

RELS 264W-1: Death, Dying and the Afterlife

Spring 2019

Instructor: Sarah Gagnebin

Classroom: Butte 321 Class Times: MWF 1-1:50

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Office Hours: M/W 11-1 pm and by appointment



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.

Required Texts

Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*

Shawn Haley and Curt Fukuda, *The Day of the Dead*

Harold Kushner, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*

Caitlin Doughty, *From Here to Eternity*

Essays posted on Blackboard

Also, Internet access is required for this class, as most homework assignments will be turned in online.

Assignments and Grading (1000 point scale) Assignments and Grading (1000 point scale)

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|---------------------------------|--|
| 1) 3 Quizzes | 250 points (80/85/85 points each) |
| 2) 2 Short Papers | 200 points (100 points each) |
| 4) HW journal assignments | 100 points (10 points each) |
| 5) Final paper | 300 points |
| - Shared/edited with peers (50) | |
| -shared/edited with prof. (50) | |
| -Final paper (200) | |
| 6) Participation | 150 points (3 points a day plus 12 points, you're welcome) |

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.

I will post grades for each homework assignment throughout the semester.

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

I will take attendance, and I will monitor student participation. If you have an illness or another problem which will affect your ability to attend class regularly, you must let me know as soon as possible. If you miss several classes without a valid excuse, it will hurt your participation grade. If you speak in class, do worksheets, comment on HW posts, or visit my office, it will help your participation grade.

The nature of this course lends itself to insightful discussions; come prepared with questions, and focus points from the reading to both contribute to, and gain from class time. This class will adhere to a policy of respect, listen attentively to others in the class and allow room for all opinions. There is a no cell phone and no computer policy in class. I encourage handwriting class notes; if you have a valid reason for needing to type notes in class come see me.

If you regularly come in late or leave early, this will also negatively impact your participation grade. It is your responsibility to make sure I know you were in class if you arrive after attendance has been taken.

Homework: 100 points (10 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 10 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.
- Students are required to keep a copy of all written assignments submitted to me, and to resubmit written work if I request them to.
- Most HW assignments will be submitted through Blackboard Learn using the Discussion tool. Please don't submit your homework in the comment field!
- All assignments other than homework assignments and the self-reflection paper should be accompanied by a bibliography or works cited page, 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.
- 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:
http://www.csuchico.edu/enql/Links/style_guide.html
- 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.

- 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 Friday 12/14/18. No late work will be accepted after this time.

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.

Course Calendar and Assigned Readings

Assigned readings are indicated by the author's last name or by "Blackboard," which indicates an essay posted on Blackboard.

UNIT ONE

NO CLASS

Date: Monday 1/21		Activity:
NO CLASS		

Introduction

Date: Wednesday 1/23	Readings: -Read Class Syllabus	Activity: Class role, assignment calendar, getting to know each other

Orientation and Self-reflection

Date: Friday 1/25	Readings: - Lundquist, "Personal Reflections on Death, Grief and Cultural Diversity" (Blackboard).	Activity: -Syllabus Quiz: Just for fun, no points just candy -Morbid Curiosity Game -Review for reflection paper
NO Online HW question due this week		

Orientation and Self-reflection

Date: Monday 1/28	Readings: No readings	Activity: - Rough draft of Self-reflection paper due for peer edits
Self-reflection paper due in class for peer edits By Friday, Watch Groundhog Day at home. On Backboard: In Supporting Materials, choose Movies		

Defining Deathways

Date: Wednesday 1/30	Readings: -Doughty <i>From Here to Eternity</i> pgs. 1-15	Activity: -Lecture: Deathways

Discussion Day

Date: Friday 2/1	-No Readings	Activity: -Lecture: Nothing is normal -Class Discussion -Practice HW format
Due: (1) Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight (2) Groundhog Film Sheet Due in Class (3) Self-Reflection Paper Due in Class		

UNIT TWO

Hinduism Day 1

Date: Monday 2/4	Readings: -Easwaran, "A Dialogue with Death" (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: The story of Naciketas

Hinduism Day 2

Date: Wednesday 2/6	Readings: -Murata, "Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America." (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Hindu death Rituals

