

# SCAR 2M03 – DEATH AND DYING: COMPARATIVE VIEWS Fall 2021

**Instructor:** Jeremy Cohen

**Email:** [cohenj10@mcmaster.ca](mailto:cohenj10@mcmaster.ca)

**Office Hours:** By Appointment via Teams

**Lecture:** Asynchronous + Optional live lecture via Teams

**Course:** Course materials and assignments via Avenue



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# Course Overview

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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 Information

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

Throughout the semester, we will explore a broad range of topics within the field of death and dying from a social scientific perspective, using an interdisciplinary and comparative approach.

We will examine various practices and rituals, conceptions of the afterlife, relationships between the living and the dead, cemetery politics, gender and death, social justice issues, and how globalization has significantly altered religious rituals.

This is an interactive course that includes creative assignment options, and opportunities for us to meaningfully connect through extracurricular events.



# Course Objectives

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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

To familiarize you 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

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You are responsible for completing all the assigned weekly readings and watching the posted video lectures and films. These prepare you for the course assignments.

PowerPoint slides will be available with the video lectures each week.

## ■ Course Delivery

- Asynchronous + Optional live lecture
- Lectures recorded using Microsoft Teams
- Assignments and material on Avenue
- **Tutorials:** Optional monthly Q&A, and TA writing workshop

## ■ Required Texts

- Journal Articles via McMaster Library
- Book chapters are on Avenue
- Videos are all publically available



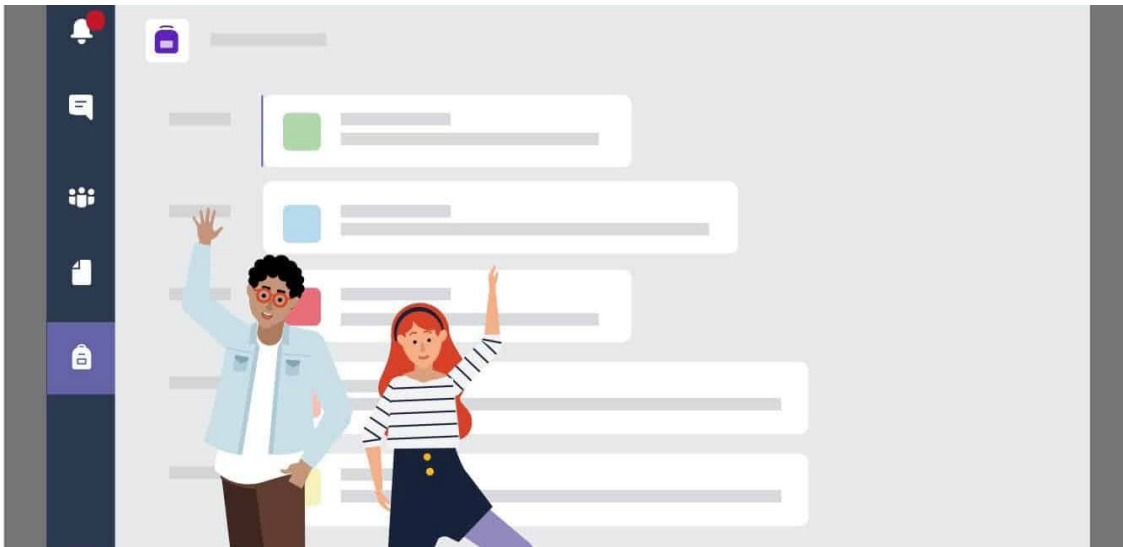
*Don't behave as if you are destined to live forever. What's fated hangs over you. As long you live and while you can, become good now.*

—Marcus Aurelius



# Lecture Information

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## ■ Asynchronous Through Teams

This course is offered asynchronously. The lectures are recorded using Microsoft Teams, and can be watched at any time through Avenue or Teams.

Students will be automatically enrolled in Teams.

- **Quick start PDF:** [Click Here](#)

## ■ Meetings & Workshops

Teams allows us to communicate, run workshops (tutorials), view and participate in lectures, and stay in touch in one location.

All meetings with myself and TAs are scheduled through Microsoft Teams (accessible through Avenue).

## ■ Optional Live Lectures

The lectures are recorded live most weeks through Teams, and you are encouraged to join. The live lectures are opportunities to meet other students, ask me questions, and engage with the course material. The live lecture is completely optional.

Once recorded, the lectures are accessible through the Teams app, and on Avenue.

The schedule for live lectures is available on the Teams and Avenue calendars.

