

SCAR 2N03 – DEATH AND DYING: WESTERN PERSPECTIVES Winter 2022

Instructor: Jeremy Cohen

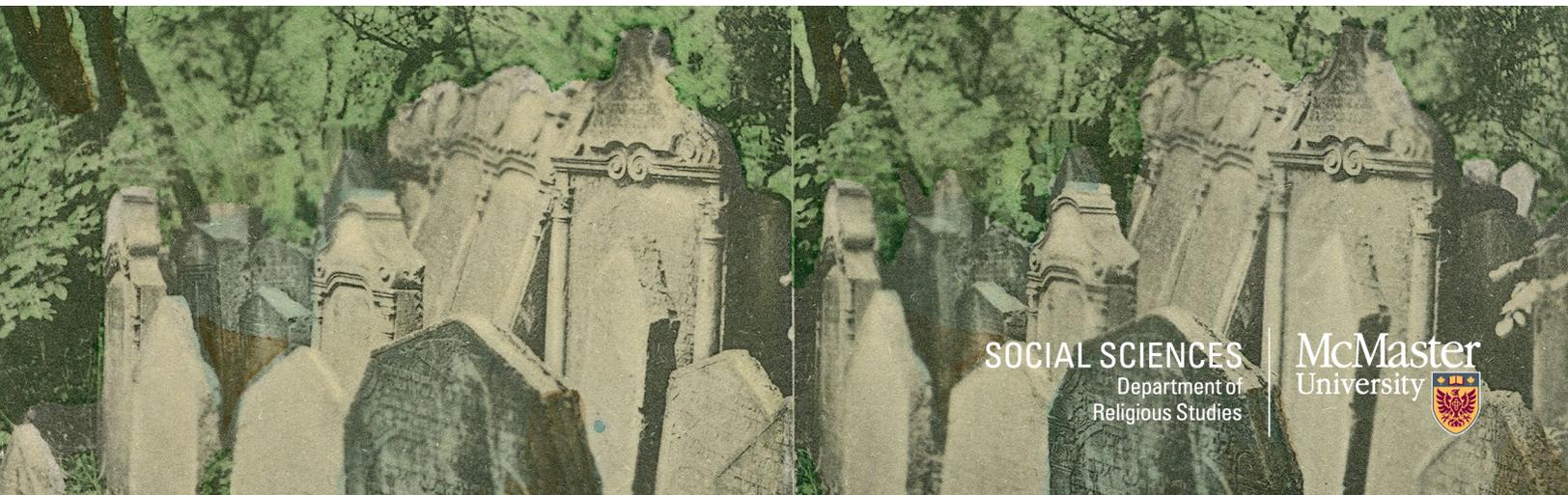
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Office: TBD

Office Hours: By Appointment via Teams, Zoom or In Person

Lecture: CNH B107: Tuesdays & Fridays @ 9:30AM-10:20AM

Lecture audio released as podcast twice a week + ppt slides



SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department of
Religious Studies

McMaster
University 

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Course Overview

■ 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 Information

We must all face the loss of the loved ones in our lives. How death occurs, and responses to that loss, are always contingent on social, cultural and religious dynamics.

Throughout the semester, we will explore a broad range of topics within the field of death and dying using an interdisciplinary approach. We will explore the historical formations of cemeteries, the rise of the funeral profession, and cross-cultural responses to death within North America.

We will also reflect on Indigenous, Black North American, and migrant experiences, and consider how systematic inequalities affect our rich mosaic of death, dying and bereavement. We will consider important ethical questions such as the right to die, brain death, and the ethics of displaying the dead in museum collections.

Throughout the course, you will be tasked with reflecting on your own experiences and assumptions through personal reflection and creative assignments.



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. All are welcome!



■ Introductory Survey

To provide you with an introductory survey of selected aspects of the cultural, historical, political, and religious considerations around death, dying, and bereavement.



■ Interdisciplinarity

By the end of the course, you will be familiar with interdisciplinary perspectives and issues within the field of death studies.



■ 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.



■ Empathy

To resist the urge to keep death at a safe distance from our Being by focusing on our shared collective humanity, and learning to articulate the power of empathy.

Course Evaluation

You are responsible for completing all the assigned weekly readings, attending lectures, and attending tutorials. These will prepare you for the course assignments.

PowerPoint slides will be made available each week.

