

**SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS**  
**GERO/HUM/RELS 099 (FALL 2020)**  
**DEATH, DYING, AND RELIGION**

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Instructor: Brent Walters  
Email: profwalters@yahoo.com  
Faculty Page: <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/brent.walters>

### **Course Description**

Is death the end or the beginning of existence? This inquiry, or one close to it, has influenced all academic fields of study over the past three and a half millennia in the Western world. This course helps to navigate the way people process the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of living, suffering, and dying. It assists students examine religious teaching and practices that made death meaningful, socially significant, or political powerful. This is particularly imperative during a war, a pandemic, a near-death experience, or a catastrophe. This section of “Death, Dying, and Religion” draws primarily from Western traditions that date to the earliest philosophical schools of Athens, but Eastern notions and customs are likewise introduced and compared. Our primary objective is to engage in the literature and lifestyle of those who ponder the meaning of consciousness and existence, before speculations about death became inflexible or lost to theological dogma.

### **Course Goals and Learning Objectives**

This course helps students understand that they are integrated beings, and this includes physiological, sociological, and psychological elements that provide foresight and offer strategies for lifelong personal development. As such, each student is part of a complex social system that enables the exchange of ideas, as well as solutions, to life’s greatest concerns, not the least of which is death. Therefore, the learning objectives for the course are more than an academic pursuit, they are life-changing challenges that refocus underlying concerns regarding immortality, fate, retribution, and justice. Toward this goal, we evaluate philosophical, religious, poetic, and mythological literature and those who debate their content.

### **GE Learning Outcomes**

Upon the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

**GEL01** Recognize the physiological, sociological, psychological, and spiritual influences on their well-being. This will be assessed through the analysis of literature and its inquiry into various approaches for the significance of death as well as a meaningful life.

**GEL02** Acknowledge the physiological, sociological, psychological, and spiritual factors on the development across one’s total lifespan. This will be assessed through

responses to renowned literary works that helped to shape the Western world and its view on the meanings of life and death.

**GEL03** Use appropriate social skills to enhance learning and to develop positive interpersonal relationships with diverse groups and individuals. This will be assessed through supplemental literature that differs from one culture to another and offers an understanding that can culminate in mutual understanding.

**GEL04** Reflect how individuals process particular stages of human development, how their academic and social systems are effected, and how they can facilitate their growth within a university environment. This will be assessed through introducing a wide spectrum of views.

### **Additional GE Information**

This course includes a writing component that distinguishes between weekly assignments and a comprehensive final paper. The former consist of two-paged summaries to readings or reflections, while the latter is a semester-long gathering and evaluation of information related to the diversity of religious traditions. This particularly concerns the ability to recognize academic from sectarian approaches. This course includes the following, in relation to benefits that affect a lifetime of data, and hence it defines the GE learning outcomes by means of:

- a focus on the interdependence of the physiological, sociological, and psychological factors that contribute to the process of human development and determine the limitations, potentials, and options of an individual across one's lifespan;
- an understanding of the university as a learning center for an integrated person, an introduction to its resources, and an appreciation for the intellectual and social vitality of the campus community;
- an inventory and evaluation of university level learning skills (that is, methods of inquiry, critical thinking, study skills, research approach, information literacy), and an exploration of the application of these skills to a student's academic and personal development and;
- an understanding of ethics and integrity in academic and non-academic settings that transcends cultural trends or religious affiliations.

### **Course Content Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

**CLO1** recognize and articulate the importance of death, dying, and religion over the course of one's lifespan, and this includes humanity over the centuries, and this will be assessed primarily through exams, final paper, and weekly course work based on assigned readings and responses.

**CLO2** demonstrate a basic understanding of the three-fold concept of death (physical death, psychological death, and spiritual death or rebirth) and be able to produce and to curate an art exhibition on death, and this will be assessed through content in relevant readings and artistic interpretations.

### **Course Requirements and Assignments**

Classes are designed to be successful; however, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (usually three hours per unit each week), and this includes preparing for readings, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and the like. More details about student workload can be found in University Policy S12-3 at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

### **Classroom Protocol**

Coursework is due each Thursday by midnight and is based on various articles, essays, documents, and extracts. The instructor shall assign this material with introductory notes and useful definitions. It is essential that this material is submitted via email using Microsoft Word and pdf technology to access and to submit each reading assignment. A helpful explanation will arrive after your email addresses are collected and organized. In the meanwhile, be prepared the day instruction begins, for that is when you will receive the syllabus. The instructor will offer his email address to facilitate this exchange, but the software is particularly essential to communicate weekly throughout the semester. Please ask for clarification regarding additional classroom protocol, since there are no face-to-face meetings.

