

SCAR 2M03 - DEATH & DYING: COMPARATIVE VIEWS

Fall 2022



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Office: UH 129
Office Hours: By Appointment via Teams, or In-Person
Lecture: Online (synchronous): Mon & Wed @ 1:30PM-2:20PM through Teams
Lecture audio + PPT slides uploaded to Avenue/Teams each week

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I recognize and acknowledge that McMaster University is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Why do we die? What happens after death? These questions are fundamental to the human experience, but the answers are always contingent on our cultural, political, and religious milieu. Each week we’ll explore a broad range of topics within the field of death and dying from a social scientific perspective using an interdisciplinary and comparative approach.

You’ll be introduced to a wide range of religious and cultural responses to death, dying, and bereavement from around the world through various practices, funerary rituals, conceptions of the afterlife and the ‘soul’, ancestor veneration, social justice, ecological grief, and globalization.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This is an introductory course on death and dying offered by the Department of Religious Studies. I do not assume you have any prior knowledge of the topics discussed, or any background in the social scientific study of religion.

- 1. Introductory Survey:** To provide you with an introductory survey of selected aspects of the cultural, historical, political, and religious considerations of death, dying and bereavement.
- 2. Connections and Curiosity:** To develop your intellectual and creative curiosity by recognizing how death, dying, and religion are connected to your daily life (including your education).
- 3. Critical Thinking:** To cultivate analytical, reflective, and critical thought regarding your own and others' attitudes toward death, dying, and bereavement, especially in relation to inequalities and social justice issues.
- 4. Empathy:** To resist the urge to keep death at a safe distance from our Being by focusing on human stories and the varied meanings behind death, dying, and bereavement.

COURSE EVALUATION

You are responsible for completing all the assigned weekly readings, attending lectures, and attending tutorials. Movies are watched on your own time. These will prepare you for the course assignments.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Journal articles can be found on the [McMaster Library](#) website. Book chapters are on Avenue as .pdf files. Videos are all publicly available.

LECTURE INFORMATION

Lectures: This course is offered synchronously using Microsoft Teams. The lectures are also recorded and can be watched at any time through Avenue or Teams. Students will be automatically enrolled in Teams.

Meetings & Tutorials: Teams allows us to communicate, run tutorials, and stay in touch in one location. All meetings with myself and TAs are scheduled through Microsoft Teams (accessible through Avenue as well).

2M03 DEATH CAFÉ

At the end of the course, we will hold a virtual 'Death Cafe.' This is an opportunity for us to informally chat about our experiences with death, and to face mortality together. This is an **optional, extracurricular event** held through Microsoft Teams. It will not be recorded!

COURSE EVALUATION – DETAILS

Introduction (5%):

- Introduce yourself and answer the following questions: Who are you? Why are you taking this course? What are your learning objectives this semester and how will you reach them? What is one academic skill that you most want to improve (ex: writing, reading comprehension)?

Due Date: September 19th @ 11:59pm

Self-Assessment Participation (10%):

- As part of an effort to make grading fairer, participation is not based on tutorial attendance alone. Participation can take several forms, including attending tutorials, speaking in class/tutorials, and optional discussion posts. Participation grades are based on a self-assessment, and input from TAs.

Due Date: December 8th @11:59PM.

Concept Mapping (20%):

- Submit four concept maps, diagrams, or any other type of map during the semester. This assignment will improve your reading comprehension skills by creating a mental overview of the readings.

Due dates: Sept 27th, Oct 6th, Oct 25th, Nov 22nd

Build-an-Altar (25%):

- Create a presentation detailing the significance of Dias de los Muertos celebrations, and the importance of continued bonds with the dead.

Then build your own altar with objects that are meaningful to you, with brief explanations for each object.

Due Date: November 14th, 2021

Final Assignment – The Cultural ‘Explainer’ (40%):

- We can only scratch the surface of the traditions, cultures, practices, and rituals examined in this course. For the final assignment, I want you to move beyond the surface by investigating and sharing the historical, cultural, political, and religious significance of your death, dying, and bereavement practices.

