

Death and Dying in World Religions

50:840:278

Fall 2022

Armitage 222

MW 2:05 – 3:25

Professor: Kipp Gilmore-Clough (he/him)
Office: 429 Cooper Street, Room 304
Office Hours: Mondays, 1:00 – 2:00, or by appointment
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Course Description

This course introduces the academic study of issues surrounding religion, culture, death, dying, and bereavement. The first part of the course will engage death and dying from the perspective of various religious traditions, both in terms of doctrinal belief and lived practice. The second portion of the course continues a cross-cultural approach, looking at death practices in various global locations. We will also consider personal narratives of death and grief in the contemporary United States and asks questions about what makes life worth living. The final segment will address contemporary issues such as the social impact of COVID-19, physician-assisted dying, shifting funerary practices, and the scientific pursuit of immortality. The course will include both lecture and discussion, with course readings setting the tone of discussion. We will also use films to engage particular issues. Additionally, there will be flexibility to address in a critical and reflective manner issues arising from contemporary events and student experience.

This course fulfills the General Education requirement in Global Communities (GCM) by meeting the following learning goals:

4. Analyze a cultural, economic, environmental, geographic, historical, political, linguistic or literary, scientific and/or sociological issue facing one or more countries or globally.
5. Explore issues that transcend national borders and their implications for policy and practice.
6. Describe the point of view of peoples from outside the U.S. on specific issues.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, the successful student will:

- be able to articulate various religious approaches to death and dying.

- demonstrate understanding of various ethical debates around death and dying.
- critically reflect upon the relationship between social structures and human death beliefs and practices.
- display the ability to critically engage and utilize academic sources.
- produce a well-written term paper investigating a topic of their choice.

Required Texts

- Doughty, Caitlin. *From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017. **(FHTE in schedule)**
- Parkes, Colin Murray, Pittu Laungani, and Bill Young (eds.). *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge, 2015. **(DBAC in schedule) – Note: 1st edition is available online through the library.**

Additional Required Resource

- **Packback** – You will need to purchase access to Packback (see final page) in order to take part in reflection/discussion that is part of your homework.

Assignments and Assessment

Response Papers (30% of total grade)

You will be expected to write **four** response papers based on your reading of course texts. Papers should be **500-700 words in length** and double spaced. The papers are meant to demonstrate your critical engagement with the readings rather than merely summarizing them. You might choose a common theme that you see in multiple readings or interact with a main point in a single text, writing about something that you have found interesting, challenging, or even wrong. **You must quote the text in your paper.** Papers are due by the following dates: 9/28, 10/26, 11/16, and 12/14. Response papers may address any of the readings or class materials covered since your prior paper. They will be graded on a 20-point scale, based on how well you have identified and explored your main idea, how clearly you have expressed yourself, and how well you have engaged with the text(s) on which you are reflecting (including whether you have quoted from them directly).

Research Paper (30% of total grade)

This is a course with an incredibly broad scope, and it is impossible to exhaust the potential areas of interest. You should choose one area that you would like to explore more fully and produce a **five- to seven-page** (12-point font, 1" margins, double spaced; Works Cited page does not count toward paper length) research paper. This may be an exploration of a particular practice in one of the religious traditions we will study; a comparison of practice or belief across two traditions; an inquiry related to one of our topical studies; or something entirely different. You are limited only by your imagination and curiosity as you choose your subject. I will put a list of possible topics

on Canvas, but you are not at all limited to them. The strongest paper you can write will be one on a topic that is genuinely interesting to you. The paper will be completed in stages as follows:

I. Topic Brainstorm (5% of project) – Wednesday, 9/21

I am interested in what interests you. If you are not sure what interests you, take a look at the potential topics list on Canvas and look over the course topics to get a sense of what we're covering in class and in the readings. This assignment is simply to brainstorm; write two or three sentences (or more, if you're inspired) about things you hope to learn or ideas you hope to explore during this semester. Your topic will arise out of your interests; I'll give you feedback on this to help settle your focus. If at this stage you already have a good idea of what you would like to write about, please simply let me know what it is and what draws you to the topic. *Please note: This is exploratory; you may still change your topic later.*

II. Preliminary Bibliography (15% of project) – Wednesday, 10/12

Having chosen your topic, please find five **academic** sources that you plan to use as resources in your research. Submit them as an annotated bibliography. With each reference, include a sentence or two about how you think it will be helpful. *Please note: Because you have begun your research at this point, your topic is more settled. However, you may still alter or change it altogether, as long as you do so in consultation with me.*

III. Rough Draft (20% of project) – Wednesday, 11/23

The rough draft is not a finished product. It does not need to be polished. I want you to demonstrate that your research is mostly complete, and that you have a good sense of what you are doing with the paper. You should add additional sources to those included in your earlier bibliography; you do not have to annotate these. The more complete your draft, the better I will be able to provide feedback to help with your final product. You should have *at least* one page of writing; the rest may be in outline form.

