

Death and Afterlife in World Religions

REL 3191
Spring 2017

Instructor: Vasudha Narayanan, Distinguished Professor, Religion
Office Location: 107 Anderson Hall
Email: vasu@ufl.edu

Teaching Assistant: Priyanka Ramlakhan
Email: priyankaram@ufl.edu
Skype ID: Priyanka.ramlakhan
Online Office Hours: T/TR 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Course Location: Online Course, Canvas <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>

Course Description

This course explores notions of death and the afterlife in many religious traditions as well as in popular culture. It is divided into two major sections. In the first (and larger section, we will look at several topics including: conceptions of a soul (if any), what happens to a person at death, funerary rites, various conceptions of a/the ultimate reality (theistic, monistic, and so forth), notions of salvation and/or liberation, judgment, and various conceptions of time (e.g., linear or cyclical). The second section will explore how some of these religious perspectives are reflected in popular culture and spiritual movements. This section will focus on views of reincarnation and debates over the topic of near-death experiences, and briefly look at what is “death?”

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course the student will be able to:

- Provide a background for each religious tradition to contextualize notions of death and the afterlife.
- Recognize basic conceptions of death and the afterlife according various Western and Eastern religious traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese Indigenous, Christian, Judaic, and Islamic traditions) as exemplified through sacred texts (written or oral), ritual practices and popular beliefs.
- Identify a few funerary practices associated with different religious traditions.
- Understand relationships between conceptions of death and the afterlife and key doctrinal positions maintained by the respective religious tradition,
- Be able to analyze ideas of death which appear in popular culture and locate themes in the religious traditions to which they bear similarity.

Required Textbook

Bregman, Lucy ed. *Death & Dying in World Religions*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2009.

Note: All required reading materials for this course will be made available in electronic format (e.g., .pdf files, .doc files, web links, etc.) on Canvas: <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>

Grading Breakdown

Quizzes	Discussion Posts	Reflection Papers	Final Exam
40%	20%	20% (10% each)	20%

Evaluation

Grades will be computed based on the percentages given above according to the following grading scale:

A: 100-93 A-: 92-90

B+: 89-87 B: 86-83 B-: 82-80

C+: 79-77 C: 76-73 C-: 72-70

D+: 69-67 D: 66-63 D-: 62-60

E: 59 or below

For more information about UF's minus grade system visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Quizzes

This course will conduct weekly online quizzes to evaluate the student's grasp and understanding of concepts, facts, arguments, and other important information covered in the lectures and readings presented during that particular week. Before taking a quiz, students should have watched all the videos and completed the required readings for the week. All quizzes will be administered online through the Canvas website. All quizzes will be made available for two days beginning on Thursday. The quizzes will be made available 6:00 am Thursday morning; the student will have until 9:00 pm the Friday of the same week to take the quiz. Unless otherwise stated the quizzes will be ten minutes. You will be notified in advance in case any changes are made concerning the time. Questions will be randomly generated from a pool of predetermined questions which ensures that no two students have the same exact quiz. This procedure is necessary in an online class to discourage cheating. These quizzes will comprise 40% of your overall grade for the course. For further information on taking quizzes in Canvas please consult the online help files.

Online Discussion Postings

Every week students are expected to submit two posts to the online course forums in Canvas. Each of these required posts must be at least 100 words in length. These forums are only available to the instructors and other students enrolled in the course. The first post must be an independent post initiated by the student in the forums. This independent post should be a reflection/response to the course readings and/or lectures required for that week. The student should feel free to compose a post on a topic and draw from the course's weekly material that most interests him or her. A few example topics will be made available to students should selecting a topic prove too difficult. The first independent post is due at 5:00 pm on Wednesday. To facilitate discussion among fellow students the second required post must be composed in response to another student's post on the readings/lectures from that week (i.e., a peer review response post). For credit, the weekly posts must be made by Thursday 5:00 pm, unless informed otherwise. Students are encouraged to upload their posts well in advance of this deadline so that other students can engage with your comments and observations for the required response post. All posts should be articulate and well-considered. Posts should also adhere to the rules of English grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Although only two posts are required, students are encouraged to make additional (relevant) posts to facilitate further discussion with your classmates. Additional posts beyond the two required posts can be of any length. All posts should be courteous, academic, and non-aggressive. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated for any reason and could adversely affect your grade. While students may certainly be critical, such critical responses and observations should be

presented in a professional and academic manner. These discussion posts will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course.

