

## **Cross-cultural Studies in Religion: Death (REL-R 662 & 762)**

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Professor: Michael Ing  
Office: Sycamore Hall 203  
Office hours: T 4-5:30pm

Class time: M 3:35-5:35pm  
Class location: SY 224  
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### **Description:**

This course will explore various disciplinary approaches to thinking about death (one's own death and the death of other people). We will read and discuss scholarship about Jonestown (by David Chidester), the death of Captain Cook (by Gannath Obeyesekere), Japanese shrines to unborn children (by Bardwell Smith), 19th century Mormon attitudes toward death (by Samuel Brown), death understood as an analytic philosopher (by Shelly Kagan), life and death in post-apocalyptic America (by Cormac McCarthy), and other topics. This will allow us to think through the study of death by scholars of literature, anthropology, history, philosophy, and religious studies.

A major theme of this course is the notion of enhancing life. The prospect of death relates to enhancing life in that death compels reflection on life. Specifically, it often gives rise to reflection on the value of life, what it means to have a life worth living, and what conditions are necessary for creating a full life.

Graduate students from all departments are welcome.

### **Objectives:**

1. Acquaint students with major topics in death studies
2. Enable students to analyze various approaches to the study of death
3. Provide students with the knowledge and skills to write intelligently about the study of death.

### **Requirements:**

1. Attendance and participation. Since this class is discussion based you are expected to not only attend every class, but to actively participate in the class by demonstrating that you have done the reading. Failure to bring *printed* versions of the readings to class will result in a less than positive participation grade. (250 points; about 25% of the total grade) **Attendance policy:** In general, only excused, documented absences are acceptable. Unexcused absences will lower your participation grade. If you have 3 or more unexcused absences, you will fail this class.
2. Notes on the readings. You are responsible for proving that you have done the reading ahead of time and have thought about it. A half an hour before each class meeting (3:05p.m.) you will turn in a (one-page) summary of the reading assigned for that day along with a question to foster discussion (via Oncourse). These

summaries should identify the primary argument made by each reading; then explain in several sentences how the author substantiates his or her argument. Finally, in a couple of sentences, you should reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of the argument. (13 summaries at 20 points each for a total of 260 points or about 25% of the total grade)

3. Outline and Final paper. This 3,750-5,000 word paper will be written on a topic of your choice. Its purpose is to provide you with the opportunity to integrate some of the things learned throughout the semester with your other research interests. An outline for this paper is due Friday, 11/20 by 10p.m. (submitted via Oncourse). The outline should state a clear thesis and explain how you will argue the thesis. It need not be longer than one page. The paper must be submitted on Oncourse before 5p.m. Wednesday, 12/16. (100 points for the outline and 400 points for the paper; about 50% of the total grade)

**Grading Scale:**

97-100%	A+	73-76	C
93-96	A	70-72	C-
90-92	A-	67-69	D+
87-89	B+	63-66	D
83-86	B	60-62	D-
80-82	B-	59 and below	F
77-79	C+		

**Books to Purchase:**

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor, 1990. ISBN# 978-0385073059

Brown, Samuel. *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN# 978-0199793570

Chidester, David. *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2003. ISBN# 978-0-253-21632-8

Davies, Douglas. *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. New York: Continuum, 2002. ISBN# 978-0826454843

Johnson, Greg. *Sacred Claims: Repatriation and Living Tradition*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007. ISBN# 978-0-8139-2662-9

Laderman, Gary. *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. ISBN# 978-0300078688

Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 2009. ISBN# 978-0393334876

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Marvin, Carolyn and David W. Ingle. *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN# 978-0521626095

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Vintage International, 2006. ISBN# 978-0307-38789-9

Obeyesekere, Gananath. *Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. ISBN# 978-0-691-05752-4

Smith, Bardwell. L. *Narratives of Sorrow and Dignity: Japanese Women, Pregnancy Loss, and Modern Rituals of Grieving*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN# 978-0199942152

Additional required readings will be accessible via Oncourse (under “Resources”). You must print them out.

**Tentative Schedule:**

**Week 1: Introduction**

Monday 8/24—No reading assigned.

**Week 2: Death and the Sacred Canopy**

Monday 8/31

- Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, v-101.

**Week 3: Labor Day**

Monday 9/7—NO CLASS

**Week 4: Death Studies**

Monday 9/14

- Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, 1-80 and 155-239.

**Week 5: Death and Myth**

Monday 9/21

- Obeyesekere, *Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*.

**Week 6: The Politics of the Dead**

Monday 9/28

- Johnson, *Sacred Claims: Repatriation and Living Tradition*.

**Week 7: Offending Deaths**

Monday 10/5

- Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*.

**Week 8: Life, Death, and Rational Suicide**

Monday 10/12

- Kagan, Shelly. *Death*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, 247-263 and 282-361. [Oncourse]

Week 9: **Disenfranchised Grief**

Monday 10/19

- Smith, *Narratives of Sorrow and Dignity: Japanese Women, Pregnancy Loss, and Modern Rituals of Grieving*.

Week 10: **The Tame Death**

Monday 10/26

- Gorer, Geoffrey. *Death, Grief, and Mourning*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967, 192-199. [Oncourse]
- Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Toward Death*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, 1-52. [Oncourse]

Week 11: **The Formation of American Death Culture**

Monday 11/2

- Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*

Week 12: **Death in Early Mormonism**

Monday 11/9

- Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*.

Week 13: **Death and American Nationalism**

Monday 11/16

- Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*.

OUTLINE DUE FRIDAY, 11/20 BY 10p.m. via Oncourse

Week 14 **Thanksgiving Break**

Monday 11/23—NO CLASS

Week 15: **The Death-care Industry**

Monday 11/30

- Lynch, *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*.

Week 16: **Death in Apocalyptic Fiction**

Monday 12/7

- McCarthy, *The Road*.

FINAL PAPERS DUE 12/16, 5p.m. via Oncourse