

Death and Afterlife

REL 3938
Spring 2012

Instructors: Vasudha Narayanan

Email: vasu@ufl.edu

Teaching Assistant: Nicholas Collins
Bhakti Mamtora

Email: collinsnem@ufl.edu

Email: bhaktim@ufl.edu

Course Location: Online Course, Sakai/E-Learning: <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

Course Description

This course is divided into three broad sections, all of which examine conceptions of death and the afterlife. The first and largest section examines conceptions of death and the afterlife from the perspective of various religious traditions from around the world. Topics that will be explored in this section include: conceptions of a soul (if any), what happens to a person at death, funerary rites, various conceptions of an/the ultimate reality (theistic, monistic, and so forth), notions of salvation and/or liberation, judgment, and various conceptions 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. The final section will briefly explore a few, select ethical issues related to death and how some American religious traditions engage with such issues.

Course Objectives

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

- Provide a general overview of many beliefs and/or practices for each religious tradition examined.
 - Recognize dominant themes in conceptions of death and the afterlife according various Western and Eastern religious traditions (Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions, Chinese and Japanese traditions, Indigenous traditions, Christian traditions, Judaic traditions, and Islamic traditions) as exemplified through sacred texts (written or oral), ritual practices, and popular belief.
 - Identify a few common 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.
 - Identify important questions about death and the afterlife from the standpoint of each religious tradition examined.
 - Understand how reincarnation is viewed in a few areas of popular culture.
 - Exchange in the debate over near-death experiences.
 - Discuss a few select ethical issues related to death (e.g. suicide and the death penalty) from the perspective of the some religious traditions.
-

Required Texts

Kramer, Kenneth. *The Sacred Art of Dying: How World Religions Understand Death*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Note: There are other required reading materials for this course that will be made available in electronic format (e.g., Course Reserves, .pdf files, .doc files, web links, etc.) on Sakai (aka E-Learning):

<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

To access Course Reserves visit <https://ares-uflib-ufl-edu.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/>

Grading Breakdown

Handbook Syllabus Quiz: 2%

Quizzes: 38%

Discussion Reflection/Response Postings:

20% Two Reflection Papers: 20% (10%

each) Final Exam: 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:

<http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

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 Sakai/E-learning website. With the exception of the final week of class, all quizzes will be administered on Friday (Handbook and Contract quizzes and Surveys can be taken any time after they are made available up until the deadline). The quizzes will be made available 6:00 am Friday morning, and the student will have until 11:00 pm to take the quiz. Unless otherwise stated, the quizzes will be eight minutes. You will be notified in advance in case any changes are made concerning the time. Questions will be randomly generated from a pool predetermined questions which ensures that no two students have the same exact quiz. This procedure is necessary in an online class in order to discourage cheating. These quizzes will comprise 40% of your overall grade for the course (38% for Death and the Afterlife content quizzes and 2% for the Handbook quiz). For further information on taking quizzes in Sakai/E-Learning please consult the online help files.

Discussion Reflection/Response Postings

Every week students are expected to post a **minimum of two** responses/reflections to the online course forums. These forums are only available to the instructors and other students enrolled in the course.

Each post should be a reflection/response to the course readings, or lectures, required for that week. The student should feel free to compose posts on a topic that most interested him or her from the readings and/or videos for that week. A few example topics will be made available to students should selecting a topic prove too difficult. Alternatively, in order to facilitate discussion among fellow students a student's post may be a response to another student's post on the readings/lectures from that week. For credit, the weekly posts must be made by **Thursday 5:00 pm** (with the exception of the final week of class, see course deadlines document online). Students are encouraged to upload their posts well in advance of this deadline so that other students may engage with your comments and observations. All posts should be articulate, well thought out, and adhere to the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling of the English language.

Two posts must meet the minimum requirement of 100 words each (200 words total). Additional posts beyond these two can be of any length. Additionally, 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. Students are encouraged to make multiple (relevant) posts, although this is not mandatory. 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 3/29/2014**. The second reflection paper will be **due 4/23/2014**. Additional details will be provided online via a Reflection Paper Handout at a later time in the semester. Each reflection paper will comprise 10% of your overall grade for the course (total 20%).

Final Exam

This course will conduct a final exam that will be administered online via Sakai/E-Learning. The exam will be cumulative, and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and so forth. 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. Additional details on the final exam will be provided later in the semester.

Attendance

This course is completely online and there are no in-person meetings for lectures or exams. All course activities will be conducted via Sakai/E-Learning (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>).

