

**St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo**  
**Department of Psychology**  
**PSYCH/HLTH/GERON 218**  
**Psychology of Death and Dying**  
**Winter 2021**

**Instructor Information**

Instructor: Christopher T. Burris, Ph.D.

Online Office Hours: by appointment

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Updates: check “announcements” on LEARN frequently for course-related info and news

**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:** In the “best” of times, talking or thinking about death can make people uneasy. Clearly the past year or so has been far from the “best” in much of the world. I suspect that far more of us (myself included) have been hit by close losses – as well as persistent, pervasive reminders of death – than is typical for an offering of this course.

With that as a backdrop, my goal is for us to confront dying and death with frankness and honesty. Doing so means venturing into ideas and experiences that can stir up all kinds of emotions. Thus, it's important for you to be clear whether taking this course is in your best interest right now.

I certainly hope that you take away something personally valuable from this course. Having said that, this is a high-enrollment, lecture-oriented course that *is neither intended nor designed to serve as group therapy*. **Thus, if you're feeling “stuck” in anxiety, anger, or grief linked to death-related issues, please seek out support from qualified mental health professionals.**

**Course Requirements and Assessment**

The course schedule, which includes topics, required readings, and test dates, appears on the next page.

**About “levels”.** Note the topical “levels”: The idea is to start at the broadest possible level of analysis (i.e., definitional and philosophical/psychological issues) and move to the most specific level (personality)... because every individual's experience is embedded in all of the broader contexts.

**About readings.** Assigned readings are *available as course e-reserves through the UW Library system*. I've retained some from previous years but have inserted lots of new ones, relying heavily on *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*. Given the vast breadth of death-related phenomena and variation within and across individuals and groups, it's impossible to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, I hope that the readings offer you at least a diverse sampling of what's out there. Example: There's one covid-related reading, but this course won't be “all covid, all the time.”

How should you approach the readings? I don't expect you to memorize dates or numbers or to understand complex statistical analyses. At the same time, skimming or looking at the summary (if there is one) won't be sufficient. Aim for somewhere in between: What are the author's main points, and on what basis are those points being made? Thinking about how reading content might intersect with lecture topic is especially worthwhile, as I won't necessarily do so explicitly in lecture... but it's a great way of testing your own understanding.

The schedule:

Week of	Topics	Reading(s)	Tests (topics/readings)
Jan 11	Introduction; Animate Level	Kastenbaum (2009)	
Jan 18	Species Level; Human Level	Masson & McCarthy (1995) Juhl & Routledge (2016)	
Jan 25	Historical/Cultural Level	Stroebe & Schut (2020) McKinley et al. (2020)	
Feb 01	Medical Level	Gül et al. (2020) Hovland & Mallett (2020)	<b>Test #1 (Jan 11-25)</b> <b>Wed, Feb 3, 7pm EST</b>
Feb 08	Legal Level	MacMurray & Futtrell (2020) Rumbold et al. (2020)	
Feb 15	<i>reading week – no class</i>		
Feb 22	Religious Level	Balmer et al. (2020) Pevey et al. (2020)	
Mar 01	Arts/Media Level	Viper et al. (2020) Khayambashi (2019)	
Mar 08	Political Level	Kelmendi et al. (2020) Leung & Chalupa (2015)* <small>*article text ends on p. 231!</small>	
Mar 15	Relational Level	Walsh & McGoldrick (1991)	<b>Test #2 (Feb 1- Mar 8)</b> <b>Wed, Mar 17, 7pm EST</b>
Mar 22	Individual Level 1 (Developmental)	Manoogian et al. (2017) Scheinfeld & Lake (2019)	
Mar 29	Individual Level 1 (Personality)	Mueller et al. (2017) Kang (2019)	
Apr 05			<b>Test #3 (Mar 15-29)</b> <b>Wed, Apr 7, 7pm EST</b>

**Tests.** The three online tests (see schedule above) are worth 35%, 40%, and 25%, respectively, based on the approximate amount of lecture and reading material that each covers. Given the high course enrollment, the format will be predominantly or exclusively multiple choice. **THE TESTS ARE NOT DESIGNED TO BE OPEN-NOTES/OPEN-READINGS:** Similar to in-class assessments, each will be timed so you will need to make sure that you “know your stuff” before writing it. The time allotted and the number of questions on each test will vary depending on the amount of material covered in the section being tested. Tests are not cumulative. There is no final exam.

**For students with a documented disability:** Please ensure that AccessAbility Services notifies me early in the term to verify any time accommodations that need to be made for the online test sessions.

**For students outside the Eastern Time Zone:** Please notify me early in the term if you are doing coursework outside the (North American) Eastern Time Zone for possible time accommodations related to online test sessions.

All assigned readings will be available to you from the beginning of the term. I will do my best to post online lectures no later than Thursday of each week. Depending on interest, I may also hold online drop-in question-and-answer sessions. If it's a short question, email works just fine. If there are one or more longer questions, then I'm happy to set up an individual Zoom meeting with you.

Marks will be posted on LEARN as soon as possible. In order to be fair to everyone, *each test mark received stands "as is"* – that is, it will not be dropped or re-weighted.

**Extra Credit:** Up to 4% extra credit is available via SONA research participation. I will post any information that the Research Experiences Group sends me to assist you. As an active researcher myself, I would ask that you ***PLEASE TAKE ANY RESEARCH PARTICIPATION SERIOUSLY***. Careless completion of a study's materials is a waste of everyone's time and undercuts the research process. This extra credit option is available to *all* students; please do not expect or request special arrangements.

## Other Important Information

**UW Policy regarding Illness and Missed Tests:** UW Examination Regulations ([www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf](http://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](http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html). 2) If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, they 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. ***Please note that documentation is expected for granting test deferral even during this online term. Unless it is impossible, please inform me PRIOR to the scheduled test to arrange an alternate writing time.*** A make-up test should normally be scheduled on the first school day after your documentation expires. Make-up exams may differ in content and format from the original.

## Other Important Information

**Intellectual Property:** I very much want this class to be a good experience for you, and I am putting a lot of time, thought, and effort into that. You (or someone who cares about you a lot) paid so you could benefit from the firsthand experience that this class provides. To be clear, I'm sharing my work with YOU – so ***it's not fair to me to sell or give away my lectures, slides, etc. to other people.*** That's "unauthorized distribution of intellectual property," and *it's not okay*. I hope that makes sense.

**Academic Integrity:** Please respect yourself, your fellow students, and your instructor. ***Don't cheat.***

"In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. [Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information.]"

**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.](#)

[www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload\\_file/PLCY\\_AOM\\_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances\\_20151211-SJUSCAproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCAproved.pdf). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information.] 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 instructor, 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](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf), [www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY\\_AOM\\_Student-Discipline\\_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions_and_Grievances) (other than a petition) or the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_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](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals), [www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY\\_AOM\\_Student-Appeals\\_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCAproved.pdf).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, [www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/).