*IV. Final Paper (60% of project) – Due in Canvas by **ending of final exam period** on Wednesday 12/21.*

Packback (15% of final grade)

We will be using the Packback Questions online platform this semester. (You can access it through our Canvas site.) This will assist you in critically engaging with readings as you do them by posting questions that they raise for you. In addition, you will participate in the ongoing learning community of this class by responding to questions classmates have posed.

You will be responsible for **posting one question** of your own and **responding to questions from two classmates** each week. **Please try to post your question by the end of the day each Wednesday** so that others have a chance to reply to it. Your answers to

classmates should be posted **by 11:59 pm each Saturday**. Your questions and responses should demonstrate that you have engaged course materials. We will receive further instruction in class about how to sign into Packback and post your questions and answers. Weekly grades will be based on a total of 30 points – 10 points per question and response. **You do not need to post on Packback during the week of 11/21.**

Participation (25% of final grade)

This course is heavily geared toward discussion, which means that you are an integral part of what happens here this semester. Your readiness to talk about the material will be crucial to the course's success. You should show up prepared for class, having read the material and brought it with you. Your participation grade will be based upon showing up to class *on time*, contributing to class discussion, and taking part in various in-class exercises, including peer reviews of each other's assignments.

Grading

The University's grading scale is as follows:

A = 90% and above	B+ = 85% - 89.99%	C+ = 75% - 79.99%	D = 60% - 69.99%
	B = 80% - 84.99%	C = 70% - 74.99%	F = Under 60%

Course and University Policies

Canvas

This course utilizes Canvas for multiple purposes, including distributing readings and submitting assignments. Please see me if you need assistance using the site.

Attendance

Your participation will enrich this course, which means that it is important for you to be here. Ideally, each student will be here for each class session. However, I also understand that circumstances may arise that keep you from being in class on occasion. As such, I allow you one freebie for the semester – an absence with no explanation required. **Each absence beyond that will result in a 3% deduction from your total grade. This means that it is possible to gain perfect scores on all work and still do poorly in the course due to excessive absences.** (Note: Illness and sports participation absences count as your freebie – but if games or extended illness keep you from class more than that, you will not be penalized for these absences.) It is your responsibility to ensure that I have all work in a timely manner. **Please note that chronic lateness will also be reflected in a diminishment of your participation grade.**

Please arrive on time and stay for the entire class. This is a matter of respect, not only for me, but for your classmates. I do understand that circumstances may sometimes necessitate your arriving late or leaving early. If you find yourself in such a situation, please discuss it with me **before** class.

Late and Incomplete Assignments

All work is due by the beginning of class on the date of the class period for which it is assigned. Work that is late will be penalized by 5% for the first 24 hours of lateness and will lose 10% per day late thereafter. Work that is more than five days late will receive an automatic 0.

The University's Academic Integrity Policy Statement

Rutgers University–Camden seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community, including in classroom space, and a community in which students respect academic integrity and the integrity of your own and others' work.

As a student at the University, you are expected to adhere to the [Student Code of Conduct](#) and [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Academic Integrity is critical to the success of our students and the community and is everyone's responsibility to take their education seriously and follow the requirements to insure that you are doing your own work and following the guidelines of the course and professor and program.

Please Note: The conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities." Please be aware of in-classroom and out-of-classroom expectations by making yourself familiar with and by following the Student Code of Conduct.

Disabilities Statement

Per the University website, If you need academic support for your courses, accommodations can be provided once you share a Letter of Accommodation issued by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) that specifies your accommodations indicated. If you have already registered with ODS and have your Letter of Accommodation, please share this with your instructor early in the course. If you have not registered with ODS and you have or think you have a disability (learning, sensory, physical, chronic health, mental health or attentional), please visit the [ODS website](#), [email](#), or call [\(856\) 225-6954](#).

Please Note: Accommodations will be provided only for students with a Letter of Accommodation from ODS. Accommodation Letters only provide information about the accommodation, not about the disability or diagnosis.

Center for Learning and Student Success

From the University: The Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) provides academic support and enrichment services for students, at no additional cost, including one-on-one tutoring, small-group tutoring and workshops, online tutoring, writing assistance, student success coaching, learning assessment, and metacognition training. Through collaboration with academic departments and faculty, CLASS facilitates programs and provides academic resources to students. Our Learning Specialists provide learning-specific resources and support to students on academic or continued probation. CLASS is in Armitage Hall, second floor, suite 231. To learn more or to schedule an appointment, visit the [CLASS website](#), [email us](#) or call us at [\(856\) 225-6442](#).

