

REL 220-00

Issues in Death and Dying – 3 credits

Spring 2009

Tuesdays/Thursdays – 2:30-3:45 p.m.

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and by appointment

SYLLABUSOutcomes, Objectives and Methods of Evaluation

As a result of taking REL 220 students will experience the following outcomes: the development of a critical understanding about the way that death is perceived in contemporary American society, the development of understanding about perceptions of death in other cultures and religions and the acquisition of care giving skills for the dying. These outcomes will be advanced through the following objectives and modes of evaluation: to understand the prevailing American attitude of denial and its historical and societal causes (evaluated through the final examination and the first short paper), to understand attitudes toward death in ancient Mesopotamia, and in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism as well as animistic religions (evaluated through the final examination and the term paper). Finally, students will gain an appreciation of grief, the role of ethics and death, and the hospice movement in conjunction with the student's own understanding of death (evaluated through the final examination and the second short paper).

NOTE: Students are required to save a copy on disc of take home exams and papers for the duration of the course.

January

- 20 Distribution of Syllabus
Course Introduction
- 22 No Class
- 27 Death and the Media, Attitudes toward death in contemporary American society
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapters 1 & 2
- 29 A historical overview of attitudes toward death
Discussion, The Death of Ivan Ilyich.

February

- 3 Historical overview continued
Contemporary American Funerals
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 8
- 5 Cultural Attitudes Toward Death
How We Die
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 3 and 11

10 Film: "Death, The Trip of a Lifetime – Going for the Glory"

12 Death in ancient Egypt

17 Death in ancient Mesopotamia

19 Film: Legacy Series, "Iraq: The Cradle of Civilization"
First Paper Due

24 Death in Judaism

26 Death in Christianity

March

3 Death in Islam

5 Death in Hinduism

10, 12 **Spring Break**

17 Death in Buddhism

19 Film: "Wisdom of Faith Series: Hinduism and Buddhism"

24 Death in Animistic Cultures

26 Ethics and Death
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapters 6 and 9
Second Paper Due

31 Suicide
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 12

April

2 Children's attitudes toward death
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 10

7 Mass Death
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 13
Film: "White Light, Black Rain"

9 Mass Death, continued

14 Bereavement - Understanding Grief
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapters 5 & 7
Discussion – Tuesdays with Morrie

16 The Hospice Movement – history and development
DeSpelder/Strickland, Chapter 4

- 21 The Hospice Movement, continued
(Term papers due – 1st Deadline)
 Film: “To live in hope, to die in peace”
- 23 The Hospice Movement – current Reality
- 28 Loss **(Journals due).**
(Term papers due – 2nd deadline)
- 30 Loss, Ctd.
(Take Home Final Examination Distributed)
Course conclusion

May

- 5 **NO CLASS – FOLLOW FRIDAY’S SCHEDULE**
Take Home Final Examination due in Curtis 239 by 4:00 p.m.

Required Reading (available in the Cedar Crest College Bookstore)

DeSpelder, L. A., & Stickland, A. L. (1992). *The last dance: Encountering death and dying*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man and life’s greatest lesson*. New York: Doubleday.

Tolstoy, L. (1981). *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. New York: Bantam.

Course Requirements:

Each student will keep a journal reflecting on readings, class discussions and their own observations about death (15%).

In addition, students will complete two papers of 5-7 pages (15% each). The first paper will explore attitudes toward death in contemporary society. The theme may be discussed using film, literature, music, or the student’s own understanding of popular culture. The second paper will examine the beliefs about death and dying in the student’s family and religious tradition (if any). This is not intended as a defense of a belief but as a critical analysis of the nature of beliefs about death, conflicts within them, and suggestions about their impact on the way one functions in society using the student’s own experiences as a reference point. A term paper (25%) of 8-12 pages will explore attitudes toward death in a culture or religion other than the student’s own. Term papers may focus on ancient or modern societies and are not restricted to those examined in the course.

