

Course Syllabus

REL3191 - Death and Afterlife

Spring 2024

Instructor: Dr. Vasudha Narayanan *Distinguished Professor*

Location: Online Course, E-Learning (Canvas)

Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom

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Course Description

This course is divided into two sections. Both sections examine conceptions of death and the afterlife. The first (and longer) 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, what happens to a person at death, funerary rites, various conceptions of ultimate reality/realities (theistic, monistic, and so forth), notions of salvation and liberation, judgment, and various conceptions time (e.g., linear or cyclical). The second section will explore how some religious perspectives are reflected in popular culture and spiritual movements. This section will focus on views of reincarnation and debates on near-death experiences.

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 to 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.

Required Text

- Bregman, Lucy ed. *Death & Dying in World Religions*, 2nd ed. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2019.

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> [Links to an external site.](#)

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/E-learning website. Except for the final week of class, all quizzes will be administered on **Fridays** (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 at 12:00 am Friday, and the student will have until 11:59 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 of predetermined questions which ensures that no two students have the same quiz. This procedure is necessary in an online class 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 Canvas/E-Learning please consult the UF online helpdesk: <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/Links to an external site.> *If there is an internet outage that prevents you from taking a quiz, or transpires during a quiz in*

process, log your issue immediately with the UF Online Helpdesk and ask for a reference number.

Discussion Reflection/Response Postings

Every week students are expected to post at least one reflection post and a response to the reflections of at least one of their peers in the course. These discussion 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 compose posts on a topic that most interested them from the readings and/or videos for that week. The weekly posts must be made by 11:59 pm on their assigned due date. Students are encouraged to upload their posts 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. The two posts must meet the minimum requirement of 100 words each (200 words total). This is a suggested minimum word limit, and the student may desire to write more than the required minimum.

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 professionally and academically. 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 must 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. The due dates for your reflection papers are listed in the course schedule below. 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 Canvas/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. The final exam will take place on April 26th, 2024. 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.

****If you have any technical issues regarding your quizzes and/or other assignments, you must contact the UF Computing Help Desk immediately at 352-392-4357, option 2. Once you have done so, email your instructor and TA with the details of your problem**

along with your Help Desk ticket number. -- Please do not contact the instructors without the help desk ticket number.**

Before taking your first quiz, view the Canvas video tutorial on taking quizzes.

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/E-Learning (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>).

Academic Honesty

Guidelines for academic honesty at the University of Florida can be found at: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/Links to an external site.>

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the guidelines detailed at the above site and related links and adhere to them. *Plagiarism and the utilization of AI technologies of any kind will not be tolerated, the usage of which will be subject to disciplinary action at the University level. The formal University Policy is listed below.*

University Policy on Academic Misconduct

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code.

Note on Plagiarism

All written assignments including discussion posts and papers must include the proper method of citation from the citation style of your choosing. Please see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/Links to an external site.> for more information on how to cite your work. Please go through the preventing plagiarism guidelines.

The use of ChatGPT or other A.I. software is forbidden and goes against the university honor code.

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://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/Links to an external site.>

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a disability must register with the office of the Dean of Students: <https://disability.ufl.edu/Links to an external site.>

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office [Links to an external site.](#). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

Important Dates

According to the University of Florida Calendar

January 8- The semester begins

January 15- Martin Luther King Jr. Day

March 9 - 16: Spring Break

April 24- Classes end

April 27 - May 3- Final Exams

Tentative Course Schedule

(subject to modification)

Week 1 Course Introduction

Reading

- Bregman, Introduction, pp. ix-xii
- Moore & Williamson, "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response," pp. 3-12 in Handbook of Death & Dying.

Lecture/Video

- Welcome & Introduction Lecture [Links to an external site.](#)(14:30) by the instructor Dr. Vasudha Narayanan
- Course Overview

Assignments

Discussion due on 01/11/2024

Quiz on 01/12/2024

Respond to another student by 1/13/2024

Weeks 2 + 3 Hindu Traditions

Reading

- Bregman, Chapter 7, pp. 93-106
- Murata, "Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America," pp. 127-148

Lecture/Video

- Hinduism - 3-Part Video Lecture by Dr. Vasudha Narayanan

Assignments

Discussion due on 01/18/2024

Respond to another student by 1/20/2024

Quiz on 1/26/2024

**First reflection paper due 2/9/2024*

Week 4 Buddhist Traditions

Reading

- Bregman, Chapter 8, pp. 107–120
- Strong, "The Death and Parinirvana of the Buddha" and "The Distribution of the Relics," pp. 45–49
- Strong, "Introduction: Relics of the Buddha," pp. 1-20