Counseling Services

Please note that the subject matter we are addressing is potentially very sensitive and painful. If you do not think that you can handle this type of material in an academic setting, please reconsider your participation. If you find troublesome issues arising during the course of the semester, I recommend seeking assistance through the Student Health Services. You can find out more about the counseling services available to you at http://healthservices.camden.rutgers.edu/psych_counseling. You can also contact the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 if you have been contemplating suicide.

Schedule

Introduction

W 9/7 Introductions and Course Expectations

I. Death, Dying, and Religion

M 9/12 Kübler-Ross, "The Fear of Dying" (Canvas); Reese, "The Fog of Grief" (Canvas)

W 9/14 Lynch, "The Undertaking" (Canvas); Doughty, "Introduction" (Canvas); Ward, "Sooner or later..." (Canvas)

M 9/19 Earp, "Against Mourning" (Canvas)

W 9/21 DBAC, chs. 1, 2: "Introduction" and "Culture and Religion"
***Topic brainstorm due**

M 9/26 DBAC, ch. 6: "Jewish Views and Customs on Death"

W 9/28 DBAC, ch. 7: "Christianity"
***First response paper due**

M 10/3 DBAC, ch. 8: "The Islamic Way of Death and Dying: Homeward Bound"
(Read the version on Canvas)

- W 10/5 DBAC, ch. 4: "Death in a Hindu Family"
- M 10/10 DBAC, ch. 5: "The Buddhist Way of Death" (**Read the version on Canvas**)
- W 10/12 DBAC, ch. 9: "Secularization"
- *Preliminary bibliography due**

II. Death Practices in the World

- M 10/17 FHTE, "Colorado: Crestone"
- W 10/19 FHTE, "Indonesia: South Sulawesi," *National Geographic* article (Canvas)
- M 10/24 FHTE, "Mexico: Michoacán"
- W 10/26 FHTE, "North Carolina: Cullowhee"
- *Second response paper due**
- M 10/31 FHTE, "Japan: Tokyo"
- W 11/2 FHTE, "Bolivia: La Paz"

III. Topics in Death and Dying . . . and Living

- M 11/7 Gutkind, selections (Canvas); Film: *Wit*
- W 11/9 Continue *Wit*
- M 11/14 Suicide: DeSpelder and Strickland (Canvas)
- W 11/16 Physician-Assisted Dying: Boer and Keizer selections (Canvas)
- *Third response paper due**
- M 11/21 TBD
- W 11/23 ****NO CLASS – FOLLOW YOUR FRIDAY SCHEDULE****
- *Rough draft due; no Packback posts required this week**
- M 11/28 Film: *A Death of One's Own*
- W 11/30 Continue *A Death of One's Own*
- M 12/5 COVID-19 readings (Canvas)
- W 12/7 Continued discussion
- M 12/12 On Living Forever: Weiner selections (Canvas); Film: *How to Live Forever*
- W 12/14 Continue *How to Live Forever*; course wrap-up
- *Fourth response paper due**
- W 12/21 **Final Paper due by end of scheduled exam period**

Packback Information *(adapted from material provided by Packback)*

Why are we using Packback for discussion?

Packback Questions is an online discussion platform specifically designed to encourage curiosity and increase critical thinking & writing skills. On Packback, you'll be encouraged & rewarded for asking complex questions about how what we're studying relates to the real world. As it relates to this course, my goals are to provide you with a forum that enriches class discussion and also allows you to dig deeper into the material than we can do in class.

How to Register on Packback:

If you were on the original roster for this course, you should have received an email at your Rutgers email address from help@packback.co inviting you to register. If you didn't receive that, you can also:

1. **Purchase access through the bookstore. Or**
2. **Create an account** by navigating to <https://app.packback.co> and clicking "Sign up for an Account."
(Note: If you already have an account on Packback you can log in with your credentials.)
3. Then enter our class community's lookup key into the "Looking to join a community you don't see here?" section in Packback at the bottom of the homepage.
Community Lookup Key: **65e2fa10-bb39-46a0-b932-768898d8adfe**
4. Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.

Packback Posting Requirements:

Each week you must demonstrate your engagement with course material by **asking one question and posting two responses**. Please post your question early enough that other students will have time to reply. Your responses must be posted by **11:59 pm each Saturday**. **Note:** On Packback you can't post early or late; you must post within the designated posting interval.

Packback Grading:

Packback is **15%** of the overall course grade.

- **Each item (question or response) will be graded on a ten-point scale – a total of thirty possible points each week. I will drop the three lowest weekly scores from your final grade.**

How to Get Help from the Packback Team:

If you have any questions or concerns about Packback throughout the semester, please read their FAQ at help.packback.co. If you need more help, contact their customer support team directly at help@packback.co.

For a brief introduction to Packback Questions and why we are using it in class, watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV7QmkrD68>