Instructor: Dr. Sherry Smith, CT
Email: smithsa9@mcmaster.ca
Office Hours: by appointment
Lecture: Wednesdays 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Location: 1E05
Teaching Assistant: Crystal Marie Beaudoin
Email: beaudoc@mcmaster.ca

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION
A comparative survey of the diversity of social and ritual practices, religious beliefs, and emotional responses surrounding death in a variety of non-Western cultural contexts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
Based on material presented in lectures, readings and videos, this course provides an introduction to the ways in which death is understood, experienced, and given meaning in a wide variety of cross-cultural settings. This course will focus on religious beliefs and ritual practices surrounding death in the major non-Western religious traditions and in the religious traditions of indigenous people in Africa and North America.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIAL
3) Online Readings

Note: Both texts are available as an e-book at Conestoga Library Resource. Please note that Death, mourning and burial: A cross cultural reader has limited reader access, meaning that only 3 students can use the book at the same time, while Religious understandings of a good death has unlimited user access. Texts are also available for sale in the Conestoga Bookstore or elsewhere.

EVALUATION OF GRADES
Online Assignment (due by December 1) 5%
Obituary Assignment (due October 4) 10%
Midterm Exam (October 18) 25%
Essay (due December 6) 30%
Final Exam (TBD) 30%
EXAMS (25% + 30%): The mid-term and final examinations will be multiple-choice, fill in the blank, matching and/or short answer style questions. Both will be 90 minutes in length and will cover material from lectures, class discussions, required course materials and audio-visual presentations. The mid-term examination will include material covered from September 6 – October 4 (inclusive). The final examination will not be cumulative; it will only include material covered after the October mid-term. Audio-visual materials will only be shown in the scheduled classes. Some of the audio-visual materials must be ordered from other Ontario Universities and are only available for the scheduled showing in class.

ONLINE ASSIGNMENT (5%): For this assignment you are to find a web artifact and discuss its significance within the context of this course. This may include an online resource, news article, photograph, video, discussion forum or other material. Your writing should be approximately 150 words. It should also make reference to course material: lecture themes, readings or audio-visual material that we have viewed in class. A web artifact can only be used once. If a peer has already posted a web artifact, it cannot be discussed again. You must select a different web artifact. In addition, you may not use material that I have used in class. Web artifacts are to be posted to the discussion category labeled “Web Artifact” on Avenue. Please include a link to your source. The final day to post your web artifact is December 1 by 11:59 PM. After this date, a web artifact will not be accepted.

OBITUARY ASSIGNMENT (10%): For this assignment, you are to write an obituary that could be submitted to the newspaper upon your death. What would you want an obituary about you to state? Your obituary should be 250-300 words in length (1 page maximum). Once you write the obituary, you will write a concluding paragraph or two that provides an introspective reflection on these questions (1 page maximum): How did it feel to write this obituary? What does the final product tell you about how you want to be remembered? Does the obituary reflect who you are now or who you are aspiring to be or a little bit of both? The assignment is due on October 4 by 11:59 PM. Please submit your obituary to the appropriate box on Avenue to Learn.

ESSAY (30%): This essay will bring together course information and analytical skills with your own experience of life and death. Drawing on academic resources and incorporating aspects of selected cultural/religious traditions that we have studied in this course, write a detailed account of how your funeral could be observed. You may also choose to incorporate the Jewish, Christian or Muslim chapters from Religious understandings of a good death or unassigned chapters from Death, mourning and burial as academic resources. Begin your essay with a short scenario describing the cause or type of death and initial reactions. In your essay you will address the following questions: How is your body treated and “disposed of?” Why and where? Is there a service? Who officiates? What rituals are performed? How, why and by whom? What kinds of views of the afterlife will be presumed? How are the mourners to react? What memorial rites or forms of remembrance will there be? Grading will not be based on individual choices, but rather on the analysis of your choices. You should use citations to course materials and other sources. Or, alternatively you could use footnotes/endnotes to make additional academic observations. I do not want to see just an imaginative narrative account—you must incorporate academic sources. BE CREATIVE! The essay should be approximately 8-10 pages in length, not including title page and references. You must also include a bibliography. Your essay is due December 6 by 11:59 PM. Please submit your essay to the appropriate drop box on Avenue to Learn.

ASSIGNMENT STYLE GUIDE: All graded assignments should be written using APA style. Students should make use of these guidelines provided by Conestoga College with regards to style: https://apa.conestogac.on.ca.
LATE SUBMISSIONS/EXTENSIONS
Students who cannot meet an assignment deadline are required to consult with the course instructor or teaching assistant. This consultation must occur before the assignment is due. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day, and will not be accepted more than 5 days after the due date unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor or teaching assistant.

COURSE LECTURES, READINGS, AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL AND DUE DATES

September 6
Introduction: The Cross-Cultural Study of Death
Film: The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America (59 minutes) ~Kanopy

September 13
Concepts of Death
Film: Dying in Africa: Perspectives on the End of Life in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and South Africa (50 minutes) ~Films on Demand

September 20
Mortuary Rituals
Film: Funeral Season (87 minutes)~Kanopy
**September 27**

**Grief and Mourning**

*Film:*  
*Mourning for Mangatopi* (54 minutes) ~ Kanopy


**October 4**

**Memorials: Relationships with the Dead**

*Film:*  
*La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (51 minutes) ~ Kanopy


**October 18**

**MIDTERM EXAM** (10:00 AM – 11:30 AM)

**October 25**

**Religious Understandings of a Good Death**

*Film:*  
*Life Before Death* (82 minutes) ~ Kanopy


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<tr>
<th>November 1</th>
<th>Dying in India</th>
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<tr>
<td>Film:</td>
<td><em>Death and Dying in Varanasi</em> (53 minutes) ~Films on Demand</td>
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<th>November 8</th>
<th>Death and the Ancestors in China</th>
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<td>Film:</td>
<td><em>Human Harvest: China’s Organ Trafficking</em> (52 minutes) ~Kanopy</td>
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<th>November 15</th>
<th>Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan Book of the Dead</th>
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<tr>
<td>Film:</td>
<td><em>Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation</em> (45 minutes) ~National Film Board Streamed Video Collection</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Vultures of Tibet: The Tradition of Sky Burial (22 minutes)~Kanopy</td>
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<th>November 22</th>
<th>Death in Japan and Thailand</th>
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<td>Film:</td>
<td><em>Saving 10,000: Winning a War on Suicide in Japan</em> (52 minutes)~the following link is not guaranteed: <a href="http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/saving-10000-winning-war-suicide-japan/">http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/saving-10000-winning-war-suicide-japan/</a></td>
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November 29

**Film:**

Indigenous People of North America

3rd World Canada ~(47 minutes) Doon Library (E99 .C88 T472 2010)

**Reading:**


December 6

**Film:**

Death in African Cultures

Homegoings (56 minutes) ~Kanopy

**Reading:**


ESSAY IS DUE

Policies

DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments.

UNIVERSITY MANDATED ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.

- Improper collaboration in group work.

- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.
AVENUE TO LEARN
In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

POLICY FOR MODIFYING A COURSE
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

MCMASTER STUDENT ABSENCE FORM
In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”. Please note these regulations have changed beginning Spring/Summer 2015. The timeframe within which the MSAF is valid has been reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The upper limit for which an MSAF can be submitted has been reduced from ‘less than 30%’ to ‘less than 25%’ of the course weight. As per the policy, students must immediately follow up with their instructors to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Failure to do so may negate their relief. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean’s office.