

SCAR 2N03 – DEATH & DYING: WESTERN PERSPECTIVES Winter 2023



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Office Hours: By appointment in-person, or via Teams or Zoom
Lecture: ITB AB102: Monday & Thursday @ 3:30-4:20PM
Lecture audio released as podcast each week + ppt slides

CONTENTS

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	2
COURSE OVERVIEW	3
COURSE OBJECTIVES	3
COURSE EVALUATION	4
REQUIRED TEXTS	4
LECTURE INFORMATION	4
COURSE EVALUATION – DETAILS	4
INTRODUCTION (5%):	4
PARTICIPATION SELF-ASSESSMENT (10%):	5
DEATH DENIAL REFLECTION (20%):	5
MIDTERM SELF-ASSESSMENT (10%):	5
VERY SHORT QUIZZES (20%):	5
FINAL ASSIGNMENT – SCAVENGER HUNT (35%):	6
WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS	7
WEEK ONE	7
WEEK TWO.....	7
WEEK THREE.....	7
WEEK FOUR:.....	7
WEEK FIVE:.....	8
WEEK SIX:	8
WEEK SEVEN:.....	8
WEEK EIGHT:	9
WEEK NINE:.....	9
WEEK TEN:	9
WEEK ELEVEN:	10
WEEK TWELVE:.....	10
WEEK THIRTEEN:	10
WEEK FOURTEEN: APRIL 10 TH	11
STUDENT RESOURCES	12
CAMPUS RESOURCES.....	12
HOW TO CITE	12
HOW TO AVOID UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM.....	12

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES	12
COURSE POLICIES.....	13
SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS	13
GRADES	13
LATE ASSIGNMENTS	13
AVENUE TO LEARN	13
UNIVERSITY POLICIES.....	14
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT	14
AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION.....	14
COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT	15
ONLINE PROCTORING.....	15
CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS	15
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	16
REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK	16
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)	16
COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING.....	16
EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES.....	16

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

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 BIPOC, 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 immortality and future technology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This is an introductory course offered by the Department of Religious Studies (SCAR). 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!

1. **Introductory Survey:** To provide you with an introductory survey of selected aspects of the cultural, historical, political, and religious considerations related to death, dying, and bereavement.
2. **Interconnections:** To unpack the complex power dynamics around gender, class, race, and religion with respect to death, dying, and bereavement.
3. **Critical Thinking:** In true anthropological fashion, this course will make the strange familiar and make the familiar strange by cultivating your analytical, reflective, and critical thought.
4. **Methodologies:** 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. Movies are watched on your own time. These will prepare you for the course assignments.

As part of an effort to make grading fairer, participation is not based on tutorial attendance alone. More information on Avenue.

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 in person and uses Avenue2Learn. It is your responsibility to check A2L on a regular basis.

Recorded Lectures: The lecture audio will be recorded and released on Avenue each week. The audio files will be accompanied by PowerPoint slides. This is being offered for students who cannot make it to campus and for students who miss a class.

Tutorials: Our tutorials are in person.

In case of illness, class & tutorials may take place online.

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: January 25th @ 11:59pm

Participation Self-Assessment (10%):

Participation in this course can take several forms, including attending tutorials, speaking in class/tutorials, and optional 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.

Death Denial Reflection (20%):

Are we a death-denying society? Write a short reflection that critically reflects on course material and analyzes the development of your thinking. This reflection will also be an opportunity to work on our academic writing skills.

Due Date: February 15th @ 11:59PM

Midterm Self-Assessment (10%):

Are we a death-denying society? Write a short reflection that critically reflects on course material and analyzes the development of your thinking. This reflection will also be an opportunity to work on our academic writing skills.

Due Date: March 3rd @ 11:59PM

Very Short Quizzes (20%):

There will be three **very** short online quizzes during the semester. The quizzes cover the concepts presented in the readings and during lectures (no need to memorize dates).

Due Dates: TBD

Final Assignment – Scavenger Hunt (35%):

Cemeteries are more than grassy fields and tombstones, they reflect a society's cultural, political, religious, and ethical norms. You can choose to complete the scavenger hunt in-person or online.

You will be tasked with finding several monuments and symbols from a list provided to you, and either photograph, draw, or etch what you find. 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. You will also spend time contemplating death during your visit and will share your thoughts in the written portion of the assignment.

Due Date: April 12th @ 11:59PM

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week One

INTRODUCTIONS

- **Jan 9th:** Overview of the course, assignments and learning objectives.
 - **Jan 12th:** Sumegi, Angela. 2014. "Understanding Death" In *Understanding Death: An Introduction to Ideas of Self and the Afterlife in World Religions*. 1-22.
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Week Two

RITUAL & RITES OF PASSAGE

- **Jan 16th & 19th:** Davies, Douglas. 2017. "Interpreting Death Rites." In *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*, 3-30.
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Week Three

GRIEF, MOURNING, BEREAVEMENT

- **Jan 23:** Joralemon, Donald. 2016. "Grief: Is It Complicated?" In *Mortal Dilemmas: The Troubled Landscape of Death in America*. 81-95.
 - **Jan 26th:** Wade, Breeshia. 2021. "Grief as Spiritual Death." In *Grieving While Black*. 19-34.
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Week Four:

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH

- **Jan 30th:** Matthews, Gareth B. 2012. "Death in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle" In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*. 186-200.

