

**RELI 305**

**DEATH, DYING AND RELIGION**

The Orchestra of the Dead, Hermann Schedel, Liber Chronicorum, 1493

**SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS & RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON**

**Summer 2006 -2007**

# RELI 305

## DEATH, DYING AND RELIGION

<b>Course co-ordinator:</b>	<b>Professor Paul Morris</b> HU 316 ; Tel: 463 5037; email: paul.morris@vu.w.ac.nz
<b>Tutor:</b>	Jonathan Brookes HU 216; email: jonathan.brookes@vu.w.ac.nz
<b>Where and when:</b>	<b>Lectures:</b> HU 323 <b>Thursday 5:30 – 8:30</b> <b>Tutorials:</b> tba

Religious Studies is in the Hunter Building. The programme administrator, Aliko Kalliabetos, is in room HU 318. **Notices regarding the course or any information on changes will be posted on the notice board outside her office.**

**Office Hours:** The office is open Monday - Friday, 9.30 – 12:00 and 2:30 - 3.30pm.

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### *Course outline*

- 1 The first section of the course will examine a number of the legal, social demographic, religious, cultural and medical aspects of death in contemporary New Zealand, including grief, mourning, burial and cremation procedures, funerals, and beliefs about life after death. The second part of the course will focus on the belief systems and practices relating to death and dying in selected religious and secular traditions.
- 2 **The course has six objectives:**
  - to familiarise students with the changes in institutions, agencies, practices and procedures involved with death and dying in New Zealand;
  - to introduce students to the ways in which these developments, and their overseas parallels, have been understood by scholars;
  - to offer students the opportunity to learn about and discuss the meaning and significance of death in a number of religious traditions;
  - to encourage students to critically engage with the issues and debates found in the scholarly literature on death and dying;
  - to develop student skills in research and the writing of academic presentations on death and its interpretations;
  - to allow students to develop their research skills by preparing a project on a chosen topic.

- 3 The **lecture programme** follows. Lectures may be varied from time to time. As much notice as possible will be given when changes occur and, if necessary, a revised programme will be issued at lectures.
- 4 **Tutorials are held weekly** Tutorials deal with topics that complement the lecture programme and they provide an opportunity to discuss aspects of the course in a small group and develop your ability to contribute to discussions.
- 5 **The course is internally assessed by means of the following assignments:**
- one **oral presentation** of 15 minutes in a chosen tutorial session based on a written **short essay** of up to 1,500 words, in total worth **40%** of the final grade. (**10%** for the presentation and **30%** for the written essay); to be submitted by noon on **Friday 15 December 2006**
  - a **research project** of a maximum of **4,500 words** to be submitted by noon on **Friday 9 February 2007** worth **60%** of the final grade;

The mandatory requirements for this course are the submission of one short essay and one research project and giving one oral presentation

- 6 **Required text:** The *RELI 305 Course Reader* should be obtained from the Student Notes shop at a cost of approximately \$30.00.
- 7 **Work-load (Recommendation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences):** For 300-level 24 points one trimester courses, 18 hours per week are recommended. An average student should spend 15 hours per week for preparation, reading and writing in addition to attendance at lectures and tutorials.

300 – level	1 trimester	24 points	18 hours
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- 8 **Aegrotat regulations apply** to internally assessed courses. Students who cannot submit or complete the course requirements due to illness or some other impairment due to circumstances beyond their control may apply for an aegrotat pass. Applications may be submitted concerning class tests or for other assessment items which are due at most three weeks before the day on which lectures cease for the course, and for which no alternative item of assessment could reasonably be substituted or extension time be granted. Applications should be made on the appropriate form to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Office within seven days of the relevant test or submission date. In exceptional circumstances late applications may be accepted if supported by a health professional seen at the relevant time. (Refer to the aegrotat provisions in section 4.5 of the Assessment Statute).
- 9 **General University Policies and Statutes**  
Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly those regarding assessment and course of study requirements, and formal academic grievance procedures.

**10 Student Conduct and Staff Conduct**

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps can be taken if there is a complaint. For queries about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor. This Statute is available in the Faculty Student Administration Office or on the website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StudentConduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StudentConduct).

The policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StaffConduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StaffConduct).