Discussion Day

Date: Friday 2/8	Readings: -Doughty <i>From here to Eternity</i> pgs. 16-41	Activity: Cremation vs. sacrifice to fire gods
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Buddhism Day 1

Date: Monday 2/11	Readings: - Wilson, "The Great Matter of Life and Death: (Blackboard) - World Religions: Eastern Traditions Ed. Oxtoby Pg. 237-238 (Blackboard)	Activity: - Lecture: The 4 Sights (of suffering and death)
This week, Watch Jacobs Ladder OR Read Excerpt from Tibetan Book of the Dead both available in Supporting Materials on Blackboard		

Buddhism day 2

Date: Wednesday 2/13	Readings: -Rinpoche, chapters 1-2 -Optional: pages from a Graphic Novel Sandman by Neil Gaiman	Activity: -Buddhist Cycles Game -Lecture: Karma and Reincarnation

Discussion Day

Date: Friday 2/15	Readings: -Rinpoche, chapters 3 and 6	Activity: --Lecture: Letting go -Class Discussion
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight AND Jacob's Ladder/Book of the dead work sheet due in class		

Chinese Traditions

Date: Monday 2/18	Readings: -Shuang, Li “The Funeral and Chinese Culture.” (Blackboard) - Ludwig, “The Confucian story” and “Rituals in the life cycle in China” (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Superstitions and taboos

Japanese Traditions

Date: Wednesday 2/20	Readings: -Doughty pgs. 152-188	Activity: -Group work: Packing for the afterlife -Quiz Reminder

Quiz Day

Date: Friday 2/22	Readings: -No readings	Activity: - In class Quiz (No makeup quizzes)
QUIZ DAY No Online HW question this week		

UNIT THREE

Indigenous/Native American

Date: Monday 2/25	Readings: --Shorty and Wiethous, “Dine (Navaho) Narratives of Death and Bereavement.” (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Death taboos to keep living

Ancient and Modern Paganisms

Date: Wednesday 2/27	-No Readings -Ceisiwr Serith, "The Pagan Family" Ch. 11 <i>Death</i> . (Blackboard)	Activity: -Pagan choose your own adventure - Lecture: Ancient Pagans and Modern Pagans
Pay close attention to the descriptions on the first 4 pages but you can skim the rituals on the last 4 pages		

Local Indigenous Deathways

Date: Friday 3/1	Readings: No Readings *Meet at the cemetery 808 W. Sacramento (down the street from the high school)	Activity: - Do not meet in class. Mechoopda Cemetery Field Trip 1pm
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Judaism Day 1

Date: Monday 3/4	Readings: -Samuel Heilman, "Shiva: Seven Days of mourning" (Blackboard) -Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People Ch. 1-2	Activity: - Group work: Shiva and the best ways to cope with grief

Judaism Day 2

Date: Wednesday 3/6	Readings: Kushner, chapters 3-6	Activity: - Lecture: Does God cause our suffering?

Judaism Day 3

Date: Friday 3/8	Readings: - Kushner, chapters 7-8 -Book of Job (you can read it online at www.biblegateway.com)	Activity: -Class Discussion: What's the Deathways lesson in Job?
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Catholic and Orthodox

Date: Monday 3/11	Readings: - Boisclair, "The Rituals for Dying and Death among Catholics and Orthodox Christians." (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Differences in Deathways

African American Christian spirituality

Date: Wednesday 3/13	Readings: -Armstrong, "African and African-American Traditions in America."	Activity: -Old school Hip Hop mashup - Lecture: A unique form of Christianity

Discussion Day

Date: Friday 3/15	Readings on various other Christian traditions. (Blackboard)	Activity: - Christianity Bingo
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Spring Break 3/18-3/22

Islam

Date: Monday 3/25	Readings: - Webb, "When Death Occurs: Islamic Rituals and Practices in the United States." (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Gentle passages and Epic Judgements

Islam And Beyond

Date: Wednesday 3/27	Readings: -Doughty pgs. 42-76	Activity: -Lecture Islam and cultural context

Quiz Day

Date: Friday 3/29	Readings: No Readings	Activity: -In class Quiz (No makeup quizzes)
QUIZ DAY No Online HW question this week		

