

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of Psychology
PSYCH/HLTH/GERON 218
Psychology of Death and Dying
Fall 2018
6:30pm-9:20pm Thursdays, SJ2 1004

Instructor and T.A. Information

Instructor: Christopher T. Burris, Ph.D.
Office: Sweeney 2031
Office Phone: (519) 884-8111, ext. 28213
Office Hours: by appointment
Email: cburris@uwaterloo.ca

T.A.: Marina Vrebac
Office: Sweeney 2035
Office Phone: (519) 884-8111, ext. 28256
Office Hours: by appointment
Email: m2vrebac@uwaterloo.ca

Course Description

Variations in the meaning and significance of death and dying will be considered from a psychological perspective, with particular attention to the contexts (e.g., cultural, familial, life-span developmental) in which these variations occur.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

I hope you'll walk away from this course with a psychologically informed understanding of:

- 1) the pervasive impact that death has on our experience of the world, and
- 2) how multiple, broader influences (e.g., biological, historical, political, media-related) affect an individual's experience of death.

PLEASE NOTE: Death makes many people uneasy. Some deal with it by avoiding any reminders of it, while others embrace "safe" notions of death and ignore others. In this course I will confront death as frankly and honestly as I am able. This may sometimes involve images, ideas, and discussions that some people might find upsetting. It's my responsibility to educate. It's your responsibility to decide whether or not taking this course is in your best interest at this time. Please choose wisely.

Most of us have experienced losses. All of us will die. Reflecting on one's own experience is thus inevitable. Indeed, I encourage it. We will address loss and the prospect of our own demise in various ways throughout the term. Still, it's important to note that *this course is neither intended nor designed to serve as group therapy*. Thus, persons (or those with loved ones) who are experiencing significant feelings of anxiety, anger, or grief linked to death-related issues are encouraged to seek out support from qualified mental health professionals.

Confrontation with death often evokes reactions that are intensely personal and individualistic. This diversity can be fascinating, but others' expressions may sometimes feel threatening or offensive. Please be aware of this potential in yourself and in others, and strive to maintain an atmosphere in which people can respectfully disagree.

Required Readings and Course Schedule

Assigned readings are *available as course e-reserves through the UW Library system*. The readings are a mix of general/specific, readable/technical, and newer/older, and include specifically Canadian content.

06 Sep - Introduction; Animate Level

Kastenbaum, R. (2009). What is death? In R. Kastenbaum, *Death, society, and human experience*, 10th ed. (pp. 35-69). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

13 Sep - Species Level; Human Level

Masson, J. M., & McCarthy, S. (1995). Grief, sadness, and the bones of elephants. In *When elephants weep: The emotional lives of animals* (pp. 91-110). New York: Delta/Dell.

Juhl, J., & Routledge, C. (2016). Putting the terror in Terror Management Theory: Evidence that the awareness of death does cause anxiety and undermine psychological well-being. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25, 99-103.

20 Sep - Historical/Cultural Level

DeSpelder, L. A., & Strickland, A. L. (2005). Perspectives on death: Cross-cultural and historical. In *The last dance: Encountering death and dying*, 7th Edition (pp. 87-123). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Northcott, H. C., & Wilson D. M. (2016). Dying and death in Canada today. In *Dying and death in Canada*, 3rd ed. (pp. 25-52). Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (**end of Test 1 readings**)

27 Sep – TEST ONE; Medical Level

Ashby, M. (2009). The dying human: A perspective from palliative medicine. In A. Kellehear (Ed.), *The study of dying: From autonomy to transformation* (pp. 76-98). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

04 Oct - Legal Level

Browne, A., & Russell, J. S. (2016). Physician-assisted death in Canada. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 25, 377-383.

Vandiver, M., Giacopassi, D. J., & Gathje, P. R. (2002). "I hope someone murders your mother!": An exploration of extreme support for the death penalty. *Deviant Behavior*, 23, 385-415.

11 Oct – NO CLASS

18 Oct – Religious Level

Hayes, J. C., & Hendrix, C. C. (2008). The role of religion in bereavement. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, H. Schut, and W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 327-348). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

25 Oct - Arts/Media Level

Light, D. (2017). Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism. *Tourism Management*, 61, 275-301.

01 Nov - Political Level

Unger, R. (2006). Untangling the web: Threat, ideology, and political behavior. In P. R. Kimmel and C. E. Stout (Eds.), *Collateral damage: The psychological consequences of America's war on*

terrorism (pp. 79-108). Westport, CT: Praeger. **(end of Test 2 readings)**

08 Nov - TEST TWO; Relational Level

Walsh, F., & McGoldrick, M. (1991). Loss and the family: A systemic perspective. In F. Walsh and M. McGoldrick (Eds.), *Living beyond loss: Death in the family* (pp. 1-29). New York: W. W. Norton.