# 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:** September 21st, 2021



## ■ In the News (35%)

At the end of each module (4 modules) find an article from a news website, blog, or op-ed, that relates to the module's theme, and/or a reading from within the module.

Write 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the article in your own words, followed by 1-2 paragraphs explaining how the article connects to the theme and/or reading.

You will also post your link to our group notebook on Avenue in order to create a repository of knowledge for everyone to access.

**Due Dates:** September 28th, October 26th, November 23rd, December 7th

**Format and Rubric:** Posted to Avenue

# Course Assignments

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## ■ Build-an-Altar (25%)

During the annual Dias de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations, families build Ofrendas (altars) to welcome back their departed loved ones. The Ofrendas are displayed in homes, or at the graveside, and are made up of various objects that represent the deceased.

Create a PowerPoint presentation (template option provided) detailing the cultural and religious significance of Dias de los Muertos celebrations, and the importance of continued bonds with the dead within Latin culture.

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

**Due Date:** November 2nd, 2021

**Format, Template and Rubric:** Posted to Avenue



## ■ The 'Explainer' Assignment (35%)

For the final assignment, research a ritual, practice, and/or concept related to death, dying and bereavement anywhere in the world and present its historical, cultural, and religious significance. In other words, discover something neat and interesting, and teach me about it!

You can submit this assignment as a PowerPoint presentation, a video explainer, as a traditional essay, or through another creative medium. Examples and template options will be provided for inspiration.

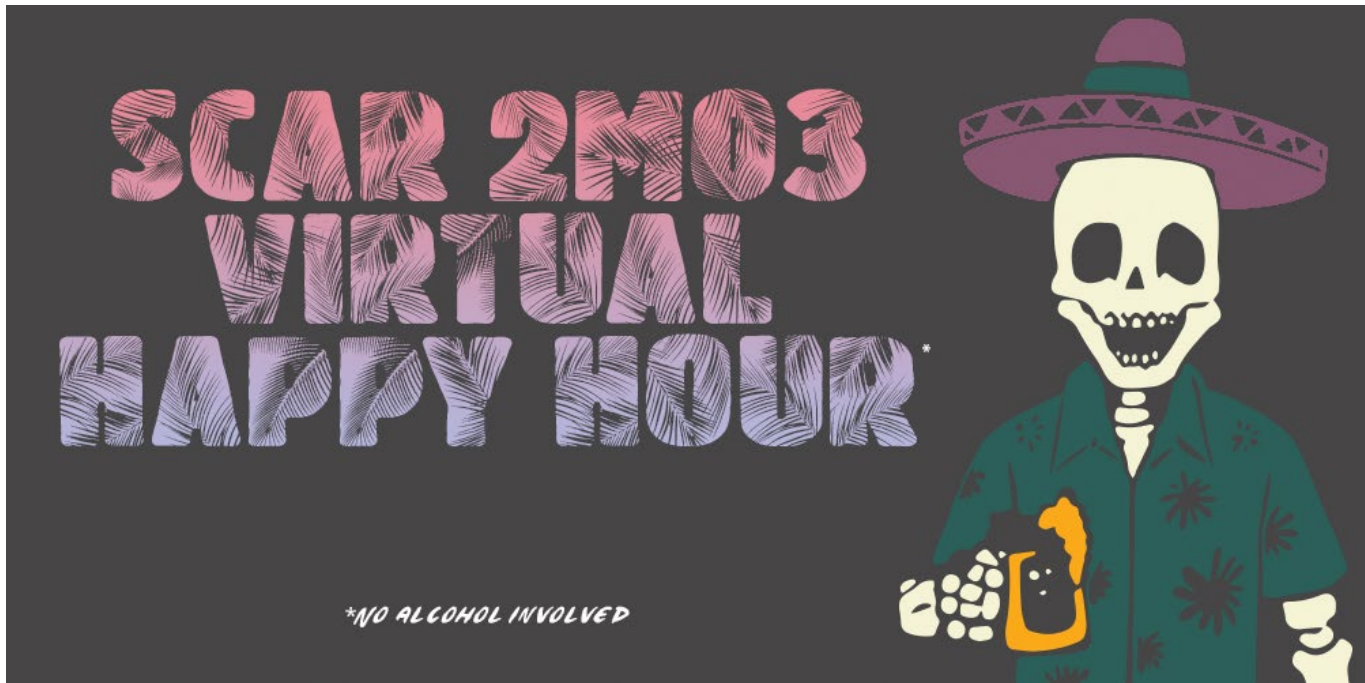
**Due Date:** TBD

**Format, Templates and Rubric:** TBD



# 2M03 VIRTUAL HAPPY HOUR

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## ■ Virtual Happy Hour(s)

This course deals with difficult subjects. While I try and approach the material lightly (see my bad 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 semester, we will hold virtual happy hours where we can discuss anything related to the course, religion, and death and dying generally.