UNIT FOUR

NO CLASS

Date: Monday 4/1	Readings:	Activity:
NO CLASS Watch Coco this week at home		

Material Culture

Date: Wednesday 4/3	-Readings: - Haley and Fukuda "The Day of the Dead" pgs. 1-35 (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Digging through peoples' stuff

"Reading" Material Culture

Date: Friday 4/5	Readings: Haley and Fukuda, "The Day of the Dead Markets" pgs. 36-57	Activity: -Lecture: Indigenous roots and Popular Piety
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Mexico and Mourning

Date: Monday 4/8	Readings: Doughty pgs. 77-104	-Lecture: What is "bad" death? -Paper 2 Reminder

Art and Death

Date: Wednesday 4/10	Readings: -Clayton , The Massacre at Paris and the Danse Macabre (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: "Reading" Art for Deathways
Bring to class an artistic depiction of death, dying, afterlife (Nothing graphic please.) Make sure whatever you bring has your name on it and can be taped on to the wall.		

Janet Turner Print Museum

Date: Friday 4/12	Readings: No readings	Activity: -Art Gallery Day: Meet in the Turner Print Gallery to look at Art
Comparison Paper Due AND Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Memorial

Date: Monday 4/15	Readings: --Sarah York, "Giving Sorrow Words" (Blackboard)	Activity: -Memorials and Justice: What does this say about our Deathways?
Bring into class some example of a way that a dead person has been memorialized: for example, a song lamenting the death; a poem; a printout or picture of a shrine or other kind of memorial (e.g. material left at the Vietnam Veterans memorials; the shrines that spring up around sites like victims of automobile accidents, or Ground Zero, etc.).		

Cemeteries

Date: Wednesday 4/17	Optional Readings: -Colleen McDannell, "The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill Cemetery." (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Cemeteries-Not Normal, Not New
Extra Credit Cemetery field trip: Chico Cemetery on Mangrove Ave. 2:30-3:30 pm		

Death Free

Date: Friday 4/19	Readings: -Visit Alan Wolfelt website at http://www.centerforloss.com/	Activity: --Class Debate: Are you a "Death Free" generation?
Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Funeral Industry

Date: Monday 4/22	Readings: -James Farrell, "The Modernization of the funeral service." (Blackboard)	Activity: -Class discussion: How much should this cost?

Modern American Deathways

Date: Wednesday 4/24	Readings: --“Five Wishes” Document. -Marilyn Webb, <i>A Good Death</i> , “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: medicalization of death
Extra Credit funeral home field trip: Newton Bracewell funeral home 2:30-3:30 pm		

Quiz Day

Date: Friday 4/26		Activity: -Quiz -Paper prep: writing your abstract
QUIZ DAY No Online HW Question due		

UNIT FIVE

Euthanasia and Religion

Date: Monday 4/29	Readings: –S. Cromwell Crawford, “The Ethics of Euthanasia.” (Blackboard)	Activity: -Lecture: Who has the right to decide?
Due in class: 2 copies of 2 pg. final paper topic for peer edits AND Watch <i>Guzaarish</i> at home this week		

Class Debate: Euthanasia and Medical Ethics

Date: Wednesday 5/1	Readings: - P.A.S. Fact Sheet (Blackboard)	Activity: -P.A.S. Debate -Paper prep: Library search

Video Games and Death

Date: Friday 5/3	Readings: -Dealing with Death in Video Games by Michael Thomsen WWW.IGN.COM	Activity: - Lecture: How does media effect our Deathways? -Paper prep: Citation and writing
Due in Class: Guzaarish Film Sheet AND Online HW Question due on Blackboard by midnight		

Functionally Morbid

Date: Monday 5/6	Readings: Doughty pgs. 105-136	Activity: -Lecture: Future of Death
4 pg. rough draft of final due for prof. review		

Looking into the Future

Date: Wednesday 5/8	Readings: -Doughty pgs. Pgs. 212-228	Activity: - Group Discussion

Class Wake

Date: Friday 5/10	Readings: -No Readings	Activity: - Class wake! -music, snacks, and late work
No Online HW Due Enjoy!!		

Finals week 5/13/19-5/17/19: Final paper due 5/17/19 by 5pm

*All late work must be turned in by 5PM on Fri 5/3/19 *Final paper due by 5pm on Friday 5/17/19.
Email your final paper **as a Word Document** to sgagnebin@csuchico.edu