**11 Academic Grievances**

If you have any academic problems with your course you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned or, if you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the relevant Associate Dean of your faculty. Class representatives are available to assist you with this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievance Policy which is published on the VUW website:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/AcademicGrievances](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/AcademicGrievances).

**12 Students with Disabilities**

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity with all other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials or in meeting the course requirements, please contact the Course Co-ordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support Services to confidentially discuss your individual needs and the options and support that are available. Disability Support Services are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building:

Telephone: 463-6070

Email: [disability@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:disability@vuw.ac.nz)

The name of your School's Disability Liaison Person is in the relevant prospectus or can be obtained from the Administrative Assistant.

### 13 **Student Support**

Staff at Victoria want students' learning experiences at the University to be positive. If your academic progress is causing you concern, the following staff members will either help you directly or quickly put you in contact with someone who can.

	<b>Staff member</b>	<b>Location</b>
FHSS	Dr Allison Kirkman	Murphy Building, room 407
Law	Kirstin Harvey	Old Govt Building, room 103
Science, and Architecture and Design	Liz Richardson	Cotton Building, room 150
Commerce and Administration	Colin Jeffcoat	Railway West Wing, room 119
Kaiwawao Maori	Liz Rawhiti	Old Kirk, room 007
Manaaki Pihipihinga	Melissa Dunlop	14 Kelburn Pde, room 109D
Victoria International	Anne Cronin	10 Kelburn Pde, room 202

The Student Services Group is also available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/)

Email: [student-services@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:student-services@vuw.ac.nz).

VUWSA employs two Education Coordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and faculty delegates. The Education Office is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building:

Telephone 463 6983 or 463 6984

Email: [education@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:education@vuwsa.org.nz).

### 14 **Taping of Lectures:**

All students in the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies are welcome to use audio-tapes to record lectures. If you want to do this, please see your lecturer, tutor or the relevant programme administrator and complete a disclaimer form, which advises of copyright and other relevant issues.

- 15 **Class representatives:** Class representatives are elected in the first week or two of term. They are supported by the VUW Students' Association, and have a variety of roles, including assistance with grievances and student feedback to staff and VUWSA. Contact details for your class rep will be listed on the Religious Studies notice board.

**16 Student Learning Support Services:** A range of workshops, drop-ins and other assistance is provided by SLSS, covering such things as study techniques, essay writing, exam preparation and note taking skills. They are at 14 Kelburn Parade, tel: 463 5999.

**17 Evaluation:** This course will be evaluated by UTDC.

## *Lecture programme*

**Lecture programme and required readings:** The required readings are essential background for the lectures / tutorials and should be completed **before each lecture**. The readings will be further discussed in the tutorials. The readings are all found in the *RELI 305 Course Reader*, which can be purchased from Student Notes .

- 16 November**      **Lecture 1    The New Zealand Death Machine**  
Death: definitions, legalities, economics, and statistics
- 23 November**      **Lecture 2    Suicide in New Zealand**  
Why? Interpretations, strategies and comparisons  
Case Study: Youth Suicide
- 30 November**      **Lecture 3    Euthanasia - A Good Death?**  
Legal, moral, theological and social issues  
Case Study: Death with Dignity Bill II
- 7 December**        **Lecture 4    Burial or Cremation?**  
The social context of death  
Case Study: Cremation in New Zealand
- 14 December**      **Lecture 5    Life After death**  
Resurrection and Reincarnation  
Case Study; Near-Death Experiences
- 21 December**      **Lecture 6    Death in Maori traditions**  
The *Tangi* Sacred Bones – Sacred Earth
- Mid Term Break**    **22 December 2006 – 7 January 2007**
- 11 January**         **Lecture 7    Heavens & Hells**  
Death in Judaism, Christianity and Islam  
Case Study: Dying for God - Religious Martyrdom
- 18 January**         **Lecture 8    The Ganges and the Funeral Pyre**  
Death in Indian Religious Traditions  
*Guest lecturer Rick Weiss*
- 25 January**         **Lecture 9    The Wake**  
Death, The Final Leveller – Death and the Value of Life

