

Enquire Teaching Timetable

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Course Outcome

ANTH 2351 - Death, Death Ritual and Culture

Learning Outcome

Through taking this course, students will:

- understand how the treatment of death varies cross-culturally, and thus how our own personal understandings of death are not necessarily universally shared;
- analyze processes of grieving and structures of death ritual in terms of how they vary cross-culturally;
- apply theoretical schemes of cultural evolution to understandings of death over human history;
- evaluate how death and fear of death affects contemporary politics, economics, and culture in societies across the globe;
- evaluate the place of death within our own lives.

Course Syllabus

Week 1, Sex and Death: Human Universals or Cultural Constructions?

This week examines what about human understandings and experiences of death are universal and what varies cross-culturally.

Week 2, Conceptualizing Death

This week explores different ways of imagining the process of death and its relationship to life.

Week 3, Death Ritual as a Process

This week considers what death ritual accomplishes in different societies. Particular attention will be paid to differing ways of handling the dead body.

Week 4, The Denial of Death; Psychologies of Death and Dying

This week presents and analyzes theories of the psychological mechanisms that allow humans to deal with the knowledge that death is unavoidable for both them and their loved ones.

Week 5, Death in Chinese and Japanese Societies

This week examines conceptions of death and death ritual in China and Japan, both traditionally and in the contemporary world.

Week 6, Grief and Mourning

This week considers the universality of mourning as well as culturally divergent ways of dealing with the problem of grief.

Week 7, Ghosts and Haunting

This week analyzes the presence of ideas about ghosts and haunting in a wide variety of societies and explore what these ideas tell us about humanity.

Week 8, Uncommon Death, Witchcraft, and Vengeance

This week considers the human propensity to find a cause for death and link it to the punishment of particular individuals in different societies.

Week 9, Death, Politics, and Power

This week analyzes the ways in which the problematic of death interlinks with politics at the level of the nation-state.

Week 10, Death and Modernity

This week examines how understandings of death have shifted with modernity: industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of science.

Week 11, Governing Death; Death and the State

This week explores how governments regulate death in a range of different societies.

Week 12, The Economies of Death and Death Ritual

This week portrays the economic processes linked to funerals and death, including commercial transactions, inheritance, insurance, and gift giving.

Week 13, The Future of Death

This week examines how death might change in the future, including speculations about the biological possibilities of reversing aging, the technologies of transferring consciousness to computers or cyborg bodies, and the beliefs of people interested in promoting these technologies.

Assessment Type

	Assessment Type	Current Percent
1	Essay test or exam	50
2	Homework or assignment	30
3	Participation	20

Feedback for Evaluation

1. Course and Teaching Evaluation Survey
2. Internal Course Review

Required Readings

Week 1

-- none: course intro

Week 2

--Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *What Does It All Mean?* p. 87-94

--Malinowski, Bronislaw. 2004 [1954]. "Magic, Science, and Religion: Death and the Reintegration of the Group," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Readers*, pp. 19-22

--Kipnis, Andrew B. 2017 "The Universality of Sex and Death" *American Anthropologist* 119(4): 759-761.

Week 3

--Van Gennep, Arnold. 2004 [1960]. "," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Readers*, pp. 213-223.

--Murnane, William J. 1992. "Taking It with You: The Problem of Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt." In Hiroshi Obayashi, ed., *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, pp. 35-48

Week 4

--Solomon, Sheldon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski. 2015. "Managing the Terror of Death," in *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*,

Week 5

--Kipnis, Andrew B. 2019. "The Evolution of Funerary Ritual in Urbanizing China." In Helaine Selin and Robert M.. Rakoff, eds. *Death Across Cultures: Death and Dying in Non-Western Cultures*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 1-18

--Mathews, Gordon. 2019. "Death and the Afterlife in Japan." In Helaine Selin and Robert M.. Rakoff, eds. *Death Across Cultures: Death and Dying in Non-Western Cultures*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 41-56

Week 6

--Radcliffe-Brown, A.R.. 2004 [1922]. "The Andaman Islanders," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, pp. 151-155.

--Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2004 [1993]. "Death Without Weeping," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Readers*, pp.179-193.

--Danelly, Jason. 2018. "Mourning as Mutuality." In Antonius C. G. M. Robben, ed., *A Companion to the Anthropology of Death*. Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 131-143.

Week 7

--Bosco, Joseph. 2003. "The Supernatural in Hong Kong Young People's Ghost Stories." *Anthropological Forum* 13(2):141-149.

--Freed, Stanley A. and Ruth S. Freed, "Taraka's Ghost," in J. Spradley and D. McCurdy (eds), *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, p. 283-290

Week 8

--Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 2004 [1937]. "Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, pp. 115-121.

--Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, pp. 167-178.

Week 9

--Verdery, Katherine. 2004 [1999]. "Death Bodies Animate the Study of Politics," *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Readers*, pp. 303-310.

--Wakeman, Frederic. 1988. "Mao's Remains," *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 254-288.

Week 10

--Aries, Philippe. 1981. "Invisible Death" *The Wilson Quarterly* 5(1): 105-115.

--Kipnis, Andrew B. 2017 "Governing the Souls of Chinese Modernity" *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(2):217-238.

Week 11

--Toulson, Ruth, 2012 "Necessary Mistakes: Reconciling the Unsettled Dead and the Imagined State in Singapore," *Power: Southeast Asia Perspectives*. Liana Chua, Joanna Cook, Nick Long, and Lee Wilson, eds, pp. 93-10

--Mullaney, Thomas. 2019. "No Room for the Dead: On Grave Relocation in Contemporary China" *The Chinese Deathscape* Stanford University Press (digital publication, no page numbers)

Week 12

--Suzuki, Hikaru. 2003. "McFunerals: The Transition of Japanese Funerary Services." *Asian Anthropology*, vol. 2, pp. 49-78.

Week 13

--Harari, Yuval Noah. 2017. "The Data Religion," *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Pp. 372-402. Harper Collins.

Recommended Readings

Week 2

--Davies, Douglas J. 2005. *A Brief History of Death*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Week 3

--Metcalf, Peter, and Richard Huntington. 1991. *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 4

--Becker, Ernest. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York: The Free Press.

--Solomon, Sheldon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski. 2015. *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*. New York: Random House

Week 5

--Watson, James L. ed., 1990. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*

Berkeley: University of California Press.

--Hikaru Suzuki, ed. 2012. *Death and Dying in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge

Week 6

--"Emotion," in Robben, Antonius C. G. M., ed., 2018. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Death*. Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell.

--King, Barbara. 2013. *How Animals Grieve*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 7

--Hanks, Michele. 2015. *Haunted Heritage: The Cultural Politics of Ghost Tourism, Populism, and the Past*. London: Routledge.

Week 8

--Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1976 [1937]. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

--Lurhmann, T. M. 1991. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Week 9

--Verdery, Katherine. 2000. *The Political Life of Dead Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Week 10

--Green, James W. 2012. *Beyond the Good Death: The Anthropology of Modern Dying*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

--Gawande, Atul. 2014. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. New York: Henry Holt.

Week 11

--Bauman, Zygmunt. 1992. *Mortality, Immortality & Other Life Strategies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press

--Becker, Ernest. 1985. *Escape from Evil*. New York: The Free Press,

Week 12

-- Sebastien Penmell Boret, Susan O. Long and Sergei Kan, eds., *Death in the Early 21st Century*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Week 13

--Harari, Yuval Noah. 2017. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York: HarperCollins.