We all believe we know what death is because it is a familiar event and one that arouses intense emotion. It seems both ridiculous and sacrilegious to question the value of this intimate knowledge and to wish to apply reason to a subject where only the heart is competent. Yet questions arise in connection with death which cannot be answered by the heart because the heart is unaware of them. Even for the biologist death is not a simple and obvious fact; it is a problem to be scientifically investigated. But where a human being is concerned the physiological phenomena are not the whole of death...to the organic event is added a complex mass of beliefs, emotions and activities which give it its distinctive character.

~ Robert Hertz, p. 197 in Death, Mourning and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader

Course Description:

In this course we explore the idea of death as an individual, social and political act. Drawing upon a range of disciplinary perspectives, texts and methods, we examine cultural meanings about death. The class will investigate the intersections between the social and physical bodies that human beings inhabit and will take a critical perspective on Western medical assumptions about death and dying. The course is a writing intensive course in which students will work toward receipt of the W certification through a variety of writing assignments, editing assignments and discussion.

Course Expectations:

Is death a universal of the human condition or a culturally bound habit of thought? Focusing on a variety of ethnographic contexts, the basic aim of this course is to explore some of the ways in which death has been (re)presented in order to be resisted or embraced. As this exploration revolves around the ‘discourse’ of death, manifested in the changing theoretical attitudes towards the ethnography of mortuary rites, it also attempts to highlight a deeper affinity between the ‘reality’ of death and interdisciplinary quests for comparative knowledge.

Students are expected to gain an advanced understanding of the issues and debates that animate the study of death. In addition, by recognizing that much of what we call ‘culture’ or ‘society’ is embodied in our response to death, they should be able to engage critically with some of the problems arising from the anthropological quest for cross-cultural comparison and to appreciate the differences/similarities between the various theoretical approaches.
I expect that this course will be challenging – not only in terms of material we cover, but in addition, much of what we learn and discuss can be a challenge to our own personal beliefs about the experience of death and dying. As with any class here at DePauw, I expect that you listen carefully to others, respect differing opinions and share your insights and arguments in thoughtful and respect ways. I expect that we will all learn something new each day in this course and that you will extend these conversations to the world beyond our classroom.

Other things I expect and you are required to do:

- you will attend class - I expect you to attend and be engaged in relevant discussions and demonstrate knowledge of the materials
- you will attend prepared (see above) – participation does not mean simply showing up and sitting in a seat, it means showing up prepared and willing to contribute
- you will feel free to come and see me if you are having any difficulties or just want to talk more about the class, or anything else that you have questions about
- you will hand in all assignments on time-I will accept a late paper but will penalize it accordingly in order to be fair to others
- you will complete all assignments – you cannot pass this course if you do not complete all of the required writing elements that have been assigned, no matter what your overall number of points

Course Evaluation:

Everyone probably tells you this, but to reiterate, according to the DePauw University handbook the grading system is as follows:

- A, A- grades reflect “achievement of exceptionally high merit”
- B+, B, B- grades reflect “achievement at a level superior to the basic level”
- C+, C, C- grades reflect “basic achievement”
- D+, D, D- grades reflect “achievement which falls short of satisfying the quantitative and qualitative requirements yet warrants credit”

What this means for this class is that work that satisfies instruction and basic material will receive grades which reflect that basic achievement-C grades. In order to receive B grades, your work must demonstrate superior work in terms of your own critical insight, synthesis and communication skills. This is really very important because many of us are used to getting the “A” grade and view “B”s as poor grades...Please don’t believe that. Getting a B in this course, and in any good course at DePauw is reflective of really very GOOD work. A grades reflect exceptionally high levels of achievement and reflect a high degree of intellectual rigor and carefully considered work.

While I will subtract points for errors or deficiencies I will happily add points for carefully written, imaginative thinking and communication. Please let me know throughout the semester if you have any questions or if any aspect of your grade is unclear. This is a dialectical enterprise-a discussion between us and the whole point is that we all get something out of it. One last thing-your grade is based upon your own mastery of the material-it is not based on how you compared with others in the class.