Create a death and dying ‘explainer’ related to the cultural/religious background most familiar to you. You are welcome to interview family members, death care professionals, or religious authorities, and incorporate their answers into your project.

Submit the final as a text-based explainer, a video explainer, graphic novel, zine, or other creative medium.

WHAT IS AN EXPLAINER?

Explainers are one of the most prominent forms of journalism and popular writing today. Explainers are short, information packed articles or videos meant to convey complex ideas in an approachable way. Unlike a traditional essay, explainers answer set questions and offer useful answers in a more conversational and direct tone.

Proposal + Bibliography (10%): November 1st @ 11:59PM

Final Due Date (30%): December 7th @ 11:59PM

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week One: INTRODUCTION

Sept 7th

- Overview of the course.
 - Overview of the assignments and learning objectives.
 - Microsoft Teams and Avenue run-through.
 - Learning strategy tips and tricks.
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Week Two: UNDERSTANDING DEATH

- **Sept 12th**: Sumegi, Angela. 2014. "Understanding Death" In *Understanding Death: An Introduction to Ideas of Self and the Afterlife in World Religions*. 1-22.
 - **Sept 14th**: Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. 1-21.
-

Week Three: RITUAL & RITES OF PASSAGE

- **Sept 19th**: van Gennep, Arnold. 2017. "The Rites of Passage." In *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. 34-43.
 - **Sept 21st**: Tsuji, Yohko. 2011. "Rites of Passage to Death and Afterlife in Japan." *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 35: 28-33.
 - Suzuki, Taku. 2022. "...Okinawan Mourning Rituals in the Northern Mariana Islands." *OMEGA* 84: 1175-92.
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Week Four: BEREAVEMENT AND MOURNING

- **Sept 26th**: Rosenblatt, Paul C. 1993. "Cross-Cultural Variation in the Experience, Expression, and Understanding of Grief" In *Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death, and Grief: Diversity in Universality*. 13-19.

- Wade, Breeshia. 2021. "Grief as Spiritual Death." In *Grieving While Black*. 19-34.
 - **Sept 28th**: Watch: A Family's Secret Grief and Trauma Shared for the First Time - www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1kGwNZrkNY
 - Ochs, Vanessa. 2018. "Jewish Funeral and Mourning Practices" In, *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, 55-65
-

Week Five: LIFE AFTER DEATH

- **Oct 3rd**: Setta, Susan M. 2013. "Determining Death: Perspectives from World Religions." In, *Death, Dying, Culture: An Interdisciplinary Interrogation*. 117-124.
 - **Oct 5th**: Gielen, Joris and Komal Kashyap. 2019. "Belief in Karma and Moksa at the End of Life in India" In *Death Across Cultures*. 22-38.
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Week six: WINTER BREAK

- Self-Care / Mental Health module available on Avenue! Includes resources, music playlists, meditation guides, hobby suggestions, and more.
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Week Seven: LIFE AFTER DEATH, CONTINUED

- **Oct 17th**: Alladin, Waseem. 2015. "The Islamic way of death and dying: Homeward bound." In, *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures*. 110-132.
 - **Oct 19th**: Ebrahim, Shanil, Sheena Bance, and Kerry W. Bowman. 2011. "Sikh Perspectives towards Death and End-Of-Life Care." *Journal of Palliative Care* 27: 170-74.
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Week Eight: LIVING WITH THE ANCESTORS

- **Oct 24th: Watch:** "The Buddha Mummies of North Japan"
mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/buddha-mummies-north-japan
 - Stefen, Edith Marie. 2021. "Interacting with the Afterlife: Continuing bonds with deceased loved ones" In, *Death, Immortality and Eternal Life*. 11-28.
 - **Oct 26th:** Adams, Kathleen M. 2018. "Leisure in the "Land of the Walking Dead." In, *Western Mortuary Tourism, the Internet, and Zombie Pop Culture in Toraja, Indonesia*. 97-121.
-

