feedback on your writing to help you improve. Other GE SLOs this class addresses are discussed below.
- Students are required to keep a copy of all written assignments submitted to me, and to resubmit written work if I request them to.
- Students are expected to be familiar with the University’s Academic Integrity Policy. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at California State University, Chico, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct, Rights, and Responsibilities. The policy on academic integrity and other resources related to student conduct can be found at: <https://www.csuchico.edu/scrr/integrity.shtml>
- Any instance of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty (e.g. copying someone else’s homework) will result in an “F” for the course and a report of academic misconduct submitted to Student Judicial Affairs. If you borrow the ideas of others in composing your written work, they must be cited; if you borrow the words of others, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited. If you have any doubts as to whether or not something needs to be cited, play it safe and cite it—or ask me about it. Any standard citation format (Turabian, MLA, APA, etc.) is fine.
- Please avoid using google/internet sources. Some websites are acceptable but please check with me before using a website as a cited source of information and note that material from the internet is still someone else’s work, and must be cited appropriately! If you are unsure of how to do this properly, consult the following website: <https://libguides.csuchico.edu/c.php?g=432300>
- If you are having health or work problems or personal crises which might tempt you to plagiarize, please talk to me. In some cases, I may be able to make accommodations for your situation; in other cases, I may advise you to take the late penalty (see below). Students who plagiarize on more than one occasion will be expelled from the university. In the long run, it is far better to receive a lower grade (or even a failing grade) than to jeopardize your entire academic career.

- **Academic Honesty:**

The university is a community that builds on shared knowledge and the assumption that appropriate credit should be given to people for the work they do. This includes acknowledging when you are borrowing the words and ideas of others through appropriate citations. The Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities’ policy is that if there is evidence that you have been involved in any form of academic dishonesty, you will receive an “F” grade for the course, and a report will be provided to the Office of Student Conduct, Rights, and Responsibilities for further action. Be careful in all of work you do to properly cite your sources (including online materials). Please see the University’s Academic Integrity Policy at <https://www.csuchico.edu/pres/em/2018/18-011.shtml>. Ignorance of proper citation methods is not a legitimate excuse for violation of these policies.

- **Students with certified disabilities**

- Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. Please note that you may be required to show documentation of your disability.
- If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC, formerly called Disability Support Services) for coordination of your academic accommodations. The ARC is located in Student Services Center 170; their phone number is 530-898-5959 and their website is <http://www.csuchico.edu/arc>
- This class meets the Diversity Studies Pathway Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also meets the Global Development Studies Area E “Learning for Life” requirement. It also fulfills the Global Cultures requirement. There will be some short-written responses that I will feedback on as appropriate. Other GE SLOs this class addresses are discussed below.

- **General Education Information**

- This is an approved GE course, part of both the Diversity Studies Pathway and the Global Development Studies Pathway.
- 1. Global Engagement: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic tenets of several major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others—as well as exploring similarities and differences in their perspectives on death, the afterlife, the meaning of life.
- 2. Diversity: Students will analyze diversity within and among religious traditions, examining, for example, “official” v. “popular” attitudes toward the memorialization of death in Islam, Mexican Catholicism, and others; ethical debates about euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide within Hinduism, Chinese religions, and Christianity; and different perspectives on the problem of evil in Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Chinese religions.
- 3. Written communication: Students will improve their writing skills by writing weekly responses discussing different religious perspectives on death, the afterlife, and issues relating to medical ethics. As this is a writing intensive course, students will receive feedback as appropriate both to improve their writing and to improve their knowledge of class concepts. The weekly assignments will build toward larger assignments; for example, the papers and quizzes will ask students to integrate material from the homework assignments into longer synthetic essays. Furthermore, the themes raised in the self-reflection paper at the beginning of the class will be revisited in the final paper in a more elaborate and informed way.

- **Tribal Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge and are mindful that Chico State stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

As educators on this campus it is important that we do not use this statement as lip-service, and actually seek to incorporate information and histories into our courses that lift up the long-standing and continued importance of the Mechoopda people and their land (see module 6).