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

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a disability must register with the office of the Dean of Students:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Course Schedule (subject to minor modifications if necessary)

Section I: Conceptions of Death & Afterlife in Religious Traditions of the World

Part One: Eastern Religious Traditions

Week 1 (1/6 – 1/10): Course Introduction

Video Lecture: Welcome & Introduction by Dr. Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

Moore & Williamson, "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response," pp. 3-12 in *Handbook of Death & Dying* available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#)

Recommended Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 1

Week 2 (1/13 – 1/17): Hindu Traditions (Part One)

Video Lecture: "Hinduism – Part 1," Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 2

Week 3 (1/20 – 1/24): Hindu Traditions (Part Two)

Video Lectures:

"Hinduism – Part 2," Vasudha Narayanan

"Hinduism – Part 3," Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings: TBA

Week 4 (1/27 – 1/31): Buddhist Traditions

Video Lecture: Buddhism: Death & Rebirth, Phillip Green
Video Lecture: Buddhism: Tibetan “Sky Burial,” Phillip Green

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapters 3 and 5

Optional Readings (all available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#)):

Strong, “The „Death“ and Parinirvana of the Buddha” and “The Distribution of the Relics,” in *The Experience of Buddhism*

Strong, “Introduction: Relics of the Buddha,” in *Relics of the Buddha*

Week 5 (2/3 – 2/7): Chinese and Japanese Traditions

Video Lecture: “Notions of Death and the Afterlife in China,” Kendall Marchman

Video Lecture: Japanese Traditions (Mizukokuyo Case Study), Jason Purvis

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 6

Recommended Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 4

Part Two: Indigenous Traditions

Week 6 (2/10 – 2/14): Indigenous Traditions

Video Lecture: Indigenous Traditions, Robin Wright

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 12

Part Three: Western Religious Traditions

Week 7 (2/17 – 2/21): Death & Afterlife in the Ancient World

Video Lecture: “Conceptions of Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt,” Phillip Green

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapters 7-8

Week 8 (2/24 – 2/28): Christian Traditions (Part One)

Video Lectures:

“Death and the Afterlife in Christianity,” Dan Johnson

“Death and the Afterlife in Renaissance Italy,” Elizabeth Ross

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 10

Week 9 (3/3 – 3/7): **Spring Break**

Week 10 (3/10 – 3/14): Christian Traditions (Part Two) Video

Lecture: “Recent Controversies,” Sean O’Neil

Required Readings:

[Holten, "Hell and the Goodness of God"](#)

[Editors of ChristianHistory.net, "What did Luther actually say in the 95 Theses that sparked the Protestant Reformation"](#)

[Gin, "Why the Hell Does Hell Still Matter?"](#)

[Interview with Rob Bell, "Hell, in Rob Bell's Own Words: State of Belief Radio"](#)

[Q&A: Francis Chan on Rob Bell and Hell](#)

Week 11 (3/17 – 3/21): Judaism

Video Lecture: “Judaism: Death & Afterlife,” Rabbi David Kaiman

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 9

Week 12 (3/24 – 3/28): Islam

Video Lecture: “Death and Dying in Islam,” Zoharah Simmons

Required Readings:

Kramer, Chapter 11

Section II: Death & the Afterlife in Pop Culture, Spirituality, and New Age Movements

Week 13 (3/31 – 4/4): Reincarnation, Past Lives, & Spiritualism

Video: “In Another Life: Reincarnation in America”

Required Readings:

Emmons, “The Spiritualist Movement: Bringing the Dead Back,” pp. 57-63 in *Handbook of Death & Dying* available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#)

Opposing Viewpoint Essay: Death & Dying (available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

- Shroder, “Reincarnation May Lead to Life After Death”

Weiss, *Many Lives, Many Masters* (**Chapter Excerpts TBA**)

Week 14 (4/7 – 4/11): The Afterlife in (Pop) Culture

Video: “Heaven: Where is it? How do we get there?”

Required Readings:

Kraemer, “What Happens When You Die,” in *Religions of Star Trek* (available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

Opposing Viewpoint Essays: Death & Dying (all available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

- Smith, “There Is an Afterlife”
- Kurtz, “There Is No Afterlife”

- Sharp, “Near-Death Experiences Are Glimpses of the Afterlife”
- Ebborn, Mulligan and Beyerstein, “Near-Death Experiences Are Not Glimpses of an Afterlife”

Optional Opposing Viewpoints Readings:

- Seidman, “Near-Death Experiences Have Natural, Not Spiritual, Causes”
- Ring, “Near-Death Experiences May Be Glimpses of an Afterlife”
- Groothuis, “Near-Death Experiences May Not Be Glimpses of the Afterlife”

Section III: Ethical Issues Concerning Death and Religion

Week 15 (4/14 – 4/18): Suicide and the Death Penalty in American Religion

Required Readings:

Stimming, “Suicide and American Religion: Tradition and Transformation,” in *Religion, Death, and Dying, Volume 2: Special Issues* (chapter excerpt available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

McAdams, “Religion and the Death Penalty in America” in *Religion, Death, and Dying, Volume 2: Special Issues* (chapter excerpt available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

Week 16 (4/21 – 4/23, ****Short Week****): Death and Bereavement and Course Conclusion

Required Readings:

Anderson, "Hospice & Spiritual Needs of the Dying," in *Religion, Death, and Dying, Volume 3: Bereavement and Death Rituals* (chapter excerpt available electronically on [UF Course Reserves](#))

Additional Readings TBA

Final Exam: TBA