The Happy Hours are opportunities for us to informally interact with each other over video, and to face mortality in a safe and welcoming environment.

This is an optional, extracurricular event. It will not be recorded!  
*Snacking highly encouraged!*

# Weekly Schedule

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## MODULE 1: FRAMINGS

### ■ Week One: September 6th – 12th Introduction

- Overview of the course.
- Overview of the assignments and learning objectives.
- Microsoft Teams & Avenue2Learn run-through.
- Learning strategy tips and tricks.

### ■ Week Two: September 13th – 19th Why the Social Scientific Study of Death Matters

- Kastenbaum, Robert. 2004. "Practicing Death: Some Rituals of Everyday Life" In *On Our Way: The Final Passage through Life and Death*. 25-43. University of California Press.
- Ing, Michael D. K. 2014. "Religious Studies as Comparative Religion." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47: 113-22.

### ■ Week Three: September 20st – 26th - Introductions due How Should We Study Death Across Cultures?

- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. 1-21. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Walter, Tony. 2019. "The Pervasive Dead." In *Mortality* 24: 389-404.

## MODULE 2: RITES AND RITUALS

### ■ Week Four: September 27th – October 3rd - In the News 1 Due The Rites of Passage

- Watch: "Sky Burial: A Tibetan Death Ritual" [mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/sky-burial-tibetan-death-ritual](https://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/sky-burial-tibetan-death-ritual) (11 min)
- van Gennep, Arnold. 2017. "The Rites of Passage." In *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Edited by A. C. G. M. Robben. 34-43. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tsuji, Yohko. 2011. "Rites of Passage to Death and Afterlife in Japan." *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 35: 28-33.

# Weekly Schedule

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## ■ Week Five: October 4th - October 10th Death and Pilgrimage

- Freeman, Charles. 2011. "The Incorruptible Flesh of the Martyrs." In *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, 15-23. Yale University Press.
- Granoff, Phyllis. 2008. "Relics, Rubies and Ritual: Some Comments on the Distinctiveness of the Buddhist Relic Cult." *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali, Nuova Serie*, 81: 59-72.
- Taylor, Christopher S. 1998. "Saints, Ziyāra, Qissa, and the Social Construction of Moral Imagination in Late Medieval Egypt." *Studia Islamica*, 88: 103-20.

## ■ Week Six - FALL BREAK

- Self-Care / Mental Health module available on course Avenue! Includes resources, music playlists, meditation guides, hobby suggestions and more.

## ■ Week Seven: October 4th – 10th Rituals and Practices: The Day of the Dead

- De Orellana, Margarita, Michelle Suderman, Dominique Dufétel, et al.,. 2011. "Day of the Dead Ritual Serenity." *Artes De México*, 62: 65-74 ONLY.
- Brandes, Stanley H. 2006. "Mexican Views on Death" In *Skulls to the living, bread to the dead: [the day of the dead in Mexico and beyond]*. 181-194. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Nalewicki, Jennifer. 2019. "The Meaning Behind Six Objects on Día de los Muertos Altars" [www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/meaning-behind-six-objects-dia-de-los-muertos-altars-180973442/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/meaning-behind-six-objects-dia-de-los-muertos-altars-180973442/) (5 min read).
- **Optional: Watch:** *Coco* (Pixar). **Read:** Cohen, Jeremy. 2017. "Cultural Appropriation: How Not to Celebrate the Day of the Dead" [www.talkdeath.com/cultural-appropriation-how-not-celebrate-day-of-the-dead/](http://www.talkdeath.com/cultural-appropriation-how-not-celebrate-day-of-the-dead/)

## MODULE 3: DEATH AND AFTERLIFE BELIEFS

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# Weekly Schedule

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## ■ Week Eight: October 25th – 31st - In The News 2 Due The Afterlife

- McDaniel, June. 2018. "From the Underworld of Yama to the Island of Gems: Concepts of Afterlife in Hinduism" In *The Routledge Handbook of Death and the Afterlife*. Edited by Candi K. Cann. 293-302. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Oualaalou, David. 2018. "The Afterlife and Death: An Islamic Perspective." In *The Routledge Handbook of Death and the Afterlife*. Edited by Candi K. Cann. 356-366. Abingdon: Routledge.
- My Jewish Learning. "Afterlife and the Messiah 101" [www.myjewishlearning.com/article/after-life-the-messiah-101](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/after-life-the-messiah-101) (4 min read).
- "You've Died. Now What?" [external-preview.redd.it/GFRPZt2BuLbkiouxvnM4czTrPiSLGbMJ1\\_H9sA4yT8.jpg?auto=webp&s=b75b18b46e0cbc820fea6b3841e6b6e275d1b237](https://external-preview.redd.it/GFRPZt2BuLbkiouxvnM4czTrPiSLGbMJ1_H9sA4yT8.jpg?auto=webp&s=b75b18b46e0cbc820fea6b3841e6b6e275d1b237) (Infographic).