*I urge you to do two things this semester: take advantage of the Writing Center – learning to craft a well written essay and communicate ideas in a persuasive manner are cornerstones of anthropology,
your education at DePauw and life itself – they are here to help, use the center. Secondly, make certain that you understand the **Academic Integrity Policy** here at the University. If you are at all uncertain about what counts as **plagiarism** please ask – what we learn is grounded in the work of others but learning to interpret and communicate new ideas based upon that knowledge and in our own manner is essential. Do not plagiarize. Even cutting and pasting things from the web is mosaic plagiarism. Penalties for this practice are severe and not worth finding out about first hand – just do not do it and if you are worried, ask. The only bad/silly/ridiculous questions are those that are never asked.

Points are assigned as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Short papers (obituary, eulogy, epitaph, will)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Initial</td>
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<td>Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/Peer Editing</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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* All assignments are due **electronically to Professor Upton by 5pm on the date they are due.** Send them directly to rupton@depauw.edu. You can expect a response to confirm receipt of your assignment. If you do not receive an email response with that confirmation, it is your responsibility to follow up to make certain it was received.

**ADA STATEMENT:**

“DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and University administered activities and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act and Amendments (ADAAA). Any student who feels she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Coordinator of Academic Success and Student Disability Services, for further information on how to receive accommodations and support. Academic Success and Student Disability Services is located at the HUB., 765-658-6267. It is the responsibility of the student to share the letter of accommodation faculty and staff members. Accommodations will not be implemented until the faculty or staff member has received the official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive. It is the responsibility of the student to discuss implementation of accommodations with each faculty and staff member receiving the letter.”

**Required Readings:**

*All of the readings for the course are available at the Bookstore or Amazon.com
*Additional articles will be posted on Moodle or given to you in class and I will on occasion give you additional readings in class as I come across relevant materials.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week 1:**

[8/28] Course Introduction

**Week 2:**


DUE: Obituary Short Paper

**Week 3:**

9/9 & 9/11 9/9 – Read: Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*

9/11 – Read: Danforth (cont.)

**Week 4:**


9/18 – Guest lecture on Archaeology & death; Read: “The Extraordinary
History of Oliver Cromwell’s Head”, Tarlow

**DUE: Eulogy Short Paper**

**Week 5:**

[9/23 & 9/25]  
9/23 – Read: Lock, *Twice Dead*  
9/25 – Read: Lock (cont.)

**DUE: Topic for Final Paper**

**Week 6:**

[9/30 & 10/2]  
9/30 – Read: Holloway, *Passed On*  
10/2 – Read: Holloway (cont.)

**DUE: Eulogy Short Paper**  
**ALSO DUE: Topic and Outline of Final Paper with between 5 - 10 sources**

**Week 7:**

[10/7 & 10/9]  
10/7 – Read: “Death Without Weeping”, Schep-Hughes, and “Passing it On”  

**MIDTERM EXAM – 10/9**

**Week 8:**

[10/14 & 10/16]  
10/14 – Read: “Executions Past”, “Death Row: Conditions of Confinement” and “Living and Working on Death Row”  
10/16 – Read: “The Funeral Transaction”, Mitford

**DUE: Paper Version I**

**Week 9:**

[10/21 & 10/23]  
[Fall Break!] 😊

**Week 10:**

[10/28 & 10/30]  
10/28 – Heilman, *When a Jew Dies*  
10/30 – Read: Heilman (cont).

**DUE: Will Short Paper**
Week 11:


11/6 – Guest Lecture on Hospice and care of the dying/elderly

DUE: Peer Edited Versions of Paper I

Week 12:

[11/11 & 11/13] Editing/Writing Consultation Week with Professor Upton [students have the opportunity to meet one-on-one about their peer edited Final Paper – appointment times TBD]

Week 13:


11/20 – Read: *Stiff* (cont.)

Week 14:


THANKSGIVING! 😄

Week 15:

[12/2 & 12/4] 12/2 – Final Presentations

NO CLASS 12/4 – Professor Upton at American Anthropological Association meetings

Week 16:


12/11 – Final Presentations

DUE: Final Paper Version II – due electronically by 5pm December 12th

FINAL EXAM - Wednesday, December 17th 1 – 4pm