Reflection Papers

This course will require you to write two 5-page reflection papers. For each paper, you will be provided with a general topic by your instructor. Students are expected to write about this topic by drawing upon their course readings, lectures, and discussions. The papers should be double-spaced and have 1-inch page margins. The font should be 12pt Times New Roman (or Calibri). The first reflection paper will be due 3/19/2017 by 5:00 pm. The second reflection paper will be due 4/19/2017 by 5:00 pm. Additional details are provided online via Canvas. Students are encouraged to start working on these paper assignments early. Each reflection paper will comprise 10% of your overall grade for the course (total 20%).

Final Exam

The final exam for this course will be administered via Canvas. The exam will be cumulative, and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, matching and one short essay question. Like quizzes, the final exam will be timed and the date will be announced well in advance. The final exam will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course. The final exam will become available on 4/24/2017 at 12:00 am and will remain available until 9:00 pm on 4/27/2017. Once started, students will have 45 minutes to complete the final exam.

Attendance

This course is completely online and there are no in-person meetings for lectures or exams. All course activities will be conducted via Canvas.

Academic Honesty

Guidelines for academic honesty at the University of Florida can be found at:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the guidelines detailed at the above site and related links and adhere to them.

Online Behavior

Students are expected to be courteous to the instructor and other students in the class. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated and could adversely affect a student's grade. All posts, emails and other forms of electronic correspondence should be courteous and professional.

Although the course is online, the University's honor and conduct codes still apply:

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a disability must register with the office of the Dean of Students:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Tentative Course Schedule (subject to modification)

Details regarding the course schedule, video lectures, readings, papers, assignments, and quizzes are listed on the following two pages.

Theme: Conceptions of Death and the Afterlife in World Religions

		Theme	Videos	Required Readings	Assignments
Week 1	1/4-1/6	Course Introduction	Welcome & Introduction Videos by Dr. Vasudha Narayanan Introduction Video by Priyanka Ramlakhan Optional Video: The Afterlife (PBS)	Moore & Williamson, "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response," pp. 3–12 (online .pdf) Bregman, Introduction, pp. ix–xiii (course textbook)	Syllabus Quiz & Course Introduction Quiz due by 9:00pm on 1/8
Eastern Religious Traditions					
Week 2	1/9-1/13	Hindu Traditions Part I	Hinduism – Part 1, Vasudha Narayanan	Murata, "Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America," pp. 127–48 (online .pdf)	
Week 3	1/17-1/20	Hindu Traditions Part II	Hinduism – Part 2, Vasudha Narayanan Hinduism – Part 3, Vasudha Narayanan	No Required Readings for this week	Hindu Traditions Module Quiz (Weeks 2 & 3) due by 9:00pm on 1/20
Week 4	1/23 - 1/27	Buddhist Traditions	Buddhism: Death & Rebirth, Phillip Green Buddhist Stupas (Harn Talk), Phillip Green Bodhisattvas (Harn Talk), Allysa Peyton	Bregman, Chapters 8, pp.105–117 (course textbook) Strong, "The Death and Parinirvana of the Buddha" and "The Distribution of the Relics," pp. 45–49 (online .pdf) Strong, "Introduction: Relics of the Buddha," pp. 1–20 (online pdf)	Buddhist Traditions Module Quiz due by 9:00pm on 1/27
Week 5	1/30-2/3	East Asian Traditions of China and Japan	Notions of Death and the Afterlife in China, Kendall Marchman Mizukokuyo Case Study, Jason Purvis	Bregman, Chapter 9 & 10, pp. 119–52 (course textbook)	East Asian Traditions Module Quiz due by 9:00pm on 2/3
Indigenous Traditions					
Week 6	2/6-2/10	Indigenous Traditions	Indigenous Traditions, Robin Wright	Bregman, Chapter 11, pp. 153–67 (course textbook)	Quiz due by 9:00pm on 2/10
Week 7	2/13-2/17	Indigenous Traditions Part II	Religions in Andean Region (Harn Talk), Maya Stanfield Mazzi Exhibits from the Kongo (Harn Talk), Robin Poynor Life that Doesn't End with Death, Kelli Swazey		Quiz due by 9:00pm on 2/17
Western Religious Traditions					
Week 8	2/20-2/24	Christian Traditions Part I	Death and the Afterlife in Christianity, Dan Johnson Death and the Afterlife in Renaissance Italy, Elizabeth Ross	Bregman, Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 43–76 (course textbook)	Quiz due by 9:00pm on 2/24
Week 9	2/27-3/3	Christian Traditions Part II	Controversies Concerning Hell, Sean O'Neil Heaven & Hell (PBS)	Holten, "Hell and the Goodness of God" What did Luther Actually Say in the 95 Theses Does Hell Still Matter?	Quiz due by 9:00pm on 3/3