## ■ Week Nine: November 1st – 7th - Build-An-Altar Assignment Due The Afterlife Continued

- Watch: "The Buddha Mummies of North Japan" [mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/buddha-mummies-north-japan](http://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/buddha-mummies-north-japan) (21 min).
- Rubin, Jonah S. 2015. "Technologies of the Afterlife: The Agency of the Dead at Spanish Mass Grave Exhumations." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 24: 141-49.
- Badone, Ellen. 2017. "After-Death Communications: Signs from the Other World in Contemporary North America" In *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Edited by A. C. G. M. Robben. 293-307. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
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## ■ Week Ten: November 8th – 14th Grieving the Dead

- Watch: "Another Side of Peace" [mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/another-side-peace](http://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/another-side-peace) (58 min).
- Dastur, Françoise. 2015. "Mourning as the Origin of Humanity." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 48: 1-13.

## MODULE 4: DEATH, POLITICS, AND ETHICS

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# Weekly Schedule

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## ■ Week Eleven: Nov 15th – 21st - In the News 3 Due Death and Gender

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death." In *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25: 187-205.
- Çalişkan, 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*. Edited by Altýnay Ayşę Gül, Contreras María José, et al. 206-18. New York: Columbia University Press.
- **Optional:** Rundblad, Georganne. 1995. "Exhuming Women's Premarket Duties in the Care of the Dead." *Gender and Society* 9: 173-92.

## ■ Week Twelve: Nov 22nd – 28th Cemeteries, Memory, and Bare Death

- Watch: "Unmarked." [mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/unmarked](https://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/unmarked) (40 min).
- Poem: Jordá, Eduardo. 2016. "Indian Cemetery" In *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*. Edited by Jacqueline Fear-Segal, and Susan D. Rose. 148-151 ONLY. Lincoln: Nebraska.
- O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2012. "There Is No More Room: Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death." *Ethnography* 13: 510-30.

## ■ Week Thirteen: Nov 29th – Dec 5th Death and Globalization

- Watch: "Vultures of Tibet: The Tradition of Sky Burial" [mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/vultures-tibet](https://mcmaster.kanopy.com/video/vultures-tibet) (21 min).
- Van Der Geest, Sjaak. 2006. "Between Death and Funeral: Mortuaries and the Exploitation of Liminality in Kwahu, Ghana." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76: 485-501.

## ■ December 8th – Final 'In the News' due No Lecture. Final Review / Q&A

# Student Resources

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## CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Food Collective Centre: [www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/14-mac-bread-bin](http://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/14-mac-bread-bin)
- Indigenous Student Services: [indigenous.mcmaster.ca/](http://indigenous.mcmaster.ca/)
- Sexual Violence Response Coordinator: [svpro.mcmaster.ca/contact/](http://svpro.mcmaster.ca/contact/)
- Equity and Inclusion: [equity.mcmaster.ca/](http://equity.mcmaster.ca/)
- Online Learning Support: [studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/online-learning/](http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/online-learning/)
- Writing Support: [studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/writing-support/](http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/writing-support/)
- Student Success Centre: [studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/](http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/)
- Ontario Crisis Resources and Helplines: [www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources](http://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources)
- Canada Suicide Prevention Service: [www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/](http://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](http://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](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html)
- APA: [guides.libraries.psu.edu/apaquickguide/intext](http://guides.libraries.psu.edu/apaquickguide/intext)

## HOW TO AVOID UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

- [www.lakeforest.edu/academics/resources/writingcenter/plagiarism.php](http://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/](http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/general/general-advice/)
- Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes: [studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/reading-and-writing-for-academic-purposes-2021/](http://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](http://www.businessinsider.com/a-guide-to-proper-comma-use-2013-9)
- How to use the Semi-Colon: [theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon](http://theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon)

# Course Policies

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## **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.

Students will lose 1 point a day for every day the final take-home essay is 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

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## 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/](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](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).



# University Policies

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## **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](mailto: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

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## 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.