■ Course Delivery

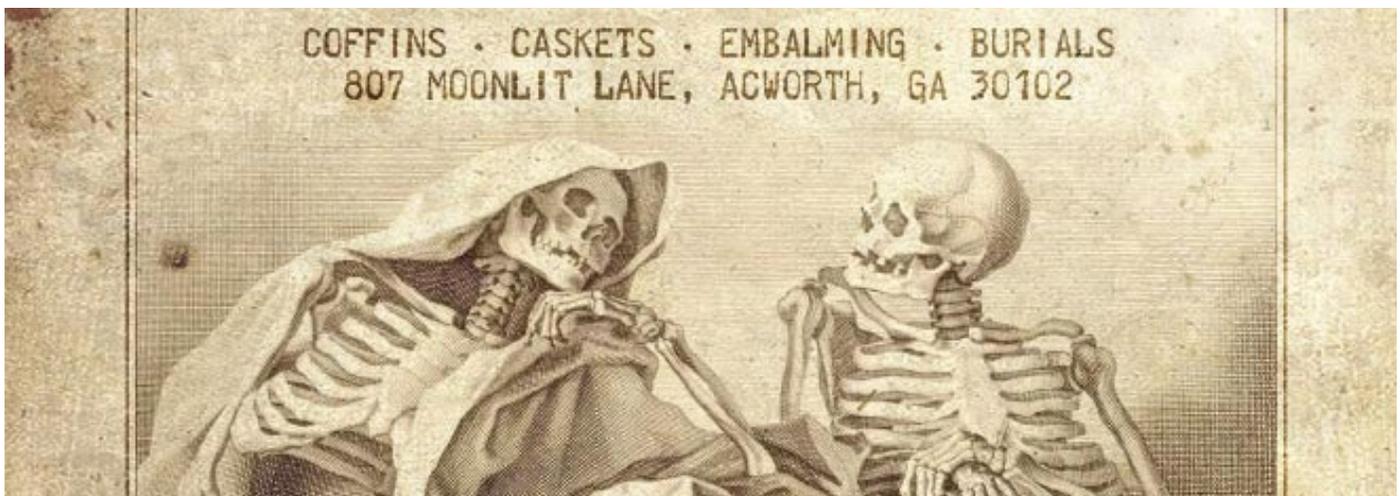
- In Person Lectures
- Lecture released as podcast each week
- The course uses Avenue2Learn
- Tutorial details TBD

■ Required Texts

- Journal Articles via McMaster Library
- Chapters are on Teams
- Videos are all publically available



One might consider it somewhat odd that the statement that death is a taboo topic in America should continue to be asserted in the face of nearly a decade of nonstop talking on the subject - Lynn Lofland



2N03 DEATH CAFE



■ Death Cafe

This course deals with difficult subjects. While I try and approach the material lightly (see: my poor photoshop skills above), I recognize that many of you may be coping with the loss of an important person in your life, or are having difficulty at the thought of your own mortality.

During the course, we will hold a virtual 'Death Cafe.' What is a Death Cafe?

- “[Death Cafe’s] objective is ‘to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives’. A Death Cafe is a group directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counselling session.” - deathcafe.com/what/

This will be 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! *Snacking highly encouraged!*

Course Assignments



■ Introduction (5%)

Introduce yourself to the class and answer the following questions: Who are you? Why are you taking this course? How comfortable do you feel talking about death? What are your learning objectives for this semester? What is one academic skill that you most want to improve (ex: writing, reading comprehension)?

Due Date: January 24th @ 11:59pm



■ 'Ungraded' Participation (10%)

Participation in this course can take a number of forms, including speaking in class/tutorials and thoughtful discussion posts on Avenue. Participation grades will be based on your learning objectives, a self-assessment and input from TAs. More information available on Avenue.



■ Quizzes (30%)

There will be a short online quiz at the end of each module. The quiz covers the concepts presented in the readings and lectures for that module (no need to memorize dates). The goal of each quiz is to strengthen your knowledge of the topics discussed, and there will be opportunities to reflect on your answers during and after each quiz.

Due dates: Feb 1st, March 1st, March 15th, April 12th.



■ Death Denial Reflection (20%)

You will write a short reflection based on our Confronting Death module. The goal is for you to critically reflect on course material, and analyze the development of your thinking. This reflection will also be an opportunity to work on our academic writing skills together.