				Hell in Rob Bell's Own Words	
Week 10	3/13-3/17	Jewish Traditions	Judaism: Death & Afterlife, Rabbi David Kaiman	Bregman, Chapter 3, pp. 29–42 (course textbook)	Jewish Traditions Module due by 9:00pm on 3/17 Reflection Paper 1 due by 5:00pm on 3/19
Week 11	3/20-3/24	Islam	Death and Dying in Islam, Zoharah Simmons	Bregman, Chapter 6, pp. 77–90 (course textbook)	Islam Module Quiz due by 9:00pm on 3/24
Death & the Afterlife in Contemporary Culture, Spirituality and New Age Movements					
Week 12	3/27-3/31	Reincarnation	In Another Life: Reincarnation in America	Weiss, Many Lives, Many Masters, pp. 9–59 (online .pdf excerpts of preface and chapters 1–3) Opposing Viewpoint Essay: Death & Dying (online .pdf): Shroder, "Reincarnation May Lead to Life After Death," pp. 190–200	Reincarnation Module Quiz due by 9:00pm on 3/31
Week 13	4/3-4/7	The Afterlife in Contemporary Culture	No Required Videos	Kraemer, "What Happens When You Die," pp. 159–86 (online .pdf) Moreman, "Evidence for Life after Death, an overview of the debate." Pp. 209–36 (online pdf) Alexander, "Proof of Heaven: A Doctor's Experience with the Afterlife." Opposing Viewpoint Essays: Death & Dying (online .pdfs): - Smith, "There Is an Afterlife," pp. 157–64 - Kurtz, "There Is No Afterlife," pp. 165–73 - Sharp, "Near-Death Experiences Are Glimpses of the Afterlife," pp. 149–54 - Ebborn, Mulligan and Beyerstein, "Near-Death Experiences Are Not Glimpses of an Afterlife," pp. 163–68	
Week 14	4/10-4/14	Near Death Experiences	Interview with Professor Louis Ritz, Department of Neuroscience, University of Florida on Consciousness, NDE, and Meditation	Opposing Viewpoints: Seidman, "Near-Death Experiences Have Natural, Not Spiritual, Causes," pp. 182–89 Ring, "Near-Death Experiences May Be Glimpses of an Afterlife," pp. 174–81 Groothuis, "Near-Death Experiences May Not Be Glimpses of the Afterlife," pp. 155–62 Singh, "Inner and Outer Peace Through Meditation"	Afterlife and Near Death Experiences Module Quiz (Weeks 13 & 14) due by 9:00pm on 4/14

Week 15	4/17- 4/19	Research on Reincarnation, Afterlife and NDE	No Required Videos	Death Experience Study Shows... Research Delves into Afterlife Experiences Alexander, What's Heaven Really Like	Reflection Paper 2 due by 5:00pm on 4/19
---------	------------	--	--------------------	---	--