15 Nov - Individual Level 1 (Developmental Considerations)

Gillett-Swan, J. K., (2017). ‘You can’t have well-being if you’re dead. . .or can you?’ Children’s realistic and logical approach to discussing life, death and wellbeing. *Children & Society*, 31, 497-509.

Manoogian, M. M., Vandenbroeke, J., Ringerling, A., Toray, T. & Cooley, E. (2017). Emerging adults’ experiences of grandparent death. *Omega*, 76, 351-372.

22 Nov - Individual Level 2 (Personality Considerations)

Kastenbaum, R. (2000). Dying: Toward a psychological perspective. In R. Kastenbaum, *The Psychology of Death* (pp. 207-251). London, UK: Free Association Books. **(end of Test 3 readings)**

29 Nov - TEST THREE

Course Requirements and Assessment

TEST 1 = 35%; TEST 2 = 40%; TEST 3 = 25%. All tests are multiple choice. Bring pencils/erasers on test days. ***Be prepared to present identification (your WAT card) during tests.*** Tests are weighted based on how much material they cover; they are not cumulative. All material covered in class and in the assigned readings is testable. Class will resume after a break following Test 1 and Test 2. Test marks will be posted on LEARN as soon as possible. In order to be fair to everyone, ***the mark received for a test stands*** – it will not be dropped or re-weighted. There is no final exam.

Extra Credit: Up to 4% extra credit is available via SONA research participation. Detailed instructions appear in the SONA instructions available for download on LEARN. As an active researcher myself, I ask that you **PLEASE TAKE ANY RESEARCH PARTICIPATION SERIOUSLY** – careless completion of a study’s materials is a waste of everyone’s time and seriously undercuts the research process.

UW Policy regarding Illness and Missed Tests: UW Examination Regulations

(www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf) state that: 1) A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html. 2) If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor. 3) The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations. 4) Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Thus, you are entitled to test rescheduling for *legitimate* medical, compassionate, or religious grounds. Whenever possible, please inform me PRIOR to the scheduled test to arrange an alternate writing time. A make-up test should be written as quickly as possible upon your return to classes, with the obvious provision of access to missed material (see Class Attendance below). When arriving to write a make-up test, please have the appropriate documentation in hand to support a medical, compassionate, or religious claim. Make-up exams may differ in format from the original.

Attendance Policy

To attend or not attend lectures is your choice, but please be aware that: (1) *You are responsible for all material covered in lectures;* (2) *there is often minimal overlap between lectures and readings;* and (3) *I do not post slides or distribute lecture notes.* If you miss class, then your first step should be to find a classmate willing to provide you with the notes you missed. If your absence is *legitimate*, then I will be happy to answer questions about the missed material once you've had a look at those "missing" notes.

Before meeting with me to clarify course material, be sure to prepare specific questions – that will make the process faster and smoother.

Electronic Device Policy

Recent research shows that in-class use of any electronic devices for non-class-related purposes can hurt both your performance and that of students around you. See:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/27/class-cellphone-and-laptop-use-lowers-exam-scores-new-study-shows>

Consequently, such use is strongly discouraged.

Other Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity](#) webpage for more information.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#).

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities: The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

How to Do Your Best in This Class

0) Make the decision to do your best and commit yourself to this! There is no substitute.

1) Come to class! Be alert, ask questions – either in class or later. Do more than mindlessly write down whatever appears on a slide: *Think* about the material – try to come up with your own examples and illustrations by applying the material to people you know, media happenings, etc.

2) Do the readings! Ideally, read them at least once before the relevant week's lecture, and at least once after that lecture. Don't mindlessly run a highlighter over the words: *Think* about the material – write down questions, observations, possible examples, etc. as you read.

3) Look for connections! We will deal with a lot of specific phenomena, but there some big themes will keep recurring throughout the term. Look for them. Look also for connections between lecture and assigned readings. Think about what *this* theorist might say about *that* topic, etc. – even if we've never addressed this in class.

4) Test yourself! Don't assume that certain concepts are "easy" or "common sense" – often, they are not. Can you explain an idea to someone, without reciting your notes, in a way that that person will understand? If given a blank page, could you reproduce the structure of ideas I use to organize my lectures? Can you create a structure of ideas that accurately summarizes a reading's main points? Can you recognize sets of information in lectures or readings that might make good multiple choice options, and can you explain how members of a set are similar or different?

These may sound difficult, especially if you have gotten by with only memorization in the past. Having said that, I strongly suspect that you **WILL** do better in this class if you put the above suggestions into practice. *I have also prepared the "MC Survival Guide" (downloadable through LEARN) that offers you specific tips for preparing for my tests.* Remember: I am happy to see you succeed, but **YOU** have to do the work.

Final Words: Good luck! I hope that this course is a worthwhile experience.