Due date: March 4th @ 11:59PM

Format: Detailed instructions & rubric posted to Avenue.

Course Assignments



■ Scavenger Hunt (35%)

Cemeteries are more than grassy fields and tombstones. The design, location, and architectural elements of a cemetery reflects a society's cultural, political, religious, and ethical norms. For this scavenger hunt assignment, you can choose from one of the following two options:

- **Option 1: In-Person Fieldtrip:** Visit a local cemetery on your own time (a list of options in Southern Ontario will be provided). Find any 5 items from a list of monuments and symbols provided to you and either photograph it, draw it, or etch its architectural details.
- **Option 2: Virtual Fieldtrip:** Visit a cemetery anywhere in North America or Europe via findagrave.com and explore the grounds virtually. Find any 5 items from a list of monuments and symbols provided to you and take a screenshot or draw what you find.

You will also spend time contemplating death during your visit and will share your thoughts in the written portion of the assignment.

Written portion: Relying on course material, you will write about the historical significance of the type of cemetery you visited, and briefly describe each symbol or monument, with a focus on its historical, religious, and cultural significance. In the final portion of the written assignment, you will reflect on your thoughts and feelings during your contemplation.

This project can be submitted as a Word document with images attached, or you can create a visual presentation using PowerPoint, Canva, or Adobe Spark.

Due Date: April 12th @ 11:59PM

Format: Detailed instructions posted to Avenue.

Weekly Schedule

MODULE 1: FRAMINGS

■ Week One: Jan 11th & 14th Introduction

- **Jan 11th:** Overview of the course, assignments and learning objectives.
- **Jan 14th:** Hakola, Outi. 2015. "Introduction: Human and Social Scientific Approaches to Death and Mortality" *Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies* 1–9.

■ Week Two: January 18th – 21st The Meaning of Death

- **Jan 18th:** Walter, Tony. 2019. "The Pervasive Dead." *Mortality* 24: 389-404.
- Taylor, Steve. 2020. "Why contemplating death can help you live a happier life" theconversation.com/why-contemplating-death-can-help-you-live-a-happier-life-146504
- **Jan 21st:** Dastur, Françoise. 2015. "Mourning as the Origin of Humanity." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 48: 1-13.

■ Week Three: January 25th – 28th - Introductions due Death in the 'West'

- **Jan 25th:** Matthews, Gareth B. 2012. "Death in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle" In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*. Edited by Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman, and Jens Johansson. 186-200.
- **Jan 28th:** Aries, Philippe. 1974. "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies." *American Quarterly* 26: 536–60.

MODULE 2: CONFRONTING DEATH

■ Week Four: February 1st – 4th The ____ of Death

- **Feb 1st:** Becker, Ernest. 1973. "The Terror of Death" In *The Denial of Death*. 11-25. New York Free Press.
- **Feb 4th:** Walter, Tony. 1994. "The Death of Death" In *The Revival of Death*. 9-26. London: Routledge.

Weekly Schedule

■ Week Five: February 8th – 11th Do We Really Deny Death?

- **Feb 8th:** Tradii, Laura and Martin Robert. 2019. "Do we Deny Death? II. Critiques of the Death-Denial Thesis" *Mortality* 24: 377-388.
- **Feb 11th:** Joralemon, Donald. 2016. "Grief: Is It Complicated?" In *Mortal Dilemmas: The Troubled Landscape of Death in America*. 81-95. Routledge.

■ Week Six: February 15th – 18th The Happy Death Movement

- **Feb 15th:** What is the Death Positive Movement? www.orderofthegooddeath.com/resources/death-positive-movement.
- Leland, John. 2018. "The Positive Death Movement Comes to Life" www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/nyregion/the-positive-death-movement-comes-to-life.html
- **Feb 18th: Watch:** Doughty, Caitlin. 2019. "Why you should spend time with a dead body" www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGyXRG-ELLg
- Koksvik, Gitte H. 2020. "Neoliberalism, Individual Responsibilization and the Death Positivity Movement." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23: 951–67.

■ Week Seven - Winter Break!