Week Nine: LIVING WITH THE ANCESTORS, CONTINUED

- **Oct 31st (PRE-RECORDED LECTURE):** Brandes, Stanley H. 2006. "The Day of the Dead and Halloween" In, *Skulls to the Living, Bread to the Dead*, 117-129.
 - **Nov 2nd:** De Orellana, Margarita, Michelle Suderman, Dominique Dufétel, et al., 2011. "Day of the Dead Ritual Serenity." *Artes De México*, 62: 65-74 ONLY.
 - Nalewicki, Jennifer. 2019. "The Meaning Behind Six Objects on Día de los Muertos Altars" <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/meaning-behind-six-objects-dia-de-los-muertos-altars-180973442/>
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Week Ten: ECOLOGICAL GRIEF AND MOURNING

- **Nov 7th:** "Ecological Grief: Mourning the Loss of our Planet"
www.talkdeath.com/ecological-grief-mourning-loss-our-planet/
 - Menning, Nancy. 2017. "Environmental Mourning and the Religious Imagination." In *Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. 39-59.
 - **Nov 9th:** Rodríguez Aguilera, Meztli Yoalli. 2022. "Grieving geographies, mourning waters: Life, death, and environmental gendered racialized struggles in Mexico." *Feminist Anthropology* 3: 28-43
-

Week Eleven: THE POLITICS OF DEATH

- **Nov 14th: Watch:** Unidentified Corpses on the Streets of Karachi, Pakistan - www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITBby2dU3Uw
 - O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2012. "There Is No More Room: Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death." *Ethnography* 13: 510-30.
 - **Nov 16th:** Çalışkan, Dilara. 2019. "'Nobody Is Going to Let You Attend Your Own Funeral': A Funeral for a Trans Woman and Naming the Unnamed." In *Women Mobilizing Memory*. 206-18.
-

Week Twelve: DEATH & GLOBALIZATION IN CHINA

- **Nov 21st: NO CLASS**
 - **Watch:** "Despised for Working in the Death Trade: The Last Rites." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0qdBdHpGtU>
 - **Nov 23rd:** Wu, Keping. 2018. "Death and Life in a Pluralistic Society" In *The Routledge Handbook of Death and the Afterlife*. 315-327.
-

Week Thirteen: DEATH & GLOBALIZATION IN AFRICA

- **Nov 28th:** Saraiva Clara. 2019. "Ancestors and Death: From West Africa to Southwest Europe" In *Death Across Cultures*. 151-165.
 - **Nov 30th:** Van Der Geest, Sjaak. 2006. "Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana." *Journal of the Int. African Institute* 76: 485-501.
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Week Fourteen: DEATH CAFÉ EVENT

- **Dec 5th:** Death Café extracurricular event!

STUDENT RESOURCES

CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Food Collective Centre: www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/14-mac-bread-bin
- Indigenous Student Services: indigenous.mcmaster.ca/
- Sexual Violence Response Coordinator: svpro.mcmaster.ca/contact/
- Equity and Inclusion: equity.mcmaster.ca/
- Online Learning Support: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/online-learning/
- Writing Support: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/writing-support/
- Student Success Centre: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/
- Ontario Crisis Resources and Helplines: www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources
- Canada Suicide Prevention Service: www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/

HOW TO CITE

- MLA: owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html
- Chicago: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html
- APA: guides.libraries.psu.edu/apaquickguide/intext

HOW TO AVOID UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

- www.lakeforest.edu/academics/resources/writingcenter/plagiarism.php

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES

- How to Write an Essay: advice.writing.utoronto.ca/general/general-advice/
- Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/reading-and-writing-for-academic-purposes-2021/
- 13 Rules for Using Commas: www.businessinsider.com/a-guide-to-proper-comma-use-2013-9
- How to use the Semi-Colon: theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon

COURSE POLICIES

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue in .docx or .pdf format (NO .pages).

GRADES

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK GRADE

90-100 A+

85-90 A

80-84 A-

77-79 B+

73-76 B

70-72 B-

67-69 C+

63-66 C

60-62 C-

57-59 D+

53-56 D

50-52 D-

0-49 F

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Please contact your TA or the professor if you plan on handing in an assignment late. Late assignments may be penalized at the discretion of the TA and/or professor.

AVENUE TO LEARN

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.