- **Feb 2nd:** Aries, Philippe. 1974. "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies." *American Quarterly* 26: 536–60.
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Week Five:

DENIAL: DO WE DENY MORTALITY?

- **Feb 6th:** Becker, Ernest. 1973. "The Terror of Death" In *The Denial of Death*. 11-25.
 - **Feb 9th:** Tradii, Laura and Martin Robert. 2019. "Do we Deny Death? II. Critiques of the Death-Denial Thesis" *Mortality* 24: 377-388.
 - ["What is the Death Positive Movement?"](#)
 - Leland, John. 2018. ["The Positive Death Movement Comes to Life"](#)
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Week Six:

THE RISE OF THE FUNERAL PROFESSION

- **Feb 13th:** Laderman, Gary. 1996. "The Birth of the Death Industry" In *The Sacred Remains*, 157-176.
 - **Feb 16th:** Rundblad, Georganne. 1995. "Exhuming Women's Pre-market Duties in the Care of the Dead." *Gender and Society* 9: 173-92.
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Week Seven:

FALL BREAK!

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

HISTORY OF GARDEN & LAWN CEMETERIES

- **Feb 27th:** Rainey, Reuben M. 2010. "Therapeutic Landscapes: America's Nineteenth Century Rural Cemeteries." *View* 10: 18-21.
 - 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.
 - **March 2nd:** Oring, Elliott. 2000. "Icons of Immortality: Forest Lawn and the American Way of Death." In *Worldviews and The American West*, 54-64.
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Week Nine:

THE PRIVILEGE OF A GOOD DEATH

- **March 6th:** Walter Tony. 2003; "Historical and cultural variants on the good death." *BMJ*, 327 :218
 - **March 9th:** Washington, Harriet A. 2006. "The Restless Dead: Anatomical Dissection and Display" In *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans...* 115-143.
 - Lenti, Erica. 2021. "[How a small team of LGBTQ2S+ investigators is seeking justice for unidentified Trans Doe victims](#)"
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Week Ten:

ECOLOGICAL GRIEF: MOURNING A DYING PLANET

- **March 13th:** Menning, Nancy. 2017. "Environmental Mourning and the Religious Imagination." In *Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. 39-59.
- **March 16th:** Pearkes, Eileen Delehanty. 2020. "Dams, Boundaries, and the Rising Spirit of Reciprocity." In *From Environmental Loss to Resistance: Infrastructure and the Struggle for Justice in North America*. 91-106.

Week Eleven:

MEDICAL AID IN DYING – PART 1

- **March 20th:** Risse, Guenter B.. 1999. "Welfare and Hospitals in Early Modern Europe." In *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals*, 216-219.
 - Risse, Guenter B.. 1999. "Ancien Regime: Paris and its hospitals." In *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals*, 293-299.
 - **March 23rd: Watch:** Richardson, Peter. 2011. "[How to Die in Oregon](#)"
 - Lavi, Shai. 2008. "How Dying Became a 'Life Crisis'" in, *Daedalus* 137: 57-65.
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Week Twelve:

MEDICAL AID IN DYING – PART 2

- **March 27th:** Ginsberg, Faye and Rayna Rapp. 2021. "'NOT DEAD YET': Changing Disability Imaginaries in the Twenty-First Century." In *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World: A Compendium*, 525-540.
 - **March 30th:** 2021. "How can Canada safeguard those marginalized by society as MAiD expands?" *CMAJ* 193: E493-494
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Week Thirteen:

WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?

- **April 3rd:** Cave, Stephen. 2012. "Magic Barriers: Civilization and The Elixir of Life." In *Immortality*, 35-55
- **April 6th:** Mercer, Calvin and Tracey J. Trothen. 2021. "Transhumanism, the Posthuman, and the Religions: Exploring Basic Concepts" In *Religion and the Technological Future*. 19-42.

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- Various. 2013. "The Transhumanist Declaration" In *The Transhumanist Reader*. Edited by Natasha Vita-More and Max More. 54-55.

Week Fourteen: April 10th
NO CLASS

STUDENT RESOURCES

CAMPUS RESOURCES

- [Food Collective Centre](#)
- [Indigenous Student Services](#)
- [Sexual Violence Response Coordinator](#)
- [Equity and Inclusion](#)
- [Online Learning Support](#)
- [Writing Support](#)
- [Student Success Centre](#)
- [Ontario Crisis Resources and Helplines](#)
- [Canada Suicide Prevention Service](#)

HOW TO CITE

- [MLA](#)
- [Chicago](#)
- [APA](#)

HOW TO AVOID UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

- [Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism](#)

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES

- [How to Write an Essay](#)
- [Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes](#)
- [13 Rules for Using Commas](#)
- [How to use the Semi-Colon](#)

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+
85-89	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

Everyone has a 24-hour extension leeway to submit their assignment. If you need more than 24 hours, please contact your TA. Late assignments (past 24 hours) 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 STATEMENT

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 the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#).

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.).

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Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.