MODULE 3: THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE CEMETERY

■ Week Eight: March 1st – 4th - Death Denial Reflection Due Family Picnics & Memento Mori: Garden & Lawn Cemeteries

- **Mar 1st:** French, Stanley. 1974. "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution: The Establishment of Mount Auburn and the "Rural Cemetery" Movement." *American Quarterly* 26: 37-59.
- Rainey, Reuben M. 2010. "Therapeutic Landscapes: America's Nineteenth-Century Rural Cemeteries." *View* 10: 18-21.
- **Mar 4th:** Oring, Elliott. 2000. "Icons of Immortality: Forest Lawn and the American Way of Death." In *Worldviews And The American West: The Life of the Place Itself*, Edited by Stewart Polly, et al. 54-64. Logan, Utah: University Press of Colorado.
- Sloane, David Charles. 2010. "Memory and Landscape: Nature and the History of the American Cemetery." *SiteLINES: A Journal of Place* 6: 3-6.

Weekly Schedule

■ Week Nine: March 8th – 11th

Cemetery Iconography: Winged Skulls & Virtual Candles

- **Mar 8th:** Hassen, Hal, and Dawn Cobb. 2017. "Grave Marker Iconography." In *Cemeteries of Illinois: A Field Guide to Markers, Monuments, and Motifs*. 123-39. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press.
- **Mar 11th:** Mytum, Harold. 1989. "Public Health and Private Sentiment: The Development of Cemetery Architecture and Funerary Monuments from the Eighteenth Century Onwards." *World Archaeology* 21: 283-97.

MODULE 4: NECROPOLITICS & CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

■ Week Ten: March 15th – 18th

The Privilege of a Good Death

- **Mar 15th:** Washington, Harriet A. 2006. "The Restless Dead: Anatomical Dissection and Display" In *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation On Black Americans From Colonial Times to the Present*. 115-143. New York: Doubleday.
- **Optional:** Meier, Allison. 2018. "Grave Robbing, Black Cemeteries, and the American Medical School" daily.jstor.org/grave-robbing-black-cemeteries-and-the-american-medical-school/
- **Mar 18th:** O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2012. "There Is No More Room: Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death." *Ethnography* 13: 510-30.
- Borrell, Brandan. 2013. "Ghosts of the Rio Grande Every year hundreds of immigrants die along the U.S.-Mexico border. Too many are never identified." prospect.org/civil-rights/ghosts-rio-grande/

■ Week Eleven: March 22nd – 25th

Indigeneity and Gender

- **Mar 22nd:** De Finney, Sandrina. 2016. "Under the Shadow of Empire: Indigenous Girls' Presencing as Decolonizing Force." In *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, edited by Mitchell Claudia and Rentschler Carrie. 19-34. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- **Mar 25th:** Razack, Sherene H. 2000. "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George." In *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*. 15: 91-130.

Warning: This reading contains graphic details of murder and assault.

Weekly Schedule

■ Week Twelve: March 29th – April 1st

The Right to Die

- **Mar 29th: Watch:** Richardson, Peter. 2011. "How to Die in Oregon" mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/how-die-oregon
- Lavi, Shai. 2008. "How Dying Became a 'Life Crisis'" in, *Daedalus* 137: 57-65.
- **Apr 1st:** Joralemon, Donald. 2018. "Brain Death and the Politics of Religion" In *The Routledge Handbook of Death and the Afterlife*. Edited by Candi K. Cann. 20-30. Abingdon: Routledge.
- English, Claire. 2016. "Physician Assisted Death: A Disability Centred Critique" www.talkdeath.com/physician-assisted-death-a-disability%c2%ad-centred-critique/

■ Week Thirteen: April 5th – 8th

Who Wants to Live Forever?

- **Apr 5th:** More, Max. 2013. "The Philosophy of Transhumanism" In *The Transhumanist Reader*. Edited by Natasha Vita-More and Max More. 3-17.
- Various. 2013. "The Transhumanist Declaration" In *The Transhumanist Reader*. Edited by Natasha Vita-More and Max More. 54-55.
- **Apr 8th:** Mercer, Calvin and Tracey J. Trothen. 2021. "Transhumanism, the Posthuman, and the Religions: Exploring Basic Concepts" In *Religion and the Technological Future*. 19-42.
- **Optional:** Cohen, Jeremy. 2020. "Frozen Bodies and Future Imaginaries: Assisted Dying, Cryonics, and a Good Death" *Religions* 11: 584

■ April 12th – Last Day of Class

No Lecture. Final Review / Q&A

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

Students should contact their TA or professor if they plan on handing in an assignment late.

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 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.

University Policies

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.

University Policies

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.