Papers are to be typed (double-spaced) and if involving research must include an adequate bibliography of at least five sources employing one of the standard style systems (APA, Chicago, or MLA). Papers turned in on April 21 and will receive full comments. Papers may also be submitted on April 28 but will receive a grade without comments. Due to the large number of students enrolled in the course drafts of papers cannot be received.

Course requirements also include a final examination (25%), and class participation (10%).

Standards for the Academic Study of Religion:

Religion courses at Cedar Crest College are grounded in academic study from a variety of disciplines. To this end students are expected to analyze myth, ritual and the cultural manifestations of religion without making value judgments about the phenomena they are observing and without imposing any faith perspective (including their own) on the data. Any student having difficulty with this approach is urged to consult with the instructor as early as possible in the semester.

Honor Code:

Students are expected to abide by the Cedar Crest Honor Code at all times and to observe a courteous classroom demeanor.

Attendance:

Unless excused for health or personal emergency, students are expected to be in class. Students missing more than three classes without a valid excuse will lose 2 points from their final course grade for each day absent.

PLAGIARISM AND THE HONOR CODE

Plagiarism is “the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work,” (The Random House College Dictionary, Revised Edition, New York: Random House, 1975, p. 1014). The Cedar Crest College Faculty Handbook (Book Four, Article B, Section 3, p. 14) further defines it:

Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed within quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified by the instructor. Paraphrased material from an outside source must also be attributed. In addition, if the student is indebted to another source for a specific perspective or a line of argument—regardless of whether the student has directly quoted the source or not—that debt must be acknowledged.

In consideration of these ideas, all Religious Studies courses will treat plagiarism in the following ways. The submission of an entire paper that is not the student’s own work, whether borrowed or purchased, will result in an “F” for the course. The submission of part of a paper or examination that is not the student’s work will result in an “F” for that assignment. This holds true even in those cases where an outside source is acknowledged but the inclusion of the material is presented as the student’s own work without quotation marks. All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the office of the Provost.

While plagiarism is a serious violation of academic life, it is understandable that unintentional violations (including misquotes and occasional omission of references) do occur. While such omissions must be corrected before a grade can be recorded, they do not result in any further action.

INTERNET SOURCES

Internet sources on all academic papers must be used with discretion since they represent a surface level of research and are often not subjected to peer review prior to publication. Research papers must include at least ten sources and no more than four internet citations with the exception of on line journals and academic papers available on educational (.edu) sites. Encyclopedias (including Wikipedia) cannot be cited as resources in research papers.

GRADE REQUIREMENTS FOR PAPERS

An "A" paper must have:

- Excellence in the creative and critical presentation of an argument relevant to the assignment.
- A clearly identified thesis or central idea.
- A structure that connects the ideas in the paper with the thesis.
- A complete bibliography or "works cited" page(s) in appropriate format.
- Clearly articulated relevance and significance of the subject matter.
- The paper must be grammatically correct and relatively free from errors in grammar, syntax or spelling. It must also contain appropriate references in the text and follow an accepted style system.

A "B" paper must have:

- A clearly identified thesis or central idea.
- A structure that relates to the thesis but may lack some connections.
- A bibliography or "works cited" page(s) that is relatively free from error.
- Appropriate connections with the assignment.
- The paper must be relatively free from errors in grammar, syntax or spelling. It must also contain appropriate references in the text and follow an accepted style system.

A "C" paper is identified by:

- A poorly constructed central idea.
- Poor structure.
- Incomplete bibliography, "works cited" and references in the text.
- Appropriate connections with the assignment.
- Errors in grammar, syntax or spelling.

A "D" paper is identified by:

- No central idea.
- Little or no structure.
- Incomplete or missing bibliography, "works cited" and references in the text.
- Abundant errors in grammar, syntax or spelling.
- Unclear or confused relationship to the assignment.

A failing paper is identified by:

- No central idea or structure.
- Failure to include bibliography "works cited" or references in the text.
- Abundant errors in grammar, syntax or spelling.
- Lack of relationship to the assignment.