## ***Tutorial Programme***

**Week 1 (No Tutorial)**

**Week 2 (Tutorial 1)**

**Why does New Zealand have such high suicide rates?**

**Week 3 (Tutorial 2)**

**Is euthanasia justified? What are the arguments for and against?**

**Week 4 (Tutorial 3)**

**Why are the NZ cremation figures so high? Is economics a significant factor?**

**Week 5 (Tutorial 4)**

**What is the evidence on near death experiences (NDEs) and what might it prove?**

**Week 6 (Tutorial 5)**

**What is distinctive about the *tangi*? How has it changed over time?**

**Week 7 (Tutorial 6)**

**What is the Jewish view on death? How similar is it to those of Islam and Christianity?**

**Week 8 (Tutorial 7)**

**How is death related to the Hindu cycle of rebirth?**

**Final Readings**



## *Essays and Assignments*

**1 Essays and assignments** must be placed in the locked assignment box located near the programme administrator's office, HU 318, and students must date and sign the essay register to indicate they have submitted an essay. **Students should keep a copy of all their work until it is returned.**

**2 Due dates:**

The essay is to be submitted and the corresponding oral presentation is to be made at the designated tutorial for each student (and no later than **15 December 2006**)

The project is to be submitted **by noon on 9 February 2007**

**3 Penalties for late essays / assignments:**

- 1 percent per 24 hours will be deducted for late essays.
- essays submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted for assessment unless prior written arrangement has been made
- Essays submitted late due to medical reasons must be given to the programme administrator accompanied by a doctor's certificate.

**4 Academic integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means **no cheating**. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. Plagiarism is **prohibited** at Victoria.

The University defines plagiarism as follows: *Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not.*

'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals or any other printed source, the work of other students or staff, information from the Internet, software programmes and other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material.

***Plagiarism is not worth the risk.***

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct ([www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct)) and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- suspension from class or university
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course.

Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, on the University's website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html).

**5 The essay:**

One oral presentation of 15 minutes in a chosen tutorial session based on a written short essay of up to 1,500 words. The presentation/essay must respond to the weekly tutorial question, and the student must then lead a discussion on the topic (approx 10 minutes). The essay must be submitted one week after the time of presentation for assessment. The presentation is worth **10%** of the final grade. The essay is worth **30%** of the final grade.

**6 The project:**

The project assignment of 4,500 words on an agreed topic, is to be submitted no later than noon on 9 February 2007, and is worth **60%** of the final grade.

Students will have the opportunity to do one research project on a chosen topic (see below, or their own proposal) culminating in the submission of an essay of not more than 4,500 words. Students should work on the project starting immediately and working through the whole course. Any problems can be discussed with the tutor.

**Requirements:**

- A project proposal and brief outline with stated questions, sources and methodology must be submitted in written form, (not more than 2 pages), by **15 December 2006**
- Submission of the project assignment by **9 February 2007**

The project is designed to allow students to work in-depth on a chosen topic relating to the themes and topics of the course.

**Suggested project topics:** In the past there have been fieldwork-based projects, surveys and literary studies, and topics have included:

- NDEs (near-death experiences) in New Zealand;
- The representation of death in contemporary rock music;
- The influence of the *tangi* on Pakeha funeral practice;
- Death in the Wellington Hindu community;
- Death in literature and art; and
- The nature of opposition to euthanasia in New Zealand

### **Other possible topics**

- Road deaths (the Wellington motorway – a road to death?)
- Anzac Day
- Sacred bones – sacred earth
- Death rituals and beliefs in different religions
- 'Death, which of all human events is the most upsetting and disorganising to man's calculation, is perhaps the main source of religious belief' (Malinowski). Discuss.
- 'Hospices have humanised death'. Discuss.
- 'The alternative is between a hospice movement or legalised euthanasia'. Discuss.
- How is death represented in contemporary popular culture? Present and analyse at least two examples. Examine the historical sources of these representations. Discuss their changed meanings and significance.
- 'Death is largely hidden in contemporary western culture'. Discuss.
- What are 'Near Death Experiences' and how might we explain their occurrence?
- What, if any, implications do NDEs have for our understanding of death and dying?
- 'Beliefs about death and survival reveal much more about this life than the next'. Discuss using examples from a selected religious tradition.
- Discuss a chosen funeral ritual and its corresponding religious concepts.
- How is death dealt with in Maori traditions? Discuss contemporary issues.

**7** **For guidance in essay writing** and presentation of bibliographies please refer to Religious Studies guidelines for essays, attached.