Lecture/Video

- Introduction to lectures (2:45) by Vasudha Narayanan
- Buddhism: Death & Rebirth (26:40) by Phillip Green
- Buddhist Stuppas at the Harn (13:52) by Phillip Green
- Bodhisattvas at the Harn (6:09) by Alyssa Peyton

Assignments

Discussion due on 02/1/2024

Respond to another student by 2/3/2024

**First reflection paper due 2/9/2024*

Weeks 5+ 6 East Asian Traditions: China and Japan

Reading

- Bregman, Chapters 9 & 10, pp. 121 -152

Lecture/Video

- "Notions of Death and the Afterlife in China" by Kendall Marchman
- "Mizukokuyo Case Study" Japanese Traditions by Jason Purvis

Assignments

Discussion due on 02/8/2024

**First reflection paper due 2/9/2024*

Respond to another student by 2/10/2024

Quiz on 2/16/2024

Weeks 7+ 8 Indigenous Traditions

Reading

- Bregman, Chapter 11, pp. 155 - 167

Lecture/Video

- Death of the World, Movements in Indigenous Cultures by Dr. Robin M. Wright
- Death and Afterlife According to the Baniwa by Dr. Robin M. Wright
- Religions in Andean Region by Dr. Maya Stanfield-Mazzi
- Exhibit of the Kongo by Dr. Robin Poyner
- Life that Doesn't End With Death Links to an external site (TED Talk) by Kelli Swazey
- What happens when we die?

Assignments

Discussion due on 02/22/2024

Respond to another student by 2/24/2024

**Second reflection paper due 3/8/2024*

Week 9 Christian Traditions

Reading

- Bregman, Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 43-76
- 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"

Lecture/Video

- Death and the Afterlife in Christianity by Dr. Dan Johnson
- Death and the Afterlife in Renaissance Italy by Dr. Elizabeth Ross
- Controversies Concerning Hell by Dr. Sean O'Neil
- Heaven & Hell (PBS)

Assignments

Discussion due on 02/29/2024

Respond to another student by 3/2/2024

Quiz on 3/8/2024

**Second reflection paper due 3/8/2024*

Spring Break March 9-16, 2024

Week 10 Judaism

Reading

- Bregman, Chapter 3, pp. 29-42
- Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz, Does the Soul Survive? A Jewish Journey to Belief in the Afterlife, Past Lives and Living with Purpose. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Light Publishing, 2001. Pp. 33-39 and 81-101.

Lecture/Video

- Judaism: Death and Afterlife by Rabbi David Kaiman
- What happens when we die?

Assignments

Discussion due on 03/21/2024

Respond to another student by 3/23/2024

Week 11+ 12 Islam

Reading

- Bregman, Chapter 6, pp. 77-90

Lecture/Video

- Death and Dying in Islam by Dr. Zoharah Simmons

Assignments

Discussion due on 03/28/2024

Respond to another student by 3/30/2024

Quiz on 4/5/2024

Week 13 Reincarnation

Reading

- Shroder, "Reincarnation May Lead to Life After Death," pp. 190-200
- Emmons, "The Spiritualist Movement: Bringing the Dead Back"
- Weiss, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, Preface & Chapters 1-3

Video

- In Another Life: Reincarnation in America

Assignments

Discussion due on 4/11/2024

Respond to another student by 4/13/2024

Complete End-of-Semester Survey

Week 14+ 15 The Afterlife in Contemporary Culture

Reading

- Smith, "There Is an Afterlife"
- Kurtz, "There Is No Afterlife"
- Opposing Viewpoint Essays: Death & Dying
- Sharp, "Near-Death Experiences Are Glimpses of the Afterlife"
- Ebbern, Mulligan and Beyerstein, "Near-Death Experiences Are Not Glimpses of an Afterlife"
- Kraemer, "What Happens When You Die," in *Religions of Star Trek*
- Alexander, "Proof of Heaven: A Doctor's Experience With the Afterlife," in *Newsweek*

Video

- Dr. Vasudha Narayanan introduces Dr. Louis Ritz
- On Consciousness, Near Death Experience, and Meditation by Dr. Louis Ritz, Department of Neuroscience, University of Florida
- What happens when we die?

Optional Reading

- 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"
- Singh, "Inner and Outer Peace through Meditation"

Assignments

Discussion due on 4/18/2024

Quiz on 4/19/2024

Respond to another student by 4/20/2024

Final Exam due April 26th