Sixteen readings are required throughout the semester and are integrated into the course agenda and academic schedule. Grades are based on responses to the readings as well as scores from the midterm and final, in addition to weekly assignments. As a result, all work must be received, read, and returned, and due to the nature of this process, no late work can be accepted without agreement in advance. Below are the expectations from each student: 1) replies to sixteen reading assignments, for which the instructor will supply prompts, 2) preparation and submission of a midterm that occurs near the middle of the semester, and 3) a comprehensive final based primarily on the *Apology* of Socrates (most students will appreciate this account).

### **Grading Process**

Grades are based on three types of work completed over the semester as reflected in: 1) sixteen readings, a potential of 800 points, 2) midterm summary, a potential of 100 points, and 3) final examination, a potential of 100 points. Hence, the highest possible culminative score throughout the semester is 1000. Submitted work varies in length, so the briefer readings will include supplementary research, and this too is supplied. Grades are derived from the amount of points accumulated throughout the semester: A: 1000-950, B: 950-900, C; 900-850, and D: 850-800. No late work or make up assignments are accepted without previous arrangement with the instructor in writing.

## University Policies

The office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs maintains university-wide policy relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity and accommodation. Students may find all syllabus related university policies and resource information listed on GUP's website:<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>.

## Reading List

The readings for this course sample scholarship and interpret primary texts regarding the development of religious thought concerning birth, life, death, and afterlife. These excerpts alternate throughout the semester in an attempt to compare academic studies and underlying documents no longer interpreted in historical context. Through this method, each student is exposed to traditions in the East and in the West, some of which evolved significantly over several centuries. These sources are provided for students and are available each Friday with prompts and other required tools. As shown below, there are eight articles and eight primary sources selected for this section of the "Death, Dying, and Religion."

### Excerpts of Scholarship

- Creation Narratives: The Ancient Near East
- Exposure, Abortion, and Infanticide in Antiquity
- The Apocalypse of Peter and Related Literature
- Gehenna, Hades, Purgation: Origins of Hell
- A Brief Introduction to Satan in the West
- Views of Heaven in Early Christian Tradition
- Demons in Jewish and Christian Thought
- Death, Afterlife, and Eternity and the Soul

### Primary Sources in Translation

- Genesis 1-3 (a Jewish Translation)
- Apocalypse of Peter
- Martyrdom of Polycarp
- Book of Secrets of Enoch
- Epistle to Diognetus
- Teaching of the Twelve Apostles
- Apology of Justin Martyr
- Apology of Socrates

## Academic Calendar

08/21	Wk 01	How Does Life Begin?	<i>Creation Narratives: The Ancient Near East</i>
08/28	Wk 02	Primary Sources	<i>Genesis 1-3: a Jewish Translation</i>
09/04	Wk 03	When Does it Begin?	<i>Exposure, Abortion, and Infanticide in Antiquity</i>
09/11	Wk 04	Primary Sources	<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>
09/18	Wk 05	What is After Death?	<i>The Apocalypse of Peter and Related Literature</i>
09/25	Wk 06	Primary Sources	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
10/02	Wk 07	What is Purgation?	<i>Gehenna, Hades, Purgation: Origins of Hell</i>
10/09	Wk 08	Primary Sources	<i>Book of the Secrets of Enoch</i>

10/16	Wk 09	Why Fear Death?	<i>A Brief Introduction to Satan in the West</i>
10/23	Wk 10	Primary Sources	<i>Epistle to Diognetus</i>
10/30	Wk 11	Only Two Ways?	<i>Views of Heaven in Early Christian Tradition</i>
11/06	Wk 12	Primary Sources	<i>Teaching of the Twelve Apostles</i>
11/13	Wk 13	Do Demons Exist?	<i>Demons in Jewish and Christian Thought</i>
11/20	Wk 14	Primary Sources	<i>Apology of Justin Martyr</i>
11/27	Wk 15	What is the Soul?	<i>Death, Afterlife, Eternity and the Soul</i>
12/04	Wk 16	Primary Sources	<i>Apology of Socrates</i>